

Inside Passage

By Velvet Belle Tree

With Brantley Thompson Elkins

I had been helping an elderly woman find a book in the large print section, so I entered the library's meeting room just as the talk was about to begin. This afternoon's talk was sponsored jointly by the Darlington Historical Association and the Friends of the Library. George Gregory Grant was giving a talk on his new book about the Revolutionary War in New Jersey. Grant was from Dwyer University, an up and coming private liberal arts college in nearby Monroe, New Jersey.

I opened the door, and sat down in the back of the room, which I was happy to see was full. I was surprised to see a very good looking man in his late thirties at the podium. He was a little over 6' 3" and well built, with thick auburn hair and green eyes. My first thoughts were: *"This is a history professor? How do his female students concentrate?"*

As soon as he began his talk, I had my answer to that question. He made things fascinating, so that you concentrated on what he said, not who was saying it. He made the history come alive. I could almost see and hear the Continental

Army and Rochambeau's French Army marching down to Virginia, passing less than a mile from where I sat.

When the talk and question period were over, I bought a book and got on the line to have it signed. I made sure I was last in line so I'd be able to speak to him. He politely spoke a few words to each person on line as he signed their books. Then it was my turn.



“Hi. I’m Marian Adams, one of the librarians.”

“Marian the librarian?”

“I’m afraid so. I really enjoyed your talk. I’m new to this part of the country and don’t know too much about the local history.”

He gave me a dazzling smile. “I’d love to talk to you some more. Unfortunately, my daughter’s here and I have to take her back to her Mom’s.”

He saw my questioning look and quickly added: “My ex. The divorce was finalized last month.”

Just then, a cute girl of around twelve came up. I had seen her in the library before but hadn’t paid her any special attention. “Marian, this is my daughter Tiffany.”

“Hi, Tiffany. Do you go to Dale?”

“Yeah. I’m in sixth grade there.”

Luckily, Tiffany started wandering around the room, looking at a local artist’s paintings on the walls, so we had a chance to talk some more.

“Can I take you to dinner some time this week, Marian?”

“Sure. I work Monday and Thursday nights.”

“I have an evening class Tuesday. How’s Wednesday night?”

“Fine.”

Tiffany came back then and started complaining: “Dad, aren’t you ready to go yet?”

“I better leave now, Marian. Can I just pick you up here at six on Wednesday?”

“No problem. See you then.”

“By the way, my friends call me Gig.”

I left the library in a good mood. Gig was the most interesting man I had met in a very long time. It's hard having a social life when you're living incognito. Be with a man a few times and he might notice some ... unusual things. And having no past, on Earth that is, sometimes makes conversation difficult.

But my people have a very strong libido and it's hard to do without. I've used a web site specifically for sexual encounters a few times and have had results ranging from mediocre to fantastic. Then there was that lovely boy Bjorn I met on my vacation in Rocky Mountain National Park last summer. He found out who I really was and fell in love with me. But we both knew nothing could come of it and parted on good terms. So mostly, I'm left to my own devices.

I stopped by my favorite Chinese takeout on the way home. When I got home, I settled down to dinner and Gig's book. His writing style was as interesting as his talk had been. Before I realized it, it was midnight and I decided to go to bed. I don't really need to sleep, but I've gotten into the habit and find it relaxing to sleep and dream.

I finished the book early Tuesday evening and didn't want to start another. I don't watch much TV. I don't understand the comedies -- there's often a woman berating her not too good looking husband and telling him that he's nothing. How can she get into bed with him feeling that way? And the dramatic action shows

don't really hold my interest. The battles and conspiracies seem awfully tame compared to the battles I know are going on throughout the galaxy.

Gig picked me up Wednesday as promised. We ate dinner at a small Italian restaurant in town. He had brought a chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio. The food was good and the music was soft enough for conversation. And his conversation was very pleasant.

By the time we'd finished our salads, I'd found out that he grew up in New Jersey and had always lived in the Northeast. This was a real relief. I was able to give him my usual story about coming from a real small town in the Midwest and going to a large, uninteresting state university.

He got the idea that I wasn't interested in talking about the past and I realized that he wasn't either, especially about his failed marriage. He said that he'd tell me about it in the future. I took that to be a good sign.

He was pleased that I had read and enjoyed his book.

"There's something you'd probably know," I said. "Any truth to the story I heard that there was a transvestite governor of New Jersey in Colonial times?"

He laughed. "That story's been going around for years. Lord Cornbury, the joint governor of New Jersey and New York supposedly wore his wife's dresses and had his portrait drawn wearing a dress. I'm sorry to tell you that there's no proof and it was probably a story put out by his enemies."

We both ordered the tiramisu for dessert and were about to begin when his cell phone rang. He looked at it and said: "Sorry. I have to take it. It's from my daughter."

“Yeah, Tiff. What’s up?” I heard him say. Then: “Your mom’s supposed to pick you up from choir practice.” He listened for a while. “OK, OK, just calm down. I’ll come get you right now.” Then he hung up.

“I’m really sorry Marian. I know I’m not supposed to pick her up tonight. When Tiffany called her mom to ask why she wasn’t there, Jessica, my ex, told her that she was at a friend’s house and she should call me. Jessica’s probably just playing games because Tiffany told her I had a date.”

“It’s OK, I understand. Not your fault.”

“Look, can you come to my house in Monroe for dinner Friday? I’m really a good cook.” He paused. “If you’re not busy, that is.”

“Well, I was hoping to see that cute guy behind the counter at Boston Market.”

He laughed, grabbed a napkin and wrote on it. “Here’s my address. It’s a white Colonial right outside the university. You can’t miss it.”

“The library closes at five on Fridays. I’ll freshen, up then drive over. Should get there by 6:15, 6:30.”

“I’m really looking forward to seeing you again, Marian,” he said softly. He called for the check and gave the waiter his credit card. When we walked out the door, he gave me a quick kiss.

“You’d better get going. I can walk home, it’s a lovely evening. See you Friday.”

I walked home thinking about how much I liked this man. Intelligent, warm, interesting and sexy as hell. I was frustrated as hell. I’d cleaned my apartment in anticipation of asking him up. But on second thought, maybe it was for the best.

Terrans could be funny about such things, and I had a feeling that he was the type who preferred a woman who didn't want to jump into bed on a first date. And he seemed too good for just a one-night stand.

I went back to my apartment after work on Friday, showered and changed. I'm always careful about what I wear. I watch the women in town not only for style but for weather appropriate clothing. I could go out in shorts during a snow storm and feel no discomfort, so I must be careful not to let my invulnerability show.

I took the small box of French pastry that I had purchased on my lunch hour out of the refrigerator. I'd looked up directions to his house on Mapquest and it was an easy drive.

He must have heard my car, because he was at the door to meet me. "Great to see you Marian. Come on in."

As soon as I got into the house, he put his arms around me and gave me a long, delicious kiss. I loved the way our lips met; with two inch heels on, I just matched his height.

He stepped away from me and grinned. "I better let you go now or we might never get to dinner. What's in the box?"

"I picked up some pastry at the French bakery. It's chocolate and raspberry – my favorite."

“Great. I’ll put it in the fridge. I’ve made some veal piccata and rice. All I have to do is make the zucchini and warm up the veal in the sauce. Come into the kitchen. I’ll open the wine and we can start it now.”

The wine was a lovely Chardonnay and we sipped it while he put the finishing touches on the dinner. He was, indeed, a good cook. After we started to eat, I said: “How long have you lived in this house?”

“About two and a half years. When we separated, I wanted Tiffany to stay in the same school. I found this house, which really needed a lot of work. So it was quite reasonable for this area. I’ve enjoyed working on it.”

“You’ve done a good job -- given it a warm feeling. My apartment is just a place to live in. I haven’t done much with it. Guess I don’t feel like I’ve put down roots here.”

We ate quietly for a few minutes. Then I asked: “Have you dated much since your separation?”

“Off and on,” he replied. “Nothing serious, just casual dating. A few one-night stands. And no one I wanted to make dinner for.”

A warm glow welled up within me and a big grin broke out on my face. I was used to men desiring me, but this felt like something more.

“How about you?” he continued.

“Mostly casual... Nothing long term. There was a really nice boy I met last summer on vacation. We had a wonderful week together. But he was European and still in school. We knew nothing could come of it. And I think I prefer a man to a boy.”

He reached across the table, took my hand. "I find myself strangely drawn to you," he said in a low, husky voice.

"And I to you."

When we finished eating, I gathered the dishes and put them in the dishwasher. I was reaching for the pots when Gig stayed my hand. "I'll take care of it later. Right now, I want to show you the rest of the house."

Bet I know what part of the house he wants to show me, I thought.

As we went up the stairs he said: "I've only fixed up the master suite, hall bathroom and a bedroom for Tiffany when she stays here. We alternate weekends and I'm happy to say this is her weekend with her mom."

He opened the door to Tiffany's room, but didn't enter. "I've promised her I'd respect her privacy and not go in when she's not here."

"It looks just right for a girl her age."

"She picked out the furniture and curtains and helped me paint. That way, she feels that it's really hers."

Then we went into the master suite. It was also nicely furnished and decorated. But, truth to tell, the only part that really interested me was the freshly made and turned down king size bed.

He took me in his arms and kissed me hungrily. He crushed me to his body and I could feel his arousal hard against me. He broke from the kiss and whispered huskily: "I want you so badly. Please tell me I'm not moving too fast."

“I want you too. Don’t worry... it’s safe.” Then I lied: “I’m on the pill.” I couldn’t tell him the truth: that a Homo Supremis like me couldn’t conceive with a Homo Sapiens like him.

His hands went inside my blouse. I pulled it over my head to reveal a low-cut lacy bra – the kind that’s getting harder and harder to find. Most bras today are rigid and opaque and designed to give uplift; my natural uplift is much better than any bra can produce, so I don’t need them and don’t find them sexy.

He looked at me in lustful admiration. He began caressing my breasts through the lace. Then his lips went to my cleavage. I reached back to undo the clasp and free my breasts. He pulled down the bra. He cupped my left breast with his right hand while kissing and nibbling my right breast. I wanted to tell him to bite me as hard as he could; but he wouldn’t understand that I would feel no pain, only pleasure, that there was no way he could hurt me.

Now he looked at my naked breasts and murmured: “Magnificent, magnificent.” His hand went under my knee length skirt and found the flesh between my thigh-high stockings and panties. “Sit down so I can take these off you.”

I sat on the edge of the bed. He knelt in front of me and pulled off my skirt, then rolled down the left stocking, kissing my leg as the skin was bared; skin completely hairless and flawless. Then he did the same with the other stocking. When both stockings were lying on the floor, he started pulling down my lacy panties which matched the bra. I lifted up so he could remove them.



Then he started kissing me, working down from my navel. By the time his lips passed over my completely hairless pubic mound, my legs were open for him and I was moaning softly in anticipation. He kissed and nibbled and licked me; I

started to scream and I knew he was savoring the taste of my already flowing juices.

He stood up to remove his clothes and I pulled my skirt over my head and lay down on the bed. When his shirt was off, I couldn't wait to have his strongly muscled chest, covered with curly hair, press against my breasts. I always enjoyed the sight of a man's hairiness contrasting with my hairlessness; a sensation not available when I was with Velorian men back home. Then he took his pants off and I couldn't wait to have that long, thick cock inside me.

He obliged by quickly thrusting into me and holding me close against him. We moved together, strongly and furiously, our lust and desire for each other culminating in a glorious mutual climax.

He withdrew and lay beside me, still holding me in his arms. Then, after a few minutes of enjoying the afterglow, we started caressing each other, slowly exploring each other's bodies. It wasn't long before we were both ready again. "My turn to be on top," I told him. Then I pushed him on his back and straddled him, positioning myself so that I just touched his tip. "Do you want it?" I teased.

"Yes, yes," he moaned.

"Who do you want it from?"

"You, **you**, Marian ... please."

"You just said the magic word."

I plunged down and impaled myself on him. I held still a moment to savor the feeling of being filled by him, of seeing the look of desire on his face. I heard him moan and once more whisper "please." Then I started to rock slowly. The gold

necklace around my neck helped me keep control; if I hadn't worn it, I would have crushed him. I gradually increased the pace till our screams of release echoed through the room.

We continue to explore and enjoy each other. Then he said: "Will you stay the night?"

"I'd love to, but I have to go to work tomorrow."

"I'm free tomorrow night... and all day Sunday"

"I can come over right after work. I'll pack an overnight bag before going to work."

"You really are marvelous, Marian. So beautiful ... so free ... yet intelligent and caring."

"You're pretty wonderful yourself, Gig." I reluctantly put my clothes back on. "I'll see you tomorrow."

I had trouble concentrating at work. Now that I knew how wonderful Gig was, I couldn't wait to see him again. I went to his house straight from work. Once more, he greeted me at the door, pulling me inside and giving me a passionate kiss. "Do we have to wait till after dinner?" he asked in a choked voice.

"I don't think I can wait that long," I answered.

He pulled me down to the living room floor. Before I knew it, my panties were off and he was nibbling me. He entered me swiftly and I wrapped my legs around him. He wasn't gentle this time, but demanding. If he only knew that nothing he could do to me would hurt me! I moved with him, as demanding as he was and we quickly climaxed.

“Welcome back,” he said, grinning.

“Good to be back,” I said, returning his grin. “When I got home last night, I realized that we never ate the pastry I brought.”

“I know. But you were much tastier than any pastry could be. We can eat it tonight.” He put his pants back on and said: “It’s really mild out so I’m just going to grill two steaks outside. Do you want to make the salad?”

“Sure.” I looked at my panties on the floor. “Don’t think I’ll bother putting these back on.”

We enjoyed our salad and steaks outside and then enjoyed the pastry. We threw the paper plates in the garbage and Gig cleaned up the grill. We went up to the bedroom hand in hand and made love deep into the night. Then we fell into a sound sleep.

In the morning, when we woke, he whispered: “Do you like it in the morning?”

“Morning, afternoon, evening ... anytime with you.”

We made love again, slowly and languorously, till his rumbling stomach forced us to get up. “I’ll make breakfast for us. I think I’ll let you do that when you get to know the house better.”

And so it began. We spent almost all our free time together. I arranged my work schedule so that I worked on the weekends when Tiffany was with him. We decided not to be seen together in Darlington; we didn’t want Jessica seeing us or her friends seeing us and reporting back to her.

I was happy and at ease with Gig. His house became a second home for me. No, that's not quite right. It was more of a home than my little apartment. Our relationship grew; the physical and emotional parts complementing each other.

The only thing keeping the relationship from being perfect was my need to hide the truth about myself. And I think that he realized that no matter how free I acted, I was holding something back.

It was late on a Saturday morning. Gig was preparing to turn one of the two unused bedrooms into a study. "I've got some errands to run," he said. "I'll be back in about an hour."

"OK. See you later."

I went into the bedroom to do a little straightening up. I stripped the bed and put the sheets into a laundry basket and then did some dusting. I was working on his night table when I accidentally knocked his class ring off the table and it rolled under the armoire. It was a large, very heavy piece of furniture. He had told me how difficult it had been to get it up the stairs. I bent down and put my right arm underneath the center of the armoire and casually lifted it off the floor. At that moment I was startled by a voice behind me: "What the hell?"

I quickly retrieved the ring and put the armoire down. "Gig! What're you doing back so soon?"

"I got to the gas station and realized that I didn't have my wallet. That's beside the point. I just saw you do something humanly impossible. No one, could do that -- not even the world heavyweight champion weightlifter."

I sighed. I had been afraid of this. There was nothing I could do but face up to it and tell him the truth, no matter what the consequences.

“Do you remember when you said how incredibly firm my breasts are and I said it was good genes?”

“Of course. But good genes wouldn’t enable you to do that.”

“Well, they’re good genes all right. But they’re not exactly human genes.”

“What ... “

I interrupted him. “And remember when I told you that my hairlessness was a genetic anomaly... that my mother was the same way? Well it’s not just my mother. My father and everyone where I come from are like that. And it’s not an anomaly; it was done on purpose.”

“Are you trying to say that you’re ... artificial ?”

“Look, Gig. It’s a long story. Let’s go downstairs and sit down on the couch.”

When we were seated, I said: “Before I begin, I have to ask you to give me your word that you’ll never tell anyone, and I mean anyone, what I’m about to tell you. Of course, probably no one would believe you. But they’d tell someone else and eventually the wrong people would find out. And it would be very dangerous ... for me but even more for you.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Marian. But I trust you and I give you my word.”

“Good.” I took a deep breath and then began.

“About a thousand years ago, a race of aliens abducted a group of my ancestors from northern Scandinavia.”

“You mean like the Grays?”

“No, not like them at all. Let me continue. These people, the Galen, had been abducting groups of people before and settling them on various Earthlike planets. But they didn't just settle us on Velor. They performed major genetic engineering, and as much as we can, we continue it to this day. They created a race, my race, which we call Homo Supremis. We are incredibly strong and practically invulnerable. We also have a type of vision that can see through things. And we can fly. And one more important thing: they created us to have an extremely strong libido – as you may have noticed.”

“Why did they create such beings?”

“Legend has it that there was a fertility crisis among their women and they wanted to create females who could bear and raise their children. So they made us beautiful so they would desire us, able to take care of godlike children, and with a sexuality to match their own.”

“Why do you have to rely on legends?”

“After 60 years, the Galen just disappeared. We have no idea why. Maybe they were disappointed in their creations. Maybe their crisis rectified itself. Maybe they found others to do the job better. Who knows why gods do what they do?”

“That explains who you are; it doesn't explain why you're here.”

“I'm coming to that. I told you that we still tinker with our genetic makeup. After the Galen abandoned us, a schism developed. A group emerged who wanted breeding to be natural; no more artificial genetic enhancements. The main group of Velorians wanted to continue as we were. The Naturalists were

very aggressive, and it might have come to civil war but for the discovery of something the Galen had left behind -- a dimensional transporter, programmed for only one destination. The Naturalists took it.

I got up then and started pacing. "They found themselves on a planet to their liking and called it Aria – they're known as Arions. Then they spread out and founded an empire. But they didn't spread out to uninhabited planets only. By that point, the Galen and their Surrogates had abducted many different groups of people and settled many planets. These the Arions wanted to conquer. They felt, like the Aryans on Earth, that their physical superiority gave them the right to rule all those they considered inferior.

"We Velorians don't feel that way. We have our own culture, but we don't want to foist it on anyone. We've offered our protection to many worlds, in what is known as the Velorian Enlightenment. Many of these worlds have a Velorian Protector. You may be surprised to know that these Protectors are all female. We're stronger than our males because we store energy in our breasts."

"Ah ... those magnificent breasts."

I couldn't help smiling.

"Are you Earth's Protector?" he asked.

"No. Only some worlds know about all this and it has been decided that it would not be good for Earth's development to know."

"Yes ... I imagine there would be some resentment over the abductions."

"Kira's Earth's Protector. But she works undercover. I'm one of her assistants."

“I don’t understand ... what are you assisting her in?”

“Gig ... you must realize that if Velorians are here incognito, so are Arions. That’s why it’s so dangerous for you to know. Only a few people, very high in the government, know about us.”

I paused and then said: “You know, I wasn’t quite sure you’d believe me.”

“I believe you because no sane person would make this up ... and I know you’re sane. And it does explain a lot.”

“Like what?”

“Like that wonderful aroma that emanates from the most intimate part of your body,” he said with a delightful leer.

“You got it. Our pheromones are known to have a very strong effect on men.”

“And like the time I told you that I had a gig at an academic conference and you just stared at me, and finally asked, ‘There’s somebody else named Gig?’”

“Yeah ... I was totally clueless.”

Now he got up and started to pace. “But more seriously ... I’ve always felt that you were holding back; that there was something important you weren’t telling me.”

I went to him and took his hands. “I’ve wished that I could tell you, but it has to be a closely kept secret. I know I can trust you.”

“Have you ever told anyone else?”

“I had to tell Bjorn last summer. I needed his assistance to rescue a family caught in a cave.”

“How did he react?”

“He didn’t believe me until I stabbed myself with a knife... only the blade didn’t penetrate. Then he fell in love with me and worshipped me ... but like a love goddess, not putting me on a pedestal.”

“Oh, Marian... Marian? That can’t be your real name.”

“My name is Arish’ka.”

And then he repeated it, slowly, drawing out each syllable: “A Rish Ka ... what a beautiful name. As beautiful as you are.”

Then he put his arms around me. “And I love your name as much as I love you.”

“What did you just say?”

“I said I love you. I wanted to say it before, but I didn’t know what you weren’t telling me, and I was afraid to tell you how I felt.”

“You loved me before you knew I was a superwoman? I felt that Bjorn’s love was more for the idea of a superwoman than for me.”

“Do you love me ... even a little?”

“Oh, Gig ... I want so much to let myself love you. But there’s a lot I haven’t told you. You remember my first night here, when I told you that I was on the pill? Well, I was lying. I don’t need any birth control. It’s impossible for me to become pregnant by a normal man.”

“You may have noticed that I already have a child. I have no great desire for any more children.”

“It’s not just that. Have you ever wondered why I always wear this gold necklace, even when making love? Well, I especially need it when making love.

Without it, you couldn't penetrate me, and even if you could, my inner muscles would crush you."

"In that case ... please keep wearing it!"

"There's more to it than that. Velor has a core of gold. It has a dampening effect on our powers. When we're away from Velor, we can live for several hundred years and hardly age at all. When I'm a hundred, I'll look like a young forty."

"And I'll be a very old man."

"Right."

"Look, Marian. No... Arish'ka. Why worry about that? Why can't we just enjoy what we have for as long as we have it? Hell, I could get killed on the Turnpike tomorrow. No one knows how long a relationship will last. Let's make the most of it while we can."

I kissed him and gently stroked his face. "You are truly a wonderful man. Now I feel that I can give myself wholly to you."

Our love making that night seemed to take on another dimension. When Gig nibbled on my nipples and clit, I told him to bite me as hard as he could; that he couldn't hurt me, that the harder he bit the more pleasure I felt. And he loved doing it, and hearing my cries of delight.

But it wasn't just that. It was hearing him whisper my name ... my real name, over and over. And hearing him shout it, and telling me that he loved me when he came. And I realized that I did love him, and told him so. And then we held each other and basked in our love.

A few days later, I let myself in with the key Gig had given me. I had finished work at five, but he had a meeting and wouldn't be home until 6:30. I was sitting on the couch reading when he came home.

"Great news, Arish'ka!", he said as soon as he came in. "I think I've mentioned my friend in the department, Bill Tyber. Well, Bill has two tickets for a cruise in Alaska's Inside Passage. Something personal's come up and he can't go. He said I can buy the tickets from him. It's in a month, the best time to go... right before the summer solstice."

"Sounds great, Gig. I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

"Don't be dense... I said two tickets. I want you to go with me."

"Gig ... you know I can't afford a trip like that."

"I know. I want you to be my guest."

"I don't know... Much as I want to go, it doesn't seem right for you to pay for me."

"Look, Arish'ka. I may not be rich, but it won't break me. And it wouldn't be any fun without you. Besides, it's for a double room. Please come with me."

"I've heard so much about Alaska ... how beautiful it is. It would be wonderful to see it with you. And I do have vacation time coming. I guess you've talked me into it."

The trip to Anchorage was long and uncomfortable. We had aisle and center seats. Gig and I kept changing seats so that at least one of us could sit with legs

stretched into the aisle. We tried to get some exercise during the two-hour layover at the Seattle airport. Then it was another cramped flight to Anchorage.

When we got to Anchorage, we got our luggage and then gathered with the other tour members. We were greeted by two very perky young girls who escorted us to the bus that took us down the Kenai Peninsula to Seward.

After the long trip, we were happy to finally see our ship, *The Royal Dynasty*. We were shown to our cabin, which just had enough room for a queen size bed, built-in dresser, closet and chair. The bathroom was as small as it could be and still have room for toilet, sink and shower. The best part of the cabin was the porthole, which was just bigger than the width of my shoulders.

We just had time to unpack and stow our luggage under the bed before going to a late dinner. The ship didn't leave port until after ten o'clock. With the four-hour time difference from the East Coast we had been up for nearly twenty-four hours. It didn't bother me, of course, but Gig was feeling it. Still, he wanted to go up on deck to watch our departure. And I was so glad he did.

It wasn't really dark – just twilight. As we left the harbor, there were snow capped mountains on both sides of us. We stood there with our arms around each other, drinking in the glorious sight. It was hard to believe that we had so recently been in the most densely populated state in the nation. After awhile, we went inside. I think it was the first time that Gig was too exhausted to make love.

We spent the first full day of the cruise at sea. It felt wonderful after the hectic trip to Alaska. At mid-morning, we had a lifeboat drill. All we had to do was take a

life-jacket and go to our assigned places on deck. Of course, it was all a waste of time for me, but I had no choice but to go along.

A woman of around fifty, about a foot shorter than me, passed by saying: "Will the band play 'Nearer My God To Thee'?" Gig burst out laughing. When I gave him a quizzical look he just said: "I'll explain later."

After a sailor gave us a short talk on emergency procedures, we were free to leave. I decided that if there was such an emergency, I would save as many people as possible and worry about covering up later.

We spent a good part of the day swimming and relaxing by the pool. My bikini was skimpy, but no more than a lot of the women's. I could tell that Gig enjoyed the way the men looked at me, knowing that it was he, and only he, that I wanted; that if he looked at me a certain way I would follow him to our cabin and he could enjoy my body in any way that pleased him, as I would enjoy his – a body that I saw many women look at with desire in their eyes.

We spent the next day exploring Skagway, a gold rush town established at the end of the nineteenth century. There were many restored buildings in the historic district. I particularly liked a saloon with manikins standing around the bar. Having my own private historian made it even more fun.

Our next stop was Juneau, the state capital. How strange to have a capital that could only be reached by plane or boat! We had a busy day scheduled: a helicopter ride to a glacier in the morning and a whale watch in the afternoon.,

The helicopter held ten: the guide, pilot and eight tourists. The other tourists were very excited, never having been in a helicopter before. Indeed, most had never done anything as exciting as this before. I pretended to be excited too; after all, I was supposed to be a librarian from New Jersey, not an alien from another solar system!

The helicopter was noisy, but we all had earphones. During the trip to the glacier, the guide gave us some background. We were told that the Juneau Icefield Research Program has been monitoring the glaciers of the Juneau Icefield since 1946. All of the glaciers have been retreating, except one: Willoughby Glacier. We passed over Willoughby Glacier and I took a quick look at it with my tachyon vision. There was something strange about it. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but it bothered me. It almost seemed as if there was a metal structure beneath it. I tested my idea out on other glaciers – yes, there was definitely something strange about Willoughby.

Landing on a glacier was definitely worth the trip. We got out and were told to walk slowly and carefully. There were deep fissures in the ice. The guide let everyone look into the cleft. She and another guide who had remained on the glacier wore special shoes to grip the ice and held each tourist as they looked down the fissure. I let myself be held, ludicrous as it was. I looked down. Never have I seen a color like that, a deep, deep blue, caused, we were told, by the extremely high pressure of the glacial ice.

We all enjoyed the ride back to Juneau. I marveled at the profusion of flowers growing at the edge of glaciers. But I also looked carefully at the glaciers we

passed with my tachyon vision, confirming by belief that I had to investigate Willoughby.



The afternoon whale watch would have been very enjoyable if I could have kept my mind off Willoughby Glacier. The boat held about thirty people and was piloted by a local man with a full beard and crusty manner, who also served as our guide. We didn't have any luck seeing whales, although we stayed out longer than normal. We did, however, enjoy the sight of many bald eagles. It's really wonderful the way they've come back. I told Gig that I had loved the sight of golden eagles in Rocky Mountain Park.

We got back just in time for dinner – no time to change clothes or talk, but I told Gig that I had to talk to him in private right after dinner. Our table was at the stern of the ship, with a large window behind us. We were treated to the sight of the rays of the setting sun reflected on the water as we left Juneau.

After dinner, we went back to our cabin. I told Gig what I had seen – told him that I had to investigate Willoughby Glacier.

“How’re you going to do that?” he asked. “We’ve left Juneau already.”

“I’m going to go out our window, have a good look at the glacier and then come back. You can help pull me back inside.”

“Can’t you....?”

“I could, but I might damage the rim pulling myself in. I’ll hover, you’ll grab.”

“How will you get there?”

“I’d like to fly, but it never gets dark enough for me to be sure I wouldn’t be seen. So I’ll have to do it the slow way and go underwater. It’ll soon be dark enough for me to do that.”

“Sounds crazy to me. But then, just about everything you’ve told me about yourself and the rest of you sounds a little crazy.”

He paused then. “Okay. I know you’ll do what you think is necessary with or without my help. What do you need me to do?”

“Just help me out the window. Then start watching in about two hours and have the window open. Pull me in when you see me. I’ll have no trouble getting in and out but you’re too wide.”

I waited a little longer until it got darker and then started undressing. I put my gold jewelry away – I would need my full powers tonight. When I was undressed he looked at me and said: “Aren’t you going to put on your bikini?”

“At the speed I’m going to go under the water it’d be shredded. Besides, darling, you know I do my best work naked!”

He laughed: "That's for sure!"

Gig opened the window and I went out, lowering myself carefully and avoiding windows. I entered the water as quietly as possible and started swimming underwater, getting far enough away from the ship so I wouldn't be sighted before surfacing. I looked around to get my bearings. The icy water felt wonderful and I wished this was a pleasure swim instead of a deadly serious mission. Not far away, I saw the whales that we'd tried to find in the afternoon. I sighted the glacier in the distance and went back underwater. I swam quickly, but not fast enough to cause any problems.

I surfaced several more times to check my bearings and distance until finally I reached Willoughby Glacier. I felt it was isolated enough to fly close to the surface to get a good look. My worst fears were confirmed. Deep within the glacier there appeared to be a command center, such as only the Arions could have built. And they must have built it more than a hundred years ago, when the area was very sparsely populated. As if I needed further confirmation, I saw them. A group of five Arion Betas entered the room under my surveillance followed by a male Prime. The Betas would be no trouble for me in a battle, but the Prime looked formidable.

I had seen enough, so I headed back to the ship. I swam in the direction I had come until I got to the approximate location I had last seen the ship. I took a chance and rose up in the air so I could see further over the horizon. I spotted the ship and reentered the water swimming steadily until I reached it. I made my way up the side towards our cabin, where I saw Gig's head sticking out the

window. As soon as he saw me, he stretched his arms downward and grabbed my outstretched arms and helped me into the cabin.

“God, I’m glad to see you,” he said, pressing his naked body against mine. Then he reached for a towel and dried me off, kissing me hungrily as he did so. But then he controlled himself enough to ask: “What did you find?”

I told him about the command center and the Arions I had seen there and the sophisticated communications systems they were using.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“I have to contact Kira. She’ll be the one to decide what to do.”

“How’re you going to do that?”

“I’ll send her a coded text message, then she’ll get back to me.”

“She knows where you are?”

“Yes. I’m required to inform her if I’m away from home for any length of time. She has our complete itinerary.”

I got out my cell phone and brought up the number I used to contact her. “Damn! I can’t get a signal. I’ll have to wait until we get a little closer to shore. I’ll keep on trying.”

“By the way, does Kira know about me?” Gig inquired.

“Yeah. I’m supposed to tell her about important things in my private life... and there’s nothing more important than you. I write letters to a special mail drop using code names. I’ve never told her your real name ... just given enough hints for her to find out for herself.”

“Well, I know you’re worried, but if you have to wait to make the call, I can think of a very pleasant way to pass the time,” Gig said, with a wolfish grin.

“My very thoughts.” I put on my gold necklace and lay down on the bed, my arms and legs open for him. “Come here and show me how glad you are to see me.” And he did just that for the next hour.

I tried again, and this time got through. “Let’s see, it’s now 2 AM, so it’s 4 AM in Denver. I should get a message from Kira in a few hours. I think you need some sleep, my dear.”

I lay down next to him clutching my cell phone, which I set on vibrate so he wouldn’t be disturbed. We would be at sea all morning and dock at Ketchikan early afternoon, so we could sleep late and no one would wonder where we were.

Three hours later I was roused by the phone’s vibrations. There was a message from Kira saying that she’d be in Ketchikan by this evening and would text details shortly. I couldn’t sleep anymore and started to pace back and forth in the tiny cabin. An hour later I received another message telling me that she had been able to rent a waterfront cottage. She gave us directions to get there and said she’d be using the name Val Orr. I sometimes find Kira’s sense of humor a little much.

We spent the afternoon on a walking tour of Ketchikan, viewing the historic district and the many totem poles, for which the city is famous. I would really have enjoyed it if my mind wasn’t on the Arion command center.

We opted to have dinner in town as did many of our shipmates. We told our steward that my old friend Val had taken a cabin in Ketchikan and we'd be spending the night with her. It was lucky for us that the ship would spend a second day in Ketchikan.

We rented a car, since the cabin was a few miles out of town. We had no trouble finding it. It was right on the water, and looked rustic but very inviting. Kira greeted us at the door. How can I describe her and do her justice? She put me in mind of one of those rich, elegant New York blondes who spend an inordinate amount of time and money on their hair, face and bodies and make plastic surgeons rich. The only difference is, with her it was completely natural.



She greeted me warmly, our breasts pressed together Velorian fashion. Then I made the introductions: “Kira, this is George Gregory Grant.”

He grinned: “Call me Gig. Can I have one of those hugs?”

Kira laughed and hugged him, making sure he got the full effect of her magnificent breasts. “You got yourself a good one, Arish’ka.” I beamed at her approval and was sure enough of Gig not to feel any jealousy.

We sat down around the kitchen table and, good hostess that she is, Kira poured us all a glass of red wine. Then we got down to business. “Report,” she said brusquely.

I gave her a concise summary of why I had become suspicious of Willoughby Glacier and what I had seen there, as I had been taught to do at Protectors Academy.

Kira got up and began to pace, seemingly unable to contain her energy. After a while she said: “Okay, I have no doubts about what you saw and your conclusions — you were well trained. But I’ll have to check it out myself to get a complete view of the layout before making definite plans for its destruction.”

She sat down again and took another drink of wine. “I want the two of you to continue your cruise as if nothing unusual has happened. Arish’ka, I’ll square it with the library so that you can extend your vacation. When you get to Vancouver, instead of going home, you’ll fly back to Juneau. I’ll take care of your ticket and book us a cabin outside of town.”

“What about me?” asked Gig.

“You go home as planned.”

“No, way. I want to be part of this.”

“It’ll be very dangerous. And it’s not your fight, Gig.”

The words came out of him fast and furious. “Not my fight? What do you mean not my fight? It’s in **my** country, on **my** planet.” Then he slammed his fist on the table, his voice getting even louder. “It sure as hell **is** my fight!”

We both looked at him admiringly and I thought: *One more reason to love him.*

“Okay, Gig,” Kira said. “I see your point. You’re obviously not a weakling, though no match for even a Beta. But we can use brains as well as brawn. We’ll find some use for you.”

Gig gave her the full brilliance of his smile. “I thought a smart woman like you would see it my way. I’ll have no trouble at home; it’s school vacation and I have no obligations. I’ll just tell my daughter that we liked it so much here that we’re staying longer. By the way, you might like to know that I’ve had some military training. I went through college on a ROTC scholarship.”

“Great. Now when you get back here, we’ll just pretend we’re old friends getting together. You’ll stay in the second bedroom. Please try not to make too much noise – I’m here alone and the sound of the two of you going at it may drive me to lose control. While you’re gone, I’ll try to catch some fish, so no one will wonder why I took the cabin.”

When we got back from Vancouver, Kira greeted us at the airport playing the part of an old family friend. But on the way to the cabin, her face took a graver demeanor.

"That Arion base," she said. "It's Diaboli make. Must date back thousands of years."

"Diaboli?" Gig asked.

Something I hadn't clued him in about. Any more than about the Beasleys – not that my escapades with them before I met him were any of his business, any more than his affairs were mine.

"They're bad news," Kira said. "Mind control adepts. Ancient rivals of the Supremis. Arish'ka had to deal with one of them last year. Must have been a thousand years old. A real piece of work."

I hadn't told Kira the whole truth about that. She'd never have believed that another of the Diaboli had been good news for me.

Gig looked at me, then at Kira.

"So these Diaboli -- they're... allies of the Arions?"

"No way," Kira interjected. "They hate us and the Arions both. The way they see it, we're all just playing power games here instead of letting you Terrans develop their own powers. But they usually lie pretty low; we can generally take care of them unless they outnumber us four to one."

"But whoever built this Arion base — you're going to tunnel into it from the near side, right?" Gig said.

"Right," Kira said. "Between me and Arish'ka, we can take care of the Prime easily enough. And the Betas hardly count."

"So you'll kill them all and destroy the base."

"This is war."

"I *know* it's war. But the ordinary people around here don't. You're going to try to be quiet, but the enemy's bound to hear you coming. Maybe soon enough to break out their heavy weapons."

"Which can't hurt us."

"Which can make a lot of noise, though. Maybe blow a hole right through the glacier and expose everything. There'll be news crews all over the place, and they won't go away until they get answers you can't give."

"I suppose you've got a better idea."

"I think I have. Try a diversion. It can't be hard to set off an avalanche further up the glacier, beyond the base. You don't even need explosives. You can just kick at the snow. Or blow on it. Whatever. The Arions will hear the rumble, figure out what it is. What they won't hear is you two burrowing in from that direction -- it's a perfect cover."

"Did you learn that in ROTC?" Kira asked.

"No, he's just smart," I cut in. "That's what I love about him. Among other things."

Gig was smart all right, but not quite smart enough. Who was going to set off that avalanche, if we were going to take advantage of it down below? Kick on the

snow? Blow on it? And risk somebody spotting a flying woman over the glacier? There might be another sightseeing plane, even an Arion scout.

Kira and I talked it over after Gig had turned in for the night.

“We’ll need more people,” she said. “We’ve got to take out the Prime fast and dirty, and somebody’s going to have to fly our plane.”

“*Our* plane?”

“The one that’s going to be stolen by some nut job intent on suicide. They’ll never find his body, or figure out who he was. Maybe they’ll think he bailed out before it hit. Assuming they bother digging the wreckage out of the avalanche.”

“But who....?”

“There’s a Messenger due to arrive in two days. Just our luck. But that means we don’t have much time to get organized. I’ll have to meet him in Denver and bring him to Ketchikan, along with another blonde tourist. I’ll message her: Top Emergency.”

“Will she be missed....”

“She’s already missed where she’s supposed to be, which isn’t on Earth. No matter; we can’t let the Arions get away with this. Near Earth Command we can tolerate, but nothing groundside. They know the rules of engagement: covert agents only.”

Like the one I’d dealt with in Washington. My first great accomplishment. She still may not know how she missed compromising that senator. John London was now a rising star in his party. Maybe even a presidential contender. He’d be a good man for Kira to work with, if....

Anyway, I knew the drill.

We spent the rest of the night going over the schematics of the Arion base – Kira had a photographic memory and put that memory on paper for me: the offices, the computer banks, the armory. We'd have to kill everyone there, get away with what we could in the way of records, and do it all without disturbing the glacier above. We'd even have to avoid damaging the refrigeration system that kept the glacier from retreating – the world wasn't ready for what its retreat would reveal.

And, no, I couldn't let Gig in on our elaboration of his plan. It was a good plan. Just not super.

Gig was pensive at breakfast the next morning. Something seemed to be troubling him.

"You don't have to worry about us," I assured him. "We've got everything mapped out. It'll be – what you say, 'a piece of pie.'"

"Cake," Gig corrected me. "But it's not about that. I have to trust that you and Kira know what you're doing."

"What, then?"

"I'm a history teacher. History and the teaching of history are the love of my life. I never expected to be part of history, and now I am. But it's history I can never write about, never talk about. It feels very strange."

"I know it isn't easy, Gig."

"But there is one good thing about it — we now have something in common."

“What’s that?”

“Like you, I have a secret life.”

If the Arions had had sonar deployed, we might have been taken for seals, or dolphins. Not torpedoes. We were swimming in what seemed a random pattern, except that it gradually brought us closer to the glacier. It was broad daylight above, and we were close enough to the surface to see the sun – but far down enough that nobody would see us from the surface.

It was just me and Kira and Kira’s daughter Xara. She’d been introduced as “Dani,” but I’d figured out the truth. Not because of the alias – for all I know, there may be a Dani among the Velorians here. Kira runs her operation like the old Communist party or the new terrorist groups – the cell system. Need to know basis.



But “Dani” didn’t have the spectacular figure of most Velorians; she looked more like a Terran teenager, and was dressed for the part as she lounged in her chair at the cabin. What clinched it for me was that Kira was assigning her to help take out the Prime. She must have seen the sudden knowing look on my face.

“Not a word about this to Gig, or anyone else,” Kira warned.

As if I needed to be told, now that I knew. We’d heard about Xara at the

Academy, but I hadn't really believed it. Half Velorian, a quarter Galen and a quarter Terran? Everybody knew there hadn't been any contact with the Galen for a thousand years. Just a legend. Or maybe propaganda, to boost morale at a time when the war wasn't going well everywhere. Yet here she was.

Only, I knew damn well I wasn't going to get any answers. Need to know again. And what I needed to know was the layout of the Arion base. I'd seen it only briefly, but Kira had mapped it out for us. My job was to take out the Betas, then to salvage as much data as possible from the computers. We still didn't have any idea why the Arions were there, what they were up to. No sign of military equipment, and it was a poor location for an intelligence listening post.

They had a secret entrance in the mountainside, but we weren't going to bother with that; just burrow into the ice from below the water level. We had synchronized watches, but to make sure we made our move at the right moment, Kira tracked the plane with her tachyon vision while Xara and I kept ours glued to the interior of the base.

It looked pretty much like a Terran installation, really, with cubicles and desks and computers in one section, a small barracks, a commissary. It was just the technology that looked different. But I was up on the technology; we learn that at the Academy, even before we go to Erin'dor for combat training. The Betas were sitting at their computers or walking back and forth. The Prime was in his office, looking important and apparently going over reports from the Betas.

Kira tapped me and Xara. That meant the plane had just hit the mountain and the avalanche was on its way. There was a shudder and a sudden commotion

inside the base; the Arions knew something was happening, but not just what. Time for us to move.

The glacial ice might as well have been cotton candy to our Velorian bodies, and the outside wall of the base flimsy styrofoam, although it was actually made of fitted stone – not the sort of material Arions would have used. The floor, I briefly noted as we smashed through, was also of fitted stone in a peculiar black and white zigzag pattern. Some sort of Diaboli symbolism.

I don't like to talk about the killing. It was the first I'd ever done on my own, but I knew it needed to be done.

A couple of Beta techs opened up on me with sidearms, as if their slugs could do more than tickle me. But it took only a few seconds for me to realize that this was a diversion; the rest of the techs had run for their cubicles to smash up the computers. So I ignored the gunfire and went after them, right through the cubicle walls. Nothing fancy, just quick chops to their necks and they were done for.

The gunmen were quick on the uptake; you had to give them credit for that; they chased after me and turned their fire on the equipment. But I was even quicker on my feet, doing a fast dance that kept my naked body between them and their targets, then rushing them and dispatching them. End of story.

It was suddenly quiet. I hadn't been paying any attention, but I knew Kira and Xara must have taken care of the Prime. They joined me a few seconds later. We followed the drill, carefully disassembling the computers and stripping them of their memory cores for later analysis. We left them by the not-so-secret entrance,

where Kira had arranged for the Messenger to pick them up and fly them out by night.

I never got to meet him. Maybe he gave Xara and Kira some R&R. I wasn't in the mood right then. Anyway, I had Gig.

When I got back to the cabin, Gig was waiting with open arms, which he quickly folded around me. Before he could ask, I said: "It's over. We did what we had to do, what we were trained to do." He was smart enough to know that I didn't want to go into any details.

He made love to me that night with a ferocity that told me he had been scared — scared that something would go wrong but even more scared that he'd lose me.

In the morning, we made arrangements to fly home the next day. We played tourist again, but our hearts weren't in it. The knowledge of what was beneath that glacier and what we had to do to destroy it cast a pall over the beauty of the land and we both just wanted to go home.

At home, we returned to our normal lives. We did our best to enjoy the summer, Gig showing me that there were many beautiful places to visit within a few hours of home.

It was mid-August when I received a briefing from Kira. I hadn't really expected it, so long after the mission. Need to know and all that. Maybe she just

wanted to humor me. Yet she came all the way from Denver. Did she have other business here in the East?

We met at the local Panera's, looking like a couple of women from *Sex and the City* out for some girl talk. We sat far enough away from anyone else to avoid being overheard. Anybody who caught snatches might think it was about *Star Trek*.

"You know what they were working on?" she told me. "Global cooling technology, custom-tailored for application to Earth. Just the right mix of aerosols to counter the greenhouse gases, without the industrialized and industrializing nations having to work very hard at reducing emissions."

She paused for a moment.

"Can you imagine a better bribe? They tried to tempt that senator of yours with sex, and as you can imagine, they've set plenty of other honey traps, but this has them all beat. It's like a magical fat pill for people who can't stay on a diet, only it would actually *work*. The Chinese would love it. Likewise, industry people here. And the Arions could have gone public and become the heroes of the hour. Earth would practically be *begging* to join the Empire."

"So what are we going to do with it?"

"Nothing."

"That's ridiculous."

"Prime Directive. This is still a closed world, after all."

I spent the next two weeks agonizing over what I should do. Should I tell Gig? What should I tell him?

Tiffany was going away for the Labor Day weekend with her mother, so we had three whole days to ourselves. We were lazing around the backyard on Sunday when he turned to me and said: "You haven't been yourself lately. What's troubling you?"

And then it all came out in a rush. The visit from Kira, which I hadn't mentioned to him. The wonderful technology that the Arions were working on, even if their motives were horribly flawed. And finally, the fact that we were going to keep it to ourselves, because of some rule they called the Prime Directive.

Gig thought for a while, as he always did when the discussion was serious. "She's right, Arish'ka."

"But Gig, think of all the good it could do, all the problems it could solve."

"Maybe in the short run, but we don't know the long term effects."

"But what if there were no adverse long term effects?"

"I don't just mean the effects on the environment, I mean the effect on the human race. We need to work things out ourselves. And the way things are now ... I don't think we can handle knowledge of what's going on in the rest of the galaxy."

"Isn't there anything that we can do?"

"The best thing I can think of is for Kira to use her influence with some big company. Feed the basics of the technology to their R & D department and let them develop it gradually."

I felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. We decided that the best thing to do was to try to get together with Kira. Gig would have Tiffany for Columbus Day Weekend, but Thanksgiving she was scheduled to go to her maternal grandparents. Gig thought it would be a good idea to invite Kira for Thanksgiving. If anyone asked, she was a friend we had met on our Alaskan vacation.

I felt full of hope now and marveled at the wonderful changes in my life since I had met Gig.