

Chapter 5: The Earth Part 2

Earth and the Girl

His mind or soul or whatever represented the essence of his living being was flying and flailing in a distant black and blue shaded surge of energy that was speckled with distant stars, suns, and worlds.

It was all moving so fast, but wasn't as harsh as he had expected it to be. It was all just a little easier to glare at this time. All he could do was glare.

Like being in the swirl of fallen leaves but more of a torrent or gale than a breeze. There was just so much to take in; all that could be focused on was the distant and rogue direction of pull.

The same headache that had dogged him the first time he traveled between worlds was back.

If he had to explain how it felt: crushing, pushing, spikes of pain, would be how he described it.

For those of you out there who have had a hangover after a wild night of partying; think if you had been partying with a group of very unhappy rowdy players who thought your head was a ball. You wouldn't feel the pain from the amount of alcohol you'd consumed but you sure as heck feel it in the morning.

Will's head felt less than exploding but still very delicate from the hustle and jostle of being flung from one distant world to another in roughly the course of several hours.

He was lying on his back as a chilly breeze kicked over him. Will was fairly certain he was not on [Mist](#) or back on [Myrrha](#). The breeze was too cold to be Mist and too fresh to be myrrh. It had the touch of an industrial spell, of civilization, but not so harsh as the coal engines from his own home world.

Will as aware that there were other people around him, but it looked very much what was called a "park" on Myrah. With of course all the exceptions of surveillance instruments and the artificial lighting.

the people also seemed to be minding their business more carefully than turning to look at him. Perhaps they were all just disinterested or not overly surprised by strange things. However, unlike Must, there didn't seem to be any particularly kindly folk waiting to help. That was fine with Will; he was glad just to be left alone. The headache was bad, but there seemed to be just a little less sting from the 'jump' than the first time.

Actually, now that he had moved from one world to another twice, he was thinking of how to best explain everything, or at least, simplify it in his mind. "Jump" just seemed like an easier term to remember; less to imply that it was like a 'warp' but then there was just so much more to explain. "warp" sounds just too much like science.

Taking a deep breath, it hurt his lungs a little, it not too much. Will wondered if every jump would leave him feeling like this. Staggering, Will found a place to sit on a bench. At least he could still walk around. He would need to find a place to stay and he didn't have any money or currency that was of any value on this world.

In fact, looking at his clothes, he had the distinct feeling that his outfit was a bit strange here. Men here dressed in pants, shirts, or coats while women were dressed similarly. However, he noticed some seemed

to be wearing what looked like terribly uncomfortable foot wear or clothes that were of bizarrely unflattering hues.

Taking another deep breath, he calmed his mind and tried to think for a bit. He let his feelings stretch out, feeling for magic, but nothing. Nothing... Nothing? It was puzzling. Very strange. A world that didn't have any arcane resonance. Like an empty room.

The trees and plants all were alive, the air was clear, but there wasn't any bounce back from the vibrations his arcane powers were sending out.

On Myst, he could pick up heavy and subtle shifts, reflections, and refraction. He could 'feel' his proximity to all the living things. The "Monsters" even gave off individual eddies and ebbs every few instants; sensing Will and their surroundings.

Here though, he felt a bit numb to all the living things. They had substance, but no essence. With all that in mind, he concluded that maybe using or showing his magics may be an unwise idea, the people might panic and then he'd have to explain himself to authorities.

Despite his talents in arcane arts, he was still just as much flesh and blood as any other person. Looking up, the sun was slowly making it's way past it's mid-day high. It has actually a little more confusing than that. He didn't know if it was morning or noon, but he knew that he would have to get a move on.

Will tried to stand up, but his legs wobbled fiercely and he sat back down. Taking a deep breath, he felt the headache kick again. He needed to figure something out, but his brain couldn't block out the screams his body was giving.

He lay back on the bench and looked up at the sky, a little longer this time. The sun looked different than Myrah's sun. It was warmer. The sky had clouds like home, but there was more variance. The clouds were happy; nothing like the overlapping layers of gray overcast.

They were different shapes that continued to change over time. It wasn't bad really. The blue sky with these bulbous white clouds. They looked like cotton at times; so soft and fluffy. It was kind of relaxing to watch...

Again, taking a deep breath he tried to sit up and just brace for a moment. The headache pounded away again, but was starting to lose it's bite.

This time, he tried to stand and his legs didn't feel like "riggol jelly-oh" (that horrible, wiggly food served at the academy). Strange, as he thought about it, Will can't remember being hungry once for the past week and a half.

The moment that thought connected, his stomach started to grumble. "Forgot what it feels like to be hungry," Will said to himself. "If I get back to Mr. September, I'll have to ask him about that."

Will took a slow step forward and tried hard to concentrate on balancing. He felt a bit wobbly, but as his head pains eased off, he could start to feel his body come back to his control.

If he was going to attempt more jumps in the future, he'd have to develop a technique for dealing with the pain and drain on his body. At this rate, he wouldn't last.

First things first, though, he had to find a place to eat and rest. Looking around the park, there didn't seem to be any street vendors. There were families taking a stroll, elderly folks out for exercise, a few younger adults who were distracted with each other's company.

Will started to walk slowly from the bench. The park has some nice pathways. Not too crowded, a lot of flowers, but most of them had wilted recently. It appears to be autumn from the bright colors on the tree leaves.

While the trees seemed younger and smaller than those on Mist, they looked well maintained. At the very least they looked happier. Most of the trees on Myrah had a sickly grey about them.

He stretched out a bit while standing. His muscles started to flex and the headache pulled back a little. "Oh, ow!" Will tried to move his head around, but his neck wasn't having it.

There was a crick in the lower part of his neck that didn't want to cooperate.

"Well", Will thought, "This is going to be a long day." Will started walking slowly to what looked like the center of town. The sidewalks were in the same design as those back on Myrah. They ran along the main road, but too narrow to allow for good foot traffic.

Julia Orrhm

Julia packs up her books and said 'goodbye' to several of her classmates. It was 2 o'clock and she was tired of classes already. That morning's seminar had been packed with 'on the exam' notes and had put everyone on edge for the day.

Not that she had to worry. She'd been studying this stuff since the semester began in September. By this point in her collegiate career she'd developed a sound system for passing her classes: JUST STUDY.

It all seemed a lot easier now that it was her 3rd year at the university. Most of her classmates were serious minded majors, not flaky freshman thinking it would be like all those foolish 'college' movies that were popular.

No, the honeymoon had been over for 2 years now. Ever since that first fall and her first 'D'... ever. Well, that certainly put the kibosh on everything.

Julia put on her coat and headed toward the double doors that went into the main hall. Her cell phone rang just as she exited the lecture hall. "Damn it, not Josh again..." She was sick of the ex boyfriend calling her every day at the exact same time. What part of "it's over" didn't he understand?

Funny thing about some people: they seem great until you get to know them. Really know them... At least on campus she could always find some excuse or another for not calling back. She really liked that part of being a college student.

She'd missed lunch already so maybe it was time to go out for something to eat. Today she was going downtown for lunch. Julia felt like something a little more varied. Cafeteria food got boring after 4 days in a row. It was going to be a bit of a walk, so she got onto the bus and exited at the third stop.

There were several places that looked good, but something odd was pulling her to go right. Not one to let a good hunch go to waste, she followed the pull of fate.

Julia didn't really believe in superstitious ideas, given that she was studying to be a physical therapist, however there was something about the unexplainable coincidences that always seemed to catch her attention. There was a thrill in something unknown being made known; it was like a little in-joke between her and the universe.

It seemed an auspicious day. Maybe today would be 'special'? Julia turned right down the sidewalk and just started walking.

There was an odd feeling in her steps today. They didn't seem to hit the ground. Or maybe she just felt lighter today. "Odd," she thought, "very odd."

As Will walked he was taken in by the vast array of similarities between this world and his own. There were automobiles, though they clearly were not driven by the mundane steam or coal engines of his world. There were overhanging artificial lights, but they were not the heavy gas lights of his 'grey' world. He wondered if he'd arrived in the future of Myrah. Is this what his world would look like in a century's time? Would magic go extinct? Maybe that wasn't such a bad thing....

Finally, the roads converged into a large 4-way cross-walk. The logical design was actually very well laid out. All the shop fronts faced the center cross and gave an impression of fore-thought to the design. After his experience on Ghed, it was refreshingly logical.

Will watched as people crossed at different parts of the sidewalk, all marked with painted lines across the road. How convenient. He tried to time his step off correctly so he would blend in, but just didn't feel like he could shake the feeling that people were staring at him.

He still has his staff in hand and his clothes seemed a bit out of place for this world. The road seemed smooth but he was feeling a bit more nervous with every step. His headache pounded again as he reached the midpoint and he found himself reaching for his temple.. As he stopped, he noticed the human shaped light blinking red. "Need to hurry." A few cars started honking their horns. "Ow!" The noise was very disturbing and his head exploded with pain.

Will fell to his knees. He'd rushed too quickly. The jump was still taking its toll and he should have rested more. Panic started to kick in. He'd have to do something fast to get out of there but he didn't want to draw more attention to himself.

The light turned solid red and the cars started to edge forward, still honking. Will couldn't even think straight. The noise... the pain... the panic... He raised his staff and prepared to cast his defensive spell but then it all stopped.

The noise of the cars was muted. Someone had rushed across the crosswalk. A stranger grabbed his free hand and helped him up.

The moment the hand touched his, he felt the pain vanish but he almost seemed to disassociate from his body. The cars had stopped as his consciousness floated with his slowly walking body to the other side.

Will took a moment in the relative safety of the sidewalk to take a deep breath and try to bring himself back to his body. It's what the person next to him was telling him to do. "Take deep breaths, okay? You're okay." It sounded like a woman's voice, breathy but authoritative; definitely not his own gravely, quiet voice.

"Can you hear me? Can you hear my voice?"

Will was still rubbing his temples and looking down but nodded in response. "I'm okay, I think," Will replied, "Just a little overwhelmed by everything."

"Here, let's go someplace to sit down," Julia said.

She had noticed him just in time. Afternoon traffic, especially after lunch, could be a little much especially for visitors which is what this guy looked like.

Julia wondered if he had been separated from his tour group or lost his way to a convention. He was wearing a strange wizard's cosplay that she has never seen. The robes and staff were some kind of mashup between Gandolf, Obi Wan, and Harry Potter, but the boots and belt were very modern, almost military, with shiny buckles and a design built for both comfort and utility. 'Josh was wrong,' she interjected in her own observations, 'I know plenty of nerd stuff.'

Looking closer, the staff was a good match with his cloak or robes or whatever. Clearly a more modern design. It was mostly wood, though there seemed to be several sections of grafted plastic or metal (she couldn't tell). It looked like it has good weight to it but the guy was grasping tightly to it, so there was no way to tell for sure.

Will continued to look down as they walked. He felt somewhat ashamed and embarrassed, having a panic attack in such a public place. but he was glad to have someone to help him, if only for a little while.

Julia led the way for awhile. She knew the perfect place to sit and relax. This was one of her favorite places in town. It had a lot of lunch options, and it was removed enough from the campus that she didn't have to worry about running into many students. Her 'secret' neighborhood.

She'd never even taken her so-called "boyfriend" here. Thank God for chatty friends. Sometimes even the talkative ones had good idea.

"Let's see... another block or two and we'll e there." She was talking to a total stranger, but something in her gut told her that he wouldn't squeel on her 'secret' coffee shop. Another glance and she noticed that he was still looking down at the street. "Rough day, huh?"

"You could say that."

Finally, a response! "What part hurts?" Julia asked.

"A bit sore all over, especially my head."

'This is good. Keep him talking. Find out more about him and maybe distract him from whatever's going on,' Julia thought. Julia reflected on some of the basic first-aid training she'd had: keep the patient focused and calm.

"First time in the downtown?" she asked.

"Kind of... There is so much to take in."

"Well, we are in one of the busier neighborhoods. Still not as bad as the business district."

"Where are we going?" William asked.

"Some place to relax. I just finished classes for the day and I was coming here to take a break anyway. Here it is." Julia looks up at the sign to "The Gathering Place" coffee shop. The front was just as normal, lit with a few neon lights and advertisements plastered on the windows, some from last fall's events.

Will looked up and could see the establishment. It looked different, or different than what he was used to. He'd never been out of the academy long enough to relax. It was usually for a quick pick-me-up and more than 40 minutes or the proctors would start getting suspicious.

This place looked very inviting; a little worn but comfortable. Inside, the pleasant jingle of bells on the door and the cheery look given by the baristas was altogether new. There was a slightly cool breeze circulating around the shop, along with a smooth, bitter smelling aroma. Almost like wood or incense. Very nice overall.

"What do you feel like having?" Julia asked.

"Anything that helps cure a splitting headache."

Julia smiled at his response. He has a decent sense of humor. She chuckled silently. 'Helps that he's kinda cute, too.' she thought.

The place wasn't too busy yet. It was an hour after lunch so the next wave of customers wouldn't be due for another 2 hours. 'Perfect,' she thought. They walked up to the counter to order.

"Hello Oh, Julia, Good to see you again!" The jovial man at the counter said. He looked like a man in his early to mid-30s. He was very glad to see Julia again. She was always such an interesting customer, what with all her different classes. "Done with classes for the day, or just taking a break?"

"Not sure yet," Julia replied. She turned to Will and asked what he felt like. Will was a bit uncertain about the entire protocol for situations like this. "Whatever tastes good, I guess."

Sensing this newcomer's apprehension, the man behind the counter gave a warm smile and replied, "If this is your first time, try a vanilla latte. It's always smooth and a good introduction."

Something about the smile warmed Will's insides for an instant. He didn't know what it was, but if the man could confidently recommend it, it was probably safe.

"Sure," Will answered. He was still overwhelmed taking in all of his surroundings. There were several sets of chairs and tables set across the establishment. The tables were all solid wood with a good finish making them appear rustic and old fashioned (at least, compared to the machines outside). The chairs were similar, but had deep cushions on the seat and seemed to sink a bit when people settled into them.

It was a few minutes before their drinks were ready, but soon they picked up their libations and Julia led

them to a table and chairs set far from the entrance. It was a little dim, but very cozy.

"I never got your name. My name is..."

"Julia? That man called you that."

"Okay. I guess you caught that..."

"My name is Will."

It was strange, to say the least, Julia had never met anyone like Will, both in form or personality. He'd been at attention the while time they'd met, just very quiet.

"So, Will, what was the deal with that cross walk? Did you have a panic attack or something? You look too young to have had a stroke." Julia felt like it was her duty to find out how Will was doing now that they'd made it this far.

"An attack of panic? That describes how I felt. Just overwhelmed by everything."

Julia settled into her seat and had a sip of her chai latte. It was okay. Still a bit hot, but another minute or two and it would be cooler. She was very curious about this strange young man. He simply screams, 'mysterious'... but not harmful... Nothing like the boys or people on campus, that's for sure. It felt like an honest-to-goodness 'mystery man'. He wasn't trying to impress her or get her back to his apartment. He may be an enigma, but it was a pleasant change from the other men she'd met.

Julia took this chance to look into Will's face, a very clear and detailed look. After a moment, she felt a weird vibe, a moment of shock as she studied his face. There was something "wrong" almost, a strong sense of 'deja vu'.

She notices that Will had a very peculiar nose, the exact shape of her own in ways. His hair was practically a shade darker, but swept the same way naturally. But the strangest part was the slight scar over his left ear. It was almost the same depth and shape as her own blemish.

Julia had always grown her bangs long to hide her mark. The unfortunate marking of an accident some years ago. 'Just too strange.'

"Something wrong?" Will asked, noticing Julia was staring with a fixed gaze and slightly awkward silence. It was unnerving. Will didn't like it when people stared. In his own experience, staring was usually when people started plotting or criticizing.

"Nothing, no, just... something... your ear." Julia said while running her fingers along her own scar unconsciously. "Try the vanilla latte, Will. It's pretty good." Julia took another sip of hers. It was starting to mellow. Will had forgotten how hungry/thirsty he had been.

The 'latte' was very smooth, but kind of bitter at the end. Certainly better than his world's version of the drink. As Will looks at Julia's face, he too felt the sense of 'deja vu'. It was the girl from the vision or dream. 'Same voice, same form and feel. Very comforting and unsettling at the same time.

Will was still swimming in thoughts but he knew that 'this' place was where he had been summoned to. The dream, the feeling of deja vu... there was no question about it.

"Julia. if I may, I have a few questions about this place." Will wanted to sound polite so he was careful to use his best manners.

Julia felt a little shocked by the politeness but decided to let it pass. "Certainly. What's on your mind?"

She sat back and took another sip of her latte. Perfect. It was in that middle area of hot and very warm. Just right...

"What is this place? I mean..." Will paused and struggled with how he wanted to phrase his next question. He didn't know how much to reveal... how much he could trust... He could have been sent to some world even more dangerous than his own (even if that danger was not as obvious).

Will leaned in and quietly asked, "What world is this?"

At that, Julia's entire train of thought screeched to a halt.

"World? This world?" She thought, 'oh-kay...!' She took a long sip of her coffee and a long deep breath. Either this man took cos-play way too seriously, or... maybe had escaped a mental ward. But her opinions stopped there. Any person who suffers a panic attack probably isn't lying and the strangely similar facial patters all leaned toward a possibility she wanted to consider but didn't want to accept. 'impossible or improbable'.

'Maybe he is from another world. The clothes, the staff, the everything! Well, here goes...'

"This world - planet - is called Earth. Seven continents, seven oceans, mostly water... You must know Earth, right?" Will just replied with a 'hmm' as he tried to process. "What about you, Will? Where do you come from if not Earth?"

"I'm from a world called Myrah. It's cloudy and dull. Inescapably grey. Nothing as vibrant and colorful as here. And you can't just walk around from place to place like this. There's checkpoints everywhere. Non-magical people are kept..."

"Magical people!? Is this like Harry Potter or something?"

"I... I don't think so. Our hair stays on our heads." Will looked quizzically.

"No! You said 'non-magical people'. Does that mean there's..." Julia leaned in and quietly whispered, "...magical people? Are you a magical people?" This didn't rule out the 'crazy' or cosplay possibility, but now we get into something that can be tested.

"Yes, I definitely fit the category of 'magical people' in my world. I'm a third year in the Academy."

"Will, are you for real or are you just, like, really, really deep in character? Can you really do magic?"

"Yes, but..." Will was very apprehensive of using his arcana in public. Not only that, the thought of disturbing that still calmness of Earth's untouched energy field felt like sacrilege. "...it's complicated." Julia was looking back at Will with a look of distrust. "There's arcana here on Earth but I don't want to disturb it."

"What's 'arcana'?" Julia asked. She was balancing between believing and just blowing this whole

experience off as an interesting waste of time. She did have the fleeting thought, 'well, it took me years to grasp just the beginning of the sciences. Is it outside the realm of possibility that there could be a supernatural connection to everything?'

After finishing their coffee, Julia had decided to press ahead. "So, you're saying Earth has magic, it's just untouched?" She wanted to be sure she had everything straight.

"Yes but it's undisturbed. Kind of like a calm pond in the middle of a forest. Pure and at peace." Will replied.

Looking at Will, and then her watch. It was getting close to dinner. Julia knew she'd have to get something to eat soon, but she didn't want to leave Will all on his own. He was no ordinary stranger. He had no money or understanding of Earth's customs. He didn't even have a form of I.D.

Julia made a few calls to some friends. Se felt a bit responsible for Will. And, she wanted to see this through. The possibilities Will spoke of were very fascinating. He was sincere and it had been a very long time since she'd even thought about an adventure. *Such a new experience!*

A quick detour for dinner, and after a final call, Julia had everything set. "I have a few more classes this week that I can't miss, but I've found a place for you to stay." She knew a friend across town who rented out a guest room occasionally. With an empty room and nothing big happening, Julia called in to reserve it while Will got his bearing straight.

"I am honored," Will replied. Julia felt a bit embarrassed. Will seemed a bit too stiff at times. Maybe his society was very different from her own more relaxed civilization. Perhaps something she had taken for granted.

As they parted ways for the night, both could sense that their journeys of discovery were just beginning. All through dinner they had discussed their various life experiences. Growing up, school, and difficulties. However, there was always this strange *vibe* both felt from the other. Kind of like when one spoke the other didn't just hear the voice, they also felt it's reverberations.

That night, both lay awake in their rooms. Separated by several blocks, but their minds seeking answers to the same question: "what is this strange feeling?"

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