

Ordinary Velorians

Alisa's Story

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Captain Peter Durgin picked up the last of the pile of personnel records on his desk. It belonged to the new science officer who'd just been assigned to his ship. He flipped it open and started to read.

Her name was Alisa Liddell, and she was a graduate from the Institute of AstroScience with an advanced degree in Exploratory Astrophysics with substantial course work in wormhole anomalies. She had glowing recommendations from three of her professors.

About on par with the rest of the science staff, he decided. All of his people came highly recommended.

What was remarkable was Captain Vicente Zapata's Perf Review. He'd been her captain on a training mission through several known wormholes, and he'd given her a perfect five. Zapata was infamous for his faint praise, and he never gave out 5's.

Intrigued now, Durgin read the boilerplate comments in the Review, only to find they weren't the usual.

“Uniquely competent for a new officer, very hard-working and learns very fast.”

High praise; but all Fleet Science Officers were especially talented.

“Able to solve all wormhole entry equations during the mission.”

That was something. Those equations were designed to humble a new techie. Maybe he had something here.

He read more glowing praise until he got to the personality comments at the bottom.

“A bit too aloof. Too focused on proving herself. A loner.”

Durgin smiled at the message between the lines. The ensign obviously hadn't

participated in the extracurricular activities of a deep space starship crew. He flipped back to the first page to glance at her picture. Young, fit and pretty. Also very blonde. The old hands would resent it if someone who looked like her didn't share in their games.

Kelsorians might be a bit stuffy on the ground, although some got pretty wild during Short Year/Long Day festivals, but their ships were very liberated when it came to crew activities in deep space. Randy shipboard romances were the norm, partners changing frequently, those temporary liaisons filling the void created by the pause in their groundside relationships. What happened on a starship was strictly crew's business, and by long tradition, never whispered to anyone once they were ashore.

The result was that the crew make-up was pretty well balanced between male and female officers. Age didn't make a lot of difference, and heterosexuals were the norm. The crews looked to their own, and that meant share and share alike. Naturally, not everyone participated in the bedroom games, especially not the members of the Christla sect, but most did.

Alisa Liddell wasn't religious like the Christlas -- her record would have flagged that -- but Zapata's review suggested she'd acted as if she were.

Durgin had no problem with that. Not on the coming mission, at least. They'd been directed to attempt a first penetration of a new wormhole, and an anomalous hole at that. There wouldn't be many off hours to play around with once they got close to the singularity. First penetrations were incredibly dangerous.

On the other hand, there would be the ritual that came after they'd gone through and made it back. Shragnel was what crews called it, and it was the reason why Christlas rarely crewed on first penetration missions. It generally took the form of a two-day long party, with everyone's clothing left in their cabins.

Durgin had always thought of it as thumbing their noses at the dangers of first wormhole penetration by engaging in a safer type of penetration. It would be a real problem if Alisa didn't play along. Crews who volunteered for these dangerous missions tended to be superstitious, and the tradition of Shragnel was a way to celebrate the joy of life in the face of possible annihilation. If someone didn't play, it could jinx the whole crew.

Durgin figured the ensign would play along once she understood the tradition. He looked at her picture more closely, deciding that she was too pretty for Science Staff. That could be its own problem. She was also very young; barely twenty-one. She'd joined the Fleet at nineteen after completing what should have been seven years of study in less than three years. Five years younger than anyone else on the ship, and far younger than any PhD he'd ever met. He didn't like prodigies. Especially in AstroPhysics. They had depth, but no breadth. Despite Zapata's recommendation, first penetrations were no place for rookies.

He was about to close her folder and refuse the transfer when he noticed the yellow triangle at the bottom of the record. Fleet Personnel Eyes-Only.

What the hell was that?

He touched his finger to the glowing triangle of the hologram, activating the embedded chip in the file folder, which in turn interfaced with the ship's computer. "Authorization Capstone or above required for access," the computer promptly said.

Classified personnel records for a new Ensign? That was very strange.

"Authorization Capstone 473824Alpha17," he recited.

The computer paused for a brief moment as it double-checked his voice scan. The room-scanning lasers confirmed his iris signature and other biometrics. They also confirmed that he was alone.

"Granted," the synthetic voice replied. "Request to disable all monitors and secure the room. Audible commands will be terminated."

"Affirmative," Durgin said.

He was the only one on the ship with the authority to shut down computer monitoring of a room. He reached up to touch the glowing triangle again with the tip of his finger. There was only a single line in the classified record.

Race: Velorian, Class: P1

He slumped back in his chair, astounded. A Velorian? On his ship?

Velorians were rarely seen in this sector, and never on Kelsor 7 itself. Just some low-level diplomats negotiating trade and other agreements too sensitive to be handled through the usual third parties at neutral locations.

It was a matter of self-interest, even self-preservation, for the Kelsorians to know

as much as possible about the outside universe -- and for that outside universe, especially the Great Powers, to know as little as possible about them. It was further in the interest of the Kelsorians that those Great Powers remain preoccupied with each other.

Although the Aurean Empire was the most dangerous, yet if left unchecked, the Velorian Enlightenment was no more to be trusted. The Velorians had once offered to station a Protector on Kelsor 7 to protect the manufacturing of the QED's.

Their emissary had been politely refused.

Durgin suddenly found himself wondering if the Velorians might still have designs. They had the dangerous ability to see through things and hear things they shouldn't, and Kelsor's prosperity was only assured as long as the secret of the quantum electric drive for starships was protected. Only the Kelsorians possessed the means to build such drive systems, and they were the primary source of their wealth.

QED modules were heavily shielded, and shipped with built-in fail-safe devices against tampering -- even the use of tachyon vision to examine them would trigger their self-destruct mechanisms. Kelsor 7 sold the QEDs for whatever the traffic would bear, and to whoever could afford them -- Velorians, Aureans, Scalantrans, Reigelians, you name it. The list of clients was in the hundreds. That helped maintain the balance of power.

The modules also had a relatively short working life, and that made clients all the more dependent on the good will of the Kelsorians as the only source of replacement units. It also ensured their neutrality. If anyone moved against the Kelsorians, all the other powers would step in instantly to stop the attacker.

As for Velorian women, Durgin knew their reputation. Hell, everyone did -- whether from official reports or the kind of spicy romantic dramas that he occasionally indulged in. Durgin had seen a Velorian once, on Buckley Three, near the Stapledon Nebula. He'd been having a drink in the hotel lobby when an extremely tall and poised blonde walked through the door. She was wearing an elegant gown, and her skin was a stunning shade of golden tan, her body so firm it looked sculpted. She walked as if weightless, her eyes sparkling like blue diamonds. She looked both very young and mature at the same time.

She saw him staring at her, and turned to look boldly back at him, her gaze piercing him with its intensity, forcing him to look away. His heart raced as he found her mere presence brought a change to the atmosphere of the room, almost as if the windows had suddenly been blown open by a fresh mountain breeze. Her perfume carried the scent of honey and blooming wildflowers. He'd stared back dumbfounded at her after she turned away, unable to even blink until she disappeared through the doorway into the grand ballroom.

That brief encounter had sent a quickening sense of electrified arousal through his body that refused to fade. It was so intense that he'd had to make a quick visit to the girls at the Golden Aquarius before bed. Like many worlds of call, Buckley Three knew how to entertain lonely crewmen, their pockets full of back pay.

Still, he'd been embarrassed by the uncontrollable strength of his arousal. He wasn't used to feeling intimidated by a woman, let alone feeling out of control of his own emotions. His usual style while on leave was to seduce the first pretty young thing who walked into the hotel lobby unescorted. The Velorian had been that woman, but he'd been frozen in his seat.

A few discreet inquiries the next morning revealed that there was indeed a Velorian staying at the hotel. He tried to locate her, but she was gone before he tracked down her room. Strangely, despite the frequent company of beautiful women in his bed, it had taken him months to get her out of his head. It was almost as if she'd placed a spell or charm on him.

And now he had one of those accursed women serving on his ship. Undercover as well, which was completely insane. Her pheromones alone would drive his crew mad, just as he was sure his brief encounter on Buckley Three had almost done that to him.

He reached out and touched the green holographic Enable diamond that floated next to him.

"By your command, Sir and Captain," the synthetic voice spoke.

"Arrange an immediate meeting with Ensign Alisa Liddell."

"She's in a Science Staff meeting down on C-deck, Captain."

"Then interrupt the damn meeting. I need her here now."

“Affirmative, Sir and Captain.” The computer almost sounded insulted.

Durgin sat back in his chair as he waited for the ensign to arrive, his thoughts racing. His emotions too, although he tried to ignore that.

Velorians were more erotic myth than reality to most Kelsorians. Not just because they were inhumanly attractive, enough to overwhelm and obsess a man, but because they were extremely dangerous if they physically exerted themselves. If the rest of the crew knew the ensign’s secret, they’d become obsessed. That could mean trouble. Especially if she left pheromones in her wake like that Velorian back in the hotel lobby.

His door chimed a few moments later. He took a deep breath to steady his nerves, and said, “Enter.”

The door slid silently open to reveal a tall, slender young woman. She was dressed in the deliberately casual outfit that science crews wore once they’d left the formality of space dock. In her case, that was a pair of yellow shorts and an oversized gray T-shirt. Ship’s sandals. Her hair was as blonde as he’d expected, hanging long and straight. She was definitely pretty, although more cute than exotically beautiful. Her figure wasn’t exotic either -- although she looked fantastically fit. Slightly broader shoulders than expected for her build perhaps, and an unusually small waist with very trim hips. Yet unlike the usual rumors about Vels, she had small, pert breasts.

The only real thing that really gave her away were her large, sparkling blue eyes, partially hidden as they were behind a pair of glasses. They were as clear as a young child's.

“Come in, Ensign.”

She was poised, and moved very smoothly, like a dancer. Almost weightless, which he realized she really was. He caught a glimpse of very slender legs; strong and tanned, but quickly pulled his gaze back to her eyes, realizing she was as tall as he was at 1.85 meters.

She was all formality as she gave him the hand to heart salute. “Ensign Alisa Liddell, reporting as ordered, Sir and Captain.”

“No need for that,” Durgin said as he extended his hand, finding her handshake was as firm as a man’s, her fingers long. Her grip conveyed a sense of physical

confidence that wasn't reflected in her eyes. She looked nervous.

"Welcome aboard the Anders Flame." He waved toward a chair that was facing thirty degrees away from his desk. He'd always found it interesting to see how people reacted to not facing him directly when he talked. The assertive and confident ones turned their chair to face him, the insecure ones looked straight ahead into the corner of the office.

Alisa sat down erect in the chair, her back arrow straight, and slowly took off her glasses as she turned her head to focus on his eyes, maintaining correct formality as she waited for him to speak.



He looked back into her large eyes, and found himself momentarily at a loss for words, knowing she was a fabled Velorian. He tried not to feel intimidated, especially given her young age.

He cleared his throat. "I've been reviewing your records, Ensign. Very impressive academic achievements for someone so young. Not to mention Zapata's Perf Review. I

hope you realize he's never given out a review like that before."

Her eyes opened marginally wider, telling him she didn't.

"I see you haven't clocked any first hole explorations."

She nodded and smiled, trying to look confident. "I'm looking forward to my first time, Sir and Captain. I've read so much about the *Flame*, so naturally I was thrilled when I heard I was being assigned to your ship. It's the real thing at last."

"You understand the nature of our mission?"

She nodded. "I've been fully briefed, Sir."

"Then you know that Cygnias 275 is an especially anomalous hole. We have no precedents, and no idea what to expect. It's not the kind of mission I'd ordinarily take a rookie on. Very dangerous."

She nodded again. "That's why Admiral Tso arranged for me to join your ship."

"You're a friend of the Admiral?" Durgin frowned. He despised favoritism in assignments. That alone was enough for him to want to toss her off his ship.

Alisa's smile faded, clearly uncomfortable by the change in his tone of voice. "No, not a friend. He is merely aware of my... unusual skills."

"Meaning, he knows you're a Velorian? Why didn't he see fit to inform me himself?"

She let out her breath as if she'd been holding it, relaxing slightly as if a weight had come off her shoulders. "You would have to ask the Admiral that."

She paused, seemingly struggling whether to ask another question. "Does anyone else know about me, Sir and Captain?"

Durgin shook his head. "Other than Doc Howell, maybe. He and I are the only ones who can unseal Fleet Personnel Eyes-Only."

She continued to look directly at him, unblinking. "I appreciate that, Sir. My people's reputation can be... disruptive. I can assure you that I don't behave like any others you may have heard of."

"I'm aware of that from Captain Zapata's Perf Review," he said, looking down at his screen. "According to him, you have the makings of a first-rate science officer, but you are otherwise very private otherwise. You don't socialize with the crew." He looked back up into her eyes. "Which is distinctly different than your race's reputation. I

presume Zapata didn't know your racial background."

"No, sir. Nor did he suspect. And about the socializing, or lack thereof, is that going to be a problem?"

"I don't give a damn what people do on their personal time, Ensign. While most crew resent loners, you can be as private as you want on my ship. I'm far more concerned with your experience in navigating holes. Or rather, the lack of it. You've got a head full of theory. I need someone who's been there. Someone who's explored a new hole."

Alisa said nothing for a few seconds. "Well, it was new to me, Sir. The hole I traversed. But it's not in the records."

"How can that be?"

"It... I wasn't on board a Kelsorian ship, Sir"

Durgin stared at her, thoughts racing. "Scalantran then? Velorian?"

"It wasn't in a ship at all," she said simply.

Durgin sat back in his chair, puzzled. "I don't understand."

"A friend took me through and back. Just the two of us."

"You went through a hole without a ship?" Durgin had heard rumors about hole-diving Protectors, but given the temperatures and gravitational gradients involved, he'd dismissed them as hyperbole. He cursed the limited intel about Velorians in the ship's databases.

"Yes."

"And I suppose your 'friend' was a Protector?"

"That's not germane."

"What can you tell me that is?"

"That I'm actually better than a Protector for this kind of work, Captain. I have the same genetics as one, saving those final Rites, but more importantly, I have an innate talent for traversing holes. I can do the math in my head and sense the right vector. Something your fastest computers have trouble calculating in real time."

"If you're that good, what are you doing on my ship? You could be exploring on your own."

"Unstable holes are dangerous for me, Sir. I can't live indefinitely in a vacuum,

and falling into a black hole will kill me as surely as it will you.”

“Nice to know you’re not omnipotent,” he quipped.

“More importantly, we both know that some holes don’t have a way back. At least none that I could ever find with my senses. But with the specialized instruments of this ship, you might be able to.”

Durgin’s thoughts were still racing as images of her plunging through a wormhole without a shielded ship filled his mind’s eye.

“But how could you go through unprotected? The heat and the pressure inside a hole approach that of a star’s photosphere?”

She shrugged. “It was uncomfortable.”

“Uncomfortable? Do you float around in the plasma of a star too?”

“Not normally,” Alisa deadpanned, a tiny hint of pride tilting the corners of her mouth. “Does Kelsor 6 count?”

Not hardly, being a brown dwarf, Durgin thought. Despite the fact that this was his interview and he was sitting in his office, his heart was racing. Instead of liabilities, he suddenly saw opportunities. His ship and crew were normally helpless in wormhole transit. Propulsion ineffective, the ship totally dependent on its shields, and no way to recover if they’d guessed wrong on the entry vectors. The ensign could help with that problem. Even operate outside the ship while inside a hole if need be.

“So, you’re fascinated by wormholes, Ensign. That much is clear from your records.”

“Not ordinary holes, Captain. But the really anomalous ones. There is nothing more exciting than unfolding the space-time continuum. To find roads none have traveled before. To explore new worlds, meet new peoples.”

Durgin grimaced. Her answer sounded like a recruitment ad for the Fleet. Yet he’d said nearly the same words during a hundred speeches back groundside. Corny stuff, but everyone on the ship privately felt the same way.

“You could be useful if we hit an unexpected anomaly in transit.” Then he thought of her being outside the ship again, and his doubts grew. “But... I mean really, plasma at ten thousands degrees, even millions at the transition foci, not to mention the force of thousands of gravities? Our strongest ships with all their shields can barely

resist those forces.”

She crossed her arms below her breasts and sat up even taller. “My race was engineered with this in mind. Despite the way we look.”

Durgin's head started to spin. He had to know more. He'd never really paid much attention to Velorians, other than that woman in the hotel, and all she'd done was validate the most outrageous rumors. But the ensign was so different.

“I have to be absolutely sure you're what you say you are. Otherwise, I can't see that you'd be any use whatever. Frankly speaking.”

“Since we are being frank, the Admiral expected you to say that. He suggested that it might help for you to see for yourself. Something about you being from Missouri, whatever that means.”

“Frank knows me too well.”

“Frank?”

“The Admiral. He doesn't like people to know his given name was Francis Xavier Tso. So he changed it to Watt. But in Chinese, the surname comes first, so...”

“What?”

“So what do we do now?”

“You've got a Vendorian Klav'en down in the Armory, Sir. Next to the spare QED module. Courtesy of the Admiral.”

Durgin's eyebrow lifted. “A Klav'en? On a survey ship? Fleet Security would never authorize...”

She stopped him with a shrug. “You might want to confirm with Security.”

“I didn't think even Frank would go Tso far.”

Alisa looked at him expectedly, not registering the twinkle in his eye. She was too tense to find anything humorous in their banter.

Durgin sighed and glanced up at the red holo port on the wall. Nobody ever got his dry sense of humor. “Connect me to Lieutenant Abrams.”

The pin-sharp image of a woman's face materialized in mid-air. “Sir and Captain?”

“Do we have a Vendorian weapon on board? A Klav'en?”

She suddenly looked nervous. “I apologize for not informing you, but I just found

out about it myself, Sir. The last shuttle transferred a package under heavy guard just before we left orbit, but the invoice and directive from Central Command arrived only moments ago. There are only two persons authorized to remove it." She glanced down at her display. "You and an Ensign Alisa Liddell, whoever that is."

Durgin muted the computer, freezing the Lieutenant's image, and looked back at Alisa. "Why?"

"I don't normally carry much energy, Captain. Being largely depleted dampens my pheromones to near zero. Something I'm sure you and the crew will appreciate. But the Klav'en provides a way for me to power up in a hurry."

"Orgone energy?" Durgin wondered out loud. Is that what she's talking about? He'd read about it, but it seemed like so much mumbo-jumbo. Some kind of biological energy source that had an energy density in the range of nuclear explosives.

"You use a weapon... to recharge?" It was the most bizarre thing he'd ever heard.

"Normally, I wouldn't. It's quite painful and dramatic."

"I've got to see this."

Alisa nodded, looking distinctly unhappy. "The Admiral expected as much, but I was hoping you'd just take my word on it."

Durgin reached out to unfreeze the image of the Lieutenant. "I think I do know what its for, Lieutenant Abrams. Deliver it to the cargo bay. And make sure the surrounding compartments and corridors are sealed off and unoccupied. Secure protocols. My access only."

The Lieutenant hesitated. "Captain, that weapon could open up our hull, shields or no shields. This is a big one: rated at 100 TeV. Powerful enough to vaporize the entire superstructure of a survey ship like the Flame. It could threaten even the QED pods."

"Understood, Lieutenant. Do it anyway."

"By your command, Sir and Captain." The Lieutenant was looking worried when her image evaporated.

Durgin turned back to Alisa. "So, do you do this kind of thing all the time, Ensign? Sneak onto starships with advanced energy weapons?"

Alisa shook her head. "Never before. But I reviewed the Klav'en's power output with the Admiral, and he had the WeapTechs tune it for my... abilities. Actually to my absorption spectrum. He said you'd know when my other abilities were needed."

Durgin rose to gesture toward the door, his heart racing. "Well then, Ensign, let's not delay."

Chapter Two

They stood outside the cavernous cargo bay ten minutes later. Durgin held the heavy, silver-colored Klav'en gingerly, the stock of the weapon covered in warning emblems. It was the most lethal looking device he'd ever seen.

Reaching up, he punched his personal code into a well-worn keypad. The huge door gave off a boom and started to open.

Alisa walked through the opening -- and then two dozen meters out into the middle of the huge bay. She looked carefully around, her eyes sparkling brightly. "The adjacent compartments are indeed empty, Captain."

She must be using her tachyon vision, Durgin thought.

She turned back to face him. "Can we keep this private?"

"Authorization Capstone 473824Alpha17," he said as he faced the holo on the wall. "Total isolation until I re-enable."

"Isolated," the computer replied and then fell silent.

"OK, Ensign. It's now just the two of us. Not even the computer can see or hear what goes on."

She turned her back and crossed her arms, and without hesitation, pulled her T-shirt up and off. Durgin stared in surprise at her sudden nudity. Her back was surprisingly muscular for someone so slender, her shoulders very defined, her spine arrow straight and deeply indented. Her skin was flawless and a uniquely golden shade of tan. Needless to say, she was in phenomenal shape.

She shook her head to send layers of spun gold cascading down to the small of her back, flowing as smoothly as if she'd just brushed it a hundred times. It was a shimmering blonde, more golden than yellow, and alive with highlights.

His mouth went dry as she bent down and stepped out of her shorts, keeping her

back to him as she tossed them toward the door. He stared at perfection, swallowing hard. Despite having enjoyed a hundred encounters with beautiful women, he'd never seen anyone with skin as perfectly tanned or smooth as hers. A body so fit. Legs so strong. Or such a perfectly rounded derriere. None of the usual effects of gravity were visible at all. She might as well be a goddess, given the way she looked.

That last unguarded thought startled him to action. He picked up the weapon and pushed the Charging button. The Klav'en gave off a soft whine that spiraled upward in frequency.

Alisa walked further out to the center of the bay. She hesitated for a moment, and then spun around on her toes to face him.

Durgin was surprised to see that she was biting her lip. Nervous? Or maybe just embarrassed at her nudity.

Neither emotion fit a Velorian's profile.

Her breasts, small that they were, sat high and firm and unnaturally round, with unusually large nipples. Her abs were as flat as a board with a faint ripple of underlying muscle visible, and her hips were slender and tight, her legs were phenomenally long. And, just as rumored, the only hair on her body was on her head. He felt his heart pound as he stared down at her nakedness. Curiously, her sex looked very normal, much like any young human woman's, the outer labia folding inward to form a small slit.

She tossed her hair over one shoulder and placed her hands on her hips, widening her stance slightly, revealing herself further. "I would get behind the lift truck, Captain. I haven't done this before, but I suspect the reflected thermals might be intense."

"You're sure about all this?" he asked, his stomach feeling strangely hollow.

She lifted up on her toes and floated upward, hovering a meter off the floor, her hands still resting confidently on her hips. "Absolutely."

Convinced by her levitation if nothing else, Durgin found he was breathing excitedly as he donned a pair of corona goggles. He ducked down behind the lift truck and raised the rifle to center the sights on her body. The Lock button illuminated a pair of crosshairs, and he carefully settled those over her bellybutton. An inny, he thought to himself, which succeeded only in making him more uncomfortable. She was barely

more than a girl!

“Just don’t miss, Captain. Our mission will be over before it starts if you vaporize half the outer wall of the cargo bay. Not to mention dumping you into hard vacuum.”

Durgin grimaced at that unpleasant thought. He’d had weapons training, but not with anything even fractionally as powerful as a Klav’en. He pushed aside his fears and squinted into the sight again. It was just another weapon, despite its power.

He found that the crosshairs were still tracking her navel. He remembered that once a Vendorian weapon locked on to a target, it would only fire on that one spot until the trigger was released and reset.

He held his breath and gritted his teeth as he slowly pulled the trigger further backward.

The weapon suddenly gave off an ear-splitting scream, and a shockwave tore at his body as a sizzle of pure death shot across the cargo bay. Alisa disappeared in a blinding starburst of light as bright as a magnesium flare. Despite the heavy goggles, he was blinded for a moment.

He lowered the rifle to blink away his tears, squinting as he tried to make out the shimmering apparition that floated in mid-air. Gradually, Alisa’s form began to reappear, the cooler outline of her hands and feet appearing first, her hair billowing around her like a golden cloud.

“Again,” she called out, her voice high and thin. She touched her finger to her chest. “Higher this time. It’s easier to absorb the energy up here.”

Durgin felt as if he’d fallen into a slow-motion dream as he lifted the weapon and aimed at her again, the cross hairs locking onto the left side of her chest this time. He pulled the trigger, and the Klav’en screamed and the starburst exploded again.

When the sparks died out this time, he saw her left breast glowing like a newborn star. Enthralled and heady with excitement, he daringly lifted the weapon and fired a third time, carried away enough to use the nipple of her right breast as his aiming point. It exploded into another starburst.

He had to duck lower behind the truck, as the thermals grew so great that he smelled his own hair singing. He set the hot rifle on the floor, noticing that he'd depleted less than a quarter of its charge.

When he rose to squint back across the cargo bay, Alisa's body looked almost transparent, a dozen colors shimmering around her. Yet her skin cooled even as he watched, her extremities quickly fading to yellow and then cherry-red, the darker colors progressing inward toward the twin white-hot blazes of her chest. Her natural skin color gradually began to return, rising from ankles upward, looking a slightly darker shade of tan.

Startlingly, where she'd had smallish, pert breasts a moment ago, she was now fabulously endowed. Yet nothing jiggled as she walked back toward him. He tried but failed to pretend detachment, but his eyes gave him away as he stared in fascination at her still glowing breasts. With what he suspected was equally false detachment, she permitted him a moment to study her, and then picked up a purple dress she'd brought and slipped into it. Her hair was glowing a spotlight was on shining on it as it cascaded down over her shoulders. Her eyes were also brighter than before.



“How... how could you cool so fast?” was the first thing out of his mouth.

“Because that’s how I store the energy. Orgone. It has to be converted quickly to keep my core temperature from overheating.”

Durgin inhaled, and caught the faint scent of honey and wildflowers. An electric shock raced through his body, warming him. He remembered that scent all too well from that hotel lobby.

Pheromones!

She saw the change in his eyes and quickly turned away. “I should go.”

She took two steps before pausing hesitantly, then turned to look back into his eyes. “Hopefully you won’t hesitate in the future if you have to use me in a somewhat less than scientific capacity. Security. Propulsion, whatever you need. The Klav’en is

here to give me the energy I'll need in a hurry. As you can see, I don't normally carry much of it."

"So you live on Orgone.... it's all true."

She adjusted her dress, the top straining as it stretched tightly over her figure. "I'd appreciate it if this remains our secret."

Turning, she took a step toward the door.

Durgin stepped forward to reach out and take her hand, his fingers interlacing with hers. "Don't go. Not like this. Everyone will notice."

She hesitated as he touched her, her body stiffening, then slowly turned back to face him. "It's not easy to get rid of Orgone once I store this much of it. You shouldn't have fired the third burst."

"How do you? Get rid of it, I mean?"

"Heat vision is best. But I'll have to go outside the ship to use it."

"Is that the only way?"

She hesitated. "No. But the other way is... personal. And inappropriate given a human crew."

He didn't understand that. Instead, he daringly lifted his hands to place them on her shoulders. They felt like spring steel, yet so slender and feminine at the same time. He inhaled more of her perfume as it rose from her warm hair, and his emotions soared like a kite, the delicious flurry of awakening making his feet feel as if they were floating. "Yes. Yes I do, Alisa. I want to know everything."

She looked at him for a long moment, seeing the way his eyes were drawn to her breasts, and turned her back to him again. She was very aware that he'd slipped and used her first name. Which meant that his emotions were balanced on the edge. She wasn't going to encourage him to cross that boundary.

"I'll need some time alone in the airlock, Captain. If I download slowly enough, chances are nobody will notice what I'm actually doing."

"Which is?"

"Beaming as much energy as I can off into empty space. But I have to be in vacuum to keep my eyes from superheating the air around me."

Durgin stared at her, uncomprehending.

“You’ll need to override the alarms and monitoring routines at the airlock,” she added. “I won’t be wearing a suit.”

His thoughts swirled faster, forcing him to finally look away to rein them in. Like all spacers, the concept of deliberately exposing oneself to hard vacuum was abhorrent. Somehow, the very fact that Alisa could do that made her even more exotic. She was a confusing mixture of femininity, youth and immense, raw power, concepts that rarely came in the same package.

He forced his thoughts back to the situation at hand, and picked up the still warm Klav'en, not sure he could even trust his voice right now he was so affected by her presence. Instead, he focused on the familiar. His ship. His command.

Pausing at the compartment doorway, he verified that the coast was clear, and then waved for Alisa to follow him to the nearest airlock. There he punched his override code into a wall-mounted control unit to isolate the airlock from computer control. He finally turned back to look levelly into her eyes.

“You’ll have to use the manual controls inside, Ensign.”

She nodded, staring back into his eyes for a long moment. When he didn’t step away, she said: “You’d better to leave me here alone, Captain. In case anything goes wrong.”

Durgin paused for a further moment, struggling with his emotions, and then forced himself to turn and walk briskly back to his ready room. Once there, he entered his override command again, and punched up a camera image of the airlock. Alisa was sitting on the floor, the outer door still closed, one leg crossed in front of her, the other bent behind.

As he watched, she reached up and to her left to turn the manual control knob. The outer door promptly popped open and the airlock explosively decompressed, Alisa’s hair billowed outward as the rush of air tugged her an inch closer to the door, and then everything went still. He knew she sitting in hard vacuum now, her hair falling limply over her shoulders. Yet other than the unnatural stillness of her chest, she looked completely normal.

All sense of normality departed now as she turned her head to stare out the open hatch, and her eyes flared with a pale blue light. Before he could blink, two brilliant

pink beams lanced through the open airlock door to disappear against the star field.

He quickly punched up the SciPlot routines to analyze the remote sensors, and was astounded to see that the spectrum from her eyes was nearly coherent, and that the energy flow was more than a megawatt per second.

He held his breath in awe as he stared at the video display, megawatt after megawatt blasting off into space at light speed. A full minute passed before he saw her figure start to slowly deflate. That was the only word for it.

Her figure was back to normal a few minutes later, her breasts petite again, but the white's of her eyes were still glowing faintly, and her irises were unnaturally blue, even after she blinked her eyes back to normal. He clicked off the video as she repressurized the airlock and climbed back inside, quickly disappearing down the corridor toward the science section.

Durgin collapsed back in his chair. What the hell do I do now? He wondered.

The rest of his day was a blur, and when sleep came to him that night; it was filled with dreams of Ensign Alisa Liddell.

Chapter Three

He didn't see her again for a week. He didn't feel comfortable approach her again, and she was busy with her duties. It wasn't until the Science Staff briefing on the 12th that they crossed paths. She was presenting the department's on-going projects at the weekly executive staff meeting, a job that rotated to a different junior officer each week. It was a chance for new officers to become recognized by the ship's staff.

Despite her conservative ship's outfit and hair tied up, she commanded everyone's attention. You didn't have to know she was Velorian to know she was a truly exceptional young woman, even more for her crisp presentation than her appearance.

Durgin approached her after the meeting to thank her for a concise briefing, something he'd say to encourage any new officer. He was about to walk away, when on instinct alone, he turned and asked her if she'd join him for a drink in Blue Zero that evening. He said it would be a chance to continue her discussion about wormhole temporal effects.

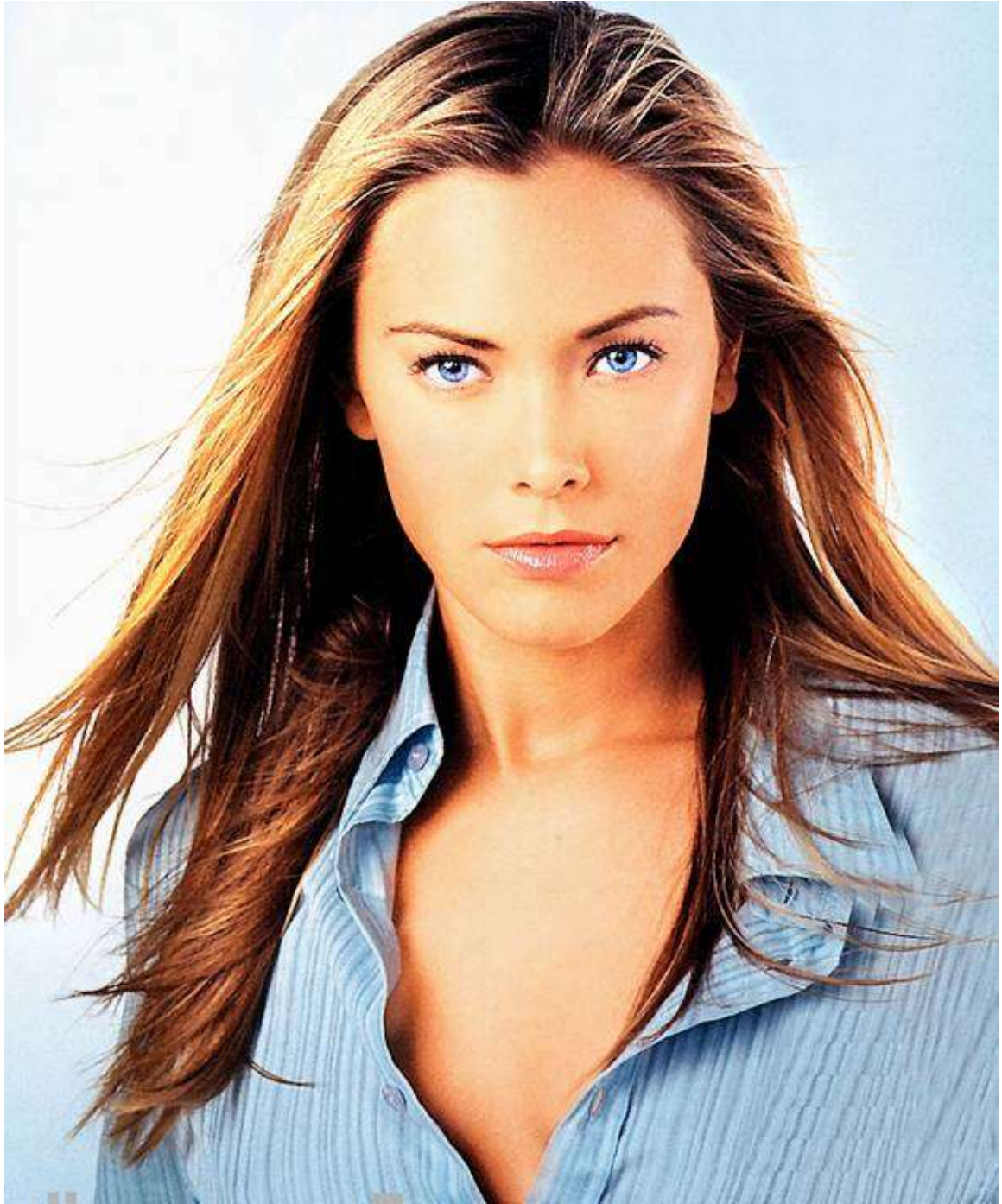
Blue Zero was what they called the glass tunnel, ten meters in width and a

hundred meters long, which contained many of the plants that were grown for food. Tables had been arranged at a dozen locations, each of them on a small spot of grassy lawn, with each area shielded from the others by the plants, creating the one place on the ship where people could seek privacy. The protocol for respecting that privacy was absolute, given that many a lover's rendezvous was consummated there.

Chapter Four

Alisa arrived wearing a conservative blue striped blouse, the top three buttons open, and a short white skirt that accented her long legs. She settled into the chair across from him, looking expectantly his way, her eyes still as bright as before. Her hair was darker, but he'd read that happened to Vels who were nearly energy depleted – the way Alisa lived.

As always, her appearance was a paradox of professionalism, youth, maturity and unconscious sexuality. Dressed plainly, sans makeup, she was still compellingly beautiful.



“I appreciate your meeting with me again, Ensign. I know you’re busy down in Science, given that we’re approaching the hole.”

“It was a request by my Captain. How could I refuse?”

Durgin shook his head. “This is strictly social. A chance for us to get to know each other better.”

Alisa looked around at the thick shrubbery that hid them and wondered what his

real agenda was. Her mother had long ago told her how human emotions get confused when they encounter Velorians.

“This might not be a good idea, Captain. If someone saw us and decided it wasn’t business...”

Durgin shook his head vigorously to interrupt her thought. “Its business. We need to discuss the ways your presence on the ship can help our mission.”

“I’m a scientist. And a good one. Isn’t that enough.”

“After what I saw in the cargo bay and then the airlock?”

“You watched me in the lock?”

Durgin nodded. “You’re going to be a great asset to the ship, Alisa. Especially if we run into trouble on the far side of the hole. Our armament isn’t bad for a survey ship, but it’s nice to have a heavy hitter aboard.”

Alisa frowned. “I told the Admiral that my contributions would be limited to science.”

“Only in an emergency then,” Durgin conceded, surprised to find he was negotiating with his youngest crewmember.

“I’m sure all of your other crewmen do whatever they can in an emergency. I will do the same.”

Durgin smiled and leaned back in his chair, taking a drink of the wine that a robotic server had brought. “Good. Then we can put that behind us. I apologize for getting off on the wrong foot here. Can we start again?”

“Life is all about change,” she said enigmatically. “And cycles.”

“Okay. What I’m really interested in is what it’s like for you to live among ordinary humans. To deliberately suppress the part of your nature that your race is known for so as to immerse yourself in the most esoteric and dangerous of scientific pursuits.”

“Oh,” she smiled faintly. “That kind of business.”

“My business is people, and you’re the most interesting person I’ve met in a very long time.”

“I’m flattered. You must meet so many important people.”

Durgin wasn’t sure if she was mocking him, or deferring to him. He decided it didn’t matter. “Perhaps we could start with how you got to Kelsor and entered the

University.”

Her smile returned. “That’s a long story.”

“You’ve got my undivided attention.”

She reached back to gather her long hair up, tying it into a crude ponytail. “Well, to begin with, my real name isn’t Liddell. It’s Alisa-zar Kim'Vallara.”

The name triggered a half-forgotten memory.

“Wait a minute... the Ambassador's daughter from Reigel 5?”

“My mother is retired now. Not by her own choice.”

“I heard something about that. They tried to blame her for--”

“I’d rather not talk about that,” she said with a shake of her head. “But let’s make this interesting. What would you say if I told you that I know the secret of the quantum electric drive?”

Durgin couldn't say anything; he just stared at her. The QED was Kelsor 7's greatest secret, even greater than the Quaker warships that constituted most of the local wormhole defense force. Only a few scientists and technicians were entrusted with the secret, and they were implanted with suicide chips that would be activated automatically by capture or attempted betrayal.

Alisa could read the questions in his face. “I figured it out for myself during my studies at the Institute. There was a brief flaw in the security system at the university research lab. The Tachyon scrambler protecting a vault went offline.”

“They kept the QED design documents in a vault?”

“Just the original handwritten research notes. For historical reasons I assume. But I was able to piece together the fundamentals and then do my own research to figure out the details.”

“By why tell me? It’s a capital crime to have such knowledge.” Durgin’s heart was racing. She could bring down his entire planet if she told anyone else.

“You’re my captain. I have to trust you. Besides, I’ve known this for two years. If I were going to betray your secrets, I'd have done so already. I can fly through wormholes, remember? I suspect I could have even earned a pardon from Velor had I done so. But I did not.”

“Yet if I reported you, you’d be hunted by not only the Kelsorians, but the

Aureans and everyone else in known space.”

“I believe in placing my cards face up with people I have to trust.”

“But you don’t even know me.”

“I probably know your personal history better than you can recall it, Captain. I didn’t join just any ship. I joined the Flame to serve with you.”

Despite his decades of exploring space, always leading the most dangerous missions, Durgin was overwhelmed with the trust this young Velorian had placed in his hands. “Yet you could have remained on Velor,” Durgin said, still confused from the shock of her revelation. “Or returned to become a Protector, given your genetic class.”

“I refused to take my Rites. For that, the High Council labeled me a deserter. So while I will always be a genetic Velorian, I am no longer a citizen of the Enlightenment. Rather, I am a criminal.”

“But why? Avoid your destiny, I mean.”

“Binkley’s World, for one thing. But that was just a symptom. As was Reigel 5. That racist group, the Aryans, on top of the Aureans, not to mention the Diaboli. And the earlier raids in the home system itself.”

Durgin nodded, even though he didn’t know how to connect the events she mentioned.

“There is a cancer eating at the body and soul of the Enlightenment,” she continued, “and the High Council and the Senate are too blind to see it. Nor can the Aureans; possibly not even the Galen. I fear it may already be too late to stop it.”

“I thought the war was slowing down.”

“This has nothing to do with the war.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It started with nightmares. They grew worse with time. Became terrifying.”

Terrified? A Velorian?

Again, she read the look on his face. “I dreamed at first that it had all come crashing down. That we and the Aureans had destroyed each other, that the stricken remnants of our societies had nothing left to them but the memory of past glory that could never be retrieved. That the entire universe had been left dark and without hope, the prey of new and terrible forces.”

“And so you came here.”

“And so I came here,” she nodded “Not for want of courage to face the old threat; I should have proved that beyond any doubt on Reigel 5 when I faced an Aurean Prime.”

A Prime? Durgin's jaw fairly dropped. They were the most feared warriors in the universe.

Alisa continued as if that were not the most important thing to her. “I could have accepted the risks of being a Protector. But not the futility. The High Council uses its Protectors, but it does not use them well. And the Senate dithers, failing Velor's allies and even its own military, undermining the morale of the entire Enlightenment.”

Durgin wanted to ask more about the Prime, but he sensed that was not what she wanted to talk about. At least for the moment. “But what did you hope to find here?”

“A way out.”

“The war seems to have reached a kind of stalemate.”

“Perhaps there's a way out. But I can't imagine what. There's nothing I can do about it. So I'm concentrating on physics instead. That's always been my main interest. Surely you're familiar with Andre Kalik and his ideas about wormholes and—”

“You *know* him? He's going to be joining us at Latham Four; he's been there on a teaching assignment.”

“My God! I'll actually get to *work* with him? I've never gotten to meet him, or even seen him – except from the back of the hall in one of his classes. But he's the one who inspired me to work on my degree in wormhole anomalies.”

Durgin looked at her in wonder. She might be a young woman, but she took her work very seriously, and didn't want the secret of her true origin to get in the way of that.

“Strange that Vicente never mentioned Andre when he recommended me for this mission.”

“Maybe he likes surprises.”

“You're not going to tell him about...”

“Relax. Your secret is safe with me,” Durgin said. “We might have a problem with Dr. Dowell, our medical officer, but I think I can work around it.”

“And you can also trust me with the security of Kelsor 7. With everything. Do you

credit me so, Sir and Captain?"

Durgin was disappointed with her use of formality again.

"Do you credit me?" she repeated.

"I credit you, Dame and Ensign."

A sign of respect, with that formal address, rarely used for subordinates.

Her expression suddenly changed, her reserve vanishing. She looked at him with new eyes, as if he had passed a test and had not been found wanting. He understood her. He didn't judge her. She remembered her father and the way he had abandoned them. He wasn't a trusting man.

And suddenly it all came pouring out: the story of her life, her childhood on Velor, her mother Naomi, her older sisters Nikki and Sara and brother James. Her mother's divorce, the move to Reigel 5 when she was appointed ambassador.

She'd never been a wild child, Not like Nikki or James. Quite the opposite. So much so that her mother had almost despaired of her. Until the day Alisa had flown halfway across the world to answer a distress call from some Diaboli being attacked by a Prime. It was just an impulse, she insisted, not a commitment.

"I could have died that night," she confessed. "I would have if a novice Protector named Cher'ee and a Army officer named Raul'Ian hadn't arrived in time."

The three of them could have executed the Aurean then and there, but she and Cher'ee had had some hare-brained scheme of taking the enemy warrior back to the capital for trial. Maybe even to reason with her.

Ulexa Gabborn of Aurea had her own plans, of course, and Alisa and Cher'ee played right into them. If Major Raul'Ian hadn't figured it out in time, Reigel 5 itself might have died within a day or two. It had been a near miss, and it could have gotten Alisa and Cher'ee into a lot of trouble.

But Major Raul'Ian had covered for them, telling the authorities that their actions had all been part of her strategy to reveal the Aurean plot. But what had caused Alisa the most torment, more than the embarrassment of her failed idealism, even more than her brush with death, had been her mother's attitude.

"Mother had been scared out of her wits for me, of course. And yet I felt that at some level, she was actually relieved; that she thought I was finally growing up,

accepting my duty -- even my destiny.”

Her mother Naomi had known that she was interested in science, even that she wanted to study astrophysics. But Alisa had never told her mother or her siblings about how haunted she was by both her doubts and her dreams. They probably thought she was just going through a phase.

To make doubly sure she got through it, Naomi had sent her back to Velor in order to live, and learn about life, with her oldest sister Sara. Sara had been entrusted to try to make a “normal Vel” of her. Which meant getting her some experience with men – and preparing her for her Rites. As a P1, it was a certainty that Alisa would be called to serve as a Protector.

“I wanted to live to the best effect,” she continued. “And I knew that I could never live merely as a Protector. Never. I’d known it since I was twelve, and nothing I saw or read or heard afterwards could alter my resolve. What happened on Reigel 5 convinced me even more. “

Yet Alisa never confided any of this to Sara, never revealed her true feelings, any more than she had to her mother, even after she was recalled to Velor. And when the time came to leave, when she knew for certain that her only chance of living her life as she saw fit lay in flight, she left without a word. Not to Naomi, not to Sara, not to any of them.

“And now I’ll never see them again. Ever.”

Now it was her tears rather than her words that began to pour from her.

Durgin had never seen a Velorian cry, would never have believed that they could cry. Alisa reached out for comfort, and Durgin offered it, taking her in his arms and holding her gently. She clung to him tightly, resting her cheek on his shoulder, her warm tears wetting his shirt.

“We’ll work it out,” he told her. “We’ll make it right.”

“I don’t want to be alone tonight, Peter.”

Durgin's heart stopped for a long moment, and then beat twice as fast. Her use of his first name; her request. The secret longing that he'd felt since first seeing that Velorian years ago filled his veins with fire.

But he wasn’t a fool. Alisa was less than half his age. He was her Captain.

Despite the special rules that governed relationships in space, as Captain, he had to set an example of where the boundaries of propriety lay.

He inhaled deeply, sensing her sweet, flowery perfume as it filled his lungs.

Strangely, his just completed thought about restraint seemed to vaporize as the scent reached his lungs. His thoughts turned instead to an erotic holo he'd once watched, really just a blonde actress pretending to be a Velorian, but it had seemed so real. A half dozen men had taken their turns with the actress, the sex phenomenally athletic. The fact that the supposed Velorian had taken them all on was intimidating enough, but what had been worse was that, at the end, the Velorian had wanted more. Far more. Durgin couldn't imagine a more sexy, yet more intimidating scene for a man.

A beautiful woman who he was completely incapable of satisfying. He recalled reading that the Supremis privately referred to humans as Ordinaries. As Frails.

His intoxication won out over his fears, and he heard himself say: "Of course."

Durgin wasn't a fool. Nobody turned down such an invitation from a Velorian.

They held each other closely, pausing to kiss longingly in a dark corner as they avoided the rest of the crew, taking the maintenance corridors back to the command center of the ship. Once safely inside his cabin and the monitors disabled, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to his bed. She clung tightly to him, child-like. He set her down beside the bed. She looked at him with large, baby blue eyes. He started to lift the bottom of her shirt, but she put her hands over his to stop him. Instead, she unbuttoned her top, letting it fall open.

She looked even more perfect this close. Muscle tone so tight, her tight, flawless skin a wonder. Her breasts were slightly larger than they'd been the first time he'd seen them, her nipples too. She watched his eyes as she reached down to lift his hands, placing them on her breasts.

"The source of my power. Perhaps your inspiration as well. For a little bit anyway."

They felt softly firm and full, the resilience of a young girl with the figure of a woman. He held her gently.

"You can't hurt me. Nothing can."

The conflicting images of femininity and invincibility filled his thoughts, opposite

ends of a continuum. He thrilled to the impossibility of that, and embraced her tightly.

She tilted her head slightly, covering his hands with hers as she guided them lower to encircle her waist.

He kissed her a second time. A delicate kiss. Her lips were softer than any he'd kissed before. Her sweet breath was fresh with the delicate taste of honey and wildflower, a perfume that filled his body with desire. It was a scent like no other, the taste delicate and sweet like sugar crystals on her lips.

Alisa reached up to turn the lights off, and then used his hands to push her skirt down, allowing it to pool around her ankles. Stepping out of the ring of cloth, she stood before him naked, but unseen in the total darkness. Yet she could see, and she reached up to unbutton his tunic, slipping it from his shoulders. Running her hands across his hard chest, she leaned forward, her soft hair falling across his skin as she kissed his smaller nipples.

He gasped in unexpected pleasure as her tongue twirled around them.

She traced her kisses lower, slowly kneeling before him. His belt came undone, his uniform trousers falling. A quick tear of fabric, and he was freed. Her lips found him, and he gasped in manly pleasures as she boldly took him in her warm mouth.

He reached down to tangle his fingers in her hair, so silky, so fine, succumbing to his urgent desire to pull her closer, to take her deeper. Her tongue traced along the bottom of his shaft, strangely vibrating, sending a shockwave of desire through his body. He cried out, and suddenly came hard as she took him the deepest of all. He thrust himself against her, knowing he couldn't hurt her.

Gasping for air a half minute later, he flopped backward, only to feel her soft hair tracing across his belly as she kissed her way upward this, her lips finding his, sending a shocking rush through his body as she shared his taste. The sweetness of her lips and the flowery scent of her perfume sent him soaring again.

And again.

Durgin had never had such endurance. Hours later, he was still as excited and hard as he'd been at the beginning, despite having come many times. Intoxicated and entranced, he didn't question that impossibility, but instead, whispered in her ear that he wanted to please her too.

She told him he already was. And that she had no gold in any case.

He insisted, his kisses moved lower, his tongue tracing the outline of her sex, awakening her stronger desires.

“Let me do the work, Peter,” she finally said. “I have the strength.”

She floated in mid-air over him now, her hair an invisible silken cloud. Settling lower to gently straddle him, he reached down to feel her thighs, marveling at the softness of her skin, even more at the firm muscles beneath. He tried not to think of her strength – she wore no gold -- yet found that it thrilled him. She was so young, so strong, and so perfect. So exciting. So dangerous.

She seemed to read his mind as she leaned forward, long hair falling across his face, as she guided herself to him. She was so ready, so wet. Gently lowering her, he felt himself strain, her body starting to open for him, only to gasp in pain as he felt himself bend.

“Roll over, relax every muscle. Let me do it,” he said, a desperate need growing to prove himself a man.

She lay on her back now, legs widely spread as he began again, her sex so wet yet so tight, feeling her opening more and more as he thrust. Working hard, he gasped in frustration as he faltered at the gates of heaven again.

“Don’t stop!” she gasped. “Please.”

He felt her heels touch his ass, his imagination soaring as he imagined the strength in her long legs, her heels pressing harder and harder every second until a sharp pain inside his groin made him gasp. Just as he worried she was going to hurt him, his surging manhood finally overcame the tightness of her vagina, and he took her in one long, wonderful slide of pure ecstasy. A rippling wave of velvety muscle pulled him deeper yet, softly yet urgently encouraging him to give her his all.

She started to give off a little series of sighs, which rose at the end to a tiny cry of pleasure as he thrust himself upward, her long legs wrapping around him tighter to hold him to her. She began to rock her hips in time with his, and then rolled back over on top of him, sitting up and then leaning back, allowing his hands to rise to her breasts. Her body rose weightlessly as she flew herself up and down his shaft, her inner strength holding him more tightly than any ordinary woman.

Durgin felt the frenzy of orgasm washing over him again, and he struggled to roll her over on her back again, the two of them slipping from the bed to float feather light to the floor. He threw his body against hers with all his strength, her head banging against the wall with each thrust.

It was over quickly, far too quickly, for her beauty and pheromones overwhelmed him again, not the least for the fact that he was having unprotected sex. Gasping out and then crying in sweet pain, he came hard, taking her in a final shudder of strength as his world exploded into pleasures.

She opened her eyes and smiled sweetly as he collapsed on top of her, thrilling to the rapid pulsing of warmth deep within her. She wasn't going to let him go. Leaning up to kiss him, she exhaled into his lungs, transferring more of her sweet pheromones. Instead of softening, as a human male should, he suddenly grew fuller inside her, his blood pressure spiking dangerously.

"May I?" she asked innocently. "I'll be careful."

"God, yes," he gasped, barely able to breathe.

She rolled him on his back this time, straddling him as she began to rock her hips faster, kissing his lips and cheeks and eyes, her hair covering him in a tent of silk. Moving her body sensuously, urgently, using her flexibility, concentrating, making sure she didn't hurt him, she felt her ardor rising, and knew she was growing tighter yet, finally too tight for him to move.

"Just relax," Peter said softly in the darkness. "Let me show you."

He gently rolled her on her back, moving with the practiced motions of an experienced lover. She wrapped her arms around his neck and began to move with him, slowly arching her body as he skillfully guided her toward her climax, her body tensing more and more each moment. He angled himself to where a woman's G-spot was, and was rewarded when she suddenly cried out and bent her head back, her body lifting his from the bed as a ripple of muscle turned her chest and stomach to velvet steel. Instead of the quick spasm of an ordinary woman, her orgasm went on and on, her body undulating beneath his, moving urgently, her song of passion so sweet and pure, her body holding him deep inside. Using him.

Many minutes later, she arched herself a final time and then collapsed limply

beneath him.

He rolled to the side to lie facing her, kissing her face. He tasted her tears again. He held her close, kissing them away. "Is everything OK?" he whispered in her ear.

She nodded in the darkness; her voice girlishly soft, shocked that she'd experienced a little orgasm. Unlike the athleticism of her usual release, when every muscle in her body strived to contain the nearly unbearable pleasures for the hours it took to exhaust herself; this orgasm had been gentle and pleasant. Instead of a towering tsunami that washed everything away before its power, this one had felt like a soft wave lapping intimately against a moonlit shore.

"That was so wonderful. So beautiful."

"And that makes you cry?"

She tried to smile. "When I'm happy and when I'm sad. Yes."

He wrapped her arms around her as she snuggled in his warm embrace. The room grew silent and they slept.

CONTINUED IN [SHORE LEAVE](#)