



A Night with Supergirl

Immorality with a Moral

By Brantley Thompson Elkins

With some x-sistance from Tarot Barnes

I

This place I'm going to tell you about looked like a huge dungeon, walls all rough concrete. But it wasn't one of those S&M joints. No whips, no chains, no manacles bolted to the walls. They did have a lot of accessories, just not that kind.

It was once a storage area for an underground missile base, and it should have been filled in and covered over under the START treaty. But somebody had influence or put up some money. I never did get the straight of it. Anyway, it was way out in the middle of nowhere. I won't say exactly, but they didn't put missile silos near major cities, okay?

They catered to a very exclusive and peculiar clientele. How they were chosen, I had no idea. I sure didn't know how *I* was. Sure, I was obsessed with Shi'kara -- the one the rest of the world called Supergirl -- and the rest of the Velorians. Yeah, me and a few hundred million other guys. I figured the Vels could monitor our e-mails; hey if the NSA Echelon program could do it... But why would they bother? And what would they be looking for?

Well, I figured out later what it was all about. I think it had to do with why we're here today. Maybe with a lot

of other things, things that may have led to other meetings like this. Or will. I never saw any of them again, but that doesn't mean they haven't invited other people over the years. Could be happening even now. Tonight. I've never tried to find out. Somehow it just doesn't seem like a good idea.

I was working on my B.S. in organic chemistry, but doing a pet project on the side. How they found out about it, I'll never know. I kept it all on my laptop, never went on line, never networked, never even talked about it with anyone else. But *they* knew. The whole thing was a setup. I was the only one they wanted -- in that group, on that night. Does that make me sound like an egomaniac?

I was pretty full of myself back then, your archetypal geek. The closest thing I had to friends were my fellow Velophiles and chem majors. Some of those were girls; times had changed. But I was shy around them, except for talking shop. A few study dates, nothing serious, certainly nothing steady. My sex life was strictly fantasy -- an impossible fantasy at that. Well, I *thought* it was impossible.

When I got the invitation, I took it for a joke. Shi'kara and the other alien superwomen didn't make public appearances, except when they were honored for really big things like intercepting those rogue missiles or stopping the Big Quake in California, and they sure had better things to do than host private parties for fans. This was before we found out the real reason the Velorians were here in the first place. If I'd known about that, I would have been even more skeptical. Knowing it now...

Anyway, I put it down to some guy who'd seen the pictures on my walls, seen how I'd looked at them... Pretty elaborate for a hoax, though, I had to admit. Came on a really fancy card that had been impregnated with the scent of honey and wildflowers: Velorian pheromones. My reaction was real, but even so I figured the "pheromones" were knockoffs, cooked up in the chem lab. The rest was just power of suggestion, maybe with the aid of a mild hallucinogen. There was an RSVP addressed to some P.O. box in -- never mind. But it could have been the prankster's home town. Shi'kara herself "fulfill every fantasy?" Forget about it!

About a week later I was sacking out at the dorm when something woke me up. It was a tapping at my second story window. It was dark and I was groggy, besides which I didn't have my glasses, so at first I couldn't make out who it was. But whoever it was kept tapping, so I grabbed my glasses, fumbled for the switch, hit the lights.

It was one of *them*. Right outside my window. Not Shi'kara herself, but she had the unmistakable look of a true Vel. If I'd had any doubts, they were erased when I looked for the ladder under her and there wasn't any. I still didn't recognize her, but most of them besides Shi'kara kept a low profile, nobody seemed to have good pictures of all of them.

I raised the window, tried to think of an appropriate greeting, but my tongue was thoroughly tied. I was too busy staring at her breasts. So she was the first to speak.

"Guess you missed our invitation," she said, smiling. Then she chuckled. "I *told* them not to trust the Post Awful."

"It... it wasn't that," I stammered. "It was just..."

"You aren't going to tell me you didn't want to *come*, after getting an invitation that was engraved *and* perfumed?"

I blushed at the double entendre. And something else happened that was as obvious to her as it was to me. You can't hide anything from tachyon vision.

"I see you *do* want to come," she purred. But then she became all business.

"I brought another copy," she said, pulling an envelope from her waistband, from inside her panties. Well, she had to keep it *somewhere*. "All you have to do is sign the RSVP and we're all set."

In a daze, I reached for a pen from my desk and signed the RSVP. She let me keep the invitation. "Be seeing you," she said, and flew off.

The card smelled of Velorian pheromones, and this time I knew they were real. I knew where they came from. I couldn't stop thinking of where that card had been, what it had touched. I couldn't stop thinking of *her*.

I lost count of how many times I had to beat off before I got any sleep that night. It was only the next morning that I noticed that this version of the invitation had an extra line at the bottom: *Bring your device and your formula, ready for use.*

II

The people who met me at the airport weren't Vels. Just a couple of rather grim-faced cut-outs. They said as little as possible, but they seemed to have been briefed in detail.

I'd brought the parts for the mechanism in my luggage. Nothing suspicious about them. Nothing that looked like it was for a weapon. Could have been parts for a vacuum cleaner, as far as the security people were concerned.

The ingredients were something else. But the cut-outs knew what to do; took me straight to a chemical supply warehouse. They'd already made the arrangements, even put everything on their credit card. Nobody at the warehouse seemed suspicious. But some years earlier, nobody would have raised an eyebrow over fertilizer and fuel oil.

They loaded the stuff into the back of a van, and we were on our way. It was a long drive, and the cut-outs weren't much for conversation.

"So how many people are coming to this party?" I asked.

"A sufficient number," was all I could get out of them.

"Are you picking up any of the rest of them?"

"Arrangements have been made."

Seeing that I wasn't getting anywhere, I was reduced to staring out the window. The scenery was boring. Semi-desert with scrubby vegetation to each side, low mountains in the distance. Nothing ahead but the two-lane blacktop, with an occasional gas station or bar. It was getting towards dusk and, after a while, there was nothing to see but the center line and the highway signs and billboards in the headlights.

There wasn't any sign marking the turnoff, but the cut-outs knew where it was. We headed down a side road that led to a chain link fence with a gate and a faded sign that referred to the area's former status and warned unauthorized people to keep out. No sign of a guard; the cut-outs used an electronic device to open the gate without even getting out of the van.

Eventually, we reached a blocky concrete building lit by floodlights and surrounded by a dozen or so other vans and cars. There were people outside, standing around or milling around. Some looked like cut-outs, the rest had to be the other guests. At a quick glance, most of the latter were young and geeky looking, like me. A few were older. There was even one woman among them.

They didn't seem to be making much conversation, for people sharing an obsession. But that didn't really surprise me, it was one thing to chat on the Internet, under the cover of screen names. But in person....

I didn't think I knew any of these people, but then one of them stepped out of the shadows. Max Cleland. He'd had the nerve to post a picture with his Internet profile, something few of us did. I certainly never had. But somehow I got up the nerve to break the ice.

"Mr. Cleland, I presume," I said, extending my hand. "Benedikt Spinoza."

Not my real name, as you well know. But then, neither was his.

"Oh, right," he said. "The fire guy."

Meaning, of course, that my favorite fantasy was imagining Shi'kara bathing in fire, climaxing again and again as the flames licked her intimate parts. And after she cooled down, of course, inviting me to....

My reverie was interrupted as my two cut-outs unloaded my bags of chemicals and the parts for the mechanism. Cleland looked at them quizzically.

"You'll see," I told him. "It's something entirely new. I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

Cleland didn't know how to take that, so instead of responding, he gestured to his own bags, kicked at one of them. I heard a clattering noise.

"I came loaded for bear," he told me, then snickered. "Well, loaded for Vel."

I knew, of course, that he was into mechanical devices. I just hoped he wouldn't take all night with them. Would there be a time limit for each of us? Nobody had said anything about the details, at least to me.

One of the cut-outs gave us a heads-up. The doors of the building opened. We were instructed to pick up our gear and head inside. I was able to carry my own stuff; so were most of the others, but Cleland needed help. He tried gamely with his bags, but managed to drop one on his foot. A yelp of pain, and more clattering. After that, he left it to the cut-outs and hobbled along behind.

Inside, there was an elevator. It wasn't big enough to accommodate all of us at once, so the cut-outs had to split us up into groups. I ended up with Cleland and his cut-out baggage handlers and the one woman in the group, who said her name was Beverly. She wasn't carrying anything.

"I just came to watch," she said.

I was disappointed by my first impression of the Downdeep Downdeep. Nothing but a corridor with bare metal doors, painted olive drab, on each side. It led to an equally drab, cavernous space that had been fitted out with the bare minimum of amenities to serve as a theater.

There were folding metal chains for the audience and floodlights to give a good view of the space that was going to serve as a stage. That space was separated from the rest of the cavern by a barrier of glass or plastic, with a door to far left and what appeared to be a couple of apertures near the center.

The barrier couldn't have been part of the original design from when this was a storage room at a missile base. When I looked more closely, I could see that the material had been melted around the edges to seal it to the concrete. Glass then, for sure. Plastic would have discolored, even caught fire. Had to be Velorian work.

Nothing behind the stage but the concrete wall. On the floor, several huge plywood containers. Props of some sort, no doubt. TV cameras were mounted on the ceiling, angled towards center stage. Out front of the barrier, monitors were positioned to each side. I wasn't sure what this setup was for, although I had my suspicions.

The elevator kept bringing more fans. Nobody I recognized, but I recognized some of the screen names: Yossarian, Adam Stone, Ultraman. Tetrite, Shadow. All fans; none of the fan fiction writers. Was that a coincidence? Some were really vocal about what they hoped to see that night. Especially Cleland.

Cleland had brought all kinds of hardware: knives, swords, railroad spikes, hammers, bolt cutters, vises, power drills, even a jackhammer, all of which he showed off proudly. After using them to demonstrate the invulnerability of her Most Sensitive Areas, he was hoping that Shi'kara would compress them into tiny balls and take them into herself for keeps. But he wasn't entirely satisfied.

"I wish they had a tank," he complained. "They said they couldn't get one in here, even if I paid for it. But she could have a dug a tunnel, and the military could have found a surplus tank somewhere. They must have thousands of them. Hell, a burned-out Iraqi T-54 from the war would have been fine."

Other fans were talking about the usual sort of thing—Glocks versus Magnums, Uzis versus Kalashnikovs.

After about 20 minutes of this sort of thing, I was getting bored. I turned to Beverly, who'd been pretty quiet so far. She was about my age, dark-haired rather than blonde; an athletic type, nice looking but hardly a stunner. Like one of the soccer players in *Bend It Like Beckham*.

"I haven't met any female Velophiles before," I ventured. "I was wondering, ah..." I was trying to find words that wouldn't give me away as a complete asshole. "I mean, the appeal to... a woman."

"Do you mean, am I a lesbian?" she responded bluntly.

"Well..."

"Not really. Although there are some. Maybe her, in the front row."

She pointed out a woman in a military fatigues with a boonie hat. She was flanked on each side by several other soldiers. I hadn't noticed them arrive. Some sort of guard detail, I guessed, but what were they here for? Not to protect the star attraction, obviously. Maybe to keep the fans from getting out of hand with each other.

"As for myself, I don't want to be with Shi'kara, sexually," Beverly continued. "I just love the idea of *being* Shi'kara. Being superior to men instead of dependent on them. To have them look at me with stunned awe. And as for all the fantasies you guys like, well I like them too. Bullets and breasts... if you use your imagination, the bullets feel like your lover's kisses on your breasts. And then there's the awe of being *watched* as you effortlessly brush aside harm that would kill a normal human. Watching your lover watch you as you show him that you're beautiful, stunning, free and totally invulnerable. And knowing that he loves you for it."

She was so forthright I didn't know how to react. She was simultaneously justifying my own private fantasies and somehow trespassing on them. Frustrating them, at least. I thought it might be nice to get together and share the fantasy. But if I even hinted at that, she'd probably kick me in the balls. And it might turn out worse if she didn't. So I ended up just quoting Spock.

"Interesting," I said.

We'd been here an hour, the seats were filled, and still no sign of Shi'kara. Could this whole thing be a

colossal practical joke, after all?

There was a sudden flurry of activity as the soldiers left their seats and entered the stage. Securing the door behind them, they began attacking the crates with crowbars. The largest revealed a glass bathtub; another what looked like some sort of air purification device. A smaller crate was filled with jerrycans, and others held sundry military and civilian weapons.

The woman soldier had kept her back to the crowd. But suddenly she turned about, whipped off her floppy headgear and shook her golden tresses free. The star attraction, and we hadn't even noticed. Talk about embarrassment. But we got over it pretty quick, and broke into cheers and applause.

III

"Hi guys!" she beamed, with a smile that could light up the Galaxy. "Are you ready to have some fun tonight? Because we're going to have some fun tonight."

It was a little disconcerting. Sure we wanted to have fun, but it still seemed strange to hear Shi'kara talking like the headliner at some Las Vegas show.

"Now I know you all have some fun ideas," she said. "But I thought we'd start with a fun idea of my own."

She paused, Nobody had expected this.

"Ever see *La Femme Nikita*?" she asked. "Nikita was one tough lady, Not as tough as me, but then... who is, right?"

More applause.

"Well, you all remember Nikita, from the American remake with Bridget Fonda even if you missed the original with Anne Parillaud, or maybe you saw TV series with Peta Wilson—I think she was the best. But how many of you remember Victor the Cleaner?"

Only a few hands went up.

"Gee, and he was in both movie versions. Don't you remember, the guy who came around with the acid to get rid of the bodies the other agents had left behind? Only one of them was still alive? That was funny, I guess, if you're into black comedy. But I always thought it was funny that Victor had the idea he could dissolve all those bodies with just a few gallons of acid."

The stagehands dressed as soldiers took that as their cue. Donning protective masks, they started emptying the jerry cans into the tub. When they were through, they came outside and sealed the door behind them. Shi'kara paid no attention to them.

"Victor dumped the bodies in a bathtub," she continued. "Of course, it wasn't a transparent tub. I got that idea from reading about a stripper you've never heard of. Lily St. Cyr. More than 50 years ago, she'd take a bath on stage. Not in methanoyl chloride, of course; that'd have been murder on her G-string."

She paused, teasing her audience.

"Among other things," she continued. "She wasn't a Vel. If she had been, she'd only be in her 80's now, not even middle-aged for us. She could have stood in for me tonight."

She paused again.

"Not that I'm complaining."

She winked, and glanced behind her to confirm that her assistants had finished filling the tub.

"Right on the mark, two thirds full," she explained. "Wouldn't want it to overflow."

Shi'kara took off her boots, but left on her fatigues.

"That leather and rubber can make a real mess," she complained. "I tried it once. Spent the rest of the night cleaning up."

She dipped one foot in the acid.

"Mmm, not too hot, not too cold," she cooed. "Just right."

She looked back at the fans, and winked again.

"Well, here goes nothing," she said.

She stepped into the tub, lay back as if she were relaxing in a beauty and let the acid do its work. We didn't have long to wait, because methanoyl chloride is strong stuff. But she helped it out, inhaling deeply so that her magnificent breasts popped out even before the fabric covering them went completely to pieces, wriggling around so that fragments of her fatigues would detach themselves from her heavenly body and float away until they vanished.

The TV monitors offered closeups, and even instant replays of Shi'kara's supremis flesh being revealed inch by glorious inch. I'd thought she might have been wearing one of her uniforms, hopefully the one without a skirt. But she didn't have a stitch on, not even a G-string — did they even make G-strings out of vitaninium? As she turned towards us, her perfect bush came into view, and the cameras zoomed in as she began to finger herself.

Knowing about Velorian invulnerability was one thing. Seeing it first hand was quite another. Knowing that Velorians were sexual beings was one thing. Seeing one show just how sexual was quite another. Here was one of the Protectors of Earth, honored by the world for her service to mankind, flaunting herself shamelessly. The acid sloshed in the tub as she masturbated furiously, her hand moving too fast for the human eye to follow — but we were treated to slow-motion replays that showed every stroke.

I was squirming in my seat, desperately wanting to come and trying to hold myself back, eyes darting from Shi'kara herself to the slow motion monitor and back. I was totally oblivious to the other fans, and they were doubtless oblivious to each other. As the gasps and moans of the Velorian goddess reached a crescendo, I zeroed in on her: the monitor could never catch up. Shi'kara arched herself, thrashed up and down and about in the tub in the tub, splashing acid into the concrete, until she screamed in ecstasy.

As Shi'kara came, as I came with her, I felt a hand on my crotch. I knew who it was, of course, she was sitting right next to me. But I'd never expected this. She was moaning as she felt me come; no doubt about where her other hand was, had been. But I didn't turn to look; my eyes were still fixed on the stage as the golden goddess there recovered herself and basked in the afterglow even as she had luxuriated in the acid. Her face took on a look of utter contentment.

There probably wasn't a dry fly in the house. Shi'kara had reached out and touched us, one and all.

But only Beverly had literally reached out and touched me. It was the first time I'd ever been touched intimately by a woman. Not that I'd have dared admit it.

After a few moments, the star attraction stood up in the tub, then floated out of it. It was the first time we'd seen her fly. She revolved slowly in midair, making sure that our eyes could drink their fill, before landing next to the air purifier that had been parked in the corner and switching it on. Then she looked back at the small puddles of acid next to the tub.

"Victor!" she called out.

"Yo," responded one of the stagehands in fatigues.

"See, we do have a cleaner," she said, turning towards the audience. "Only our Victor knows what he's doing, unlike the one in the movie. Right, Victor?"

"Fuckin' A."

"So as soon as we get the place cleared of hydrochloric acid fumes, he'll come in and finish the decontamination. Meanwhile...."

A pause. A really *long* pause. Then she looked down at herself, as if only realizing just then that she was stark naked.

"Oh, *that*," she said. "I'm only supposed to wear the uniform when I'm on duty. And I'm not on duty tonight. So look all you want."

She struck a series of provocative poses. There was a stirring in the audience, at least among those with quick refraction times, and most of them were young enough, including me. I felt Beverly's hand on my crotch again, then inching into my pocket.

Apparently the air purifier had done its job by now.

"Got to make a quick change now," Shi'kara said. "Back in a few."

She came out, headed for the corridor. They'd improvised a green room behind one of those olive-drab doors, no doubt. Everyone looked at her, but nobody actually tried to touch her. We seemed to know the rules of the game instinctively.

Chances are that nobody noticed Victor entering the stage area with his chemical tank. He was already there by the time we took our last glimpse of Shi'kara wafting out the door.

IV

"Poise or Always?" Beverly whispered, her hand stroking me again.

My face was reddening with embarrassment.

"Uh, store brand, actually. It's just that I didn't want to risk..."

"Messing your Jockeys? Try a rubber next time. Nice and thin. Gives a lady a better feel."

It wasn't a conversation I wanted to continue. I looked around. Some of the others must have heard, but they

were averting their eyes. Beverly moved in closer.

"What I use," she whispered in my ear. She took my right hand and guided it inside the top of her jeans. She was wearing some kind of rubber panties. They felt clammy on the outside and I could tell from the way they slipped against her crotch that she must have really soaked them inside. I could feel her crack through the sheer latex.

"Mmmm," she moaned softly.

I suddenly withdrew my hand. Christ, there were people around. It was one thing for a Vel to be an exhibitionist, but....

Then she giggled.

"Hey, you got off on your fantasy, and I got off on mine. Maybe later..."

Seeing my embarrassment, she giggled again.

"Got to go to the Ladies," she said. "Freshen up. Back in a few."

If I'd had any experience with women, I'd have jumped at the chance for "later." But since I didn't, I chickened out, took advantage of those "few" to change seats, taking by duffel bag with me. I ended up next to Yossarian. I figured he was far enough away not to have noticed anything. But I could tell from the look on his face that he had.

"Don't say it," I interrupted.

"Don't say what? That you got lucky. You know how few girls share the fantasy?"

Yeah, I knew. But I didn't want him to know how little I knew. Let alone Beverly.

"I met this woman once. She'd script whole scenarios, act them out with me. It was incredible. We went at it for days. Actually, her favorite thing was the She Hulk; she'd even paint herself green."

"But the She-Hulk's just a fantasy!"

"Well, that was the Bad Girl side of her; only she didn't want to go as far as playing an Arion. Still, she'd do Shi'kara just for me. It was the closest thing ever to having sex with a Vel."

Then he sighed. "While it lasted."

Despite myself, I was intrigued. "So what happened?"

His mood suddenly turned sad.

"She got religion. Cut me off cold. Might as well be the Beast of the Apocalypse to her now."

"Catch 666," I ventured. "Maybe only Vels are cut out to be Vels."

Before he could think of a comeback, Shi'kara returned. I was soon too caught up watching the next act to notice, or even to wonder, when or whether Beverly had returned.

They'd kept the artillery secured in the stage area until now, and even during the performance it was strictly controlled by the men in fatigues. Maybe they were soldiers after all. They acted like they had military training, anyway.

Only one shooter at a time. Only one weapon at a time. Those were the rules, and they were strictly enforced. The Velophiles who'd signed up for this act had had to draw lots twice, once for the weapons they'd use, once for the order in which they'd be firing.

Shi'kara was wearing a slinky dress like a torch singer, and had somehow managed to do up her hair to match. We'd never heard anything about her singing, but she sang that night. She could have gone Platinum, we thought (Gold was hardly an option!) – if she'd had time to spare from saving the world for a career in music.

It now became obvious what the apertures were for. They could have saved time by having two shooters at a time. Maybe made it a contest, if they'd figured out a way to tell the bullet impacts from the two guns apart. No problem if they'd been using paint guns, but nobody had come all this way to see Shi'kara shot with paint guns.

Shi'kara took her place center stage, and they piped in the music from somewhere: Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me." Why had she chosen that particular song. She watched over us, she watched over the world, but she hardly needed anyone to watch over her. And why sing at all? But then I was caught by the wonder of her voice, as beautiful as her face and body. It seemed so real. Perhaps the only real thing. I gazed at her in enchantment, and for a moment I could have sworn she gazed back.

But only for a moment. The song ended, and the performance began. It wasn't as easy as you might have thought. Most of the fans were lousy shots, even at such close range, but Shi'kara did her best to accommodate them, stepping into the path of their errant bullets, making sure they tore into her dress as she began singing again. This time it was "Hit Me with Your Best Shot." She didn't miss a beat, and hardly missed a bullet.

It was more fun to watch on the monitors, especially after her breasts were exposed by the gunfire ripping away the front of her dress. In those bullets–and–boobs stories, everything seems to take place in slow motion, but in real life it's all too fast to follow. With slow motion replays, people in the audience got a better view than the shooters: closeups of everything from standard rounds to black talon bullets impacting on her tawny supremis flesh and rebounding harmlessly.

Our eyes were glued to the monitors. We may not thought of it at the time, but that spared us the embarrassment of looking at each other and seeing what we were doing with our hands. We were mesmerized by the electronic vision of our fantasy played out before our very eyes — frozen in lust and rapture as even the most lethal steel–jacketed rounds flattened against the softest flesh of her breasts, which dimpled and bobbed under the impact but were totally unharmed. Of course, the steel and Teflon bullets didn't leave the lead smudges we loved, but dum–dum rounds more than made up for that.

And yet it began to pall, at least for me. Maybe it just went on too long, but at some point I lost interest in the monitors and started watching Shi'kara herself – even listening to her. She was still singing – by this time, strangely, it was "You Needed Me." Only shreds of her dress remained; I was surprised to find myself thinking that was a shame. Her invulnerable flesh was peppered with smudges, her breasts still jiggled from impacts; but she seemed to be ignoring all that, caught up in a fantasy of her own more important than ours. Again, I could have sworn I caught her glance for a moment.

There was something troubling about that glance, but I couldn't have said exactly why. And as if that weren't enough, Beverly stopped by a moment after the Boobs & Bullets act.

"Sorry if I was too forward," she told me, as if no time had passed.

"Forget it," I said. "Maybe I'm just too backward."

For all her forwardness, she seemed like a sweet girl. Not innocent, mind you. Most likely not a virgin. But sweet. And I wasn't feeling like a sweet guy, or hanging out with a sweet girl. I was feeling like the geek I was.

VI

It got worse during the next act.

Cleland was pissed. In the first place, he'd come here expecting to use all his tools and weapons on Shi'kara himself. Instead, he had to just sit back and watch like the rest of us as she and Victor took care of things. In the second place, it looked as if either he'd bought a bunch of second-rate tools, or Shi'kara was even tougher than we'd imagined.

In the third place...

Most of us were young; I don't think I spotted a single guy who looked to be past his mid 30s. More testosterone per capita than you'd find in the average strip joint. But we had our limits. How many times can even a guy in his 20s come within the space of a few hours without getting too pooped to pop?

Shi'kara herself seemed to be getting... well, not tired. Never that. But maybe a bit bored. None of the stuff seemed to last long enough to get her really warmed up, let alone get her off. The knives and swords broke at practically first impact with her invulnerable breasts and the bolt cutters didn't last much longer with her clit, or the vises with her nipples.

The head of the sledgehammer went flying from contact with her supremis abs. The power drill shorted out in short order and the business end of the jack hammer broke off inside her before it could get down to business. She took care of the railroad spike herself, but it just sat there inside her. She played with it in a desultory manner, but got it only red hot, nowhere near enough to melt.

"I come 3,000 miles for this?" Cleland was complaining to the people next to him. "We're her fans. She *owes* us."

Shi'kara owing *us*? Was he crazy? She could probably hear him through the glass, too, but she didn't give any sign of it as she continued to fiddle with the spike.

The others tried to shut him up, but he kept on about what a drag it was anyway to watch her play stuff like boobs and bullets instead of smashing up heavy machinery and the like. There wasn't any machinery on stage but his smashed power tools and the air purifier. What did he want, anyway?

Come to think of it, what did I want?

It had seemed like a lark at first, but now it was looking... well, anything but. It was one thing to indulge our private fantasies about Shi'kara. It was another thing to turn them into a public spectacle, something to snigger at. As I looked around now I thought most of the fans looked like the raincoat brigade at some seedy sex show.

I was so depressed that I didn't even notice that Shi'kara had finished up whatever she was doing and taken another break. Victor got my attention, told me I was up next. Only I suddenly realized I didn't want to be.

Not any more. I headed out, as if looking for the men's room, and kept on going.

VII

The desert night outside was moonless, but the floodlights around the building blotted out the stars. And for some reason I desperately wanted to see the stars. So I put down my gear — dumb thing to do, anybody could have taken it — and started walking. The glare faded behind me, and the stars came out.

One of them might be Velor's, but I doubted it. Nobody knew where it was, or even if it lay in that part of the sky we call the northern hemisphere. But it was supposed to at least a hundred light years off. The only red stars visible to the naked eye at that distance were the giants like Betelgeuse and Mira.

I kept walking. One foot in front of the other. No destination in mind, I just wanted to get away. Another dumb thing to do; I was lucky I didn't stumble into an arroyo and break my neck. Somebody must have been watching over me, I thought. As a matter of fact, somebody was.

At some point, I halted. I was surrounded by darkness, and my thoughts were darker still. I stood there for a moment, then sat down. I was still brooding when suddenly a fire erupted in the distance. It was blindingly bright, must have lit up the desert for at least a hundred yards around. I'd already known the ground wasn't bare, and from the light I could see there was a lot of sagebrush and other fodder in the area.

This could be serious. I got to my feet, rushed towards the fire, hoping I'd be in time to clear a break around it before it got out of hand. Pulling sagebrush out of the sand was no big deal, I knew. But as I approached the flames, I could see that they came from a human figure. I knew instantly who it must be; the Human Torch wasn't real, and nobody would be burning himself as a political protest way out here.

Shi'kara moaned softly as she bathed in the Greek fire, slowly fingering herself through the flames, rubbing the gelatinous blend of petroleum, resins and other ingredients against and even into her intimate places. Despite myself, despite the crush of cynicism and alienation I had experienced at the club, I was responding to her gasps of pleasure. It was *my* fantasy now, something precious, something shared with her and *only* with her.

She'd cleared the area around her; no chance of the fire spreading. She'd assembled a pile of brush nearby, however. After she came gloriously, but before the flames about her had entirely flickered out, she took some of the brush and lit a fire next to her. I stood there frozen to the spot, until she invited me to sit next to her.

"You're lost," she said. "You need someone to light your way."

I couldn't think of anything to say.

She glanced between my legs.

"I see that I've already lit your fire."

That fire died quickly.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Why should you be sorry?"

"Because—"

And I couldn't say any more. I just started crying.

VIII

Shi'kara held me in her arms as I cried my heart out. My whole body was shaking as if in cold, despite the roaring fire before us, and my mind felt numb. But she held me she calmed me, and the numbness eased.

When she finally released me, we just sat for a few moments, side by side, saying nothing. The fire was dying down by then. Without a word, I got up, walked far enough to collect some more brush, piled it on, then sat down next to her again.

She had been naked the entire time, but somehow her nakedness hadn't registered on me for a while. Until now. Her body was smeared with ash and grime, but she was still a goddess. My own body responded again with desire; but my mind was filled with something deeper, a longing so desperate it was almost painful.

Of a sudden, she lay back, struck a pose leaning on her right elbow, inviting my eyes to roam freely from head to toe and back. Her breasts, of course, breasts I knew could defy bullets as well as gravity; her pussy, its tuft of golden curls now covered with soot. But also her arms, arms that had held me so tenderly but with muscles I knew were harder than Vendorian steel. Legs that could crush anything on Earth, but that now made me think only of the gateway to paradise that lay between them.

And, oh God, that face and that smile....

As she smiled at me, she began fingering herself with her left hand, the smell of her pheromones mingling with that of burnt oil. I should have been ashamed of myself, as I'd become ashamed at the show. Yet I felt no shame now as she indulged me; somehow matching her rhythm to mine so that we came together at the same second.

Afterwards, she looked at me as if she were pleased with herself, as if she'd just done her good deed for the night. The aura of smoke and honey and wildflowers lingered in the air.

"We really are exhibitionists," she said quietly. "Only not all the time. And not for just anybody."

"So why...."

"The show? It had its purpose. And there really are exceptions, Like the bath. That one I thought up myself. It isn't easy, even for Shi'kara, to come up with a fantasy you Velophiles haven't already thought of. I knew you'd adore it, and I love being adored."

"But not by everybody."

"Cleland?"

I nodded.

"Not one of my favorite people."

"You know him?"

"I don't even want to know him. He just keeps... cropping up."

"So what was he doing there? Was he actually invited?"

"Only under a false I.D. He has a bunch of them, and his latest wasn't tied in with any mailing address or server or web site he'd ever used. When he showed up, I didn't want to make a scene, so I.... well, made a scene."

She held her hands to her eyes, pantomiming lenses.

"Certain higher frequencies induce metal fatigue," she explained.

She was silent for a moment.

"Not that it matters, Not that he matters."

"So what does matter?"

"You. At least, you could. That's why I needed to see you. I have something to tell you."

"Are you serious? Anyway, I'm not that hard to find. Your card found me. So did your second card, and..."

"Bet she really had you going, too. As for the rest, telling wasn't enough. It had to be show-and-tell. I've shown. Now I'm telling."

"Telling what?"

"I kind of have to back into it. But it comes back to you. So here goes. You know how we stopped those rogue missiles. Have you ever wondered why we didn't stop the people who launched them?"

I hadn't, really.

"Because we *couldn't* have. Any more than we could have kept the peace in places like Bosnia or Somalia or Burundi or Iraq. If we'd tried, we'd have just made things worse. Machines are easy to deal with. Not so millions of people with hatred in their hearts and guns or machetes in their hands. Nor bands of rogue state or stateless madmen with hands on nuclear triggers, or eager to put them there."

"Peace gas," I remarked. From a really old science fiction movie, H.G. Wells' *Things to Come*, where an elite of black-clad airmen and engineers takes over a war-ravaged world by putting all the warlords and their deluded followers to sleep.

"And what happens when they wake up? They won't be converts, you know. Your men in black will have to find other means. Terrible means. The end justifies the means, they'll say. Others on your world have said it for centuries. But somehow the means always *become* the end."

She even knew about that movie. Had she been studying sf film or studying me? I was speechless.

"That's the trouble with you men of thought," Shi'kara continued. "You never really think about what happens next. Just like with the Greek fire."

"It was just a one-shot. Nothing was going to come of it."

"But you were going to show it off in public, weren't you? You were going to brag about how clever you were, how all by yourself you'd rediscovered the secret weapon of the Byzantine Empire. Probably tell enough that anyone with half a brain could have figured it out how to make it themselves."

Again, I was speechless. She had me dead to rights. But she chose at that moment to be compassionate.

"It's a small thing, really," she reassured me. "No worse than napalm. But does the world really need another such small thing?"

"I guess not," I half-whispered, half choked."

"You aren't such a terrible person," she said then, looking straight into my eyes. "You have a good mind. You understand science. You could have a great career, and not necessarily in the service of death and destruction. But is that all you want?"

Well, I wanted her, of course. But more than that, I somehow wanted to please her, to be worthy in her eyes.

"You could be," she said.

I practically jumped. Could she actually read my mind?

"Only body language," she answered unasked. "You men are so obvious. But you'll be relieved to know you've passed the first test. Now it's time to study for your degree."

Degree?

IX

I wish I could say that my studies had gone better, or at least started better. I was totally unprepared for it in more ways than one. I was unprepared when Shi'kara took my face in her hands and leaned forwards to kiss me, but that was the least of it.

I couldn't believe what was happening for a second. And when I believed it, I still couldn't believe it would lead anywhere, that I was in for anything more than a goodnight kiss. Wanting to make the most of it, my response was at once hasty and clumsy, more like I was trying to bite her lips than kiss them.

My "experience" had been limited to a few immature fumbblings and now of all times my hormones let me down again. Shi'kara pulled away, a slightly quizzical smile on her face. "There's no need to hurry," she cautioned gently. "This isn't a race. We have all night if need be."

All night?

I nodded a bit too quickly, anxious not to let her see me blush and eager to pick up where we'd left off. Especially if... all night?

Our lips met a little less frantically the second time. The rush of passion was still thundering in my ears but somehow I controlled it enough to hear her soft commands, instructing me in just the right way to kiss a woman.

Slowly the storm of sensation I'd felt from her first kiss ebbed, and I could begin to distinguish between the softness of her lips and the satin smoothness of her skin. As our passion mounted, Shi'kara introduced her tongue, pushing it past my lips and against my own. Again my inexperience made itself painfully obvious; instead of responding to the intrusive flesh, I shied away, causing her to chastise me again before resuming the kiss.

My next attempt was better, not brilliant or, if I'd allowed myself time to think about it, even halfway decent.

Still, Shi'kara had no complaints and as such I, naïvely took that as a good sign.

What happened next, as it turned out, was up to me.

Sadly I didn't know that at the time.

Though our kissing had become ever more frantic, we didn't seem to be going anywhere and even through my hormone driven lust I could tell Shi'kara was beginning to become more than a little frustrated.

I still couldn't believe I had permission to do anything more. Sure she was naked but she'd been naked when she'd been in that bath and, after the guns had had their way with her clothes, on the shooting range. Nudity was a way of life for her, it didn't necessarily mean anything and if I took it as a sign of... something and it wasn't, well an ordinary girl would slap you, *Shi'kara* might kill you, or drop you on the moon.

But part of it was just plain garden variety, gut level fear. I'd never gone anywhere nearly this far with a girl before and I had absolutely no idea what to do. Well, that's not entirely true; I'd read books, even seen a few porn movies – but in the latter there never seemed to be any preliminaries. The guys were suddenly just *doing* it. And doing it, and doing it. I knew women didn't like sort kind of thing. I figured out later that I'd have been better off reading women's romance novels.

I was staring helplessly at Shi'kara when she finally took my hands in her own and guided them to her magnificent breasts.

"Well?" She drew back momentarily, her eyes revealing an expression that was halfway between an indulgent smile and a weary sigh.

Gingerly at first, and then with mounting enthusiasm, I began to knead the abundant flesh. My technique wasn't up to much but it didn't seem to matter because, if only for half a second, I saw Shi'kara's eyes flutter and heard her sigh in pleasure. Even better, her lips parted a fraction to whisper, "More."

With renewed fervor I attacked this wondrous woman's chest, doing everything that I could either remember reading about, or think up on the spot. Strangely this seemed to have precisely the opposite of the intended effect. Things came to a complete halt when she grasped my hands and pulled them away from her.

"I'm not a lab rat." Shi'kara warned. "Or a science project. You're trying too hard to remember what you've read or heard about. Go with what *you* feel is right; it makes a girl happier if she knows you're trying from your heart" — she tapped the side of my head — "not your brain. Don't worry, I'll tell you if you're doing anything wrong."

I nodded dumbly, proceeding slower, but with greater effect, squeezing her breasts between both hands, grazing the darkened flesh around her erect nipples before lowering my head and taking one into my mouth.

But I screwed up again. While she initially gasped in pleasure and pleaded for more, she quickly pulled away when I started to suck on more and more of the sensitive skin, trying — however vainly — to stuff my mouth with the breasts themselves.

"They're not loaves of bread, you know. Don't try and eat them."

They weren't Wonder bread, for sure. But she didn't want me to turn this into a joke, I knew. Neither, really, did I.

"I'm sorry," I flustered, "I was only—"

"I know." She smiled and nodded. "Just be a little careful. I may be invulnerable; you can't hurt me; but I'm also just like every other woman. I don't like to be mauled, okay? At least, not at this stage."

"Oh." I nodded.

"Try a little lower." Shi'kara suggested, undulating her hips. I did as instructed and moved to the triangle of hair just above the joining of her legs. Burying my face in the soft down, I was rewarded by her incredible floral aroma, overwhelming even the burnt oil, as Shi'kara parted her thighs and allowed me access to the pink treasure there.

I set to work tasting the delicious wetness, running my tongue up and down the velvety slit, causing Shi'kara to moan out loud and arch her back in pleasure. I'd read just enough to recognize her clit when I found it. Lust consumed me, urging me onwards, to drink of the heavenly goddess lying before me, to lick her until she cried out in ecstasy.

I needed that, before anything else. Before even my own gratification, I needed to hear Shi'kara come. It was like a drug high, I couldn't stop. My tongue simply wouldn't stop. Somewhere above me, way beyond the soft squish of her juices and press of her thighs, I could hear the distant moans of Shi'kara mounting into a scream of pleasure.

"Not bad for a novice," she assessed afterwards. "Of course, you had an advantage. Velorians are a lot hornier than frails. And we have our fantasies too. Like Messengers. Sometimes they come true. And when they don't..."

My jaw dropped.

Then Shi'kara burst into laughter.

"I really had you going there. It's true that we're really horny. It's also true that we take pleasure in doing good deeds. Especially when they may lead to other good deeds. It wouldn't have been the same with any of the others. And don't kid yourself, you've still got a lot to learn. This was just the entrance exam."

I summoned enough humor to mention that I hadn't even entered her yet.

"You couldn't have. Not here. Not now. You know what I mean."

Well, I kinda sorta did. I hadn't actually been able to get my tongue *into* her.

As for...well, my response to her own excitement had taken care of that. Like Onan, I had spilled my seed on the ground, although the circumstances were hardly the same.

"I think it's time for a change of scenery," she said.

With that, she took me in her arms, but not for further embraces. Not just then.

"Hold on tight," she warned.

And with that, the desert began to fall away below us, as she bore me I knew not where. The fire, already dying, vanished into the distance. There were only the stars, and the Moon finally rising in the East, to light our way.

I don't know just where she took me that night, or maybe it was the wee hours of the morning. Some place on the mountains. Maybe Colorado. A Frank Lloyd Wrightish house with a glass roof and furnishings that seemed at once Spartan and luxurious. Including the bed.

It was nothing but a mattress on the floor. But it was thick and soft and springy and *huge*, obviously intended for more than just sleeping. Looking down at it, feeling as if its vast dimensions might swallow me up, I wondered how many times Shi'kara had lain here with some lucky guy (or even gal – Vels were supposed to swing both ways after all) and given it a real workout. I hoped *I* would be able to give it such a workout.

I also hoped I'd be able to hold up. I wasn't so naïve as to think that, faced with a sister of Aphrodite herself, I'd be able to last long. Without her laying a finger on me, just the memory of her perfect curves was enough to take me halfway to the edge.

But bad as it was, I knew it'd be worse if it wasn't for the gold. I knew about gold. I knew it would allow Shi'kara to relax enough for me to enter her, while making her even hornier. I was the one who needed to learn to relax. Just the thought of being inside her, of being surrounded by the loving cunt of a goddess, was almost enough to make me lose it.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" she asked.

My train of thought was derailed. I was only able to manage a "Huh?"

"Grime doesn't pay. The shower's in there. You first."

Yeah. It hadn't seemed to matter out in the desert. But sweat and dirt and petroleum residue would have kind of spoiled the mood here. I thought of sharing a shower with her — but that thought, too, brought me close to the edge. So I took her advice. The water was hot, and the shower gelée luxurious — some department store brand. One thing I hadn't thought of — I couldn't put those dirty clothes back on, now could I?

She had positioned and lit a half circle of candles around the bed by the time I got back. A true romantic; who would have guessed? I was somehow embarrassed now by my own nakedness, and turned away as she headed for the shower. I was still standing staring at the mattress when the electric lights dimmed and I heard bare feet padding softly on the floor behind me. Turning, I stood in awe of a deity.

Shi'kara was standing in the half light cast from the dozen candles while dressed in a soft white negligee that consisted of nothing so much as a pair of satin straps that sought valiantly to contain the large globes of her breasts, and a tiny white thong that did nothing to hide anything.

She continued walking towards me. In a way I was grateful for that. Not because she undulated her hips sexily with every step, but because she wasn't doing anything super. I'd seen so many, been *part* of so many, amazing events in the past few hours that I needed some semblance of normalcy before the big plunge.

"So are you ready to begin?"

It was perhaps the worst line she could have used, but such was my arousal that I wouldn't have cared if she'd spoken pidgin Greek. She looked between my legs.

"Oh yes, you're ready, all right. And getting readier."

She approached me boldly.

"Uh..." Shi'kara placed two fingers across my lips, silencing me.

"There's no need to speak, you just need to sit back and enjoy." Then she giggled. "Metaphorically speaking."

I nodded dumbly and looked back at the mattress, conveying my question without words. Shi'kara smiled again and lightly pushed me into a sitting position. Gazing up at her, I saw her grin devilishly before lowering herself onto her knees.

Her act *stunned* me. Never had I imagined that this golden being, this goddess incarnate, would kneel before a mortal man so easily.

"This isn't part of your degree." Shi'kara whispered as she bent low. "Consider it a reward for services rendered."

I was still so stunned to talk and could only groan in pleasure as I felt her take me between her lips. Shi'kara seemed content to let it remain there for a second, perhaps just to let me become accustomed to the head of her mouth before proceeding any further.

After a couple of seconds she began to bob her head, slowly at first, but with rapidly increasing pace. Seeing the mess of straight blonde hair moving up and down above my lap was the single most erotic sight I'd ever seen. Even without the unbelievable pleasure, that would have had me ready to blow in a couple of seconds.

"Uhh." I tried to warn her of the coming explosion. "Shi'Kara — wait, I'm about to...."

But if she understood my utterances, Shi'kara gave no sign. If anything she only increased her pace, literally sucking my orgasm out of me.

When she'd finished and I was lying on my back, trying to regain my breath, Shi'kara slowly crawled her way up my body while licking her lips. "I said, no words." She grinned.

"I was just trying to warn you." I wheezed; she'd taken just about everything out of me with that one action.

"Why?" She gave her lips one final lick. "I wanted it."

"But then..." I looked down. "I won't, you know... be able...."

"You're not hard any more, is that what you mean?" She took my now limp member in hand. "I know. But you deserved it."

"For what?"

"What you did for me out in the desert."

"But all I did was—"

"Want me."

"But *every* man wants you."

"Do they? They want the performance. They want the fantasy. They want to share it with other men. But you walked out on the show. Because you wanted me for myself, wanted to find the true me."

She paused to smile at me.

"Even if I was reeking of Greek fire."

Her smile broadened, turned into a grin as broad as the Cheshire cat's.

"I *really* appreciated that, if you know what I mean. And now —"

"Yes, but I won't..."

"Oh yes you will." Shi'kara kissed me. "But this way you'll last longer. And that's what's so great about young guys; less time between, err, 'pops.'"

As she'd been speaking, her hand hadn't stopped working its way up and down my length. Gazing down at it, she murmured, "See, your 'plant' has already found a little water."

Indeed it had, but it was nowhere up to the stage where I could do anything with it.

Shi'kara had an answer to that. "You just need more motivation." Then, performing a lazy back flip away from me, she stood before the mattress with her legs apart, looking down at me.

From there she began a casual striptease, slowly revealing the flesh her lingerie was doing nothing to hide.

If you think a woman can't do much of a strip with just three strips of cloth, you just don't have much of an imagination. Shi'kara certainly did and by the time she'd finished, I was more than halfway towards being useful to her again.

Or so I thought. Shi'kara quickly reminded me that it wasn't just my manhood that could make a girl happy. Flying over me until she was hovering just above my face, she said.

"Consider this a refresher test on your previous lesson. I want to see how much you've learned." Then she smirked and sank a couple of inches lower.

Faced with her naked sex once again, I was more than eager to prove myself. The floral scent was even stronger than before and I couldn't help but plunge myself between the delicate folds.

As I worked, Shi'kara gasped and moaned, twitching and gradually lowering herself further onto my face. To my utter delight, I found the promise of the gold vindicated when my tongue penetrated deeper and deeper between her moist labia, making the woman atop me quake so hard she nearly broke my nose.

Not content to merely lick her insides, I moved around, using my past memories to guide me to where she was especially sensitive. Tracing the outside of her vulva before flicking my tongue briefly inside again and then around the sensitive knob of flesh at the top of her slit.

"Oh yes!" Shi'kara gasped as I almost, but not quite, touched her clit for the fourth time. "Please, Yeesss!"

But I refused her demands and began to suck on her cunt as she'd done to my cock. What happened next started slow, from deep within her I could feel a powerful shudder begin to shake her. Growing in strength as it passed through her body, it finally erupted as a breathless screech as Shi'kara's climax washed over her.

Licking away the seemingly unending flow of liquid that accompanied Shi'kara's bone shaking orgasm, I focused my energy on the one area of her sex I'd ignored. Yet instead of merely licking it, I tried something different and merely hummed gently on the quivering projection.

Shi'kara obviously wasn't expecting it for no sooner had she crested over the peak of one orgasm than she found herself propelled into a second, even more titanic climax. I didn't even have time to breathe before her legs clamped down on either side of my head, nearly suffocating me as she rode the orgasm out. Rocking herself violently back and forth, nearly coming for a third time before she rolled aside and kissed me, licking some of her juice from my lips.

"Well," She panted, "you certainly learned that lesson well."

"Thanks," I gasped along with her, thankful to be able to finally take an unrestricted breath.

"Okay then." Shi'kara, recovered from her pleasures and wanting more, rolled onto her knees. "It's time for the big exam."

I looked up in shock, "But I'm not ready..." I looked down, to my surprise I was more than ready. "How?"

"How big a dose of my pheromones do you think just passed between your lips?" She responded. "A retest wasn't my only reason for that little encounter."

"Uh, okay." I nodded, still amazed to find I'd been so focussed on imbibing Shi'kara's nectar that I hadn't noticed becoming rock hard again. "How do you... you know, want to do this?"

"I said you had to sit back didn't I?"

Pressing on my chest, she pushed me down onto the mattress and put one long leg over my chest.

Unless my knowledge of human anatomy was grossly distorted, that was not where she'd need to be if we were really going to do this.

Shi'kara answered that by leaning forward to peck me once on the lips before taking my hands and placing them on her breasts. "Remember what you learned before?" She asked.

"Of course."

"Then prove it. Every time you do something I like, you'll be rewarded."

"And if I do something you don't like?"

She smiled. "Then you'll be that little bit further away from your goal won't you?"

I learned what she meant only a few seconds after I began fondling her breasts. When I did something she liked, like gently grazing her nipples with my thumbs, she eased her bottom an inch down my chest. But when I did something she didn't, such as grasping her flesh too tightly, she moved back up.

Shi'kara showed me how best to pleasure a woman using nothing more than the tips of my fingers. Finally she hovered just above my crotch, tantalizing me with her nearness yet refusing me the pleasure of penetration.

A sticky trail ran down my chest. In places the wetness had pooled where a fumble on my part had caused her to move back up instead of further down. It had been a painstaking journey, forged over twenty long minutes. The better part of half an hour in which I'd been forced to go through agony while she squeaked her pleasure. But now that I was literally *on the doorstep* of ultimate release, she denied me that.

A particularly inventive caress earned me a most tantalizing moment of penetration when she lowered herself

until the tip of my cock was *just* parting her labia, and then she stopped dead once again.

Groaning in frustration I tried to thrust upwards, to gain even another millimeter, yet Shi'kara simply floated up with me, balancing weightlessly on my cockhead.

Nothing I could do would get me further inside her. She escaped my every thrust by rising, while my attempts to force her down met steely resistance. No amount of breast fondling would do it either.

All the while Shi'kara was grinning and smirking inanely. As if she was sitting on the world's biggest secret and knew I only had to make a small intellectual jump in order to realise it as well.

I groaned again; what she was sitting on was anything but a secret.

Then I caught her furtive glances, she was keep flicking her gaze down to her breasts so it had to be something to do with them. But what, I'd done everything?

Then it hit me, I hadn't done *everything*. Pulling myself into a sitting position, I squeezed one of her tanned globes between my hands while running my tongue over her hard nipples.

That earned me another half inch and when I repeated the procedure on the other breast she sank until the whole head was inside her. The equal time rule, perhaps? Was that the secret? Yet there she stayed — if anything, leaving me in an even worse position than before because I could actually feel the velvety walls of her sex rippling along the top of my shaft.

Finally I stopped licking and began sucking while teasing the underside of her breasts with my fingers.

With a long groan, Shi'kara finally relented to the pleasure I was giving her and sat back, fully immersing myself within her body.

The feeling of that long slide up inside her was almost more than I could bare, thankfully she did nothing else for a while and simply sat there, allowing me to get used to the feel of actually being inside a woman for the first time.

"You finally worked it out." Shi'kara rested her head on my shoulder as she hugged me tight. "I was beginning to think to think you'd never get it." Her grin threatened to split her head as she asked. "Are you ready then?"

I nodded enthusiastically and Shi'kara began to gently rock her hips, squeezing me with her strong inner muscles. So long as she kept up the slow undulation, I was safe.

I figured that without factoring in the unique attributes of the Velorian vagina.

"Now you're really in for something." Shi'kara whispered mid-thrust.

"Wh—" The question was roughly torn from me as Shi'kara tired something new. While before I had been luxuriating in the her firm grasp, nothing could have prepared me for the sudden contractions of muscles that rippled up and down her cunt, throwing me relentlessly towards orgasm!

I didn't stand a chance. Against the supremis flesh squeezing my cock, endlessly trying to pull it even further within her, I strained to maintain myself, but Shi'kara's gasps of pleasure, the movement of her hips, the rhythm of her muscles, and finally the simple knowledge that this unbelievable woman *wanted* me, sent me over the edge.

Every muscle in my body locked as my back arched. I hugged her to me with bone breaking force, abandoning myself to passion as I let loose into her body.

Through it all, Shi'kara just continued her leisurely thrusting, accepting my semen without complaint and, once I'd finished, kissed me.

"How was that?" she asked, still idly moving her hips backwards and forwards.

It was beyond anything I could ever have imagined. Even if I had had the strength to speak, I couldn't have found the words. But the look on my face must have been enough.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it." Shi'kara held my gaze. "And don't worry about coming so soon. I expected that. This time you'll last long enough."

I didn't need to ask what she was meant and nodded slowly. What really surprised me was that she hadn't let go. I was still inside her, and I was still hard. And, oh God, she was starting to *move* again.

"So what do you want me to do?" I asked as she picked up the pace of.

Shi'kara gave me a look that said, had this been a real exam, I'd have just lost a load of marks. "Please me. What else?"

After that I only gasp and hold on as she went from leisurely lovemaking to hard fucking. The rhythmic rippling of her inner muscles hastened as well, yet no matter how hard or how fast she moved, I couldn't come. Every time I got close, she would simply squeeze me tighter until the feeling went away. Yet even as the sensation of immediacy faded, the underlying urge grew ever stronger.

If I ever wanted to be able to walk straight again, I knew I had to repay my goddess for some of the pleasures she'd given me. The smell of honey and wildflowers was still in the air, but even if it hadn't, I'd have been just as eager to take the challenge..

My first targets the two most obvious and I used every bit of knowledge she had gifted to me in attacking her breasts. But while my fingers worked their way around her areolas, my lips were locked with hers and, unlike before, I didn't shy away from her tongue.

I could feel her passion mounting as I lowered my head and licked at one dark nipple, shifting both of my hands to cup and surround the firm globe, lifting and fondling it as my lips and tongue went to work on the hard nipple.

Between gasps, Shi'kara managed to make out. "...Baiiit...."

"What?" I stopped my ministrations to look up, prompting an urgent gasp as two insistent hands pressed my head back to her breast.

Shi'kara moaned again. "Bite me!"

Were my ears deceiving me? In the desert, she'd said... I tried to play it safe, tasting again the wonderful flesh surrounding those points of desire, stopping only when she grasped my skull tightly and held it unmoving against her nipple.

Gently chewing on it, I was rewarded by an extra long moan from Shi'kara, and an extra long clench around my cock. I continued to nibble the tender yet invulnerable flesh — harder and harder and with increasingly

frantic urgency, finally biting with all my might, until Shi'kara finally threw back her head and cried out in release..

Her entire body convulsed with the force of her passion as Shi'kara came, violently quaking with such force that it was impossible for me to keep my mouth on her breasts and I was forced to continue my worship with my hands.

Yet even after I'd made her climax, I still wasn't allowed release. Still, the sight of Shi'kara leaning back, forced to support herself on her hands as she panted and squeezed her eyes shut against the last sparks of pleasure still bursting inside of her, was almost gratifying enough to take my mind off it. Almost.

She was still recovering when I began to thrust inside her. Momentarily dazed, she'd released most of the stranglehold she had on me and I thus time I meant to have my own fulfillment before she recovered.

But Shi'kara had other ideas and in the final moments before my climax, I felt the flesh surrounding me clamp down yet again.

Pushing herself up, Shi'kara grinned and shook her head. "No, not like that."

"But—" I cried, she cut me off.

"I know. One last time, together."

I grinned my reluctant acceptance and began exactly what I'd been doing before. The difference was that, under Shi'kara's remarkable control, I was pleasing her as well as myself.

Before too long my grunts were joined by Shi'kara's familiar cries of passion as our bodies met again and again. This was like nothing before, it wasn't lovemaking, it wasn't fucking. I guess, if you had to put a name to it, you'd call it passion.

Hovering above me in near-flight, Shi'kara began to buck uncontrollably, her face screwed up with the force of restraining her passion. Yet she wasn't ready to come just yet. Even working over both her breasts, even aided by the enormous strength of her own hands, I couldn't bring her over the top!

Finally I realized this was a last lesson. Even at the pinnacle of my 'exam' Shi'kara was trying to teach me something, I just had to figure out what it was. And this time, there weren't going to be any hints.

Or maybe there didn't need to be. I could see and feel just how close to the edge she was, just a few more minutes of what we were doing would be enough. Assuming I didn't go insane in the meantime.

But... I didn't want to, I didn't want to cheat, I *needed* to do this and prove myself in her eyes.

But I still didn't know what it was she wanted me to do. And this time it was even worse because of the mounting pressure in my groin.

Then something came to me, or rather, prodded me.

Usually in male/female sex it's the woman who feels the prod, but in most cases the woman isn't capable of reflecting bullets. I looked down to see Shi'kara's clit brushing against me with each thrust and I had my answer.

Taking one of my hands away from her breasts, replacing it with deft flicks from my tongue, I traced it down

her tummy until I came to the soft down above her entrance to nirvana.

Gingerly, I touched it, causing Shi'kara to jerk and moan even louder, yet she still refused to come. Even with every muscle tensed, her face a picture of concentration on the edge of losing control, even pleading with me in her own language to set her free, still Shi'kara refused my offer of ecstasy.

Moistening my finger in her own juices, I tried one last time to bring her over the top. Circling her clit, teasing her with ever so brief touches, I gradually, agonizingly, brought Shi'kara to the very pinnacle of ecstasy before slowly tipping her over the edge.

All of an instant all motion froze within her body. Then, as if she were a spring wound too tightly, she snapped.

Shi'kara came hard, releasing her hold of me and triggering my own glorious orgasm.

Yet as powerful as my climax was, hers was more so. Not even bothering to hide her screams of pure joy, Shi'kara arched her back to the point where the top of her head actually hit the bed. Her legs suddenly wrapped around my back, pulling me into her, smashing us together and holding me there while she surfed the crests and surges of pure ecstasy. Her voice peaked in time with her pleasure, telegraphing through squeaks and squeals each mountain of passion she crossed on her way back to Earth.

I knew then that I had passed her test. As we lay together in the afterglow, hand in hand, looking into each other's eyes, I wept with joy. It was more than feeling like a man for the first time, it was the feeling of absolute freedom. I knew that Shi'kara had changed my life, as I might never have changed it myself. I would never be the same again. Never.

The healing power of love. It was real. But so was the exhausting power of love, and the need for sleep.

XI

When I awoke, it was mid-afternoon. Shi'kara was still lying next to me in bed, still naked, and reading a book: Colin Wilson's *A Criminal History of Mankind*.

"When people do terrible things, there are always explanations," she said, as if we were already in the midst of a conversation. "There were born to terrible parents, or in terrible places, or under terrible circumstances. All very reasonable explanations. And yet people aren't reasonable."

After that past night, I wouldn't have believed anything could startle me. And yet, I was surprised. She could tell.

"I am Aphrodite," she said by way of explanation. "But I am also Athena."

"Here to impart wisdom?"

"The first thing you have to learn is that wisdom is where you find it. Like art, or love. Colin Wilson, for one, is very wise about some things, and incredibly foolish about others. The worst thing that could happen to him would be to be taken as a guru."

"I don't think I believe in gurus."

"So much the better. It's easy to become possessed by ideas, sometimes by terrible ideas. Your only defense is to have faith in yourself, to trust your own judgment. And to feel good about yourself. That's what last night

was really about."

I did feel good about myself. And about her. I reached over, brushed her nipples lightly, was rewarded with a smile. But I left it at that. For the time being,

"You could have become one of them, you know."

"One of who?"

"The terrible people. The ones who are the more terrible for not seeming terrible. Those who hold despite in their hearts, who believe that they are only victims of an evil world or an unfair universe, who can think of nothing but vengeance and yet mask their hatred in seemingly just and noble causes."

"I don't think I believe in causes, either. At least, not that way."

"Oh, there are still good causes. They just need better people. And now you're ready to be one of them. Some of us didn't think so. But I knew you'd take that first step, and when you did I was ready to lead you the rest of the way."

"Was I --"

"Some of the others left, too, a little later. I won't tell you about them. Perhaps you'll meet them again. Or not. But you were the one I needed most, because I thought you were the one the world would need most. Anyway, you've passed. You're ready to be man now, in more ways than one."

"I really like that one, though."

"So do I. And so will she. You'll meet her one day. She may not be a goddess, but she'll be good. Be good for her. Be good to her."

We made love again. I knew this was going to be the last time for us, ever. I wanted to make it last. So did she. And we did. But we made it fun, too. I wasn't afraid to kid her about the equal time rule with her breasts, and as I kneaded them, she even broke into the refrain of "You Needed Me." She giggled with delight when I entered her, and we were laughing with joy when we came,

I learned *everything* from her. The moves, sure, and I knew they would stand me in good stead for the rest of my days -- and nights. But more important, I learned that there was a time and a place for everything between a man and a woman: a time to give and a time to take, a time to hold back and a time to let loose, a time for laughter and a time for tears.

It was night by the time she flew me home. I'd missed my plane, of course, and we were hundreds of miles from the airport I'd arrived at. Nobody saw us at the dorm. She left me off at the window where her acolyte had handed me the invitation, what seemed like an eternity ago.

Shakespeare was right. Parting is such sweet sorrow. And I knew that this was a true parting, that I'd never see Shi'kara again.

"So what do I do now?" I asked as she turned to leave.

"Think about it," she said. She waved, and took off, into the night.

I suppose you have to be wondering, did she enhance me?

No, nothing like that.

She could have made a superman out of me, if she'd wanted. But it wasn't what she wanted. And from where I stand now, it isn't even what I'd want.

Ever met an enhancee? Ever seen one? I haven't. Not knowingly. They never seem to show up on TV or in the tabloids. I don't know what the Vels do with them — besides the obvious. But I don't think their lives really belong to them any more. Men of steel can't approach women of Kleenex.

Anyway, I'm an ordinary frail. I'll never leap tall buildings or bend steel in my bare hands. I'll grow old, live my three score and ten or whatever, and die. But I don't have any regrets. There are other rewards.

The money?

No, that's just a means to an end. It's the chance to be me, to do something only I could do. Something good, something that would make my life worthwhile. And there's another thing, the greatest thing of all; I'll get to that.

She told me to think about what to do with my life, remember?

So I thought about it. And I had an idea. But I couldn't do anything about it. Not just then, not without any money. So when I got my degree, I took a job. The same kind of job I'd wanted to take anyway, with a military research lab. Only I hated it.

Their main project was incapacitating agents. Not poison gas; they were beyond that, or so they said. This was supposed to be about humane warfare. Just knock out the enemy and round them up. Yeah, and then shoot them like fish in a barrel, most likely. I'd read somewhere that the Army had done that with tear gas, back in Vietnam.

I was just a glorified gofer at first, running errands for the research teams. But it paid well, and I was frugal. I bought a modest house in a working class neighborhood that was turning, furnished it cheaply, drove second-hand cars, lived on frozen dinners (always bought the store brand), dressed out of Kmart (except for obligatory suits), never took expensive vacations.

The security agencies have their radar out for people doing classified work and living beyond their means. I don't know what they made of me, living below my means. A miser, maybe. Anyhow, I managed to outfit my own lab in the basement, worked there nights and weekends. They never caught on. I didn't have any real friends at the military lab, nobody I'd invite over.

It took me five years before I knew I was getting somewhere. By that time, I was in line for a major promotion, and they were really surprised when I quit to go into private consulting for industry. They didn't know I'd kept up with civilian research, and they still don't know why or how. But I knew my stuff, and it paid handsomely, and I could pretty much set my own hours.

This was just before we found out about the Arions. That pretty much ended Terran military R&D, even on missiles and weapons of mass destruction. There was nothing we could do against a *real* Evil Empire that ruled thousands of worlds; we'd have to rely on the Velorians for that. When I saw the news, I naïvely thought it would at least unite our own world, put an end to our differences. No such luck, and there was nothing I could do about it.

But there was something I could do. Not about the Arion war, or even our own wars. Something more fundamental, looking beyond war. Another ten years, and I was ready to call you. You've read my research. You know this is going to work. That's why I picked you. Not every venture capitalist has a degree in organic chemistry. You know *why* it's going to work. You know it's going to make us both multi-billionaires, you know it's going to help save the world, and you know how.

Sure I'm in it for the money. Money still makes the world go around. Ever heard of George Washington Carver? He was this black chemist who revolutionized the economy of the South by inventing a thousand and one things to do with peanuts. Henry Ford once offered him a job that would have made him rich, but he turned it down, stayed on as a professor at Tuskegee Institute. He lived modestly, died modestly.

Well, that may have seemed very noble, but was it? Suppose Carver had become a multi-millionaire, set up a foundation with the money and the clout to do more than just carry on research at Tuskegee? We might have made a lot of racial progress a lot sooner. So we're going to be multi-billionaires, and proud of it. And we're going to make Earth a better place, depend on it.

Something I didn't tell you before. One of my consulting jobs, I ran into that woman I'd met there at the show, and never expected to see again. I'd been a geek then, a total asshole. But here she was, years later, working on a project that by sheer coincidence — or was it? — related to my own.

Only 29, and already a research director. Really smart. She could tell I was smart, too. Didn't recognize me at first, I looked different; but when she did her face actually lit up — the last thing I'd have expected. She'd left too, all those years ago, she'd even looked for me in the desert. I fell in love with her, just like that; and when I told her what I was really up to, she fell in love with me.

I'd had a few casual affairs since Shi'kara, kept in practice. I wasn't afraid. I knew what to do. And, no, I'm not going to tell you about *that*. Some things are too good to tell. But we've been happy together, sometimes even deliriously so. And we have a couple of daughters now.

See, there's a reason I wanted to have this get-together at home instead of over at the office or the lab or some restaurant. We've taken care of business now, I think. Time for lunch. Time to show you the greatest reward of my life. Come meet Bev and the kids.

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A guide for readers new to this genre.

The Aurora Universe was created in 1995 by a writer then known as Sharon Best, and now as Shadar. It was inspired mostly by the universe of DC Comics, save that the focus was on *Supergirl* rather than Superman.

But before long, the Aurora Universe began taking on a complex mythology of its own. Instead of Krypton, there was Velor — a planet settled ages ago by northern Europeans abducted from Earth by an alien race called the Galen. The Galen were genetic engineers, who turned the Velorians into a new species called *homo sapiens supremis*, with all the characteristics of comic book superheroes like super strength, invulnerability and the power of flight. But on Velor itself, their powers are inhibited by a gold field, although (unlike kryptonite) gold is not otherwise harmful to them — no more than alcohol to ordinary humans, at any rate.

Unlike Krypton, Velor has never blown up. But for reasons still unclear, the Galen vanished. The Velorians

were left to their own devices, and divisions. A dispute over reproduction — artificial versus natural — led to a schism. The Naturalists left to found their own culture on a world called Aria and became known as the Arions. A Genetic Bomb, apparently of Arion origin but later blamed on Velor, robbed them of most of their powers. Stripped of their ability to fly, less than one percent, — the Primes, retained their full strength and invulnerability. The rest became Betans with abilities that, while greatly exceeding those of ordinary humans, are a tiny fraction of what they once were.

Increasing enmity between Velor and Aria erupted into a war such as had never been seen in the Galaxy. The Arion Empire set out to conquer other worlds and species, the Velorian Enlightenment to defend them. The defenders, known as Protectors, are always women — specially enhanced by Aphro'dite, last of the Galen, and assigned to worlds near and far, including Earth. Some serve openly, others covertly, depending on whether their assigned worlds are deemed ready to know the truth about Velor and Aria and the Great War. Earth is rather a special case; everybody seems to know about the Protectors who perform great deeds of rescue and crime fighting but few truly believe in them and even fewer know the true reason for their presence.

The most important aspect one needs to understand about Protectors — or at least the facet everyone seems to latch onto — is their enhanced sexuality. Though the exact reasons for this are unknown — the Galen apparently had their reasons — the sexuality runs both ways as, in addition to an increased libido, Protectors are nearly irresistible to humans (males as well as females). This isn't just because of their beauty, but because of their pheromones, which smell like honey and wildflowers. The only males of their own kind that they see, at least on undisclosed worlds, are the Messengers who carry official dispatches to and from Velor. To satisfy their needs, they occasionally enhance humans with a retrovirus that transfers some measure of their powers, except for flight. Occasionally, especially to reward deserving humans, they may wear gold which weakens them enough to have safe sex with ordinary beings. Either way, the prospect of an ordinary human getting lucky with a Velorian goddess is what Shadar calls "the heart of the fantasy" and, especially in the early days, the appeal of Aurora Universe fiction was largely the "good parts."

Since its early days, however, Aurora Universe fiction has steadily evolved — not only in the works of Sharon/Shadar, but in those of other writers inspired by him — towards greater sophistication in subject, style and theme, while still usually including those good parts. My own site, The Bright Empire (<http://brantley.ubergirls.org>) is one of many devoted in whole or in part to Aurora Universe or similar superheroine fiction. A number of these are under the umbrella of the Aurora Universe Writers Group (<http://aurorawritersgroup.tripod.com/>), including works of the late S.T. Mac <<http://www.infinitybridge.com/>> and Toomey Starks <<http://www.nicework.com/Susan/>> as well as living writers like Shadar <<http://velorian.org/auow/>> himself, Jolie Howard <<http://ljbinkley.tripod.com/>>,* Ed Howdershelt* (Abintra Press <<http://abintrapress.tripod.com/>>), Tarot Barnes* (Alternate Histories <http://www.geocities.com/alternate_histories/>), AK (Julie and Friends <<http://julievalor.ubergirls.org/>>) Diana the Valkyrie <<http://www.thevalkyrie.com/>> and Greg/Aileron (Ubergirls <<http://ubergirls.org/>>), the last two of which offer links to a host of other superheroine sites.

May the first story of mine to be posted at eBookAd.com (the writers above with asterisks were already represented here) be an invitation to sample Aurora Universe fiction and other science fiction, fantasy and adventure by members of our writing community.

—Brantley Thompson Elkins