

Castia's Quest

by Isra

"Woah!" Castia hollered, as she tripped over a root. She was hiking on a trail close to her house. She enjoyed hiking and went often. Trees swayed in the wind like they were dancing, birds chattered happily to one another ahead, two squirrels fought over an acorn but saw her and scampered away. It was a beautiful summer day. She loved nature and would do almost anything to protect it.

Suddenly the bushes behind her rustled she turned expecting to see a chipmunk or squirrel. Instead, a gray male tabby cat padded out of the undergrowth. "Do you have an owner?" Castia murmured, half to herself, half to the cat. The cat seemed to roll its eyes at her. "It's okay," she soothed.

As the cat stepped forward, Castia reached out and stroked him. The cat let out a happy puuurrrrrrr. Castia examined the cat. It had a collar so it must belong to someone she thought. Or I think it's a collar? It was huge! And stranger still, it was made of glass! She looked closer and to her surprise, she could see the moon and the Milky Way and all the stars. As Castia touched it, the inside of the glass collar swirled and showed her Mercury. "WOAH!" she said aloud as the cat hissed and bit her hand. "OW!" she yowled.

Castia stared at the cat, the cat stared at her, she stared at it. This continued, until suddenly the cat ran off into the woods. Castia looked behind her, hesitated, and then ran after it. She saw it ahead gracefully extending its legs. She felt clumsy and awkward compared to it. Eventually the cat got ahead, and Castia gave up. She was exhausted. She looked around her,

but nothing was familiar. She looked up and almost fainted because it was night. "No, this was impossible," Castia thought. Maybe she was seeing things. And how could it be night when she even hadn't had lunch?

Castia sat down dizzy and puzzled. She decided to try and find the path and wandered around for quite some time until she saw a cave. It was small and damp. Inside, there was a tunnel which was very dark. Maybe it would lead her home! She headed into the tunnel.

For a while she had to walk on her knees but soon the tunnel opened, and she stood up. She still had to bend over a bit, but it was better than crawling! She stopped because there was someone ahead. She could hear them they were walking very loud! Castia stopped and held her breath.

"Meow" a voice meowed. It was the cat she had seen earlier!

Castia breathed a sigh of relief "here kitty kitty cat," she said softly.

The cat stepped forward. She could see its outline in the dark. It growled at her "you need to go back" it told her.

"Why? I don't under..." Castia started to say. "Y...you talked," she stammered.

"No, I always was talking just not in your language," it replied. "You need to come with me" the cat said. "I'm called mercury," Mercury said.

"My name is Castia" she said. "A talking cat..." she said dreamily.

Mercury hissed "Don't get used to it."

"I don't understand. Are there more talking animals where are we going? How is it already night?" Castia asked Mercury.

"Oh, I suppose should tell you..." he sighed.

“Thank you!” she said happily.

Mercury sighed and rolled his eyes at her “there are more creatures like me, and we can speak in almost any language. Our leader is named Earth. She created Earth and humans and most animals. Some of us chose to live on Earth with humans. The rest of us live on our planet, Nephete. This cave is a portal from Earth to Nephete.”

Mercury continued “humans invented plastic. Big factories polluting Earth and warming the planet. Eventually humans destroyed Earth. So, we remade Earth and humans. We gave them a second chance, but the same thing happened. We gave them a third chance-- you are still on your third chance. My leader sent me to Earth to see if it is going to happen again” Mercury said.

“And?” Castia prompted.

“It is going to happen again; in about 2 years I’d say” Mercury said.

“That doesn’t explain why it’s night!” Castia said, still very confused.

“Every day on my planet Nephete, all the animals, cats and dogs vote on whether they think it should be night or day. Today most voted night,” Mercury said simply.

“It must take a long time if all the animals on Nephete and Earth vote,” Castia said.

“It takes ten minutes,” Mercury said.

“What?” Castia said.

“We mind-speak messages to one another in our heads.

“Let’s try it,” Castia pleaded.

“You have to concentrate” Mercury replied.

“But that doesn’t explain why it’s night on Earth,” Castia pointed out.

“Right,” he meowed. “Because you’re so close to the portal and you saw it was night,” Mercury explained. “Anyways, do you want to try to mind-speak?”

“Ok,” Castia said excitedly. She concentrated hard. She and Mercury had stopped walking. She focused. For a second, she thought she could hear Mercury’s voice in her head.

“Castia,” he said. His voice sounded wobbly. “Try talking to me,” he mind-spoke to her. She tried. “Can you hear me?” she thought.

“Yes,” Mercury replied. She had done it! “Let’s keep going,” Mercury said normally.

“Can we please try again?” Castia pleaded.

“No,” Mercury mewed flatly.

“How come you’re always so grumpy?” she complained.

“You haven’t even known me for a day,” he growled. She sighed with frustration, and they kept walking. Eventually she was aware of a noise up ahead. It was a sort of rushing noise like a waterfall. The tunnel was getting brighter too.

“Are we reaching Nephete?” she asked eagerly. Mercury nodded. The noise was getting louder and louder. The light was getting brighter and brighter, until Castia found herself squinting.

“Just behind those,” Mercury gestured with a paw toward some boulders. He leaped over them. Castia followed. Excited to see what was on the other side, she climbed the last boulder and gasped. There was a wall and on it a swirling blue glowing thing.

“What is it?” Castia asked him

“This is how we get to Nephete,” Mercury said answering her.

“It’s a portal...” But before she was even halfway through her sentence, Mercury had leaped into the portal. Without thinking, Castia jumped into the portal after him. As soon as she had hopped into the portal she was already out. It happened so suddenly and without warning that she fell to the ground with a thump. She sat up. She looked around. Everything on Nephete was exactly like everything on Earth, besides humans or anything humans created. There were cats and dogs everywhere. She saw a silver cat with indigo eyes in a tree! “Woah!” she said, her jaw dropping.

There were trees everywhere. Cats and dogs chatted happily to one another. Some had noticed her and were staring and whispering to one another.

“Castia...?” Mercury said, waving a paw in her face. “Come on!” he called.

“Coming,” she said nervously. She was aware of every animal there staring at her. She followed Mercury deeper and deeper into the woods.

“Hi, I’m Squirrel, everyone is talking about you. Are you going to see Earth? Hi dad!” said a brown and white cat who had burst out of the bushes.

“Hello Squirrel. This is my daughter Squirrel, Castia,” said Mercury.

“You’re married?” Castia blurted.

“Partnered,” Mercury corrected, blushing.

Castia looked at Squirrel. “Hi,” she said.

“Hi, I’m Squirrel. Protector of squirrels,” Squirrel boasted. “And you are a human,” she said. “Let’s be friends,” Squirrel decided.

“Ok,” Castia said.

“Great! Has Mercury told you everything you need to know about Nephete?” Squirrel asked her.

“I think so,” Castia replied, recalling everything Mercury had told her on the way

“No, not everything,” Mercury said.

“Did he tell you every cat and dog here named a thing on Earth or in space after themselves? Our leader named Earth, named your planet after herself. She let all the other animals of Nephete name something after themselves,” said Squirrel.

“Well, you just told me,” Castia said.

“Oh!” Squirrel giggled.

“Come on you two,” Mercury said gruffly. “We are here.”

Castia stopped talking and looked up to see a cave. Up ahead, the silver cat with indigo eyes was outside of the cave. There was also a Golden Retriever guarding the entrance. “Hello Sun!” Mercury said, nodding to the Golden Retriever, who must be named Sun. “Hello Moon,” he said, nuzzling the silver cat who was obviously his partner.

“Come in,” said a voice from inside the cave.

Castia gulped. “Have you ever met Earth before?” Castia whispered to Squirrel.

“A few times,” Squirrel replied.

“Come in,” the voice repeated.

“Go in,” Mercury said.

“You’re not coming with me??” Castia said, panicking.

“Go in!” Mercury hissed.

“Ok,” Castia said, and ducked into the cave. Inside, a tan colored cat waited for her. “Are you the leader of Nephete?” Castia asked.

“Yes. Call me Earth. You may stay here Castia, but you must learn to speak cat and dog,” Earth said.

Castia thought about staying on Nephete and decided that she wanted to. Earth’s voice cut into her thoughts.. “You can go now,” Earth said. Castia nodded and headed out of the cave to join Squirrel, who was waiting.

“What did she say to you? Are you going to stay? Was she mad at you?” Squirrel asked eagerly.

“Yes, I’m going to stay, and no, she wasn’t mad at me,” Castia said, exhausted. The words that she had said rang in her ears. She was going to stay.

In the following days, Castia became more and more comfortable on Nephete. She still refused to eat mouse, but Squirrel insisted she try. It was getting late and Castia crept to the oak tree where she had been sleeping. Squirrel was already curled up and fast asleep. Castia laid down beside her and immediately fell asleep.

She woke up again in the middle of the night. “How long until the planet Earth was going to be destroyed,” she thought. Mercury said it would be destroyed in 2 years. But why did she care? She didn’t even live on Earth anymore.

Castia looked around. Everybody was sleeping. She sat up and walked over to the portal. Castia got a running start and jumped into it. She fell on her face. She stood up and walked down the tunnel. The walk seemed shorter then when she had come to Nephete. When she reached the end of the tunnel, she realized something. Something big. She had no idea what to

do about Earth being destroyed. She sat down. “Who would believe her when she said that it was the end of the world? How would she tell everyone in the world?” She thought for a moment. She had it! “Social media!”

Castia skipped to her old neighborhood. She ran up to someone holding their phone, snatched it, and ran off screaming. “I’m going to save Earth!” She went on social media and typed about how Earth would be destroyed. The next day, people started showing up at the cave. She showed them Nephete. The day after that, even more people joined including news reporters, and the president! People didn’t use any plastic anymore!

Castia knew nothing on Earth would ever be the same again. She had made a difference. She was Castia!

