

KESRA

The Shape of Home

— STORY TWO —



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The Shape of Home

The illustrated story

An ocean community refuses the rooms prepared to save them. To bring its people aboard, Mara and the Kesra’s crew must learn to listen in a way their instruments have not measured.

STRANGEWOVEN

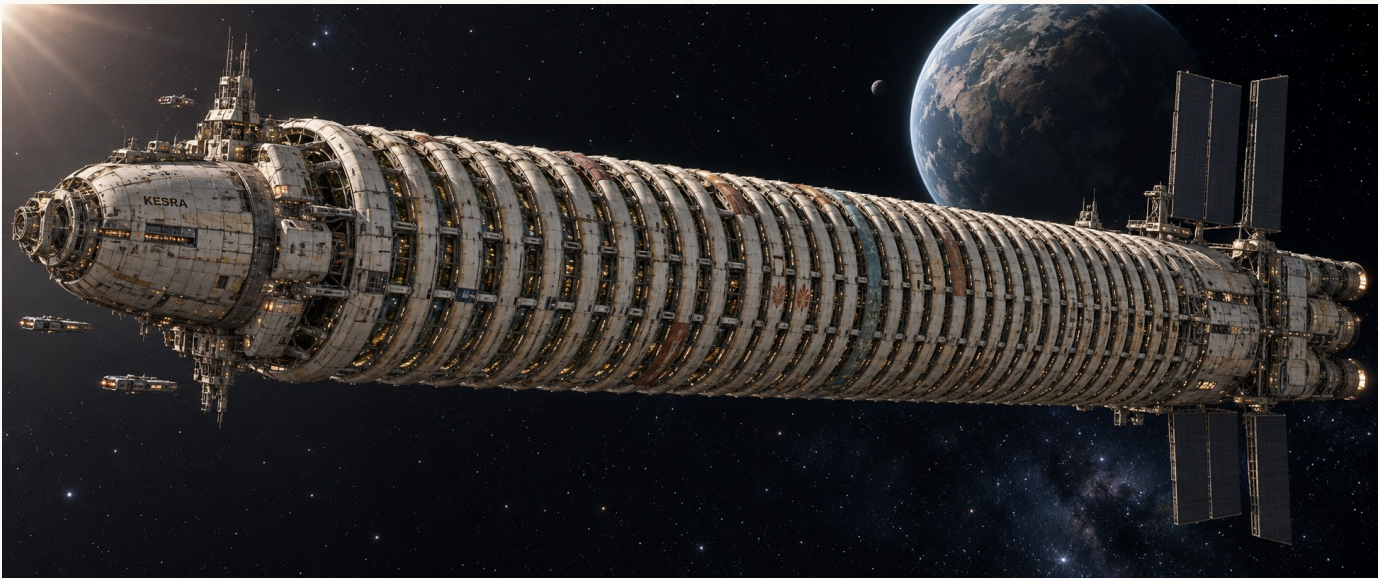
Different worlds. One imagination.

The complete story, arranged in five chapters with the established cover and ship artwork, plus new illustrations of the settlement, the work aboard, and the gift that remains.

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- 02 People Being There
- 03 Perfectly Safe Water
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CHAPTER 01

The Rooms They Refused



Seven months to reach a world whose people are still waiting below.

Oru had asked three times for the clicking to stop.

The first request had gone to maintenance. The second had gone to Dorr. The third had reached Mara with an audio recording attached.

Mara listened outside the communications enclosure.

“I can barely hear it.”

Inside the curved pressure window, Oru folded two fins close to their body.

“Yes,” their translator said. “You have mentioned your limitations before.”

Mara smiled.

Behind her, Dorr removed a panel beneath the enclosure.

A tool clicked.

Oru went still.

“That,” they said.

Dorr examined the fitting.

“The replacement valve.”

“It has been discussing itself with me for six days.”

“I will find a quieter one.”

“Thank you.”

Mara was about to leave when the arrival indicator lit.

A message had reached them from the ocean settlement below.

Oru opened it.

Through the window, Mara watched the fine feelers along their body spread.

“What is it?”

“The evacuation agreement,” Oru said. “They have withdrawn it.”

* * *

The *Kesra* had spent seven months reaching the system.

There had been warning enough to prepare. Deep fractures beneath the inhabited basin were releasing substances the local filtration plants could no longer remove fast enough. Whole neighborhoods had moved uphill along the seabed. Others had sealed themselves inside shelters.

The planetary authorities had requested help, chosen a temporary refuge elsewhere in the system, and sent detailed requirements for transporting their people.

Sere’s teams had spent the journey preparing liquid habitats.

Now the settlement council was refusing to board.

Mara studied its message.

“They approved these specifications.”

“They approved the measurements,” Oru said.

On the bridge, a model of the settlement filled the planning display: low dwellings arranged around stone ridges, sheltered channels, broad gathering hollows.

Tavi rotated it.

“Can they reach the terminal?”

“Yes,” Oru said.

“Is the terminal functioning?”

“Yes.”

“Then this is an unusually complicated way to remain in danger.”

Mara glanced toward Oru.

“Arrange a conversation.”

“I already have.”

* * *

The council representative appeared on the display as a broad, ridged body resting against a curved support. Several delicate limbs held its edges. Light moved across rows of small sensory pits.

Its name reached Mara through the translator as Teren.

Behind Teren, a child repeatedly pressed one side of their body against the wall.

“We understand your urgency,” Mara began.

Teren waited for the translated vibration.

Then their answer arrived.

“You have built us separate rooms.”

“We can connect them.”

“With passages.”

“Yes.”

The child pressed against the wall again.

Teren moved aside to make space.

Mara tried another approach.

“What needs to change?”

A long pause followed.

“We do not know how to explain what is absent from the plans.”

“Could you show Oru?”

Teren’s sensory limbs lifted.

Oru answered before Mara could add anything.

“I can come down.”

CHAPTER 02

People Being There



Oru visits the settlement and discovers the familiar rhythms carried through its stone.

Mara disliked sending a department head to a settlement already being evacuated. She disliked it less than sending someone who would never know what to ask.

Oru’s pressure vessel occupied most of the small survey craft’s equipment bay. Two communications technicians traveled with them. The craft descended, landed at the terminal, and connected to a flooded reception chamber.

For several minutes after the connection was opened, Oru said nothing.

Mara watched the transmission from the bridge.

Their fins moved slowly. Their sensory fringe rested against the clear enclosure.

Finally:

“Captain. Turn off the reception audio.”

Mara checked the channel.

“Yours?”

“The one you are hearing.”

She muted the speakers.

The picture continued.

Oru extended a feeler against a contact plate on the terminal wall. Teren settled beside it.

A pressure pattern began moving across the screen.

The communications technicians redirected the feed to the *Kesra*’s instruments.

Mara watched colored traces travel across the display.

“What am I looking at?”

Oru’s translator answered over a separate line.

“Someone preparing food. A door being repaired. The gathering chamber requesting help moving a resting platform.”

“Those are messages?”

“Some.”

“And the rest?”

“People being there.”

* * *

The settlement spoke through its structure.

Not continuously in words. Most of what traveled through the ridges and dwelling walls was too ordinary to translate: movement, work, familiar rhythms.

Children learned their family’s presence before they learned formal speech.

Neighbors could recognize one another moving through shared spaces.

The stone beneath the community carried a constant, changing account of who was nearby.

Mara thought of the child pressing against the wall.

“Our pods isolate vibration,” she said.

Dorr’s tools stopped.

“We work very hard to achieve that.”

“I know.”

Oru’s voice remained quiet.

“They have seen the accommodation demonstrations. Teren says the rooms would be suitable for sleeping alone.”

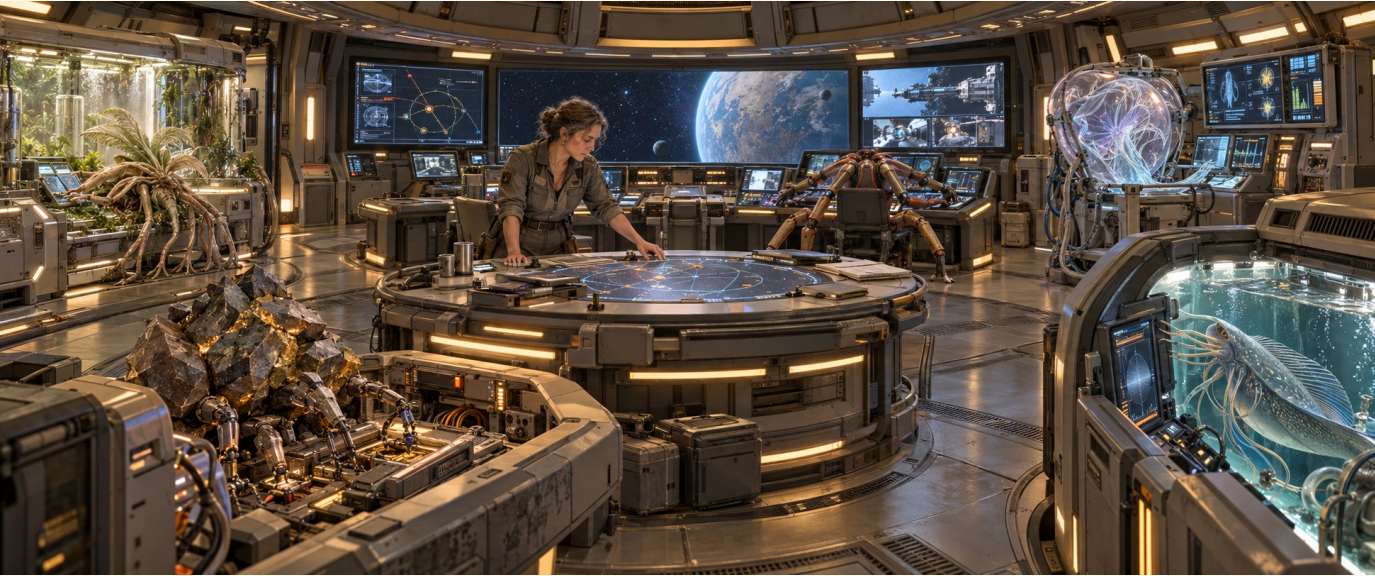
Sere opened the habitat plans.

“They would not be alone.”

“No,” Oru said. “But they would not be able to tell.”

CHAPTER 03

Perfectly Safe Water



A rescue requires more than suitable measurements. The crew begins again.

They could install speakers.

That was the first proposal.

Oru rejected it gently.

“They need to answer.”

“Microphones,” Mara said.

“Then they need to know where the answer comes from. Which wall. How far away. Whether someone is approaching or leaving.”

The engineering department produced a second proposal.

Dorr inspected it, then enlarged the total equipment requirement.

“That will take weeks.”

“We have eleven days,” Mara said.

The quiet that followed was interrupted by the replacement valve.

Click.

Oru’s feelers tightened.

Dorr turned toward the enclosure.

Then toward the habitat model.

“Perhaps,” they said, “we have made this unnecessarily elaborate.”

* * *

The test chamber held one family.

Teren arrived with two adults and the child Mara had seen on the first call. They entered from their transfer vessel through a flooded connection and settled against the newly fitted interior supports.

Dorr's people had attached broad contact surfaces to the walls. Sere had helped shape them to the passengers' bodies.

Those surfaces connected through an internal framework carried on isolated mounts. The framework could transmit the passengers' movement while limiting interference from pumps and rotating machinery.

It looked crude.

Mara had been aboard long enough to distrust equipment that looked finished before anyone had used it.

Teren touched a wall.

In the adjoining compartment, another adult answered.

The child lifted away from the floor.

For a moment, Mara allowed herself to hope.

Then a heavy vibration passed through the structure.

The child struck the floor and curled tightly against an adult.

The adult gripped the nearest support.

Dorr checked the instruments.

"Circulation pump changing speed."

"Can we filter it out?" Mara asked.

"Some of it."

"Enough?"

Dorr did not answer.

Beyond the window, Teren waited until the child had unfolded.

Then they requested a return to the transfer vessel.

* * *

Mara found Oru in communications.

The enclosure lights had been lowered. The replacement valve sat on a workbench outside it, disconnected.

"I could ask the council to order boarding," she said.

Oru turned.

"Would you?"

"If the alternative is leaving them there."

"They are frightened of dying below. They are also frightened of what we are asking them to survive aboard."

"We can't reproduce an ocean settlement."

"No."

Mara rubbed her forehead.

“What am I missing?”

Oru drifted closer to the window.

“On my first voyage away from home, I was given quarters with a circulation system that changed direction every nine minutes.”

“Was that a problem?”

“I could not rest.”

“What did you do?”

“Asked for help.”

“And?”

“The technician explained that the water was perfectly safe.”

Mara looked toward the disconnected valve.

After a while, she said, “We’ve been presenting them with finished answers.”

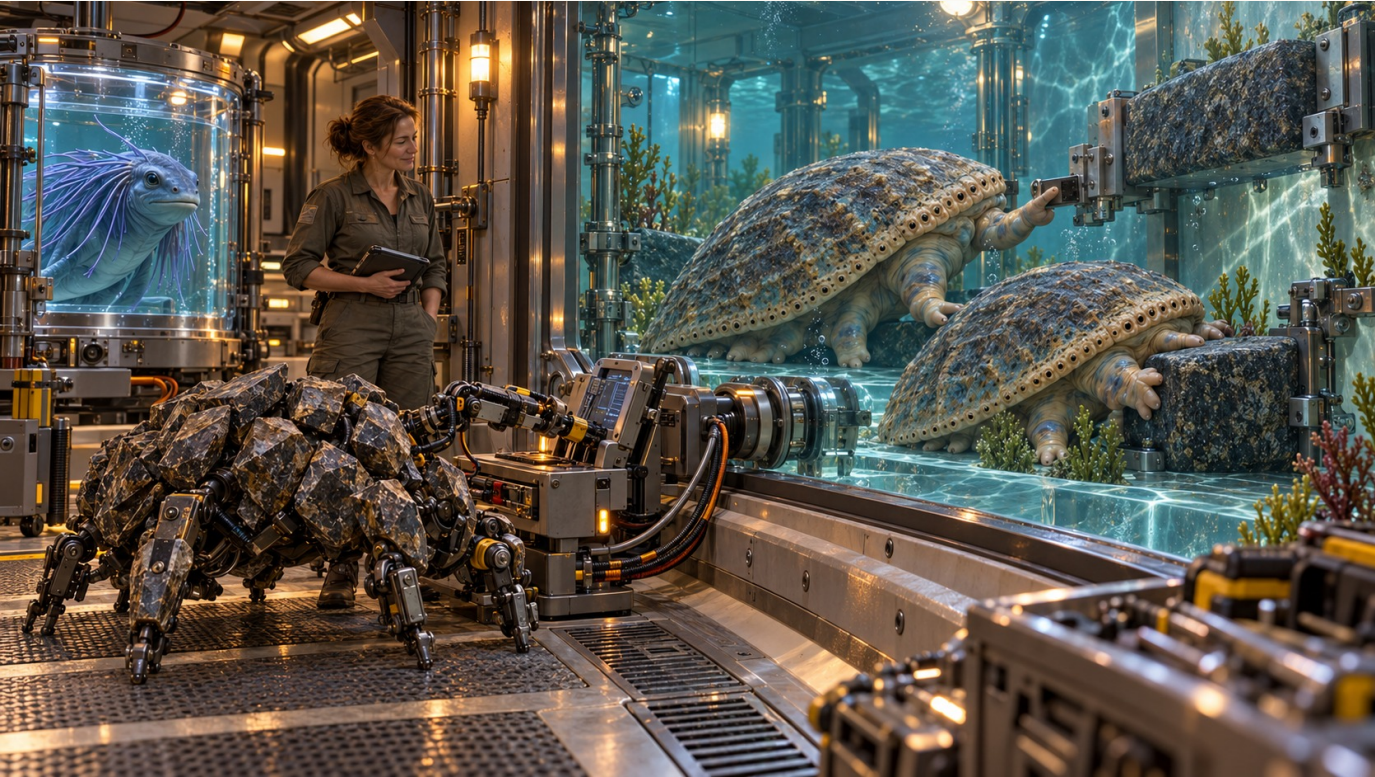
“Yes.”

“Let’s invite their engineers aboard.”

“And their families,” Oru said. “The engineers may also believe that safe water is sufficient.”

CHAPTER 04

Somewhere to Sit



The residents help design and test their own temporary home.

Six residents came for the next test.

They brought tools.

One brought food. Another brought a long object wrapped in woven strands.

When the wrapping came off, Mara saw a weathered length of dark stone.

Teren rested against it while the visitors discussed the chamber.

“What is that?” Mara asked.

“A piece of the old gathering ridge,” Oru said.

Dorr examined its scan.

“You brought a structural sample?”

Teren’s translated reply arrived.

“We brought somewhere to sit.”

* * *

Work changed after that.

The passengers tested each modification themselves.

One engineer found a mounting bracket carrying machinery noise into the framework. A parent pointed out that two resting surfaces were too far apart for a small child to reach both.

Dorr’s team adjusted the supports.
Sere changed the placement of partitions.
The residents moved the stone bench three times.
On the fourth evening, Tavi joined the call from the bridge.
“The next carrier departure needs a decision.”
Mara checked the clock.
Below them, filtration crews were abandoning another shelter.
She looked through the test chamber window.
The child was resting beneath the bench.
A few compartments away, someone began working against a contact surface.
The child stirred.
Pressed a small limb against the stone.
Waited.
An answer came back.
This time, the child settled again.
Teren remained beside the bench for a long while.
Then their translator spoke.
“Begin boarding.”



An answer comes back through the stone. This time, the child settles again.

CHAPTER 05

What the Ship Keeps

They could not save the whole settlement.

Its ridges were too large. Most of its dwellings would remain beneath water nobody could safely return to.

They saved people.

They saved tools and records, food cultures and small living things kept in traveling containers.

They carried aboard lengths of stone from places the residents chose.

The stones served as resting surfaces, contact points, and landmarks in the new framework. Passengers worked beside the crew to install them.

Some asked for quiet compartments.

Others wanted their families close enough to feel every movement.

The *Kesra* accommodated both.

As each carrier returned, the gathering spaces became more complicated.

There were arguments over work schedules.

A familiar rhythm traveled from one compartment to another, and someone answered.

Children discovered that maintenance crews were excellent listeners if approached during a meal.

Dorr acquired three assistants who were not qualified for engineering work but were exceptionally good at identifying unwanted sounds.

One of them located a loose fitting Dorr had been searching for since the previous rescue.

“I would like to retain this passenger,” Dorr informed Mara.

“You’ll have to ask.”

“I did. They requested a workshop.”

“Of course they did.”



The carriers return with passengers, tools, records, and pieces of the gathering ridges.

Months later, the last family left the *Kesra* for the refuge settlement. Their new dwellings had been built around a shared framework. More permanent homes would follow when the community had decided where and how it wanted to live. Teren met Mara at the transfer enclosure before departing. Through the translator, they thanked the crew. Then they asked to leave the bench. Mara looked toward Oru. “Are they certain?” Teren answered directly. “It has been somewhere to sit here.”

The framework was dismantled where it needed to be. Useful sections were stored for another rescue. The flooded habitats were cleaned and prepared for whatever passengers might come next. One small chamber remained. The stone bench rested against a contact wall connected to a neighboring room. On quiet watches, Oru visited. Sometimes Dorr joined them. Mara came once and found both already there, each connected through equipment suited to their body.

She sat on the dry side of the chamber and placed her palm against the contact plate.
A faint rhythm reached her hand.
She tapped twice.
Something answered.
Mara smiled.
From the corridor came a sharp metallic click.
Oru withdrew their feelers.
“Dorr.”
“I heard it.”
“Good.”
Mara left them examining the wall together.



The bench remains aboard, making a place for another kind of conversation.

THE END