E returned to the main hall, pushing through the crowds covering the floor, looking for their crew members, for opportunities to unblock them in the morning’s preparations. In two decades of harvesting the city, no one could explain why the Warehousers forced everyone to prepare for excursions the morning-of, but in that time, E had developed the skills and political clout to escort their crew through the hurried bureaucracy of these early morning preparations.

Through the gaps between heads, they spotted the bright red curls of R standing in line to receive their crew’s allotment of voice comms for the trip. They followed the flow of the crowd, navigating its currents to get closer.

They reached them as their line moved forward another step, putting them at the edge of the winding queue. Years in the sun had tanned their white skin but a few degrees. They were the palest member of their crew by far. They wore their typical kit, a pair of rugged orange pants and a matching orange shirt, each free from patches and repairs. R, like E’s child A, spent considerable time bartering for such pristine clothing, but they could not deny that each took great pride in their appearance.

“R!” they said. “Good to see you this morning.”

The taller person smiled as they turned to find E, eyes wide with pleasant surprise.

“Crew leader, good morning to you,” they said, their full red beard competing with their hair for length. “How was your rest?”