

The New Era

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The room was dim and the rich paneling lent an air of mystery and elegance to the scene. Polished oak, lamps emitting a rich but dim light, book cases containing printed leather bound books and an aroma of age made low voices and decorum almost mandatory. An oak horseshoe shaped table dominated the room. There was seating for thirteen people and all seats were occupied.

A man, perhaps 50 years old, was speaking intensely with a low harsh intonation. "If we don't do something, the Interplanetary League will increase their pressure against telepaths and the trend is far less than positive. There have been several unexplained deaths and any investigation has been far less than complete. I see a mounting campaign against telepaths, in general, and they will become a focus to distract the populace from what is really happening."

He hesitated and a small light by another persons seat lit. The figure at the head of the table took notice and responded, "Delegate 12 acknowledged."

"I recognize delegate 5 has concerns but portraying the Interplanetary League as the essence of murdering evil simply does not make sense! We are a civilized people and the government simply does not condone or engage in murder. I can't accept that." She had spoken with equal intensity and it was obvious there was no real consensus amongst the thirteen present.

Four more small lights lit but there was no acknowledgment from the head of the table and no one spoke. The figure at the head of the table was shrouded in an eerie shadow and was not clearly visible. A combination of clothing and wave disruption was used to create the shroud effect which completely concealed the identity of the party seated there. When speaking, the voice was electronically altered so any identifying characteristics were masked and even gender was obscured.

Standing, the chairperson spoke, "I wish to thank all of you for your comments. However, we must conclude for the day. Due to the nature of your concerns, we will meet tomorrow at twenty two hundred. I'm sorry for the inconvenience but my duties require my attention elsewhere and I'm sure many of you have similar pressing needs." A pause and the figure spoke again, "You are dismissed,"

Everyone stood and began leaving. There was low murmured conversation but most simply stood and silently left the meeting room.

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"Sam, you are amazing. I watch you do that and it really spooks me. I know you're projecting but it's like you've slipped back in time and are some primeval goddess. I almost expect you to start speaking in thunder and tossing lightning around. It's amazing how easy it is to be impressed by something like that!" Carla sat back on Sam's couch and took another sip of her ginger tea. "You know, you got me hooked on this stuff," she

commented raising the cup of tea. "It's been almost twenty years now, hasn't it?" she murmured thoughtfully.

Sam nodded. "Yes, twenty." She paused, shaking her head. "Has it really been that long?" There was a period of pensive silence and then Sam continued. "You know, I really hate this council charade. It is just so hackneyed and phoney."

"Sam, since you've become the chief executive officer of the Academy, you done a lot of good and most of the good you've done has been through the Council. I think the whole presentation is a thing of genius. No claims are made. Nothing is presented. The entire thing is delightfully underplayed which makes it even more effective," Carla added.

Sam nodded and reflected on the day Mr. Howard approached her on assuming the helm of the Academy. It had been shortly after returning from Reylo and she had been absolutely dumbfounded. The summons had been straight forward and she'd thought it would be concerning their stay on the distant world. Mr. Howard liked the additional information that only a face to face meeting could produce. She had actually been looking forward to the interview.

The fact that Mr. Howard and Liz were waiting for her and had coffee prepared did not alert her to the fact this meeting was somehow different. She was a little surprised Liz was there. Mr. Howard usually conducted interviews alone. Sam suspected Mr. Howard had far more telepathic skills than he allowed others to suspect but she'd never been able to confirm that. The only thing she knew for sure was he had the best shield she'd ever encountered and trying to read him was a way to get the world's worst headache.

Liz handed a cup of steaming coffee and invited her to sit down. Then the surprises began.

"Samantha," Liz began, "for the first time you are going to be introduced to certain information that must remain in this room. You are going to be offered an opportunity and we think we know how you'll respond but, whatever your response, what is said here, today, must remain here. Can you agree to that?"

Sam nodded. "Yes, Ma'am. I can do that." She then waited. Over time, she'd learned to offer what was requested and ignore any urge to elaborate. It made things go much faster and did not irritate Mr. Howard who, while polite, had a way of seeming irritated with idle chatter and sorely wishing you'd stop it. His presence seemed to intimidate although his words rarely did.

The room they were in was small, contained three chairs arranged in a semi circle around a small table, a coffee pot in the corner and nothing else. There was silence after her agreement but she was used to that. Neither Liz or Mr. Howard rushed into conversation or spoke superfluously. She glanced at Liz and gasped. Liz's appearance was subtly shifting. As Sam watched in amazement, she seemed to become younger and more vibrant. Sam had never really thought about it but, if she'd been asked she'd have probably guessed that Liz was a hundred and ten to a hundred and twenty. With and

average life span of one hundred and fifty, that would have made her elderly but not ancient. Now, she looked no more than seventy and perhaps even younger.

Sam gasped and Liz smiled. "You needed an older person to relate to so I needed to look older to you. I hope you don't mind but that is behind you now."

Sam was visibly flustered and the fact that Mr. Howard's appearance was shifting as well did little to calm her down. He appeared leaner, trimmer and even a bit older. Sam had him pegged as hefty, mid sixties but, now, he could be a vibrant eighty, and for the first time, she saw him genuinely smile.

"Well, Samantha, you now know that neither of us was exactly what we appeared to be and you're bright. I'm sure you've figured out that, around the Academy, neither is anything else." He gave a hearty laugh and Sam wasn't sure which was eerier, the fact that nothing was as she thought it was or the fact Mr. Howard was relaxing and laughing. She shook her head as if trying to come to her senses but everything remained as it was.

"You might as well sit back and enjoy this. The Academy is older than you think it is and it has a purpose other than what you might suspect." He held up his hand to prevent her from interrupting. Smiling, he continued. "And you are about to become the next leader, boss, Chief Executive Officer, or whatever you care to call it." He stopped speaking and stared at her.

That bombshell landed in Sam's lap and completely overwhelmed her. For a moment she has a flash back of facing a carnivorous feline on a distant world and she had the almost irresistible urge to run far and fast but she took a large sip of hot coffee and didn't even notice how hot it was.

She offered a shaky smile and gave high pitched, hoarse, "I see." She heard how bad that sounded so she cleared her throat and said, "I see," in a firmer stronger voice.

Liz chuckled and leaned forward and firmly squeezed Sam's arm. "You are precious, girl. Howard is dumping this on you in the most direct way possible way and I told him you'd cope. In the Academy, everything is a test. It keeps us alive and sharp."

"Howard?" she managed to say in an almost normal voice.

Now it was Liz's turn to laugh. "Yes," she chuckled, "don't tell anyone but his name really is Howard Howard. Thus he is known simply as Mr. Howard.

Sam felt the overwhelming urge to snicker. It started to come out and she stifled it by taking another gulp of too hot coffee. That time it hurt and the pain helped her regain control.

For a moment, Mr. Howard was back. "Miss Smith, you get one snicker then never again," he said sternly.

"Yes, Sir," she started weakly but then realized he was grinning. This was a side of "Howard" she'd not seen before yet she like it.

"Now, on to the real business of this meeting," Mr. Howard continued.

What followed was the single greatest shock Sam had endured since knowing about the Academy. Liz had become aware of Sam shortly after her birth and had Academy

instruments following her progress. The Academy had no direct interest in genetic manipulation so there was no official interference but both Liz and Mr. Howard had a keen interest in her potential as a telepath. Her physical skills were a pleasant but not unsuspected bonus.

The academy became aware of the dissension within the drug company and managed to plant an operative that took part in the kidnaping. That had not worked as planned but Sam was removed from the control of Merkizer and put under the protection and guidance of the Academy, and thus, the story of Sam began.

As she developed and her abilities became visible, Mr. Howard took a personal interest and began to view her as a possible successor. Carla, a protege of Liz, was assigned to her, and much to everyone's surprise and pleasure, they became fast friends. Carla and Liz conferred about Samantha but Carla was hesitant to reveal too much really personal about Samantha. What Carla never realized was Liz's skill as a telepath. Carla was a prime empath and she was totally confident in her ability to shield or to know if she was being read. Her confidence, however, was misplaced and Liz was able to read everything without her knowing it or causing any disturbance.

With that knowledge, Liz was able to influence Carla and Samantha in subtle and not so subtle ways to focus them in the direction that Mr. Howard felt was optimum for Samantha's development. There was a surprising amount of latitude as Mr. Howard felt that she had to prove herself to be capable of surviving. The Academy could only go so far in protecting her. She had to be able to stand on her own but the Academy would surely try to insure that she had adequate tools to do that.

"Yes, Carla, that's true. It's a completely different world of wheels within wheels and I'm no longer on the front lines." She paused. "You know, I liked it on the front lines."

Carla smiled took another sip of tea. She'd had enjoyed the "front lines" too but she was enjoying the task of assisting Samantha and helping shape events that affected trillions of beings. Screaming bullets, laser fire, wild sex, alien beings and the incredible adventures had certainly been exciting and immediate but the impact on the entire population was minimal. Carla liked the power she influenced and wielded.

"OK, girl," Sam said, "Suck down that tea and lets get to work. You meet with the Jedoran faction and calm them down and I'll meet with the Conserves and try to crank them up a little. Let's see if we can meet somewhere in the middle."

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Sam was not happy. The meeting with the Conserves was more difficult than she'd anticipated. The head of the delegation, Josepha had a personal dislike for the head of the Jedoran delegation. Sam didn't want to dig into it or play one personality against the other but her tendency was to go against anything the man was for. Sam had listened to about ten minutes of personal attack against him but had finally turned the conversation towards actual issues.

"We can agree that the Interplanetary League is not evil incarnate," Sam said. "It is simply an organization and any organization has good and bad people within it. We can agree on that, can't we?" Sam was dressed simply in a conservative outfit that enhanced her figure without emphasizing it. Her smile seem to implore understanding and agreement. The subtle mental enhancement of her position was also having a positive influence. She was dealing with well developed telepaths but she was exceptional herself and had training that none of them could suspect.

The angry woman facing her nodded and smiled a small tight smile. "We can agree on that much but the Jedorans are simply paranoid in extreme. No one in the league is killing telepaths or trying to sterilize them."

"I'd agree that is highly unlikely but, to be honest, I do have a concern and that's more political than anything else. The IL is heavily influenced by the Transportation Consortium and the Consortium has practiced some very heavy handed job discrimination and contributed a lot of money to organizations that are very anti-teeep. There is understandable friction between normal people and telepaths that the Consortium is making worse and is influencing the IL to make worse. The equal employment opportunity bill was killed and there were several telepaths killed in the riots that followed. I don't think that was an accident and I'd like to have that investigated and the truth determined." Sam waited.

"Yes, that was nasty business. Distressing to say the least," responded the woman facing her.

"Yes, I agree with you. I think we should investigate and discover the truth of what really happened. What do you think?" Sam asked. She could see the indecision on her face so she increased the mental pressure without making any overt suggestion. She just implanted a feeling of discontent.

"I would like to know what really happened," she said shaking his head. "If we know, maybe we can prevent such incidents in the future."

"Good lady," Sam enthused, "I knew we could count on you. The council needs the support of reasonable people." Samantha made more nice noises but the meeting was over so quickly, from that point, that it almost seemed she vanished in a puff of smoke.

Carla felt like she had stepped into a hornets nest. She was facing five very angry telepaths, and while they were not attempting to read or tamper, she was sensitive to their anger. She was very subtly attempting to project a calming influence. Most telepaths could be influenced by an empath without their knowledge. Such tampering was considered "bad form" but Carla was interested in the results of this meeting and had no objection to using whatever she had to use to accomplish that end.

"We make progress by taking many small steps," she was saying, "not by great leaps and bounds. We all want the same thing here. We are all sensitive in some fashion or we wouldn't be here."

"You can talk about your small steps all you want but my brother took the giant step to the next world in that damn riot. As far as I'm concerned, he was murdered by the Transportation Consortium and I want it made known!"

The white hot anger of the Jedoran group washed over her and she wanted to cringe. Telepaths had no idea of how noisy they were. Well, maybe they did and simply didn't care. She understood such anger but understanding didn't shield her. She badly wanted to shield but if she did she wouldn't be able to project and she was sure that, without the influence of projection, there would be no agreement.

She focused on the leader of the group. He was the one fomenting the violent discontent. If she could get agreement from him, the others would probably go along. Taking a deep breath, "You want some resolution, right?"

"Damn right I want some resolution," came the answer shooting back at there along with another blast of anger.

"Suppose I told you that your actions are preventing the resolution that you want? Suppose I told you that you could change that? Would you have the sense to listen or would you act like a damn fool?" she hissed with equal intensity.

The immediate response was dead silence. The Jedoran Delegation leader sat back with a shocked expression on his face and a couple of the delegation were clearly suppressing smiles. He opened his mouth, hesitated and closed it. Carla had finally gotten his attention. "Uh...." He stared into Carla's ice cold eyes and hesitated.

"The Council is on your side. We want to help but we need your help and your cooperation. Let us help you," Carla said leaning forward intently.

His face assumed a pensive expression, anger fading. "Ah, yes Ma'am," he said. "What do you need from me?"

"For the moment all we need from you is for you to say no more. Your views are understood and further talk will serve no purpose. So, first, we need you to simply be present." He nodded and said nothing. Carla continued, "Second, the council will propose a vote to form an independent investigation committee. We want your affirmative vote."

"What does it take to be on that committee?" he questioned.

Carla smiled. "All it takes is your affirmative vote. We want you on it. The Council appreciates your position. However, we do have to deal with the realities of other view points," Carla said relaxing. She'd made her point and gotten the cooperation that she needed. The rest was details.

The tension was thick in the dimly lit Council meeting room. The Jedoran faction, true to their word, had been strangely silent. The meeting had begun with Josepha delivering a Conserve rant which Samantha, as moderator, had allowed for the allocated three minutes. No attention lights had lit. All eyes turned towards the Jedoran faction but they remained dead pan and requested no speaking time. Carla, from delegate position

number one, smiled at the leader a slightly nodded. A semi-nod was returned. The entire exchange took seconds and was totally unnoticeable unless you knew it was happening.

Carla triggered her request to speak and was recognized. "We all seem to agree that there is a developing situation that is potentially counter to the welfare of system sensitives. I make a motion that the Council form an independent investigation committee."

Samantha, as moderator said, "A motion has been made. Is there a second?"

Both Josepha and the leader of the Jedoran Faction said, "Seconded"

Sam intoned the ancient formula, "A motion has been made and seconded. All in favor, say aye."

A number of "ayes" were heard. "All opposed say nay," Samantha said. There was complete silence. "The motion to form an independent investigation committee has been carried by voice vote with no opposition," Samantha said. "This business meeting is concluded and you are all dismissed. Please remain accessible until noon tomorrow. The initial formation of the investigative committee will be from members of this council."

"I think Ms. Josepha of the Conserves and Mr. Ricardo of the Jedoran Delegation is a good starting point, what do you think?" Sam asked.

"You're trying to start a war, right?" Carla snickered.

"No. Actually, quite the opposite. If I can get them working together, they might see the value of the other's view. And they might uncover something interesting. Josepha does have doubts about what's going on and Ricardo has too much certainty. I'm hoping they meet in the middle," Sam replied. "And to help that happen I'm thinking of assigning Kayla as liaison."

"Now that is a good idea and I'd really like to see her again. It's been too long. What's she up to these days?" Carla asked.

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Kayla crouched at the stern on the life boat and tried to become invisible. She could hear the pounding of foot steps coming up the metal ladder well. Her tension increased with each approach, hollow step. Very few telepaths can function under extreme stress and fatigue but Kayla could get the impression of one of the nastiest mil-spec lasers she'd ever seen and a clearly murderous intent, both of which she realized were aimed at her. "Bet this is going to hurt," she thought as she stared into muzzle of the huge laser.

"Hey, you!" came a shout.

The man holding the laser turned towards the sound and Kayla and her assailant saw Adam at the same time. He swung the laser towards Adam and fired. The smell of his vaporizing flesh was rank in the air and Adam dropped as if he'd been clubbed. The gaping hole in his chest bore mute testimony to the fact that he'd not be getting up.

"Ok, bitch, on your feet. You have some talking to do for us. You're going to answer all sorts of interesting questions."

Kayla shakily stood and looked at Adam's body. She choked back a sob and felt desolation wash over her. She'd only known him a couple of days but he had been a fascinating and sweet companion.

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Kayla took a sip of her drink and glanced at her watch. Adam should be coming in any moment now. She'd heard that he was the BEST when it came to doing computer searches and she needed help. A quick email to his university and he'd readily agreed to meet her. She felt a strange quiver as Adam walked in. He was taller than she'd expected and thicker through the chest than average but it was his penetrating gaze that she noticed. "He's not missing a single thing," she thought.

He glanced towards her, nodded and smiled. As he headed towards her she realized that no one glanced at him. No one seemed to even notice. She glanced left and right to confirm this and realized that she'd lost him.

"Samantha Smith?" a voice said from behind her.

She controlled the urge to jump, turned and smiled. "Adam Boucher, I assume," she said smiling, giving the Boucher a French pronunciation, Booshay.

"The one and only. Can we walk outside, please? I spend so much time in front of a computer the opportunity to get some real air should not be wasted. Especially on a beautiful day like this and even more so with such a beautiful lady as yourself."

Kayla felt a genuine blush starting and that was even more embarrassing. She'd been the recipient of many compliments and many pick up lines but Adam seemed so sincere and so honest it was somehow disquieting.

They had walked outside and they had talked. Adam was very versed in every search technique Kayla had ever tried and mentioned several she heard of and then went into a technical explanation about folded layers that lost her almost instantly. She was convinced.

When she began to ease into the basic background of the Consortium and the Interplanetary League Adam seemed to have as much information about it as she did. He'd laughed at her expression of utter surprise. "Well you did call me for research help so I simply did my homework. I did what any researcher worth his salt would do. I researched you. It wasn't hard to put together." He grinned at her shock.

"Ah... Ummmm....." Kayla was at a loss for words. "What does salt have to do with it," she stammered.

Adam had laughed out loud and explained how Roman soldiers had been paid their wages in salt and to be worth one's salt meant the wages had been honestly earned. He was an excellent researcher as she'd found the next day and he was a most entertaining companion as she discovered that day. That night had revealed other talents Adam possessed that had left Kayla as she'd never been left before.

She'd been mostly celibate since Teelo but somehow Adam had reached her and they'd spent hours talking and making love. He'd touched her as no other human ever had.

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Kayla was firmly tied, almost hanging from an overhead pipe. She'd been stripped and her nipples were bleeding and her breasts were bruised. Blood dripped from her groin area, running slowly down her legs and forming a small puddle around her feet. She tried to gather strength to mentally undermine them but a combination of drugs and pain had been used to render telepathic capabilities useless.

"You will tell us who is on Josepha's team and if they've penetrated the IL," one of her captors said grinning.

Kayla had given up. She knew she was going to be killed and she felt the desolation of those about to die and she wept for Adam. She'd sucked him into something a life of research had not prepared him for. Now that sweet soul was dead and it was her fault. She hung limply from the pipe, the chain biting into her wrist. She no longer cared that they were hitting her or debasing her body. She simply waited to die and the sooner the better. It hurt too much to want to live.

"Ok, she's done. She's going catatonic. I've seen other teeps go this way. Once they hit this level, they don't come back. Kill her and let's get out of here," their leader said.

The man with the huge laser raised it and aimed towards Kayla when the aft hatch swung open. Adam was standing there and quickly took in all that was going on. The keen glance that Kayla had noticed was far keener than she could have ever imagined.

"Do you gentlemen mind if I cut in?" he asked in a sarcastic manner. The man with the laser swung the weapon towards Adam but the large weapon clattered to the floor along with his arm. Blood was squirting from the stump at his shoulder with each beat of his heart. His mouth opened and closed and he collapsed without a sound.

Pandemonium broke loose. A head rolled across the deck and the other man was split from the crown of his head to his waist. Slime and gore covered everything and the smell was terrible. Though it all strode Adam. A short heavy sword in his right hand was dealing death and destruction wherever he turned it.

He reached Kayla and a stroke of the sword against the chain on the bulkhead severed it and released Kayla. Adam caught her as she fell. He quickly examined her and ascertained her injuries were not life threatening.

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Kayla reached up and touched Adam's face with a bloody hand. "So this is what it's like to be dead. But I hurt, Adam. You're not supposed to hurt when you're dead," she whimpered.

"You're not dead, sweet Kayla. You are on my couch leaking blood all over it but you're not dead," Adam responded smiling slightly.

"I'm dead. I have to be. I'm talking to you and you're dead so I have to be dead," Kayla said.

"No, girl, you are not dead. Promise. And neither am I. Now, let's get you up and get you into a nice hot soak, ok?" Adam gently picked her up and carried her to his bathroom.

The tub was full and Adam lowered her into the hot water. Kayla gasped and then relaxed. "Oh, that does feel good," she breathed.

She relaxed and closed her eyes for a moment. She sighed and opened her eyes. Then she focused on him. He was bare to the waist and wearing cutoff jeans. She raised up and ran her hand down his muscular chest. "There's not a mark on you," she said stroking the slightly pink spot where she was sure he'd been burned. "I saw you get shot. Adam, what's going on? What I remember doesn't seem real. I've always trusted my mind and now I'm not sure of anything. What's going on?" she asked in a very small voice.

"Don't you worry, sweetheart. Trust me a little while longer and it'll be ok," Adam replied. He kissed her gently on the forehead. She felt a prick on her thigh and warm darkness enveloped her.

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The smell of coffee was the first thing Kayla became aware of. She opened one eye and got a blurry impression of Adam holding a cup of steaming coffee in his hand.

"Think you're ready for this?" he asked smiling.

She scooted to a sitting position and nodded, reaching for the coffee. She felt twinges of pain but the urge for coffee was stronger. She took the cup and inhaled the aroma.

"Oh, that's good," she thought taking the first sip.

She noticed the mounds of her breasts and their strange blue, yellow, and black color and then the events of yesterday came crashing in on her. She gasped as her hand started shaking. Grasping the cup with both hands was not sufficient to control the shaking but Adam was taking the cup from her and setting it on the night stand next to the bed. She bit her lip and established control over her emotions. She reached for the coffee cup, took another sip, set it down and rose to a sitting position on the edge of the bed. Her bruised body bore testimony to the abuse of the previous day. She gingerly ran her hands down her discolored body. "Wow, am I a mess!"

Adam smiled and handed her one of his shirts which she shrugged on. "You're going to tell me what happened yesterday, aren't you?" Kayla asked. "I'm quite sure I saw you burned. I mean really burned! And then.... what they what they did to me." She shuddered. "But then you were standing there with a sword!" she said her voice rising. "What I saw then was," she hesitated, inhaled and continued. "unreal." She sighed and took another sip of coffee.

Kayla marshaled her strength and tried a light probe on Adam. Nothing. It was like he wasn't there. A second attempt with a more focused approach yielded the same result. She could see him. He was sitting right in front of her but he had the most perfect shield she'd ever encountered. A third try and he lit up like a Christmas tree. He was there like a friendly bumbling puppy. In fact there was even the faint image of a puppy and Kayla

had to grin. He was playing with her in a way no one in history had ever played with a prime telepath and it was funny. She realized that the man in front of her was far more than he appeared and that there was no way she could touch him mentally.

It was funny. It was really funny and she chuckled. Adam grinned and she started to snicker. The snicker turned into a laugh which continued until she was sobbing. Adam reached for her but she grabbed his hand and held it in both of hers. "I'm ok. I think I just needed a little release." She grinned a wicked grin. "I'd ask you for a little but I don't think I could take it," she said gingerly touching her sore breast.

With that, Adam broke out laughing. "You have got to be the randiest mortal I've ever met!"

"I'm not randy," Kayla huffed. "Do you have any idea how long it's been since I've had sex?"

"Night before last if I remember correctly," Adam quipped back.

"No, I meant before you, silly! It's been over ten years."

For a moment, both of them sobered and simply sat staring at each other holding hands. Kayla sighed. "Tell me what happened."

Adam instantly turned serious. "Kayla there are things about me you just shouldn't know. I do have training that your group isn't aware of and you really don't need to know about that."

"Are you human," Kayla whispered.

"Yes," Adam grinned. "Born on good old planet earth and only been off planet a couple of times for pleasure. I am truly a native and my loyalties are one hundred percent Earth."

Kayla let out a breath she'd been holding. "Thank heavens. I don't need any more problems with aliens." She took another sip of coffee. "But I did see you die, Adam. I don't understand."

"You know that our senses don't always show what really is. In the coffee shop, you lost sight of me when I was only a few feet from you. Ok, I was playing with a pretty girl but you know what I mean. What you see is not always what is."

"Yes but the room and the sword," she stammered.

Adam took a deep breath, almost a sigh. "That was real. I've always been into the martial arts and no one scans for swords and knives any more. Everyone is into energy weapons. You may have noticed, that in a small room, a sword is more than a match for even a military laser.

"Yea. It sure is. That was awesome. I've seen battles but I've never seen anything quite like that. It was somehow very primal and primitive. They never stood a chance."

"Only a fool give his enemy a chance," Adam laughed.

"Hey! That's not very sporting," Kayla shot back.

"Getting killed is not a sport," was the instant response. "Anyone want's to take my head, it's going to be over my dead body!"

Kayla thought about that for a moment and broke up laughing. "Ok, ok, I give up. Tell me what you can. Anyone who will risk his life for you can't be all bad."

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Kayla had called Sam and given her a run down on her experience. She'd finally convinced her that there was nothing that she could accomplish and that she still had productive leads to follow. This was true. Adam had uncovered a back door into some data files that contained information about the Interplanetary League that should never have been committed to digital encoding! He had uncovered a major security breach.

She'd understated the seriousness of her encounter but there is only so much you can keep from a clone twin. But Samantha understood and was giving her room to operate. Sam was good that way. She had learned to delegate and trust those in the field.

Kayla was becoming very emotionally involved with Adam and he seemed to be as smitten with her as she was with him. She was still covered with various bruises but she was no longer sore and she was delighting in frequent sex with Adam. He had more stamina than Teelo and he made her feel very special. There was something about Adam that seemed to set him apart from an ordinary man even though it wasn't easy to define. Adam was unique in Kayla's (very limited) experience and she was loving every minute of it.

While he seemed to be the quintessential researcher and very scholarly, his thick arms and chest and his ability with a sword gave graphic proof that he was not average. His shield seemed to always on. He never seemed to slip. Even Carla leaked, and when relaxed, could be read. Not Adam. It was like he wasn't there. Except when he wanted to be and then he seemed to be anything he wanted to be. He was nothing like anything in Kayla's experience and it thrilled and excited her.

She had tried all sorts of concepts to try to classify him. She'd even briefly wondered if he was a vampire but they'd spend several nights together and if he was going to feed on her blood.... Well, she shuddered, any old time! But he was not a vampire as far as she could tell.

Telepaths were a genetic mutation that gave certain people abilities that other people did not have. Kayla finally came up with the personal theory that Adam represented some sort of anti-telepath but that didn't mean he was against telepaths. She wasn't against normals. They were just different and any person was simply what their genes allowed them to be.

She felt comfortable with that.

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Kayla and Adam waited for the elevator door to open. He'd even looked the other way as she'd pressed seven twice and close door. Getting Sam, Carla and Adam to agree on a meeting place had been difficult. It seemed that Adam was far more security conscious than Kayla had ever expected. He'd been so open and free with her that his reticence to meet with Sam and Carla had come as a complete surprise to her.

Even more surprising was Carla and Sam's caution in meeting him seemed to match his in meeting them. She simply didn't understand.

Kayla was not a shy lady. When she didn't understand something she tried to find out. The place to get data is at the source so Adam was her target. He'd explained this way and he'd explained that way and, finally, he'd asked, "Kayla, will they meet me at a location of my choosing?"

She'd had to answer that they wouldn't. They wanted to meet on Academy turf.

"Well," he'd replied, "I won't meet with anyone who won't meet me half way. Let's just call it a silly rule that I've picked up over the years to stay alive."

That was it. There was absolutely no negotiation with him beyond that. There was no way he was going to step one foot on Academy property. Hours of conversation and he'd finally agreed to meet with only Carla and Sam at Sam's apartment and only if they offered the promise that no one else would be aware of the meeting. He said, that if he ever found out the conditions were breeched, he'd cease to cooperate instantly and forever.

Kayla felt there was an implied "and hunt you to the ends of the earth" there but she thought it wise not to bring this up.

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The elevator door opened and they stepped into the small hallway. Adam seemed perfectly at ease. After all the negotiations, she thought he would be tense or nervous but he was far more at ease than she was.

Sam opened the apartment door and they entered. Sam and Carla made polite noises but it was Adam who played the trump card and seemed to take control of the moment.

"I'm certainly pleased to meet you ladies. Any friend or sister of Kayla," he said nodding towards Sam, "is a friend of mine. I'd suggest that we have a nice cup of ginger tea and get to know each other."

There was a moment of silence and the three ladies exchanged glances. Adam smiled and said, "No probes now ladies. That is not polite. I'm a guest."

Sam was the first to recover and she chuckled. "Right you are Adam but you knew there would be a reflexive probe after your ginger tea comment. By the way, would you really like some? It only takes a few minutes."

"Why, yes, I really do enjoy it. Especially if you have a little turbinado sugar to sweeten it," Adam replied.

"Ok, Adam. You've made your point," Sam responded a sharp edge to her voice.

"Sam, before we get started, there's something I need to tell you," Kayla interjected. "You really need to know this."

They sat and Kayla began the story of the afternoon on the boat. She'd gone there to find hard copy of records their research had uncovered the existence of. It had been a trap. She told of Adam saving her life and seeming to get shot. She told of the torture, rape and how they were about kill her when Adam appeared.

Somewhere in the telling of what had happened she'd grabbed Adam's hand and was squeezing like she was hanging on for her life. When she got to the part about the sword she was crying, tears running down her cheeks, but speaking with a firm voice.

Both Carla and Sam were totally absorbed in the story and every now and then would glance at each other or Adam. Hearing of her pain was difficult for both of them. Carla was empathetically feeling it and Sam, her clone, was feeling every sensation and emotion.

Kayla finished the story. She'd not been explicit about relationship with Adam but neither Sam nor Carla had any doubts that they were intimate and both of them were pleased with that. They had both been concerned about her celibacy but just didn't know what to do. Telepaths are notoriously unstable and the both felt they'd shouldn't try to interfere. She seemed happy if not well adjusted.

Now, here she was with a man that seemed far more alien than Teelo and she seemed to be totally wrapped up in him.

There was silence as Kayla finished telling her story. Sam got up and went into the kitchen. The sounds of her movements clearly indicated tea brewing as did the pungent smell of ginger.

Carla sat, chewing on her bottom lip, glancing from Kayla to Adam. The only sound was Samantha in the kitchen. Kayla leaned against Adam and he put his arm around her.

Sam returned bearing a tray with four cups of ginger tea and a bowl of turbinado sugar. They all busied themselves with pouring, sugaring and stirring. Still, no one was talking. As usual, it was Sam who broke the silence.

She sighed. "Well, Adam, you're in the room with three prime sensitives and it's like you're not here. You saved Kayla's life and that means more to me than you can ever know. We are more than sister's you know. We are twins. It's almost like we are one person. As Kayla was telling us her story, Carla, a prime empath, and I were experiencing it. We believe. Oh, how we believe!" Sam paused to catch her breath and establish some control.

"Thank you, Samantha. If it weren't for Kayla, I wouldn't be here. This is not something that I normally do. I do not like being this visible but these are special times," Adam said.

"You are something outside of my experience. You had to know that we'd know that you're not a normal and you came here anyway. So, talk to us Adam. Tell us what you are. Tell us what you want. Tell us why you're here," Sam offered.

Adam broke out laughing. "Ok. Right to the point aren't you? Very direct, open and honest. I like that. As you can tell, I am not normal. Like you teeps, I'm a mutation and part of that seems to make me impossible for you guys to read. If I work at it, I can put up something for you to see but, normally, it's like I'm not there for you. There aren't many of us and we're not too social. We've learned that concealment is one of the better ways to survive. Normals are the majority and it really is their world."

"You have to be wondering why I'm here. That's because of Kayla. Well, directly and indirectly. She contacted me to do some research and what I found disturbs me. This Consortium and IL conspiracy is dangerous. Very dangerous. This is fanaticism with planet busters. The death that can result is simply mind boggling." Adam sighed. "So, I deviate from my normal pattern, take a risk, and come to talk to you ladies. It's a dangerous time and such times make risk necessary."

"My kind does have mortal enemies and I had to make sure I wasn't walking into a trap. When I realized that you and Kayla are clones, I was pretty sure that I wasn't but, still, when you bet your life, you want the odds to be with you!"

"Damn!" Sam said, "you have more surprises and are more mysterious than Mr. Howard!"

Adam laughed. "Oh, I doubt that. Howard has more surprises than you'll ever guess at!"

Sam, Carla and Kayla looked at each other. Their reference to "Howard" and his off hand comment caught all of them totally off guard. "Um, I think we'll let that one slide," Sam commented and Kayla and Carla smiled. So far, it would seem that Adam was controlling what was happening.

"So, we're allies?" Carla, speaking for the first time, asked.

Adam nodded. "We're allies. In this endeavor, we are allies."

~~~~~  
I am history, I am time.
I am reason behind the rhyme.
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"Carla, I don't like it. This guy is scarier than Mr. Howard," Sam hissed.

"He might be scary, Sam, but Kayla has it bad for him and he seems to be no less than what he says he is," Carla retorted.

"That's one of the things that scares the crap out of me, Carla. He's obviously a lot more than he claims to be and neither one of us can read him. We don't have a clue if he's telling the truth or not."

"Yea, how about that," Carla observed. "We're just like normals when it comes to him. I don't like it either but he did put his life in jeopardy for Kayla and I can't dislike someone who does that."

Sam shook her head. "No, I'll give you that. Damn fool must have nine lives and to take on that bunch with a sword!!! Can you believe that? What sort of weird freakazoid has Kayla come up with it this time. I thought it was bad when she was screwing the cat guy but I don't even know what this one is!" Sam said laughing.

"Yea, but she seems really happy and how long since we've seen her like that," Carla mused.

"Ten years!" Sam shot back. "Since we got back she's never really let go and lived. It's like she was mourning losing Teelo. I thought she'd get over it but, until today, there

was no sign that she would. Damn, I was glad to see that well fucked look on her face! But, I guess you win some and lose some. Adam does seem to come with that package."

"He could be worse, you know. I'd say that he seems rather pleasant and he sure put it on the line for Kayla. How many have done that for you?" Carla asked.

"Well, none exactly like that. But you've come pretty close," Sam replied smiling at Carla.

That caught Carla off guard. She thought back about Colorado and remembered the mission that went wrong. "Yea, well you returned the favor big time. I thought I'd bought the farm on that one."

Sam and Carla sat together for several minute, neither moving. The memories of that day so long ago when both of them and been so severely injured and the truth of Sam's origin and been uncovered seemed like yesterday. It had been intense and until you've experienced that level of intensity you cannot conceive of it. Once you have, you are never the same again. Both of them realized that Kayla and Adam were now a member of "that" club, where you put you life on the line, suffer to the point of certain death but return.

Returning is the trick.

"Yes, it is," Carla answered.

"Huh? Did I say that out loud?" Sam asked shaking her head. "Didn't mean to."

Carla laughed. "Yes, love, you said it. And how right you are."

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Kayla stretched and opened one eye. Yes, it was morning and she felt pretty good. Most of the bruises had vanished and she no longer hurt. She liked waking up in Adam's bed and knowing that he was someplace close. Close because whenever she awakened he was gone. He was a very early riser and a very silent one too. Even with her hypersensitive senses, she could not detect his leaving.

She smelled an aroma that was strange to her then she realized that Adam was preparing breakfast. He had some very strange ideas on what constituted breakfast and he had access to some of the strangest food Kayla had ever seen. She'd heard of ham and eggs but she thought they were green. She'd never even seen a real egg until Adam had gotten her to taste one. It had not been unpleasant but when it came to the ham, there was no way she was going to chew on a dead animal! That was simply disgusting and too much.

Adam had laughed at her and made some obscure comment about food fashion but hadn't insisted. As they spent time together and he relaxed around her, he would make comments that just didn't seem to make a lot of sense to her. He always seemed to be amused when she asked but would patiently explain and always with some sort of historical explanation.

His research had seeped him in the past and he almost seemed out of touch with the present except for his talent with computers and his obvious expertise with technology.

That and the fact anything Kayla could mention Adam seemed knowledgeable about it. He was a strange fellow.

She slid on a short top and some loose shorts and went to the kitchen, following her nose, but Adam had eaten and even cleaned up. The only thing remaining was the aroma. She went looking for him.

A thumping sound caught her interest and she followed the sound to the workout room. Adam was wielding the biggest sword that Kayla had ever seen and was performing complicated moves that involved striking multiple padded poles at various heights and in various sequences. He was beginning to breath hard and was moving with ever accelerating speed. Even with her keener than average reflexes and vision, she could not keep up with or determine what the next target was to be. She has never seen anything like this. Not even in a movie.

He finished with a spin that sent the sword sailing across the room. It took off and traversed about seven meters and thudded into a man sized target. It was a firm strike, the weight of the sword driving it into the practice dummy with no motion, well within the heart shaped area painted on the dummy's chest. Kayla could not contain herself and she gave an appreciative squeak and clapped enthusiastically.

For brief moment, Adam looked confused then he smiled at her and bowed deeply. "I didn't know I was on display, Milady, or I'd have tried harder to impress."

"Well, I'm impressed anyway. I tried fencing in high school and a little Kendo at the Academy but I've never seen anything like that," Kayla enthused.

"Did you now," Adam replied walking over to a weapons rack. Pulling a blade free. "Use something about like this?" he asked tossing her a medium length blade.

By sheer superior reflex Kayla managed to catch the airborne blade by the hilt and still look casual. The fact was that Kayla had more than a little Kendo. Like Sam, Kayla had the reflexes of a cat and the aggressiveness of a rabid wolverine. The Academy instructors had finally refused to train her. They had claimed to be unable to offer her anything more but there was the suspicion that they were really exercising the art of self-preservation.

"Yes, something like this," she casually replied. She knew what was coming and she found it exciting. She assumed an informal ready stance and glanced at Adam. He was in a similar stance with a blade identical to her's.

She had a momentary qualm. "Should we really do this?" she asked.

Adam grinned and replied, "What we've been through? We can survive anything. Besides, we'll be careful."

Kayla looked an the razor sharp blade she was holding and thought, "We'd damn sight better be careful! This dude is nuts." Then the "ting" of metal meeting metal occupied her attention.

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Kayla was trying hard to catch her breath. She and Adam were facing each other and he was covered with a sheen of sweat, as was she. Kayla had never had such a work out. They were dueling with live steel and she was not cut. They had started slowly, testing each other's skill. Adam had been the first to get more aggressive but in a very controlled manner. She had blocked and replied with a rather unconventional response and nearly lost her blade when he countered.

That was her wake up call. She should have known. This was the man who had slaughtered a room full of men armed with energy weapons with a blade. The sword was his first choice of weapon. While she'd tried a fairly sophisticated technique, he'd deflected it like a master. In fact, maintaining her grip on her blade had pulled her out of position and his only reaction was a slight smile. She was sure he could have capitalized on her carelessness but had not.

Kayla has sighed to herself and remembered that the best defense was a good offense. She began a complex pattern that was based on speed but, with her iron hard muscles behind it, had the danger of a power attack as well. Adam did not address her offense directly. He faded back and used the tip of his blade to redirect anything that came too close to his body. Kayla pressed her attack but Adam just refused to directly address it. She was running out of energy and couldn't keep up that level. Already the apparent weight of the blade seemed to have doubled.

She slowed and shifted to take the stress off of her lead arm but found that she was on the receiving end of the same attack. The defense she knew required more energy than the one Adam had used. Her exertions had left her with few reserves and she was calling on them now. Adam was not even breathing hard. He was covered with a sheen of sweat but he seemed fresh and competent.

Twice, she felt the sting of the flat of the blade on her wrist. Had he used the edge, the tendons would have been severed and she'd have been weaponless. She felt a slight tug beneath her breasts but she felt no pain so she ignored that. She took a deep breath and focused. It was time for something different.

She stepped back to break the rhythm of his attack, and in the brief lull that resulted, attempted a leg sweep. That was a complete disaster. He jumped over her leg, parried her blade and sat astride her stomach. She tried for his head in a leg scissors but he leaned forward to avoid that. He had her wrists in a firm grip and they were nose to nose, eye to eye and he held her wrists with apparent ease. She finally relaxed to catch her breath.

The kiss was not an unwelcome surprise to Kayla. She responded with more passion than she realized she had. Her hands were suddenly free and his hands were under her short top and so very warm on her breasts. She could feel her nipples harden with excitement. She reached down and fondled the cheeks of his ass pulling his rising manhood against her pubis.

The both gasped with the intensity of the sensation. It was clear that he wanted to be in her body as badly as she wanted him there but neither wanted the delicious contact they'd achieved to cease. She arched her back and he slid her loose shorts down. He rolled flipping her on top of him. She kicked off her shorts and sat astride him. She loosened the tie on his work out pants and he arched his back so she could slide them down.

The sight of his erect penis inflamed her desire. She grabbed him with both hands, slid her body down to his knees and took him into her mouth. The warmth and hardness of him was too much. She want this deep inside of her body. Rising up, astride him, she grasped him with one hand and lowered her moist hole to engulf him. As she lowered herself onto him and the full sensation of full contact was felt they both moaned with the intensity of the sensation.

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Kayla was trying hard to catch her breath. She and Adam were facing each other and he was covered with a sheen of sweat, as was she. Kayla had never had such a work out and neither had he. "You are quite a swordsman, Adam," Kayla said with a coy grin.

Adam looked at her with some degree of surprise and broke out laughing. He pointed towards her with a knife hand. "Point to Kayla," he said.

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The second meeting with Carla and Sam was less tense. By now Kayla was getting good at reading Adam and she could tell that he was alert but not worried. His body language was more subtle that a normal's but it was still visible and she was a keen observer. Of course, she knew him better than anyone else and that couldn't hurt.

He did enjoy shocking her every now and then and she thought that was childish. When the got into the elevator he pressed the access to Sam's apartment. Kayla was quite sure that he could not have observed her entering the code last time, and it bothered her that he could know it. She was not going to give him the satisfaction of asking, though.

The meeting started simply enough. Ginger tea was served and Kayla briefed Sam and Carla on what they had accomplished. It was Adam who convinced them to not use computers or any sort of public communication to transfer vital information. He had demonstrated how easy it was to intercept and even alter computer communications and none of them trusted the public airwaves. Even military grade encryption was suspect. What one person could encrypt, another could decrypt. It was just a matter of time.

Kayla handed Carla the printouts that she'd made from the records that Adam had turned up. Smoking gun was a term Adam had applied to them. It took Kayla a moment to understand the reference. She was used to energy weapons but she'd seen some of Sam's favorite guns in use. Yes, they did smoke and make a lot of noise.

The documents were communications between two high ranking officials of the Interplanetary League and Transportation Consortium. The Transportation Consortium operated the glue that held the IL together. Without effective transportation there could

be no interplanetary anything! Safe, cheap and fast transportation was the key. The relationship between the two was symbiotic but each had his own agenda.

The average citizen was aware of telepaths. Most telepaths worked in some government capacity and were respected members of the community. Respected but distrusted. Who would want to be around someone who could know their deepest feelings and secrets or someone who could do strange things to make reality to work to their advantage? A medical teep was someone you'd beg for if you were injured but you wouldn't want to go to a party with one. There was a basic distrust towards sensitives of any talent. What is not understood if usually feared.

The documents that Kayla had handed Sam detailed the outline of a scheme to make telepaths appear to be working against the Transportation Consortium using paranormal powers. A few incidents and the prices of security would escalate allowing much higher prices to be charged for even routine flights.

Higher prices were against the interest of the IL but if the main body of the IL was convinced that such security was actually warranted, they would tolerate price increases to insure continued uninterrupted flow of commerce.

Sam was scanning the document and the lift of her eyebrows and the occasional grunt indicated her interest. As she finished a page she'd hand it to Carla who was silently and rapidly digesting what was there.

It took about twenty minutes but Adam and Kayla patiently waited and drank tea. A low chime sounded and Sam looked up. "What the hell," she said. At the same time Adam jumped up, produced a sword and assumed a combat stance. Carla and Kayla were lost. Both knew the chime meant that someone had pressed Sam's floor code but what was wrong with Adam. He could not know that and he was obviously ready to fight. And where did the damn sword come from. He'd been quietly drinking tea and then he was ready to fight with a three foot blade in his hand.

"Adam," came a voice from outside, "Put the sword away. I'm not here for your head. I want your help. Sam, open the door please."

"Yes, sir," Sam replied. "Adam, please! It's only Mr. Howard."

Adam nodded and gestured toward the door. He lowered the sword but did not put it away. Sam opened the door and Mr. Howard walked in holding his hands out from his side and in plain sight. "Relax Adam. I need your help. You know I don't lie," he said.

Adam nodded and lay the sword across Sam's coffee table. "I'll admit that I'm not completely surprised. When Samantha mentioned your name at our last meeting I figured it was just a matter of time till we met again. It's been a long time."

"Yes," Howard replied, "even for us it's been a long time."

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Sam brought two steaming cups of ginger tea into the room for Carla and herself. "Well, that went almost civilized," she sighed.

"Sam, where did that sword come from?" Carla asked.

"If you can tell me where it went to, I'll tell you where it came from," Sam shot back.

"Yes, that was weird. I saw him put it on the coffee table then we got talking and I never saw him remove it but it sure isn't there," Carla rejoined.

"And Mr. Howard! Do they know each other. It seemed like they did and they didn't. That has to be one of the stranger things I've seen." Sam took a sip of tea and shook her head. "

"I expect weird from Mr. Howard," Carla said. "After all, he appointed you, to, to," she paused and then continued, "to whatever it is you do," she said laughing.

"Hey, be nice! Besides, I agree with you. I don't like it. I don't want it. But, like they say, someone has to do it."

"You poor suffering, Baby," mimed Carla.

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"Now, you are going to tell me what was going on back there, aren't you," Kayla said with a slight edge to her voice. She was naked and astride Adam. His view was of her cascading blond hair, the mounds of her breasts and pink nipples with hints of her flat stomach and a rich shadow area that would fascinate any man.

"You have got to be kidding me! You want to talk about that now!" Adam exclaimed.

Kayla dropped her weight on him and thrust his hardness deep into her body. "Why not?" she asked smiling. "It's as good a time as any. You want something. I want something," she said leaning forward kissing him lightly on the lips. She wiggled her hips a little. "You give me what I want, I give you what you want."

"Great Odin be Damned, I have never had any woman so blatantly use sex to get what she wants," Adam whispered.

"But you love it, don't you," she whispered back. Reaching between his legs, she raked her fingernails over the soft flesh of his scrotum. "I might not be able to read you mind but your body is speaking to me," she breathed into his hear.

"You are an evil wanton woman," he said grasping her hips and thrusting into her.

Kayla countered his move by arching her back and moving her hips back. "Now, now..." she said, "play nice and I'll play nice."

Adam relaxed his body. He seemed to turn to jelly beneath her. Kayla controlled her urge to start humping and bring herself to orgasm. She reached between her legs with both hands and cupped his testicles. Squeezing gently she pressed his penis deeper into her body. Adam gasped and she could feel him harden and feel the additional heat of his building excitement. It was as if he throbbed to the beating of his heart.

He ran his hand from her hips to her stomach and slowly, dragging his fingernails, up her body to her breasts. Kayla could feel herself building to an orgasm. "This is ridiculous," she thought, "we're hardly moving."

Putting her lips right next to his ear she whispered, "Promise to tell me and I'll be oh so very nice to you." Tightening her grip she again pressed him deeper into her body.

She felt a twitch that she knew could become an orgasm if she let it but froze and allowed the moment to pass.

He grasped her hips again and gritting his teeth he said, "I'm going to tell you. I have to tell you. You need to know. Now!" He withdrew and thrust into her again and again. Kayla arched her back and sat up. That drove him even deeper into her and she could feel her orgasm beginning. With him this deep into her, she felt his first orgasmic spurt as a hot wave on her cervix. Wave after wave took her and she dimly realized that she was grasping her own breasts and screaming. She wanted to drag him into her body, she wanted it to last forever.

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They lay, spent. Adam was the first to move. He sat up and pulled on the breeches he wore around the house. It was a style that Kayla was not familiar with but it seemed to suit him, somehow. She had wondered where he got them as she'd never seen such a style. "Come on, girl. Wake up. We do have some talking to do," he said poking her in the back with his index finger.

"Ummm.... don't you ever need rest?" she moaned, but did sit up.

"Damn, you look good," he said.

"Thank you," Kayla replied, "but don't go getting any ideas. I need recovery time. I'm not superwoman!"

Adam chuckled, "That's supposed to be my line. Well, except I'm supposed to say superman."

"I know," Kayla replied pulling on a loose top and stepping into her shorts. "But then I really don't have a lot to compare against. Ten years remember?"

"Yea, I remember. But don't you worry. I'm telling you, you don't have to worry. I think it's I that should worry."

"Why would you worry? You could wear out three of me," Kayla replied.

"Now that's not really true," Adam said. "The fact is that I don't have that much more stamina than do you. It's just that I recover quicker."

Kayla's interest immediately peaked. He was telling her about himself. She felt a twinge of apprehension and wondered if she really wanted to know. For all her wheedling, she was not all that unhappy about their relationship. She felt comfortable with him, like it was the way things were supposed to be. "Are you sure you want to talk about this?" she asked with a degree of trepidation.

"Don't really want to but I guess I have to. We're too close. You are going to see things you can't explain and I'd rather you know the truth than be guessing and coming up with all sorts of strange theories. Fact is the truth is strange enough," He replied."

Kayla made a sound of assent. Not a word, actually, just a sound to encourage him to continue.

And he did continue. He told her that, like her, he and those like him were a mutation that set them apart from the normal branch of mankind. The mutation gave him

remarkable recovery capabilities. He could be killed and he suspected he would die eventually but, and he was very vague here, it took some very special circumstances to kill him outright, he explained.

He stood and withdrew a short knife from his breeches. Turning to face Kayla, he drew the blade diagonally from his left shoulder to his right hip. Kayla had a very normal response and screamed, "What are you doing!!!" She grabbed the pillow and tore the case from it and reached for the gaping wound across his body to stem the flow of blood.

He stepped back and grasped her hands to prevent her from touching him. She started to struggle but then the wound on his chest caught her attention. There was no blood flowing and it had closed. As she watched she could see a welt of pink flesh form over it and then that smoothed out and all that was left was a trace of a blood curst and a thin white line where the slash had been. As she watched, even that thin line vanished and his chest was as before. No indication of what had just transpired remained.

"Oh. My." Kayla breathed. She reached and traced where the wound had been with her forefinger. "I don't believe this. Adam, is this some sort of trick?"

He shook his head. "No. It's for real and it really hurt like hell. I heal quickly but the pain of the injury is the same. I hope you don't make me go further," he replied with a wry grin.

Kayla considered the implication of what she'd just seen. Her eyes widened with an incredible thought. "Adam," she sighed, "How old are you? How long have you lived?"

Adam grasped her hand and looked deeply into her eyes. "Longer than you want to know, little one, longer than you want to even think about."

"Oh," she squeaked. "Oh....."

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I am history, I am time.  
I am reason behind the rhyme.

Feel the cold, feel the years,  
Feel the dark, feel the fears.

~~~~~  
The tension in the Council Chamber was palpable. Six months had passed since the last meeting and the formation of the investigation committee. Since that time conditions had worsened. Telepaths had been banned from Io Station, the home base for the Transportation Consortium. In the early days of interplanetary flight, the gravity well of Jupiter was used for the slingshot effect. Now, it was a heavily guarded corporate headquarters. Almost a small planet, it was a hub of activity and housed over twenty thousand people, all employees and family of the Consortium.

Forty telepaths had been shipped off station after having their employment summarily terminated. The Sensitive's Guild was petitioning the Interplanetary League Congress to pass anti-teep discrimination legislation but, so far, they'd not had any success.

There were rumors that forty five telepaths had been employed by the Consortium but no one had been able to confirm that or find what may had happened to the five missing sensitives. The rumors were taking on a life of their own and each successive stage was more horrible than the last.

Since Sam knew what had been done to Kayla, she wondered if there was any fact to what was being passed as truth. At this point it was clear that both the Conserves and Jedorans believed that the tales were true. Ms. Josepha and Mr. Ricardo were almost foaming at the mouth. The enmity between them had been long forgotten. The information that Adam and Kayla had turned up and turned over to them had permitted them to determine for themselves that there was clearly a conspiracy. Both were insisting that direct action by the Council and the Sensitive's Guild be taken.

"Delegates, we have seemed to reached an consensus on what is," Sam intoned. "We have the facts before us. We will retire and consider approaches. We will meet at twenty two hundred tomorrow." Sam used her foot to extinguish the delegates lights and to turn on the exit lights. The light level of the room actually decreased a little (this was not an accident) but the glimmering line of dim exit lights make the way out very obvious.

Sam stood to impose her presence on the room but said nothing as the delegates filed out.

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"That was certainly interesting," Sam exclaimed. "I suspect they want to lynch someone and I seem to be handy."

Carla had to laugh. "I don't think they're bring any rope into the council room yet, Sam. I doubt that anyone is going to have any really useful suggestions over night and they are going to want to hear about at least an approach. Looks like you're going to have to really earn the salary the Academy's paying you."

Sam grunted. "Any time you want to trade jobs and salaries, just let me know!"

At that point, Carla allowed a most undiplomatic laugh to escape. "Oh no! We're not going there! I'm sure that Mr. Howard and Liz knew exactly what they were doing when they appointed you. We all have our roles to play and mine is not Council Chief."

"You are such a comfort to me in my hour of need," Sam said sarcastically but grinning. "Think you could make us some tea? I have a feeling that this is going to be a long night."

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A bell sounded and Kayla called to Adam, "Guess that's the notes Sam sent us. I'll go get them."

Kayla really loved Adam's place. He was in an almost virgin area. He was at the very edge of a Federal preserve and the property had actually been grand fathered in. But there were no dwellings for several miles in any direction. The most common mode of access was some sort of hover craft. Other than that, only the most primitive access method

were available and Kayla didn't know too many people that would break out the canoe to visit.

She pulled on a sweater before stepping outside. There was a chill to the evening that had just a hit of arctic to it. She suspected the jet stream had dipped because winter will still at least a month away and Virginia just didn't get that cold. She walked out to the hover pad and it was an Academy courier. He held out the goggles and she put them to her eyes. She blinked from the brief flash but her vision quickly returned.

The retinal scan confirmed her identity and the courier handed her a sealed envelope. If the courier was to be trusted, and it was a safe bet that an Academy courier could be trusted, this was the most secure method of communication.

Kayla would read a page and hand it to Adam. This was an effective method of not having to do a lot of explaining. They'd both have the same data within minutes on each other. She waited for Adam to finish the final page.

"They're going to be looking for Sam to come up with a solution, you know," Kayla commented.

Adam nodded. "Yes, they sure will." He paused and scratched his chin. "You guys have the will to do what it takes?" he asked.

Kayla realized that she was chewing on her bottom lip like Carla would do when she was stressed. Adam patiently waited for her answer. He was strange that way. He never rushed anyone for an answer. He'd ask a question and then he'd wait for an answer. Kayla gave a heavy sigh. "I'm not sure. I'm not sure they will and I'm not sure I know what you mean," Kayla responded.

Adam stood and paced in a small area. "You know what I mean. I mean there doesn't seem to be any obvious solution other than the elimination of the particular parties originating this action. You're not going to the local police station and swear out a complaint against these guys, you know."

"No... I don't think we are but the Ac.... The Council does have political connections." Kayla had never mentioned the Academy to Adam. She suspected he knew of it but she was not going to be the one to breach such an ingrained security.

Adam diplomatically ignored her hesitation and replied, "Your political connections haven't done you any good so far. This is a rapidly maturing plan, there are deaths and even you, Sam's sister, have been nearly killed. I have the feeling this is beyond your connections."

"You're a cheerful sucker, aren't you?" Kayla asked with a wry grin.

"Just practical, my love, just practical. I intend to survive a long, long, time and wishing doesn't get you there."

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Sam looked at the clock and took another sip of coffee. Yes, coffee. Ginger tea just did not have the authority needed for the night Sam and Carla were having. They were both bleary eyed and the display was showing 3 AM. Carla and Sam had not been as

quick as Adam but they had reached the same conclusion. Both of them were survivors and survival requires certain attributes among which included recognizing a threat and one's weaknesses in the face of it.

"So, what do we do?" Carla asked.

"We need a handle," Sam suggested. "We need something we can use against these guys. At least one of them has to be neutralized. I'd go for the League connection. I think he's the initiator of this... this.. thing."

"And there is that little thing of staying alive while we do this," Carla reminded her. "Don't forget what they did to Kayla. These are not nice people."

"No, they are not nice but exactly what are you saying, Carla? Are you saying we need to get directly involved?" asked Sam.

Carla nodded. "Yes, I think that's what I'm saying. We have several dead telepaths, five missing telepaths, your sister has been raped and almost killed. I think I'm saying we should get directly involved. Personally, I'd like to rip the suckers nuts off and stuff them down his throat."

"CARLA!" Sam screeched!

"Don't you Carla me, Samantha Smith. The hell we've been through should have prepared you for this. Are you getting soft in your 'old' age? Wake up Sweetheart. This is your call to action."

Sam's eyes were big and she was breathing shallowly and rapidly. "I guess you're right. Let's develop an approach."

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Sam was standing. The delegates could not see that her seat and area was slightly elevated. In the dim lighting, wearing the ceremonial robes of her position she was an imposing figure. The optical disrupter and voice modification were very lightly applied but left the impression of "otherness."

"Delegates," she said in a low husky voice that could not be recognized as hers, "we all know the purpose of these recent meetings. I'd like to remind you of your membership charter to this council. We share information and vote on issues. The will of the delegates is at all times respected. However, you are all delegates and the council has the right and even the responsibility to act autonomously when necessary. Security dictates that no one have information that they have no need to have."

"We have reached such an occasion. Would each delegation dismiss it's members and the delegation chief remain, please."

Sam sat and waited. There was a low buzz of conversation and delegates began leaving. Before long there were four remaining. Sam again rose. She felt she needed the height and the imposition that her garb provided. A little intimidation could go a long way.

"Delegates, before we begin you need to understand that we are about to address a problem with no easy solution. There have been deaths and there will probably be more

death before this is over. Anyone here will be a target and will be in a position of having sensitive information that will put you in a very precarious position. There may be legal and illegal attempts to get this information from you. If, in either case, you give it up or fail to give it up, your life or freedom may be in jeopardy. I'm going to ask you to retire to a deliberation room and discuss among yourselves who should continue. Please step that way," she said indicating towards a light that lit over a door near the back of the room.

The delegates looked at each other and silently filed into the room.

Only a few moments passed and the door opened and two delegates returned. Ms. Josepha and Mr. Ricardo. Sam stood and thanked them for volunteering. She stepped backwards, deeper into the disruption field and exited the room via a concealed doorway. She hit the switch to cause the light to return to a normal level and quickly divested herself of the robes. A short hustle and Samantha Smith entered the delegation chamber through a side door.

"Good evening," she said. "I've been chosen to brief you. Before we leave to go to a secure briefing place, I'd suggest that if the thought of killing someone to protect us all or the consideration of the legality of killing someone to protect us all bothers you, you may not want to continue with this meeting."

Ms. Josepha was the first to react. "Are you saying that you're going to ask us to kill someone?" she asked incredulously.

"No, Ma'am," Sam responded. "I said if it bothers you, you should not continue." Sam, although older, was still fit and muscular. She walked towards Ms. Josepha until they were eye to eye. Sam had to look up slightly but due to her stature it did not diminish her presence. "You could be involved and responsible for worse."

Ms. Josepha was a grade 10 telepath with moderate empathetic skills. Less than five percent of the telepaths had her ability and she had survived to a mature age and responsible position. She was not to be underestimated. She had strength and character.

She nodded. "I understand. And... I think it would bother me." She sighed. "I'm not saying it's not necessary or that it's wrong." She held out her hand towards Sam and the solemnly shook hands. She walked out of the room leaving Sam and Mr. Ricardo alone.

Sam looked at him and he grimaced. "I'm no murderer but I can kill."

"Can you execute someone?" Sam asked. Point a gun at their head and end their life without their ever knowing what coming? It could come to that, you know."

His face showed concern. "If the council absolutely needs me or my faction, we will serve," he said. "But I don't know if I want to be part of this if I'm not absolutely needed."

Sam breathed an internal sigh of relief. She'd wondered how hard it would be to get him to quit. Ms. Josepha had been an unexpected surprise. She was tougher than she looked. "At this point, the Council's resources are adequate. If you have something to offer that we can't provide, we'll call on you if you don't object."

Mr. Ricardo nodded. "I do not object. I would be offend if you did not. Now, I take my leave...."

They shook hands and he left.

As he left, Sam sagged and sat down. Carla walked in and sat next to her. "He was a tough one," she said.

"Tell me about it," Sam shot back. I thought for sure he'd detect you projecting."

Carla snickered. She drew herself up to her full height, "I am a prime," she emphasized the word prime, "empath you know."

Sam had to laugh. She hugged Carla. "And life would be much more difficult without you," she said. "Now, lets get with Kayla and Adam and figure out our next move.

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Sam felt the safest and the most secure in her own apartment but Adam felt most uncomfortable there. Since Mr. Howard had walked in on them, he'd refused to go back there. Not because he felt that Sam had any ill intentions towards him. He just didn't trust her security. Sam felt that her security was superb but Kayla had tried to tell her that her place was an open forum compared to Adam's. She didn't believe it but she'd not argued the point.

Sam did have to admit Adam did practice tight security , though. This meeting has been scheduled for a week. Adam had picked the place and had Kayla deliver a note containing the location. The note was in a sealed container and, when Kayla handed her the container, she told her to go into the bathroom to read it. "Open the canister, unroll the note and place it in the sink," she'd said. "Read and memorize it. Do not hold it in your hands."

Needless to say, within fifteen seconds, the note has flashed and all the remained was a fine dust that would be impossible to determine anything from. At this point, only two people knew of the meeting place: Adam and Sam. Neither of them were going to tell anyone. Need to know was the order of the day.

Sam and Carla had taken a public cab to 16<sup>th</sup> and M. At the designated time, Adam appeared in a public cab and they joined him. A short ride and they disembarked and took another cab a short distance. From their debarkation point, they walked a short distance to a rented hover craft. Adam manually piloted them a short distance where they met Kayla who was driving another rented hover craft.

A short ride along the Potomac and Kayla landed the craft in a small clearing. "This way," Adam said and started walking towards the sound of rushing water. They were on a rocky beach near the water. It was level, wild and eerie at this time of night. Adam beacons for them to approach him and he removed portable disrupter device from the satchel he was carrying. He turned in on and motioned towards the rocky beach. "Make yourselves comfortable. This little gem is a wide spectrum disrupter. We should be no more than a small spot of noise on any EM detection system and even a blur to optical

systems." He flipped another switch and a low rushing sound could be heard. "A random noise generator," he said grinning. "Now even a shotgun mic can't pick us up."

Sam and Carla looked at each other and nodded. "He is security conscious," they said in unison.

They made themselves comfortable on the rocky beach. Each found a satisfactory seat and settled in. A few moments were spent and they all enjoyed the beauty and wildness of the spot. The wind was cool with a sharp bite and the night very dark. No moon was visible but the stars were bright overhead. The glow of DC could be seen faintly in the distance, and there was a primordial feel to the area that was quite pleasant and stimulating.

It only took a few minutes to bring Kayla and Adam up to speed on what had happened at the Council meeting. Then Sam surprised every one. She asked Adam for help.

"Adam you are the one who discovered the nature of this situation. You've been turning up most of the really relevant information. Would you be willing to agree to help us get this taken care of?" Sam asked with an obvious degree of hesitation.

Adam turned his intense gaze on her. "Sam are you asking or is the Academy asking me?"

Sam's jaw literally went slack. Neither Carla or Kayla had ever seen her at such an absolute loss for words. In the dead silence that followed, the tension mounted. It was probably only a few seconds but it felt like hours. Finally Sam managed a sound.

"Ah...." she managed. "Ah.... That would be both, actually."

Adam nodded, ignoring the silence and her obvious shock. "That being the case, you may consider me an independent contractor, a consultant so to speak. I will simply be rendering you professional services. I will not be a member of your organization. Can you accept that?"

Sam still seemed to be having problems dealing with Adam's mention of the Academy. She nodded, cleared her throat, coughed and replied, "Yes. Yes. That will be fine. Thank you."

Then she pulled herself together. "Yes, Adam. Thank you. You obviously have talents that can help in this matter. I'm glad you on our side." She stood and faced him and held out her hand.

Adam rose with her and took her extended hand. "Good," he said. "I have a feeling this is going to be an interesting project."

Holding Sam's hand, Adam looked directly into her eyes. "You know," he said, "you two sure do look alike but you have a completely different feel." He paused and then continued. "Sort of like the difference between a cat and a kitten." He nodded. "Siamese," he commented under his breath.

Adam visibly flinched. He held his finger to his lips indicating silence. Moments later the intrusion alert for the rented hover craft began a low musical chirping. Kayla

reflexively slapped it to silence it and turned to head towards the craft. Adam grasped her arm and indicated that she follow him. Using standard squad hand signs, he indicated that Sam and Carla should execute a flanking maneuver.

Sam and Carla drew their personal weapons and silently vanished into the darkness. Adam beacons to Kayla and headed in a direct route to the parked hover craft. The glint of steel told Kayla that, somehow, he'd produced a sword. They'd been together almost three weeks now and she had no clue how he did that. All he'd do is smile and say, "A guy's got to have some secrets," when she'd ask him. No amount of pleading, teasing or cajoling had gotten him to tell her.

As they approached the hover craft, they could see a tall man dressed in a long black coat working with an electronic key at the access hatch. Most rented craft did not have proximity alert systems or remote alarms. They are not easy to spot and it appeared that this person hadn't even considered it. The tall man straightened and produced a sword from beneath his coat. Adam pushed Kayla behind him and walked forward.

They crossed blades and an intense battle began. By this time Carla and Sam had gotten on the scene. Sam took one look at what was happening, took aim, fired, putting a 45 caliber bullet through the intruder's heart.

"NO!" Adam screamed. He looked at the body on the ground and sighed. "Ok, ladies, come with me," he said with a heavy sigh.

"Hold on one minute," Sam began.

Adam wheeled towards her. "Now," he said in a very intense manner. "Hurry." He turned and walked rapidly back the way he came.

The three ladies looked at each other, looked at the body on the ground. They shrugged and trailed after him. Adam went back to the area where they had been seated. He picked up the disrupter, turned it off and put it back in the satchel. "Ok, we need to go where it's safe," he said in a resigned fashion. "Let's go."

He headed back towards the hover craft with a firm stride. He was moving too quickly for Sam or Carla to ask him anything. Kayla had an expression that seemed to say, "He'll talk when he's ready to talk."

They all trailed behind. As they approached the hover craft, Sam asked, "What are we going to do about the body? Should I call in an Academy clean up team?" She looked where the body had been but it wasn't there. She glanced around the surrounding area and there was no sign of a body.

"Ok, hold on one minute, here. Adam, where is the body? Where is the damn body?" Sam did not seem to be in a good mood at moment and it seemed to be getting worse by the second.

Adam turned towards her. "Not here, he said. We need to get where it's safe."

Kayla handed him the hand remote and he open the canopy. "Ladies, he said waving them in."

They got in and he executed one of the wildest ascents any of them had ever experienced from a civilian rental craft. Adam began a low level seemingly reckless flight that absorbed all of his attention. Conversation did not seem to be a good idea so the ride was conducted in silence. Kayla began recognizing certain things. It was a dark night but she realized that Adam was heading towards his home. She gave a low whistle of surprise. He valued his privacy more than anyone she'd ever met. This had to mean something serious was afoot.

She made a light mental link with her sister and communicated her impressions and confusion about what was going on. Carla could sense the communication although she could not "hear" it. She could get a sense of Kayla's confusion and trust in Adam. They were all hyper alert but calm.

Adam did not land on the hover pad but selected an area on the other side of the house. This side of the house was wild with trees and no one would expect that there was a place that a hover craft could land there. He edged the craft under the shelter of pine trees, where it could not be readily seen from above and killed the engine.

They were sitting in Adam's living room. It had a rustic slightly "other" appearance but was very comfortable. When they entered the house, Adam seemed to relax. Within a few minutes he seemed almost jaunty. After bidding them to sit and be comfortable, he was humming a tune to himself as he busied himself preparing the ritual ginger tea with turbinado sugar. Sam seemed ready to explode but Kayla shook her head and calmed her down. Carla, as always, seemed to be taking things in stride. She was wearing her inscrutable face and smiling slightly. As Adam served her tea, he winked at her as if sharing a private joke.

He sat in a light chair, which he'd pulled around so he could face the three of them. "Guess you ladies have some questions, don't you?" Adam asked with a wry grin. All three started talking at once.

Adam laughed. "Let's try it this way," he said holding up a hand to slow them down. They all paused and he began. "Long, long ago in a land far away....."

That beginning got him hisses and boos, led by Kayla, but even Sam had to laugh. "Ok, Kayla, why don't you bring them up to speed with what you know," he said. "For obvious reasons I don't want to do the demonstration again." He stood and left the room.

Kayla took a deep breath and began the tale of the 'demonstration.' Carla and Sam listened with rapt attention. When she was done Carla and Sam looked at each other and shook their heads. "He's working you, Kayla. That's impossible," Sam rejoined.

Kayla linked to Sam and shared the entire incident with her. "Wow, that is impressive but it can't be real. Things just don't work that way, Sis. They don't," Sam stated firmly.

"Sis, I was there. He was not lying to me. Believe me. No one could scam me that way," Kayla shot back.

With that, Adam returned to the living room with them. He walked over to Sam, and with a lightening movement, removed her .45 from the shoulder holster she was wearing. Sam's reflexes were excellent but Adam was one step ahead of her. He cocked the weapon, reversed his grip and thrust the butt of the gun into her hands. Reflexively, she grasped the weapon as he firmly gripped the weapon in her hands and placed it over his heart and forced her finger against the trigger.

The explosion of a .45 in a room is very loud and the power of the hollow point slug threw his body across the room and he landed in a limp heap. He did not even twitch. "Oh shit," Sam breathed and ran across the room to where Adam's body lay. She quickly examined him and put her fingers on his throat to check for a pulse. Nothing. She shook her head and stood.

Kayla and Carla were transfixed by the whole scene. She turned towards them and spread her arms in a helpless gesture. "Kay, I didn't mean for that to happen. I couldn't stop it. Please, please...."

The expression on their faces when from stunned sadness to absolute incredulity. Carla pointed in Sam's direction with a shaking hand and squeaked several unintelligible words. Sam was about to ask what was wrong when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She spun like a cat and - was face to face with a grinning Adam.

"Am I working you, Sam, or is there something going on here you don't understand?" he asked in a reasonable voice.

Sam gripped his arm and looked at his torn shirt. She ripped his shirt aside to reveal a .45 caliber size pink, raw area on his chest. She reached forward and touched it with one finger. As she watched, the area seemed to writhe and pucker and then it became smooth. The color faded from a raw pink to match his skin tone, and in a few moments, the only evidence of the incident were the holes in his shirt and the bullet embedded in his wall.

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Sam sighed and looked around her apartment. This was the only place she really felt safe. She loaded the serving tray with tea for Kayla and Carla. A second thought and she put a bottle of scotch on the tray too along with three shot glasses.

As she walked into the living room, both Kayla and Carla noticed the bottle scotch. "Well, isn't this a good idea?" Carla said. "Ginger tea with a scotch chaser." She chuckled but took one of the shot glasses from the tray and poured a hefty shot of scotch into it. She tossed that one neat, refilled and took a sip.

"Ah....." she breathed as she took a sip of ginger tea. She pucker her lips and made a face. "These do not mix well, people! I strongly suggest one or the other at any given time."

Yesterday, Adam had dumbfounded Sam and Carla. Kayla was aware of the situation but the dramatic demonstration had shaken her. That night they had agreed that what they had seen was too much, on top of all that was happening, to comprehend. Adam had

served a rather potent drink he called Mead. They'd all heard of it but found that it possessed unexpected "authority."

No further business discussions were held that evening. They quietly drank and made small talk. Shortly, Sam and Carla were shown a guest room and all were awakening the next morning before they hardly realized it. After a most interesting breakfast, prepared by Adam, and the three of them had returned to the Academy to prepare for additional security. That they had been compromised was clear. Who and how was far less obvious.

Now, evening, time to relax and discuss together what they had seen and experienced the prior day. Kayla and Sam both passed on the tea and went straight for the scotch. "Good move," Carla said grinning. "Somehow, I think the events of the past day or so warrant a good stiff scotch."

A few minutes passed, a few sips and they were beginning to mellow. "Well guys," Carla began, "I'd say we're up to our necks in some of the weirdest weird stuff I've ever seen."

Sam nodded and took another healthy slug of scotch. "Yes and, somehow, my asexual sis has achieved a metamorphosis into Miss Randy. Over ten years and over night she starts making up for lost time. No offense, Sis," Sam said offering her a toast, "we are all glad and wish you well, but you know it's a fact."

Kayla blushed and grinned. "I guess I did sort of fall for him, didn't I? He did get under my skin a bit. He's so mysterious, so competent, so damn cute....." she trailed off, a dreamy expression coming across her face.

"Kayla. Kayla!" Sam said with increasing volume, snapping her fingers.

Kayla started and focused on Sam and Carla and grinned.

Sam laughed. "I think he did more than get under your skin lil Sis. I think clearly got into your..."

Kayla squeaked with indignation. Sam was leaking and the mental image, while funny, was not flattering and the term she was about to use was pure gutter talk. She tossed a pillow in Sam's direction but Sam had read her intention and caught it with ease. Sam was about to launch it back when Carla reached over and plucked it from her grasp.

"Now, Sam," Carla said sternly, "you know telepaths should never engage in pillow fights in the living room. It's not only very bad form, it's very bad for the living room. Kayla, you too," she said fixing her gaze in Kayla's direction.

"Yes, mama Carla," they echoed perfectly.

"Wise ass clones," Carla murmured in a good natured manner.

The evening progressed in a very pleasant manner. The scotch and the release of tension had them all a little giddy. They were family and they were very, very close so they were able to discuss what they were doing, planning and feeling. Sam and Kayla, as clones, could almost totally share minds. Sam could project to Carla even though she was not a telepath. Her empathetic capabilities did allow her to receive and relate. The three

of them were closer than anyone understood and what they could accomplish together would surprise everyone.

The giggled, they laughed, and the seriously discussed Adam and the events that had transpired. The agreed that he seemed trustworthy but that they should be careful. They all wanted him to be as he said he was but they realized they could be betting their lives on him. Even Kayla agreed that Sam and Carla or the project should not be jeopardized but she was insistent that she absolutely trusted him and was willing to risk her life on his behalf. "He saved my life at great risk to his own," she reminded them.

"Kayla, Love, I'm not sure that guy can die. How much risk was he really exposed to?" Carla asked in a pensive manner.

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In the world of bits and bytes, like the real world, the most secure piece of information is the one no one knows to look for. The second most secure piece of digital information is the one that is not online. But there are leaks and sooner or later that there is something to look for becomes known. It's disturbing to find that what is being looked for is not online.

The information that Kayla had gone to the ship to attempt to uncover had surfaced again. The Jedoran's had encountered a reference to the fact that the data was being moved off planet to Io Station. They had quickly notified the Academy of the current location and the expected move date. It was believed to exist as hard copy only and was in the personal residence of the Secretary of the Transportation Consortium.

Carla shifted her body in an attempt to get the stone that was digging into her left hip bone to stop hurting. It was very dark and there was only one light on in the house. It was cold but Carla was perspiring after digging under the fence and crawling 25 yards to the stand of trees near the house. "I'm getting too old for this crap," she thought. "Why did I think this was going to be fun?"

She had the floor plan of the house memorized but security was tighter than she'd expected. Twice, while digging under the security fence, guards had come by and only her mission garb had saved her from being spotted. The dead black fabric was hard to focus on and it was dark!

Controlling her shivering, she began projecting boredom and lethargy into the house. She was fairly sure that there was no telepath around to detect her tampering. That was one good effect the Transportation Consortium's antipathy towards telepaths had accomplished. It made it easier for an empath to sneak in.

Samantha had two meetings that she had to attend to and she did not want Adam to know about this maneuver so that left Kayla out of consideration. At the moment that left Carla to do the job. Sam want this exercise to stay within the "family." She'd enthusiastically accepted fondly remembering exploits of the past. As she climbed a drain spout to the third floor she began to remember some of the less fun aspects of prior

adventures. "Me and my damn selective memory," she thought as she pulled herself onto the roof.

She lifted an air vent cover and slipped in. This was her intention all along but it somehow seemed more difficult than she'd imagined it would be. Her forearms and biceps burned from the climb and she was absolutely sure nothing remained of her nails. She sighed as she carefully lowered the vent cover behind her. "The fun can start any time now," she thought.

After allowing her eyes to adjust to the darkness she slowly worked her way towards a third floor office. She figured this would probably be where files and data would be kept. Peering through the grate of air vent, Carla could see the sleeping form of a guard. Her empathic influence had produced the desired effect. She worked the grill loose and suspended her body into the room. She let go and dropped the final meter to the floor. She landed as softly and silently as a cat.

She considered her options. If she could get in and out without being detected, the element of surprise would be on her side. She could sap him but when he awakened an alarm would be raised and they'd be sure to discover the missing documents. She focused on him and impressed the deepest lethargy and sleepiness she could on him without causing his breathing to cease or his heart stop beating. For all practical purposes, he was in a coma.

Carla expertly searched the room but she was at a disadvantage. She wasn't sure what she was looking for. So far, she'd found no hard copy of any report that looked suspicious. She went over to a computer that seemed to be the focus of the room. Pressing the space bar brought the screen to life. It appeared to be a standard interface and active. She brought up the interface screen to the internet and quickly discovered there was no such connection. "Ok," she thought, "I must be on the right track."

She started a search using Jedoran, academy, transportation and a few other key words she thought may be relevant. A few minutes passed and she was beginning to lose hope when about fifteen files scrolled down the screen. She reached into her mission pouch and withdrew a data crystal which she plugged into the crystal bay. A few key strokes and the data was copied and the crystal safely in her pouch. She cleared the search and called up the log file. Yes, there were her commands logged in for anyone to see who cared to look. She loaded the log file into a memory resident editor, deleted the final few entries and she wrote it back out with an overwrite switch so that she'd not have to enter another key stroke.

She grinned. If you don't know there's a problem, you don't know to look for a problem.

Now to get out. She looked at the over head air vent and wondered how she was going to get back up to it without leaving a trace in the room. Glancing around the room she noticed the classic typist's chair; simple, on wheels with an adjustable back. Pulling it under the vent she figured she could stand on it and jump the distance to the open air

vent. Removing a cord from her pouch, she looped it around the seat adjustment knob at the back of the chair. She stood on the chair holding the looped cord in her mouth. She pulled on her leather gloves and readied herself. "I gotta be crazy to try to jump from a wheeled chair to a hole in the ceiling," she thought as she bent her knees and thrust straight up. Her fingers just grasped the lip of the vent and she could feel the sharp metal edge biting into the leather of the gloves. She pulled herself into the relative safety of the vent.

"One final thing," she thought. Taking the cord from her mouth, she leaned from the vent and used the cord to accelerate the wheeled chair from under the vent. Letting go of one side of the cord, she pulled it up and put it into her pouch. She looked at the effect she was leaving. The chair had ended up near a desk and did not look too out of place. At least it wasn't under the vent, in the middle of the room, calling attention to itself. She grinned and fastened the vent grill back into place. "This is fun," she thought, making her way back towards the roof.

Making her way down the drain pipe was not as difficult as going up although she could feel the strain. "Oh, I'm going to be sore tomorrow," she groaned to herself. She paused and projected a more alert state to the people of the residence. Retracing her steps, she made the fence and exited as she'd come in. She even took the time to fill the shallow trench she'd dug and to smooth it out. Unless you knew what you were looking for, you'd never notice any difference from the surrounding area. A short jog brought her to her concealed hover craft.

She flopped into the pilot's seat, activated stealth mode and popped up to 30,000 feet. She switched off stealth and activated a commercial transponder. She now looked like a commercial shuttle that was running a little behind schedule. These codes had been prepared beforehand and were all designed to mask the fact that any unauthorized craft or person had been anywhere near this area.

The almost 2000 km flight from Thunder Bay, Ontario to Washington, DC was probably going to take two to three hours depending on the traffic computer. Carla loosened her clothing, reclined the seat, allowed fatigue to wash over her and she quickly dropped into a sound sleep.

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Sam was seated in front of the terminal, Carla leaning over her with her hand on her shoulder. The slowly scrolling screen was displaying the data that Carla had obtained and it was explosive. It was an entire history of the operation and seemed to be contained in the one large file, the last one saved. The first fourteen had been sadly disappointing and contained nothing of real interest. Names, dates, amounts of money paid even a list of several future actions were contained in this one.

Sam shook her head. "You have got to be crazy to document something like this," she commented.

"Well, it wasn't online, it was in a secure location and it was concealed even there. Sam, that was better security than is on most of the Academy's sensitive data," Carla offered.

Sam snorted. "Now, you're really scaring me, girl. You just waltzed in there and took it. I sure hope we're not that vulnerable."

Carla replied with some degree of indignation, "Well, you have to realize that I am one of the best." She chuckled and continued, "And I have an excellent support crew behind me."

Sam laughed but she was really concerned. She made a note in her hot file. Only two words, "security check," but those two words spoke volumes.

"Whoa," Sam exclaimed and stopped the auto scroll of the screen. She paged back half a page and read what was there with total dismay. She pointed at it with a shaking hand to indicate to Carla what was distressing her. And, there, on the screen, was a very clear reference to the Council. Not by name but by function. Even that was far, far more than Sam even suspected was known. The dates of the last two meetings were indicated and there was a reference to an unknown consultant.

"Oh, shit," Carla exhaled, "we've been breached."

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Kayla's eyes were blazing. "You didn't tell me of this mission," she hissed. "It should have been me going out there. Carla's too, too... a bit out of practice and I have as much interest in this as you two do! Are you guys crazy?"

Carla bristled at that comment. She wasn't a telepath but her empathetic talents clearly revealed a less than respectable attitude from Kayla. "Now you hold on there, Child. I was doing missions while you were in diapers and I am not out of practice."

Kayla had not expected such a retort but she didn't want to back down. "But you're.. You're..," she hesitated and muttered, "damn," Continuing, "You should be concentrating more on administrative tasks."

Carla was radiating fury. Both Sam and Kayla were shielding like crazy to keep from being literally blistered. Kayla vaguely remembered someone telling her to never piss off an empath. Now she knew why. In her entire life, she'd never seen Carla angry. She was actually beginning to get scared.

"You wise ass kid. You're trying to say I'm too old for such a simple mission. I... I..." Carla sputtered. She was so mad she was having trouble forming words. She had unconsciously dropped into an offensive stance and, while she'd not assumed a full ready position, Carla looked like a very dangerous martial artist getting ready for combat.

"Aunt Carla, please," Kayla implored. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that like it sounded," a distressed Kayla wailed. "I love you and I don't want you to get hurt."

Kayla dropped her shields and let Carla's anger wash over her. Carla could feel her distress, fear and real concern and realized that Kayla was really repentant. She hardly ever called her Aunt Carla, and when she did, she was in severe distress and needed

comforting. What had started as arrogance had turned to something else and the insult was long gone.

Carla relaxed. Her features softened and her hands dropped to her side. "I'm sorry, Kitten. Guess I'm a little hyper this morning." She held out her arms and Kayla stepped into a very warm hug. Being hugged by an empath is an experience that isn't easily forgotten either. They can be difficult people to be around. Carla was one of the most stable but she'd just proven that might not be saying a lot. It was considered by people who should know that a stable empath is a contradiction of terms.

Sam noisily cleared her throat. Now that we've got that settled, do you think we could get on with business," she inquired.

Sam finally convinced Kayla that Carla had been chosen for the mission because of her empathic capabilities, which clearly had been exactly what was needed. It's difficult to argue with success. Then she gave Kayla the bad news about the council being compromised.

Kayla blanched and asked shakily, "You don't suspect Adam do you?"

Sam quickly replied, "Oh, no! Not in the slightest. I think the reference to the 'consultant' indicates they know of him but do not know him. What disturbs me is the fact that any enemy knows this much. All Academy pass words have been changed, Council recognition signals have been altered, tagged information planted in various suspect points and with various suspect agencies. Physical IP addresses of all our node computers have been changed and symbolic references removed. No computer with hot data on it is connected directly to the internet and all firewall protocols have been upgraded." She chuckled. "You should have heard the howls of agony from systems and users. It was one helluva traumatic transition."

Sam scribbled something on a piece of paper and handed it to Kayla. "Here, give this to Adam and ask him to crack it. If he can, ask for his recommendations on making it impossible. I don't want any unauthorized person getting into our data."

According to the "liberated" data, an incident was planned for next week. A telepath would be blamed for the crash of an intra-city shuttle. The little town of Cambridge had been chosen for this incident. Cambridge had several plants that produced components for nav gear for the Transportation Consortium. Most of these people belonged to the TC Union and had been whipped to an anti-teep frenzy already. It wouldn't be difficult to get something really nasty going in this type of environment.

Carla looked at the map of the area they'd called up. "Is there a time on that?" she asked.

Kayla zoomed in on the graphic she had on the screen. "That's Tuesday at 2:30, coming in from New York City," she responded.

Carla zoomed her screen. "If I wanted to really cause some trouble, I'd crash that shuttle right there," she said pointing at a map icon north of the shuttle port. "Right into the school before it lets out."

Sam and Kayla looked at Carla in dismay and then at each other. "I hate it when she does that," Sam said.

Kayla nodded. "But I'd bet she's right. She's got an evil mind and she thinks like a criminal."

"All right, you two. You know I'm right, but how do we stop this?" Carla said.

"We start by getting information. Carla, I want you to be researching the Cambridge area. I want to know if there are connections in that area to this plot. Kayla, I want you and Adam to dig into the shuttle crew and any known passengers. This is a shuttle so most of the passengers will be walk on." Sam stood and paced back and forth. "And all of us will be considering how they intend to accomplish this crash and blame a teep. That's the biggie. We figure that out and we know how to stop them."

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Adam laughed. "You're right. Carla does have an excellent criminal mind and I think she's right. The school sounds like a probable target. I'm not sure exactly how they're going to blame a sensitive for the accident but I'd bet it's one of the five missing from the purge at Io Station. Remember? There were five that were unaccounted for. They are either collaborators or dead, you know."

Kayla took another sip of morning coffee. Sunlight was streaming into Adam's kitchen windows and it was a perfect crisp autumn day. It was weird, discussing death and destruction on such a beautiful day. The coffee was good and she was glowing after a morning workout and a most satisfactory wind down with Adam in the hot tub. Somehow it didn't seem real considering the possibility of someone deliberately crashing a shuttle full of passengers into a school full of children. She shuddered at the image of torn bleeding bodies screaming as their life ended in agony and flames.

"I guess you're right. I hadn't thought about it but that makes sense." The grim image of white bones protruding through charred flesh was hanging with her and she couldn't seem to shake it. "We've got to stop this, Adam. We can't let this happen." She paused. "We can't."

"We've got five days, girl. Shake it off and let's get working. We're not going to stop anything sitting here."

Adam had one of the best computer systems Kayla had ever seen. The seated themselves at adjacent terminals and prepared to begin searching for references to the target flight. "Oh," Kayla said. "I forgot. Sam asked me to give this to you. She said crack it if you can and tell her what she can do to make it more secure." She handed him the slip of paper with cryptic numbers written on it.

"Ah! A challenge. I like challenges," Adam responded. "You start on reservations for shuttle 828. I want to check this out."

For some time the only sound was the tapping of keys and the soft sound of coffee being consumed. Suddenly, Adam broke out laughing. Kayla looked at him like he was crazy. "What are you yucking at? You reading jokes now?"

He wiped the tears from his eyes and cleared his terminal. "You've got to see this," he gasped trying to control himself.

She slid her chair over where she could see his screen. He entered the IP that had been written on the piece of paper she had given him. After some hesitation, the screen cleared. He opened another task and started a crack program. A few seconds passed and suddenly a picture of Carla appeared on the screen. A few seconds later a flashing overlay read, "Bite this, Adam!!!" and the picture was replaced by Carla bending over bearing her quite shapely bottom.

Kayla absolutely dissolved into laughter. "Hey, she's not bad for an older lady," Kayla commented when she regained control.

"Ah, I'd say not," Adam replied. "I'd say that is a classic."

Kayla smacked him on the shoulder. "You're bad but you have good taste. Carla is a lot of lady. We've all had some wild times. I could tell you some stories....."

Adam lifted one eyebrow. "Is that a fact?" he asked. "And what do I have to do to get these stories started?"

Kayla leaned over and kissed him on the neck and whispered in his ear, "Ply me with exotic liquor, soft lights and soft music. Then we can see what happens."

"Sounds good," he said grinning. "There's a couple of more things I want to try, here, but it sure looks like they have that address locked so tight air can't even get through. Besides, I want to see if Carla will take any more off."

Kayla's response was less than lady like.

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Tuesday morning found Carla, Kayla and Sam in Cambridge. They had driven in an Academy mobile equipment van and were parked where they could view the school and the hover port. The hover port was south of the school and a shuttle from New York would pass not too far from the school on the westward side. Hover ports are very safe. A commercial hover craft would land vertically and enter landing airspace at low speeds. The Cambridge hover port was small. There were only two landing bays, and looking at the day's schedule, at no time would both be in use simultaneously.

The equipment van bristled with surveillance gear, jamming and anti-jamming devices, detection and monitoring mechanisms, computer links, and satellite up and down links. It was painted to look like a rental moving van, and under the right circumstances, attracted little attention. At this point, neither of them cared if they attracted attention or not. The concern was to prevent a disaster from happening.

"I thought Adam would be here," Carla mentioned.

"He left yesterday afternoon saying he wanted to check something in New York. I thought he'd be back last night," Kayla responded. "I'm not sure whether to be worried or not."

"Adam is one strange dude," Carla remarked.

Kayla grinned, "Yes he is that and he likes your ass."

Carla laughed at that remark. "Hey, he's pretty good. How long did it take him to get that far."

The task of trying to figure how the TC was going to crash a hover craft into the school and pushed aside the very real concern of Academy security. "I think it was about ten minutes. Maybe a little bit less," Kay answered.

"He is good! I'd have guessed three days. Hold on....." Carla responded. She typed a few commands and her eyes registered shock. She read silently for a few minutes and then closed the connection. "You're not going to believe this. He got in. Not only did he get in, he modified and compiled our main security module, fixing the problem. He then left me an email in.. in.. well in a private area telling me what he did and then backed out. Amazing. Absolutely amazing. He really closed that door."

"I'd feel a lot better if I knew where he is," Kayla lamented.

"I have a feeling that Adam is quite expert at protecting himself. We know he's damn hard to kill," Sam interjected. "Neither of us asked him to be with us, today, and Adam has uniformly delivered on everything we've asked him to do. What more can you ask of a consultant?"

As the arrival time of flight 828 approached, the tension in the van increased. "They're about 20 minutes out," Carla said. "I'm showing them as clearing Baltimore now. "

Sam nodded. "Ok Kayla, heads up. I'm going to be focusing now. Physical security is yours."

The three were a team. Carla was handling the computer links, Samantha was working the teep arena and Kayla was responsible on covering their asses. The van was lightly armored and had an effective energy and conventional weapons array. Kayla settled down in the weapons control console and focused on business.

"Show time," Carla stated.

"Damn," Carla hissed. She furiously typed on the key board. "I just intercepted an attempt to override the shuttle computer. I think a TC satellite was the origin. It was a fairly tight beam and the only reason I got it was because we're so close to the shuttle now."

Sam's body spasmed and she grunted. Her face tensed with concentration. A few seconds passed and she relaxed. "Some teep tried to trigger an implant in the shuttle pilot. I didn't get what it was but I blocked..." She stopped mid sentence and tensed again. Kayla started to link with her but got a stern mental rebuke. "Your job," a clear mental message stated.

Kayla realized that a police car was approaching their van. The officer parked and walked around the van. Kayla watched him with intense concentration on the external monitors. He noted their license plate and wrote it down. It would track back to a rental company so that was not a problem.

He tried the cab door but it was locked. He peered in but spent little time there. He walked around to the back and banged on the rear door. "Police, open up in there," he shouted.

Kayla hesitated. Carla and Samantha were very occupied at the moment. This was not a time they should be distracted. She pulled the security curtain and slid open the rear door. She jumped down to ground level, sliding the door shut by her descent.

"What's the problem, officer," she said in her best little girl voice. When she tried, Kayla could pass for eighteen and she was trying very hard. That didn't stop the officer from jabbing the end of his baton in her stomach. The air whooshed from her lungs as she dropped, rolled and kicked the side of his knee. The crack of failing cartilage indicated the success of her strike.

Although she couldn't stand upright or breath properly, she struggled to her feet in time to see the officer aiming a laser at her. Legitimate officers do not carry lethal lasers on routine patrol, nor do they attack citizens with no provocation. Kayla realized she was in a fight for her life. She dropped again and heard the hiss of the superheated air next to her ear. She didn't feel any pain so she hoped she'd not been hit.

She drew her own laser, rolled and struck him cleanly in the chest. She watched the fabric vaporize to reveal an inner reflective layer. He was wearing body armor. His laser had cycled back up and, from the prone position, he pointed in her direction and fired. Kayla felt a searing pain run down her left side. "So much for the theory that it doesn't hurt till ten minutes later," she thought as drew a wicked short dagger from an inconspicuous sheath on her side. Ignoring her pain, she lunged and struck the recovering officer in the chest with her body, forcing him back down on the ground. An upper cut thrust the razor sharp steel into the soft area beneath the chin. She felt the hot wash of blood over her hand and he began making strange gurgling sounds.

She could feel him struggling to line the laser up on her body and she hit the hilt of the dagger with the heel of her hand driving the steel another three inches into his body, causing it to penetrate the brain. His arms and legs flailed like broken puppet, his eyes widened, and with a high pitched squeak, he went limp.

Kayla rolled off of him and looked up. She could see a peaceful blue sky and delicious white clouds. It was so good to be alive. A hover craft passed over head and settled down into a landing bay. It all looked so normal. She slowly stood and slid open the rear door. She climbed in with some pain and realized that she wasn't hurting all that much any more. It was just a twinge here and there. She closed the door and slid back the curtain.

Sam and Carla were grinning like they'd just won world war five. "We did it! It landed safely," Sam enthused. Then they looked at her and their faces changed. She could see that something was distressing them. Their mouths were moving but she couldn't quite make out what they were saying. The floor she was lying on felt so comfortable. She decided she'd congratulate them right after her nap.

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Coffee. She could smell coffee. Damn! She'd overslept. Sam was going to be pissed. They had to.... had to.... She knew they had to do something. Better get some coffee. She started to sit up and it really hurt. Her eye's popped open and there was Carla, Sam and Adam all looking pleased yet concerned. A whirring sound and the bed was rising so that she was assuming a sitting position.

Sam smiled. "I told Adam coffee would do it. You never could sleep through coffee."

Yesterday came rushing back to Kayla. She could feel Sam's concern and presence. "Yes, we did it. Without you, we'd have lost. You saved a lot of lives yesterday, Sis," Sam said.

Kayla reached out and with only a little help took a huge sip of coffee. It really taste good! "Tell me what happened," she croaked.

"First of all, let's talk about you," Sam began. "That phoney cop lasered you through the clavicle. You must have been lying down, facing him. The exit wound is your rump! You are going to want a pillow to sit on for a bit. You were covered with blood and we thought for sure you were dying but nothing vital was hit. The blood was all his, and in fact, your treatment is pain killers and rest. You did go into shock but when it's all over you'll have the satisfaction of saving all those lives, a couple of interesting scars, along with a good story to tell."

Kayla interrupted. "He shot me in the ass? The sucker really tried to blow my ass off?" She started laughing but discovered another cliché. It only hurt when she laughed. Everyone knew exactly what was going on and patiently waited while she chuckled, grimaced and tried to control her nervous laughter.

When she got herself under control, Sam continued, "There were four separate assaults. One you already know more about than you want to. The second was an attempt to override the shuttle nav com and crash the shuttle. At the same time, there was a very strong telepathic attack aimed at the pilot who had been infected with an implant. Carla intercepted the nav override and I blocked the implant trigger. The fourth attack is the one that boggles my mind." Sam paused and took a sip of her coffee.

"Seems there was a woman on the flight that had a implant compulsion. When descent started, she attempted to gain entrance to the pilots cabin and she was armed. She had two plastic knives and three single shot disposable lasers. None of which would register on normal scanners for a short local flight," Sam continued. She paused again to take another sip of coffee.

Kayla looked confused. "How did you stop that one?" she asked, her curiosity being obvious.

Sam grinned, stood and made an expansive gesture towards Adam. "Our good friend Adam, here. That fool was on the shuttle just incase direct intervention was needed. It seems that the poor lady lost her head in an attempt to kill the pilot. Even more amazing

is that no passenger ever realized what had happened. When our guys boarded the shuttle, Adam turned over the pilot, the body and head of the, ah, terrorist and walked out like nothing out of the ordinary had happened."

Adam smiled. "I can be persuasive when it's necessary. Besides, I had a bad feeling about our girl here," he said pointing to Kayla.

"Yea," interjected Carla, "and I'm here to tell you to never get in front of Adam when he's worried! He came roaring up in his hover craft, landed, took one look at you, scooped you up and was airborne before either of us could say anything. We were going out of our minds, not quite sure what to do. We were up to our ass in alligators. After all, there was a very dead body lying in the road and Adam did not exactly land on stealth mode. His take off was even worse."

"When we explained that the dead body was not a real officer of the law but a terrorist and showed some very impressive credentials to the locals, they were inclined to look more favorably on us," Sam continued. "We were winding up and I was getting ready to go into panic mode when the console in the van started chirruping like a wounded canary. It was an email from Adam. It said you were fine and gave the g.p.s. coordinates of his house. I had an operative drive the van back, we rented a hover craft and pushed every legal limit to get here."

Kayla gulped down the remainder of the coffee. "What a day," she said. "What a day."

Unlike a gun which propels a slug that fragments or expands, a laser wound is almost surgical. It's clean, self cauterizing but painful. It is a burn. A deep and serious burn. Kayla was alive by luck only. Alive but in far more pain that she was admitting. Adam had seen many wounds and was quite generous with the pain killers. Kayla, as a prime telepath, would have to relax and trust a med-path to allow a pain block but she'd never managed that level of trust. Sam, as good as she was simply did not have that talent.

Kayla was going to recover the old fashioned way, rest, sleep, and morphine.

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It always surprised Sam how little Adam actually volunteered. He listened quietly and said little. He'd respond to direct questions, and as a consultant, he produced whatever was asked for. This was the first time the three of them, Kayla was sleeping, had sat down to actually discuss the Cambridge event.

After determining that Kayla was ok, Sam had to do the normal, boring, crazy making things the commander of any mission had to do. She did the basics, but since her sister was injured, she was allowed personal time with no questions. Of course, since she only reported to Mr. Howard, this was not a real issue. Rank does have it's privileges.

The beverage of the night was mead. Adam had introduced them to the potent potable and they'd learned to enjoy it. It somehow seemed a little more social than scotch and was a pleasant change.

"I have the feeling we got lucky," Sam said. "If it hadn't been for Adam, we'd have failed. The fact that we were attacked makes me wonder if we have a leak or if they are far better than I want to think they are."

"Yes," Carla added, "and we know that some high grade telepath is a traitor and working with them."

Sam's face went dead pan. "Some son of a bitch tried to kill my sister and they are going to regret doing that."

"She did a pretty good job of showing him the error of his ways," Carla said with an evil grin. "But when did she start carrying a knife? She always loved her lasers. Hey.. Sword Man, sitting there all silent and inscrutable, you had something to do with that, didn't you?"

Adam smiled. "Well, I think she realized that backup to high tech isn't a bad idea. She's quite an excellent student."

Sam laughed. "You trained her to knife fight and you still have all your appendages. You are a survivor! But I'm sure glad you did. Over ten years of field work and that's the first time she's really been injured. We were blind sided." She sighed, shook her head and took a hefty swallow of mead. "Absolutely blind sided," she muttered to herself.

"What I want to know is how you got into my, I mean the Academy computer. I saw the fix you made and that was," Carla hesitated, "ingenious," she continued, "but how did you ever get in?"

Adam had to laugh. Carla almost looked as if she'd been personally insulted. He took a sip of mead, slowing down his response and finally answered, "I've been interested in computers for a long time and have learned a few tricks. You had an IP tunnel in your fire wall...."

Carla jumped up, splashing some mead on her hand. She automatically licked it off and exclaimed, "You spoofed my IP! You spoofed my home IP!!" She laughed at the thought of something so simple confounding her for so long. "How did you get the IP? It's not listed, I always use encryption when I'm online to the mainframe.." her voice trailed off. "I'll be damned. You put a sniffer on me when I wasn't online to the main frame. No, that's not even necessary. The IP can't be encrypted, only the data envelope! Oh....." She sat down looking very distressed.

Adam grinned. "Now you know why I hesitate to use electronic communications. There is no such thing as real security. If you want to be secure, change your IP randomly every day and never use the same one twice. And even that is only good, not great."

Carla took another sip of mead and licked the residue from the previous spill from between her fingers. "You are a real bundle of security cheer, you know," she said with a snicker.

Adam just grinned. Sam looked at Carla. "Been sipping right regular on that mead, haven't you, girl?" Sam asked.

"It has been a rough couple of weeks, you know. Seems like forever since I actually got to relax," Carla rejoined.

"That is has," Sam responded emptying her glass and holding it out for Adam to refill. He quickly complied and filled Carla's glass too.

At forty and fifty something, Sam and Carla had changed little over the years. Carla had a few streaks of gray in her jet black hair and Sam's blond was exactly the same. If you looked closely, you could see some fine lines around Carla's mouth but very few men would get that close and be looking for lines. They both exercised regularly and were fit and trim. By the standards of the time, they were mature and looking good.

"You know what I think?" Carla asked. Not waiting for an answer, she continued, "I think we should get ripped. When was the last time we got ripped, Sam?"

"Uh.."

"See!" Carla exclaimed. "It's been so long you can't even remember. " She emptied her glass and held it out to Adam. "Hit me again, big boy!"

Adam did so but when she went to withdraw her hand, he held it. "Better slow down a little," he said grinning. "You want to stay awake to enjoy the evening." He noticed Sam holding her glass out and he refilled it too. "Same message," he said to her, winking.

Carla stood, weaving slightly. "I understand you have a hot tub out here in your boondocks chalet," she said kicking off her shoes. "Why don't you offer a poor tired lady a nice hot soak?"

Sam raised her glass, "Hear, hear," she said. "I vote we adjourn this meeting to the hot tub."

"I second that motion," Carla chimed in right behind her.

"Ok, ok," Adam said, raising his hand in surrender. "I can take a hint. This way," he said walking out a side door into the brisk evening air. He flipped a switch and the agitator jets began swirling the water causing steam to start rising in the cool air.

Carla gave a squeak of appreciation. "Oh, doesn't that look delightful," she said pulling her sweater off. She reached out and steadied herself by grabbing Adam's arm as she stepped out of her skirt and panties. She grinned at Adam. "Kayla said you like my ass," she said with an evil glint in her eye. She straightened up and struck a sexy pose. "How do you like the rest of me?"

"Ummmm, ah... The rest of you is spectacular," he said cautiously.

"You hear that, Sam?" Carla asked. "He said spectacular. Spectacular is hard to beat."

"Spectacular would be hard to beat," Sam replied. "We can be glad that we are a team and not competitors."

Adam glanced towards Sam and did a double take. She was naked except for the drink in one hand and the bottle of mead in the other. "I suggest we get into that nice warm water before my essentials freeze off," she said laughing, with an obvious glance at her very cold erect nipples.

"No argument," Carla agreed. "You going to stand there fully clothed all day, Adam?" Two splashes announced Sam and Carla's entrance into the steaming water. A third splash followed within a few seconds.

Adam awakened, as usual, before sunrise. Warm bodies pressed next to him brought a rush of memory that was most stimulating. Images flashed through his mind and he had to smile at the memory of Carla straddling him in the hot tub. She was totally beautiful and wild as she reached orgasm. She slowed her movement and almost stopped, stretching the experience to make it last as long as possible. Only the strength of her grip on his arms gave a clue to the intensity of her impending climax. As she came, she spread her legs and drove him as deeply into her body as she could, bit her lip and threw her head back. Her small, perfect breasts, erect nipples and muscular stomach rippling with orgasm were more than any man could take. He had arched his back and exploded.

He grinned at the memory as he arose to meet the day. His body was rising in more ways than one. He silently left the room, leaving the sleeping ladies to their slumbers.

He made a pot of coffee, had a twenty minute sword workout, showered and scanned the news on his terminal for any reference to Cambridge incident. If there was nothing in the news by this morning, he'd figure Sam's coverup worked. No mention was found and he figured the Academy had to get points on that one. The media was very difficult to control although local police were a lot easier.

He poured a cup of coffee and quietly entered Kayla's room. He held his hand in front of a wall sensor and the curtains slid open allowing morning sunlight to enter. The sun was just rising and the view from the window was impressive.

Kayla squinted and opened her eyes to the morning light. She saw Adam standing there. "That had better be coffee in your hand," she murmured sleepily. She raised the back of the bed to a sitting position and took the proffered coffee cup. "Ah, good," she breathed after the first long sip. She grinned, "But not as good as last night," she said with an impish grin. "You know they set you up, don't you?" she asked.

Adam wasn't quite sure how this conversation was going to go. He correctly guessed that it was very difficult to keep any deep, dark secrets in a house full of telepaths. "Somewhere, I sort of had suspicions but by then I was beyond caring," he said honestly. "Carla is a lovely, delightful lady but Sam," his eyes glazed and his voice trailed off.

"Ah," Kayla started. "Ah, I guess I should tell," she hesitated.

"You should tell what?" he asked, clearly puzzled.

"Well, I hope you don't mind but that was all of us," she sighed in a contented manner. "I was with Sam and you were great. I loved what you did with us, Adam. I never would have...." She paused and then continued, "Sam is certainly more experienced than I and I don't think I'd have tried that." She got a dreamy expression on her face. "Am I glad the three of us were linked. I think that was the best sex I ever had."

Kayla was obviously getting excited again. Adam had never been around telepaths before. His natural shield made him uncomfortable for them to be around and he was never comfortable around them. These primes seemed very comfortable with themselves, though, and didn't seem to be uncomfortable around him, and for the most part, he felt comfortable around them. Especially this morning. He was discovering that the sharing of emotions and thoughts amplified everything and make life more intense. And intensity he was not unhappy to experience.

Adam had sat beside Kayla's bed after offering her the coffee, and now, she took his hand and guided it under the sheet covering her and ran it down her naked body. As his palm felt her firm nipple and passed over her quivering stomach, he really didn't need any hints about what she wanted. "Gently," she said as he caressed her clitoris and slid a finger into her moist vagina., "I still hurt, you know."

Words were unnecessary as Kayla surrendered to his attentions and let a delicious orgasm build and consume her. What Adam did not know what that Sam and Carla were with Kayla, sharing her sensations and making love to each other at the same time.

Kayla had reached to Adam and was stimulating his erect penis and unknown to him, as he and Kayla climaxed so did Sam and Carla.

Some time would pass before they actually arose to begin a work day.

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Kayla firmly declared that she was ready for limited duty. After a week flat on her back, she was throughly sick of day vid shows and anxious to do something productive. She was moving slow and the occasional grimace showed she wasn't as healed as she said she was but Sam understood how bored she was and had relented and allowed her, with sworn promises to be careful and not over do it, to assume some limited duties.

Kayla had been thoroughly traumatized by her capture, beating and rape but she'd remarkably recovered from that. She'd had a few sessions with Liz and they'd all been amazed at how she'd dealt with it and resumed her life with no apparent ill effects.

Liz had visited her shortly after her getting shot but pronounced her in a stable frame of mind. Kayla had laughed at that and agreed, stable but homicidal. She maintained that she had the intent to blow someone's ass off when she found who was responsible for her pain.

Adam had questioned Liz about her state of mind. He was worried that she was fixating on it. Liz had laughed and said she might be fixating on it a little but, in the context of what they were doing, that wasn't bad. He'd commented on the chance of her killing someone and Liz's reaction and dumbfounded him. She had reached up and patted his cheek and said, "But dear boy, that's what we do."

Her touch was electric as were her words. Adam shivered as we watched her walk out. Lis was something he didn't understand. He knew what he was, or at least he'd made peace with himself. He knew how to recognize others like himself and he usually managed to survive such meetings without killing them.

Adam and his kind, like telepaths, were beings represented in fiction. In most fiction and legends there is some truth. Adam is what some would call an immortal. There is no such thing, as far as he knew, of a human who could not die but Adam and his kind were close. Immortals, such as he, were usually hostile to their own kind. No one knew their origin but certain protocols had developed and were accepted and there were rigid codes of honor.

Adam could not remember his origins. It was possible that he was the oldest human alive. The meeting with Liz had unnerved him. He was convinced she was like him but he could not sense her and she was clearly a very strong telepath. In his experience, no "immortal" was ever a telepath. Mr. Howard was an immortal and Adam suspected that he was not a telepath but he did have an absolute shield, as did all immortals he knew. Kayla had mentioned his shield.

Liz disturbed Adam. She had shown no signs of any enmity towards him but her touch had given him a sense of age and he was good at sensing age. Adam had not survived for the years he had by remaining ignorant. Both Liz and Howard were disturbing but, he had to admit, not threatening. He resolved to investigate further. As soon as he had the time, he'd check into it.

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Kayla blocked the diagonal slash of the sword. She parried and stepped back wondering what the hell was going on, wondering who the man was she'd burned twice and wondering where Adam was. She couldn't read him. He was blank, like Adam, so the sword practice she'd been having with him was the only thing keeping her alive.

This was supposed to be a pleasant break for Adam and Kayla. A weekend on the Appalachian Trail was supposed to be relaxing and refreshing. They had hiked in late Friday afternoon, hiked a couple of hours, enough to get off the beaten trail, and set up camp. They were traveling light. Adam had brought water, toilet paper, simple eating utensils, some coffee beans and matches. A light tent and a thermal blanket rounded out the equipment he brought. He did carry a sword, long knife, short knife and a hand axe, scattered around his body by various attachments. None were conspicuous but Kayla had learned what to look for.

Kayla had survival training so she was not too dismayed by the idea of being out in the field with minimal supplies. Adam had prepared a surprisingly tasty evening meal and prepared a snug lean to so they didn't even bother to pitch the tent. For once, she had awakened the same time as Adam.

Adam had gone to get some water for morning coffee when Kayla was sure she heard a hover craft descending. She cast with her mind but detected no one. "Strange," she thought. "No sign of a pilot."

She finished unbanking the fire and got a small blaze going. She heard the sound of Adam approaching. Straightening, she called, "Bout time you got back. I'm ready for coffee." When there was no answer, she looked up in time to see a short, powerfully built

man approaching her carrying a sword at the ready. He was approaching rapidly and silently for the quickness of his movement.. Kayla took all this in and went on reflex. She drew her laser and fired, striking the man in the left knee.

He grunted and pitched forward on his face. He rolled and used the sword he was carrying regain his feet. He stood favoring his left leg. Kayla was amazed. The pain had to be unbearable and he was standing. She assumed a two hand grip on her weapon and aimed at his chest. "Drop the sword and get down on your face," she said in a voice that brooked no argument.

The man said nothing. He simply stared at her. "Down, I said. Down or I burn you where you stand," she hissed. He said nothing and just stared at her. Kayla wasn't sure what to do. She hesitated to just burn him, and a man with one functional leg couldn't be that much of a threat. She figured that, if he so much as twitched, she'd burn him. But until that time, she'd wait for Adam to come back.

Kayla had taken a couple of steps back to put a little more distance between her and the mystery figure. She'd seen what Adam could do with a sword and she didn't want be anywhere near someone who knew how to use one. She realized the there was a tree behind her and Adam's sword was leaning against that tree. She was about to consider this when the man facing her made a lightening roll towards her. Kayla, distracted by finding Adam's sword, was caught off guard, but as he attempted to get to his feet, she fired the laser reflexively and struck him center mass, a classic heart shot.

Kayla looked at the dead man but remembered what she had seen Adam do. Never taking her eyes from the prone figure, she reached behind her and grasped Adam's sword. It was longer and heavier than what she was used to but it was very comforting in her hands.

To her dismay, the man twitched a couple of times, and once again, regained his feet. He said something in a language she couldn't understand but she was sure it was not flattering. He shrugged his shoulders like an athlete that was shaking out the kinks. Kayla felt a thrill of fear through her body. She couldn't remember ever seeing anyone so menacing.

"Where was Adam," she wondered. She really wanted Adam to appear and take care of whatever was going on here. She parried a thrust and countered but did not commit to the strike. A few weeks ago, she'd been superbly confident that she could engage almost anybody and win, but since practicing with Adam, she'd understood there was a vast difference between what she knew and what a real swordsman knew. She didn't realize it, but her caution had kept her alive to this point.

Kayla was getting desperate. She was fatiguing and her opponent seemed to be as fresh as when they had started. She decided to try a ploy. She slashed, allowed him to parry and went to one knee. He could sense her weakness and stepped in to finish the

duel. She had coiled and was ready. A vicious slash and she managed to inflict a deep cut across his calf and block the aborted strike to her neck.

The surprise of the wound gave Kayla sufficient time to regain her feet and she ran like the wind. She'd gone a couple of hundred meters when she was tackled from behind. The sword she'd been carrying went flying and she felt her arms being firmly pinned. "It's me, Adam. Take it easy." He released her and retrieved his sword. No sooner had he stood erect when Kayla's assailant appeared looking as healthy and fresh as when he had started.

Saying nothing, he stepped forward and engaged Adam in combat. Kayla could only watch in awe at what she was seeing. The flashing steel seemed to weave a pattern that evoked images from ancient runes of power. The air was electric, like the static charge of an impending lightning strike. Centuries seemed to coil, recoil and yield to the fury of the combatants.

Both men were cut and bleeding but the wounds seemed to heal as quickly and they were inflicted. She had never seen such absolute abandon and total disregard for safety. She came to her senses and realized that she still had her laser. They were moving so rapidly that she was taking extra care to aim when Adam stepped back and struck the laser from her grip with the back of his blade. "No," he grunted. "I end this here." The battle raged.

Adam finally managed a vertical slash that opened his opponents abdominal cavity. This elicited a scream of agony but the man did not go down. He seemed to fight with even greater fury and desperation but he was not moving as quickly and the protruding intestines were hindering him. Adam increased the intensity of his attack and with a deft twist of his blade he sent the opposing sword high into the air. The man wryly smiled and stood as erect as possible with the wound he'd received. "Do svidaniya, Adam," he whispered.

Adam stepped forward, and with a clean stroke, removed his head. "Poka, Kurchov. Poka," Adam replied.

A fountain of blood rushed skyward and the headless body toppled, lifeless and inert. Adam stared at him and slumped to his knees in the widening pool of blood. Then there was absolute silence. Even the birds had stopped singing and the wind was no longer blowing. Kayla limped to him and knelt putting her arms around him tried to offer some comfort. As she held him, his panting slowed and his breathing returned to normal.

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Carla and Sam were feeling no pain. The noisy George Town club was filled with tourists, the college crowd and a locals who came in for the experience. They were possibly the oldest ladies in the place but you'd never suspect to look at them. Carla was wearing a form fitting sweater and a fashionably short skirt. Sam had selected a translucent loose blouse, that when the light was right, was a show stopper. Sam was very conscious of this fact and made sure the light was right every now and then.

They were consuming straight scotch and thoroughly enjoying dancing with each other. They had each had dance offers from some of the college "men" which they'd accepted but hadn't followed through on. Neither was in the cradle robbing mood.

"What do you think, Sam? Do we have to kidnap someone or should we bag it for the night?"

"I can still see across the room and the music isn't bad. Let's give it a little more time." Sam chuckled. "We can always wait for Adam to come back."

Carla gave a sly snicker and slapped Sam's arm. "You are bad! That's Kayla's guy."

"Yes," Sam replied laughing. "But that didn't slow you down, now did it? Besides Adam is a very mature man, and as long as we keep it in the family, Kayla won't mind - especially if we link." She grinned her wicked grin and sighed. "That was something!"

"You wanna be really bad?" Carla asked Sam, grinning.

"What do you have in mind? I will not dance on the table and strip tonight," Sam answered.

Carla laughed, "No? Well, I might! Seriously, next slow dance let's get on the floor and, ah, dance. Let's see what sort of reaction we can raise."

No sooner had she said that when the band did begin playing a slow dreamy piece from the 1960s. "Couldn't be better," Carla said and suiting words to action they got on the small dance floor and began a slow sensuous dance with each other.

They pressed their bodies together and followed the slow beat of the music. Sam's breast brushed Carla's and the sensation of her erect nipple against her own was electric and caused both of them to quietly gasp. "Damn," Sam said, "I felt that all the way down to my toes."

"Is it my imagination or did you broadcast that sensation a little?" Carla asked.

Sam looked around and the music did seem a bit more sensual and it appeared that couples were more involved with each other. "Mmmmm," Sam answered, "you're the empath. You tell me." She ran her hand down Carla's back and caressed her firm ass. A soft moan from Carla and a breath taking pelvic grind was the response.

They continued to play with and stimulate each other and by the end of the dance they were flushed and breathing rapidly. Sam had deliberately allowed some of the sexual tension to broadcast and the evening in the club had taken on a much more interesting tenor.

They returned to their table, giggling like school girls. As they sat down, they were joined by two smartly dressed ladies. "May we join you?" the taller of the two asked. Sam looked at Carla and she shrugged.

"Sure," Carla replied. "Let's all get refills and then we can get to know each other."

Both ladies were law secretaries in their mid-thirties and they had come to the club hoping to hook up with a couple of available men but had struck out due to age. They weren't interested in the college kids and the older men present seemed to be more interested in the college girls. They had introduced themselves as Gerry and Judy and

laughed. "I know. We sound like the Bobbsie Twins," said Gerry, the taller of the two. "I'm not sure if it's a curse or a blessing but that's our names."

Gerry and Judy were amazed when Sam and Carla, without mentioning any specific numbers, revealed that they were older than them. They chatted and generally had "girl" talk. They danced but Sam and Carla confined themselves to the faster dances with their two new friends. Gerry, a trim elegant lady nearly six feet tall, danced with Sam while Judy, not nearly as tall, and Carla became dance partners. They all moved well together and they had a great time.

The lights coming up to full brightness was a rude reminder that the club was closing. "I'm still up," Judy commented. "Would you two like to come back to our place?"

"Yes, why don't you?" Gerry asked. Sam and Carla had figured to make the offer to them but this made life much less complicated. The security at Sam's apartment always required explanation and this made life much simpler. A short cab ride brought them to a stylish apartment high rise near the water. Sam correctly guessed that the ladies were probably living just a little beyond their means with such a "classy" address and the fact that they had taken a conventional ground cab seemed to confirm her suspicion. She suppressed the urge to probe. She was a guest and it wasn't polite.

Over mild protest, Sam payed for the cab ride and they adjourned to their new friend's apartment on the 17th floor. It was stylishly high but not so high as to put it's price outside the range of two law secretaries rooming together. Security was Sam's second nature but she didn't want to get obsessive or paranoid.

The apartment was nice, as to be expected from such an address. Being a proper hostess, Gerry served nice eight year old scotch and put on some pleasant, low key music. "Oh, you have got to see what we got today," Judy said with apparent excitement. "You won't believe this....." Judy vanished into the next room and appeared a few moments later holding a tiny, dull grey, sweater like object on a hanger.

Carla and Sam looked at each other in confusion. Carla grinned and said, "Ok, I give. What is it?"

Judy laughed with glee. "It's a chromasynskin. Have you ever....."

Sam and Carla had never and they were curious. This was a very new fashion based on a synthetic fabric that emulated the skin of an out planet desert animal. "How did you ever get one?" Carla asked. "There's a waiting list a year long!" She touched the blouse and was rewarded with a flash of color.

"My Uncle. He works for the developer and, well..." she smiled at the implication. "Want to try it on?"

"Oh yes!" Carla instantly agreed. She was much more fashion conscious than Sam and had placed an order for one. Sadly, there was no promised delivery time. Just a large deposit required. She quickly slipped out of her sweater and took the chroma. It seemed so tiny.

"Just put your arms in it and let it slid down onto your body," Judy said. Carla followed instructions and held her arm straight up with the her hands inside the chroma. She presented an enticing sight, standing there half naked with her hands over her head. Her small firms breasts were pulled up and presented in a very attractive fashion. "Wow, you are fantastic," Judy whispered.

The fabric responded to her body heat and pressure and expanded. He shook her arms and wiggled into the chroma. It hugged her body like a skin and shimmered with color with every breath and movement. She ran her hands down her torso and sighed. "Oh, this is better than being naked. It seems to massage you and..."

"That looks great on you," Judy said with some enthusiasm.

"Does it feel as good as it looks?" Carla asked breathlessly, taking Judy's hand and running it down her breasts and flat stomach causing a remarkable display of color and sensation. She didn't protest when Judy slid her hand down her thigh and caressed the soft skin of her inner thigh above her skirt line. Moment's passed and they tentatively explored each other's body with gentle touches and caresses.

Sam turned to Gerry who's eyes were riveted on Carla's dramatically revealed form. "We know what they're going to be doing in a few minutes," she said with a smile. "We should join them or allow them some privacy, don't you think?" Sam had moved between the light and Gerry to take advantage of her translucent blouse, knowing she presented herself in a most stimulating fashion.

Gerry tore her eyes from Carla, who was slowly removing her skirt, and looked at Sam. She did a double take at what she saw and licked her lips. "We could join them," she said shyly. Sam was surprised at the reticence of the reply and felt a wave affection for the tall girl.

"Then let's," she said and began to unbutton her blouse. Gerry actually blushed but began to unbutton her own blouse. To Sam's surprise she was wearing a small, sexy brassier. With her height and lean build, she easily reached behind her back and unfastened it, releasing her larger and fuller than expected breasts. Sam put her arm around her waist and pulled her close. She was warm, lean and very tense. Sam ran her hand down her back and just held her.

Gerry relaxed a little and put her hand on Sam's ass. She made a soft sound and rubbed her breasts against Sam's. Sam could feel her hands sneaking inside the band of her skirt, seeking the bare flesh of her buttocks. She loosened the button on the side of her skirt, allowing Gerry freedom of access.

"Hey, you two," Judy said, "we're going into the bed room. Why don't you join us?" Carla was still wearing the chroma but nothing else. Judy was wearing only panties. Sam took in the sight of the almost naked Judy and she liked what she saw. Judy was not as trim and compact as Carla but she was firm, healthy and very attractive. She could feel a titillating warmth between her legs and Gerry's finger sliding in the crack of her ass was only increasing the desire for more intimate contact.

"I think that's a good idea," she said softly. "How about you, Gerry?"

Morning's light awakened Carla. She was lying on her back with a warm hand between her legs and a cheek on her stomach. She sighed and began to return to consciousness. Memory of the previous evening came rushing back and she opened one eye to verify that this was not her normal bed and grinned. "That was fun," she thought. "We might have to consider doing this again."

Sam and Gerry formed an interesting tangle of arms, legs, breasts and buttocks. Carla looked at both of them approvingly. The warm hand at her crotch made her consider having another orgasm but it was more of an intellectual concept rather than a real desire. She carefully extracted herself from the tangle, padded into the living room and spotted the kitchen. A can of Columbian coffee showed that her hosts had good taste.

She started a pot brewing.

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Carla and Adam had no telepathic ability so words were necessary for communication. Sam and Kayla could converse almost instantly and completely, when they chose to, but the tried and true technology of language was necessary for the four of them.

It was Sunday evening and Kayla had requested a meeting with Carla and Sam. She was bursting to tell them what had happened in the mountains. Adam had assured her that they should continue their hike and that any further attack was highly unlikely. "These things are simply a fact of my life. They happen," he had said and refused to go further into issue. Once Kayla had resigned herself to his silence on the matter, she managed to enjoy herself.

The Appalachians were beautiful after the fall turn of leaves and the aroma and wildness was delightful. Squirrels were scampering around, storing acorns for the coming winter, and their industry was comical and inspiring. They seemed so intent on their labors that they'd almost run over you if you didn't get out of their way. Kayla was absolutely shocked when Adam told her they were good to eat! It took him some effort to actually convince her that he was telling the truth.

They encountered a beaver dam in a stream and Adam showed her the small tree stumps that had been gnawed off by the beavers, and once again, she was amazed by the industry of the wildlife. They were hiking off of the main trail and they discovered an old abandoned house. It was stone walls that were slowly collapsing and a roof that had long since vanished. The holes in the walls, where windows used to be, gave an impression of a skeletal dead stare, bleaching in the sun. It was a mute reminder of the fact that nature stood ready to reclaim the works of man given the opportunity.

As promised, the rest of the trip was peaceful and enjoyable. Sunday, noon, when they called their hover craft and began the journey home, Kayla was on the com unit almost instantly arranging to meet that evening with her sister and Carla. True, she had

enjoyed the camping trip and hike but the attack and subsequent events had never been far from her mind. She had to tell someone.

"Then Adam cut off his head. I mean he really cut off his head. It was rolling across the ground and blood was spewing everywhere. I've never seen anything like it. It was awesome," Kayla finished, breathless.

Adam, being a good host, freshened everyone's cup and sat down. "She makes it sound far more dramatic than it really is," he commented. To him, what she'd not recounted was as significant as what she had. She seemed to have an innate sense that part of the incident was, and should, remain private. A small weight lifted from his mind.

Sam shook her head. "Adam, you are one bad news dude. Trouble follows you like lightning follows a storm."

He laughed. "Yes, but the trouble that follows me is for me. The troubles you meddle in affect millions. I think I hear the pot calling the kettle black!"

Sam started to retort when Carla caught her attention. "He's right you know. And I think we can use his help."

Sam pursed her lips. "Yea, we could use your help, Adam, but, honestly, you scare the hell out of me. I don't understand you and I don't know how to handle you."

Adam looked her in the eyes. "You understand me almost as well as I understand you. You should know that I'm sympathetic to your cause and there is no way you can handle me. I'm cooperating with you because it interests me and serves my ends. That's the reason we all do the things we do, I guess. You know," he said, "you ought to ask Mr. Howard and Liz whether you can trust or should trust me. Use your resources."

The stare held and Sam really tried to probe him and found absolutely nothing. She broke the stare and sighed, "Yes, I guess I should." A pause. "Yea, I will." Another pause. "I'm sorry, Adam. I guess some strange maniac trying to do a slice and dice number on my sister has me on edge."

Adam nodded in agreement. "Yes. That should not have happened. That was against the rules."

"Tell us about these rules, Adam. What are these rules?" Sam asked.

Adam stood and paced back and forth. As skilled as he was at masking his emotions, stress was evident on his face. He took a deep breath. "You are aware that I've become," he hesitated, "quite fond of Kayla, and through her, I've met you ladies. I won't say I haven't enjoyed this meeting but you are complicating my life and now you ask me to tell you the rules." Adam sat and took a swallow of too hot coffee and grimaced.

"You know what he's going to do, don't you, Carla?"

Carla nodded. "Yep. He's going to say, that according to the rules, he can't tell us the rules."

They turned and looked at Adam and he was shaking his head with a ironic grin on his face. "You're closer to the truth than you can imagine. Let's not go there, ok?"

"Come on, Sis. He saved my life. Back off a little." Kayla paused. "Please?"

"Yes, he saved your life but if it weren't for him, your life may not have needed saving!" Sam shot back. "And I've got a question for you," she said, turning towards Adam. "I can ask a question, can't I?"

"Of course, you can ask a question," he responded testily. "I'll even do my best to answer to your satisfaction."

"How come this guy attacked Kayla? Where were you? I think we need to understand enough of 'your' rules so we can survive," Sam addressed to Adam.

"Ok, first, let me tell you what happened. This guy, Kurchov, has been hunting me. I'm not sure when he started tracking me this time but he was following us on the trail. I went to get some water for morning coffee and he chose that time to attack me. I'll admit it. I got sloppy and I felt safe. I didn't have my sword with me. By the time I realized what was happening, he was between me and the camp. I did the only thing I could do. I jumped into the ravine."

"That ravine was over a hundred feet deep!" Kayla exclaimed. "That would have killed you."

"I'm hard to kill," Adam grinned. "If he jumped after me, I'd have recovered before he did and I'd have taken him. He knew I'd recover and I think he went to the camp to use Kayla as bait for me. It worked too. What he didn't expect was for her to have my sword or for her to be able to defend herself. You can't imagine how relieved I was when I saw her running towards me and with my sword!!! She told you the rest of the story."

He continued, "Here's the immediate problem. I've kept a low profile in everything except this investigation I've been working with you ladies. I suspect that Kurchov was allied with the Transportation Consortium. I doubt that they know what he is, but they are going to miss him when he doesn't report back in. The fact that the crash was intercepted and their agent is missing is going to set off alarms in any normally paranoid security person. I don't think you have the luxury of assuming that you are unknown in this investigation, any more."

Sam's face showed intense concentration. "Yes," she murmured, "that would be my guess too." Carla and Kayla were waiting to hear what would follow. They weren't sure how Sam would react to what she was hearing. "Would I be correct in assuming that you killed this Kurchov fellow," Sam asked.

Adam nodded. "Yes. He is very, very dead"

"And he's like you, ah, hard to kill?"

Adam nodded again.

"Would I be correct in assuming that he was trying to do the same to you."

Adam nodded again.

"I see," Sam said. "You guys play rough."

Adam offered a wry grin and a shrug. "That's the 'game.'"

Carla could no longer resist. "Why?" she blurted out.

Adam looked at her and shrugged. "I don't know."

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"If Adam's right, Kurchov tried to shift the game. At least he's dead. Good riddance!" Mr. Howard spat out.

"I'm glad Adam's involved," Liz said. "At least we can trust him. He's a good man."

"I can't believe he didn't recognize you."

"It was a long time ago, Howard. Even for me it was a long time ago," Liz replied.

"It was a bad time for him. I'd guess he's lost it. Memory can fade. Especially the ones that hurt too much. Adam's a good man and the fact that he's still sane proves something."

"I guess so," he grumped. "He is an arrogant..."

"Now, Howard," Liz interrupted. "If you'd survived what he's been through, you'd be arrogant too." Liz chuckled. "In fact, you're arrogant any way, and that's why you and he don't like each other."

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"Damn, Sam, that's not bad for an old lady!" The thud of a loaded weight bar landing in the rack sent its reverberations through Adam's compact weight room.

"Carla, you call me an old lady again and I'll wrap that bar around your scrawny, ancient neck. I don't even know why I let you spot for me. If I got into trouble you'd probably want to put on gloves to keep from breaking a finger nail before you'd help."

"If you'd reasonable weights, there wouldn't be any problems. What old... make that senior... citizen is tossing around three hundred pounds. And, please, I don't want to hear about what you used to bench when you were 'in shape.'"

They both laughed and stripped the bar to two hundred pounds. Carla took her turn on the bench. "I don't know why you ladies want to handle so much weight," Adam commented. "Beyond a certain point, it's not going to buy you anything."

"This may be true," Sam shot back, "but you want to step on the mat with me without your sword?" Sam asked, laughing.

Adam lifted an eyebrow. "Now don't you let your mouth go writing checks that your body can't cash," he replied in a good natured manner.

"Oh ho! That sounds like a challenge. You won't get all testy if I win, will you?"

"Nah," Adam answered. "I'll tell you what: You win and I'll treat for the dinner of your choice at the place of your choice. Does that sound fair?"

"Can't kick about that," Sam agreed. "Let's do it," she said stepping into the next room, where Adam did his sword training.

Sam was wearing shorts and a sports halter, and had a sheen of sweat covering her body from the weigh workout. Assuming a ready position, she waited for Adam with a grin on her face.

Adam joined her on the mat and the first clue Sam had that this wasn't going to be a normal match for her was the realization that she couldn't read him. She wasn't too concerned because she'd spent years with her capabilities occluded. She waited for Adam

to make his move. She waited. She waited. "Well, come on! Do something," she finally said.

He laughed. "You do something. You're the one going for the dinner."

Sam had to admit that he was cool. Most men would have come rushing in figuring that they could overpower her. She hopped and dropped low executing a leg sweep. He seemed to casually step over her speeding leg and kicked her in the ass. She rolled out of range and popped to her feet. She laughed. "That hurt! Bet I have a bruise."

A grinning Adam replied, "Could have been worse you know."

Sam executed a spinning reverse kick which Adam countered by simply leaning back from and painfully slapping her thigh.

"Damn! That's two bruises, now."

"Aw, that was just a love tap." Sam was sure he snickered.

She feinted with a low kick, threw a left jab and then stepped in with an elbow strike that should have taken his head off. She may have grazed his chin. She wasn't sure but felt his right hand on her triceps accelerating her motion forcing her back toward him. She saw bright lights and opened her eyes to the sight of three grinning faces.

"How do you feel, Sis? Did you have a nice nap?" Kayla asked.

Adam held out his hand and helped her up. "I'm impressed, Adam. I really am. I guess I don't get that dinner, huh?"

"No, I guess not but you are one tough lady. That elbow strike did get a piece of me."

"Ok, Adam, are you ready for the first string, now?" Carla asked. "When Sam can't handle the light work, I'm called in."

Adam looked surprised but Sam and Kayla were nodding confirmation. They had stepped back off of the small mat and Carla somersaulted onto the mat and planted a foot in Adam's stomach followed by a leg take down. She bounced to her feet and was prepared to finish him but Adam had rolled out of harms way and kipped to his feet. Carla had seen what he'd done to Sam and he had just been on the receiving end of her attack. Both were hyper cautious.

Adam surprised everyone. He went for a leg sweep which Carla easily avoided but he inverted and bounced to his feet right in front of her. A ridge hand to her solar plexus widened her eyes and caused her to gasp but she'd been fading back at the time and her muscular abdomen had absorbed most of the force. "Oh," she gasped, "That could have been the end of the match. Good try. You won't get that one again." She grinned and circled him.

She stepped in and redirected the knife hand that came whistling at her neck, grappled with him and they both went down on the mat. She tried for an arm bar but he rolled out of that, switched around and had her in a scissors from behind. He had grabbed her hair and was pulling her back towards him. She grasped her right fist with her left hand and used the extra thrust to jab her elbow into his thigh, forcing him to reflexively release her.

She twisted around and attempted a knife hand to his groin but he'd rolled backwards and out of her reach.

They faced each other and Adam mimed tipping a hat to her. Carla smiled and threw a lightening left jab. To her shock, she felt a strong grip on her extended wrist. A sharp jerk whipped her neck and she saw stars. She felt an arm under her arm and a strong hand on the back of her head. The next thing she knew she was face down on the mat with her left arm bent behind her and a firm knee in her back. She tapped twice on the mat to indicate surrender.

She felt a kiss on the back of her neck then she was rolled over and lifted to her feet. "Wow," she said, "you gotta show me what you did. I didn't have a clue. That was the most fun I've had in a long time."

Adam broke out laughing. "You girls are crazy. Are there any more like you back at the Academy?"

Kayla grinned. "If there were, do you think you could handle all of us?" she asked impishly.

"No, no, no! Sorry I mentioned it. That's was merely idle curiosity," Adam quickly responded. "Idle curiosity."

"You know, Adam, coffee with honey in it isn't bad," Cara said.

Sam snorted. "I wanted dinner in Turkey followed by a nice Turkish coffee. A ride on the Cord-4 would have been nice too. On Adam's credit of course. Think I'll go pout."

Adam laughed. "You gotta win to collect winners wages, Lady."

True to her word, Sam pouted, getting laughs from all around. Following that, they all got more serious and got to the real reason for the morning get together. They listed what they knew of the situation to date and Adam brought out the fact that at least two immortals were involved. The one he'd killed and the one who'd been trying to break into their hover craft during their Potomac meeting.

Kayla brought out the fact that the information Carla had obtained had, originally, been in the hands of the IL not the TC. Since this information was so sensitive, she speculated that there may be dissension between the two and wondered if they could use it to their advantage.

Carla wasn't sure that it was the same information. She was sure that what she'd gotten came from Transportation Consortium offices and contained far more information about the Transportation Consortium than it did about the Interplanetary League.

They quickly realized that they knew far less than they thought they did. Despite their success in stopping the crash of the hover shuttle, they really hadn't a clue who they'd really thwarted or how.

"So what do we do," Kayla asked Sam.

Sam turned to Carla. "Any ideas, Carla. I'm drawing a blank here. I'm not sure what to do."

Carla chewed her lower lip as she was wont to do when she was unsure of herself. She noisily sighed. "Adam, help," she implored plaintively.

Adam smiled. "This is a tough one, I'll admit but one thing is clear: we don't have enough information. When you don't have enough information, you have to get more. Our next step has to be intelligence.

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Sam rolled onto her back and sighed. Gerry was breathing hard and so was she. She'd met with Gerry a couple of times since they first met and found her a stimulating companion as well as a willing and enthusiastic lover. She had a quick wit and a keen sense of humor. She was a little unsure of herself, because of her height, Sam guessed, but seemed like a well adjusted and moderately successful lady. She'd not guessed that Sam was a telepath and Sam was enjoying the opportunity to just be herself.

Years ago, Sam had lost her telepathic abilities and had regained them only with tremendous effort and trauma. It was very easy for Sam to "shut down" and be almost normal, which she did when she was with Gerry.

Sam rolled toward Gerry and trailed her finger between her sweat soaked breasts. Sam was fascinated by Gerry's breasts. They were larger than either Kayla's or Carla's and she loved to just rest her head on the naked flesh and listen to Gerry's heart beat. It was somehow comforting. That her tongue could make the nipple harden and pucker was fun too. She had quickly discovered that Gerry could have an orgasm just by having her nipples stimulated. She found that very exciting and was loving doing that. Gerry, being multi orgasmic, had no problem with Sam playing all she wanted to.

Allowing her fingers to trace a route down Gerry's stomach to her soft mound, Sam asked, "What time do you have to be in the office tomorrow?"

Gerry moaned and arched her back offering more of her sensitive areas to Sam's attentions. "I have to be in early tomorrow. By six am. I'm working on a brief relating to the Transportation Consortium and it has to be ready by ten. Some big wig is coming in at noon and my boss wants time to review all the details."

Sam felt like she was choking. She couldn't believe what Gerry had just said. She started to probe Gerry's mind but stopped herself. That would not be right. Gerry was her friend and trusted her. She simply could not betray that confidence.

"But what if hundreds or thousands of lives are at stake?" a small voice kept whispering in her ear. She allowed her finger to slide into Gerry's warm body and Gerry's enthusiastic response distracted Sam as she spread her legs to allow Gerry access to her warmth and wetness.

Sam looked at sleeping Gerry. Sam had learned she was actually six feet and one inch tall. She was not what anyone would call a classic beauty but Sam had learned to quickly appreciate her body. Her breasts were full and soft, she had an incredibly trim waist that

made the flair of her hips, which were spare by current standards, noticeable. She had long shapely legs and firm buttocks that indicated that she ran or jogged almost every day. Sam realized that she'd become very fond of Gerry in the short time she'd known her and she didn't want to abuse the trust Gerry had offered her. She was trying to figure out how to resolve the problem she faced when Gerry woke and saw Sam staring at her.

She reached up and put her hand behind Sam's neck and close the inches the separated them. Kissing Sam lightly on the lips she smiled. "I'm glad we met. I didn't realize it but I really needed a friend in my life."

Sam felt herself slipping. "What about Judy," Sam asked to cover her own confusion.

"Oh, we room together and we work together but, usually, we have completely separate lives. Judy's great but we don't click that way you and I do."

Sam sighed. There was not way she could ever deliberately hurt or use Gerry. But there was no way she could ignore the possibilities either. "Ok, Sam," she said to herself, "it's command decision time." Sam gathered her courage. She stuttered and stammered a bit. "Ah, Gerry, ummmm, there's something. I mean I need to tell you... ah, Oh Shit!" She exploded.

Gerry laughed. "Oh, Sam, what are you going to tell me? That you're in love with a man? I don't care! I enjoy sex with you but I mostly want you as my friend. I'd never try to come between you and your guy."

Sam groaned. "Oh, Gerry, if it were only that simple. I don't have a guy. I mean, I mean, I like men but I don't have a guy." She looked at the smiling Gerry lying next to her and continued. "I kinda like women too. And since I've met you..." her voice trailed off.

"Then what's bothering you Sam?" To break Sam's solemn mood, Gerry tried to make a joke. "I know! You're going to tell me you're a super secret agent and you are about to recruit into a life of danger and intrigue." She was chuckling at her joke when she realized that Sam's eyes were wide and her face was serious. Gerry sobered almost instantly. "Sam, you are trying to be funny, aren't you?" Gerry ask with trepidation obvious in her voice.

Sam took Gerry's hand an pressed it to her cheek. "We're friends," she said smiling a Gerry. "We're more than friends. We're lovers." Sam felt a tear trickling down her cheek.

Gerry looked at Sam and felt herself go soft inside. The lonely girl realized she needed Sam's friendship and affection. Gerry grabbed Sam and hugged her tight. "It's ok," she whispered. "It's ok. You just say what you have to say and we'll be just fine"

Sam felt herself filling up. She was not used to being comforted. She was usually the one comforting or supporting others. She relaxed into Gerry's warm arm's and, momentarily, reveled in the feel of her soft and firm breasts, the beating of her heart and the strength of her hug. She sniffed and gained control of her emotions. "Ok. Will you

promise me that you'll never ever tell anyone what I'm about to tell you?" Sam asked. "No one. EVER!" Sam stressed.

Gerry nodded. "I promise," she said raising her right hand and crossing her heart. "Really, I promise."

"I am an agent and the reason for all this is your mention of the Transportation Consortium. I'm working on a problem that involves them and your mention of them puts me in a very awkward position. I want to ask you for your help but I don't want to jeopardize our friendship and I don't want to put you at risk or make you compromise your ideals." Sam squeezed her hands. "You understand?" she asked imploringly.

Gerry was very quick and she was good at her job. Her memory was almost photographic and she was a walking law library. She gasped. "The TC is anti telepath. Everyone knows that." Shock showed on her face. "Sam, are you a telepath?" she breathlessly asked.

Sam nodded, waiting for the horror she knew would come over Gerry's face. She'd seen it too many times before. Every telepath has. Telepaths have a hard time living with each other but it's almost impossible to associate with a normal. They just can't trust a telepath. "Oh, Sam," she said, "You poor thing." She grabbed Sam again and hugged her tightly. "How do you stand it?"

Sam was dumbfounded. Fear, revulsion, disgust, hatred, these were the emotions all telepaths were used to, not affection or pity. Sam sniffed. "Gerry, don't play with me. I'm sorry I didn't tell you but I was enjoying your company so much I didn't want it to end."

"But, Sam, can't you tell? I'm telling you the absolute truth. You're a telepath. You should know that."

"Oh, Gerry, I don't go around probing and reading my friends. I mean, a couple of times, I was tempted but I didn't."

"You haven't," Gerry asked, "you never?"

Sam shook her head no.

"Would you now, please? I want you to."

"You want me too," Sam asked with total disbelief.

Gerry got a determined look on her face and nodded. "Yes, please."

Sam took her hands and gazed into her eyes. It almost felt like Gerry was reaching out for her. Sam carefully lifted her shields and the atmosphere came to life. The thousands of thoughts that permeate the world became a muted reality and, next to her, a warm glowing presence. Sam focused and gently allowed her being to become aware of Gerry. Sam was dumbfounded. Gerry was a latent. Her talents had never developed but she must have had the instinct that she was different. "Poor Gerry," Sam thought. "Not exactly normal but not a telepath. No wonder she was so lonely."

Sam found the area that, when changed, would let Gerry sense her and she nudged ever so gently and, suddenly, Sam was a presence that Gerry could feel. Sam looked at

the girl facing her and suddenly Sam saw her as beautiful. Her smile, her sparking and intelligent eyes, her shapely breasts and delightful waist. For the first time, Gerry saw herself as someone else saw her and she was amazed. She'd had no idea that she was actually beautiful. And, Sam, for the first time, was seeing herself as a normal would have seen her. Both of them were sharing a unique experience.

Sam, as touched as she was by the emotional impact, was still the consummate professional. She gently scanned and found the pool of information about the TC. She encompassed it and made it hers, to be sifted through at a future time. She knew what Gerry knew, now, and she'd be able to figure out how to work this to the benefit of all, she felt sure. Gerry inviting her to share her mind was an incredible stroke of good fortune.

They gazed into each others eyes, lightly sharing minds. Gerry reached and touched Sam's nipple, making it harden. The sensation echoed back through the link and made her own sensitive nipple harden. Gerry's nipples were very, very sensitive and the stimulation excited her. Her excitement was communicated back to Sam who realized what was happening and abandoned herself to it. The building excitement bounced between them and within a few minutes Gerry threw her head back and totally surrendered to a shuddering orgasm that, simultaneously, shook Sam's body. The orgasm ricocheted back and forth and they fell into each others arms only to be shaken by the additional contact.

Sam reached deep into Gerry's mind, into primal layers, and found the brains raw pleasure centers. They glowed and pulsed to her telepathic sense. She mentally touched and stroked them and pure raw electric pleasure ripped through Gerry's body and was echoed into her own being, so intense that she gasped and knew no more.

It was dark. Sam rolled over and looked at the night stand clock. Only ten pm. Her movement had awakened Gerry. Their eyes met and they smiled, the memory of what had occurred very present between them. "Sam," Gerry asked, "how good of a telepath are you? I've read about telepaths and talents and I know you're rated. Is it polite for me to ask your rating?" She smiled shyly.

Sam grinned. "It wouldn't be polite in normal company but we're not exactly in public. I'm a prime."

"Prime? I've never heard that classification. Oh... Prime?" She squeaked, "You mean..., Sam, how many primes are there? There's almost nothing published about primes."

Sam smiled. "I know. I'm pretty good at my job." Gerry's eyes widened as the implication of what was said sunk in. "And prime used to mean one. As more and more telepaths were found and trained it, loosened up a little. There are now about four prime telepaths (one is my sister), three prime empathes, three prime med-paths. You get the idea."

"All my life I've read about sensitives. I so wanted to be one but I just couldn't. I remember now, a few years ago, I read an article that speculated about an organization of sensitives. Samantha. I remember now. Samantha... Sam..."

"I never did figure out who released that one," Sam admitted.

"My god, they made you sound like a killing machine! Almost a super being."

Sam roared laughing. "Now that proves it. You simply cannot believe everything you read."

Gerry was not dissuaded by Sam's protest. She realized that Sam was something special and she was not going to ever think otherwise but she wasn't going to argue either. She had a friend and she hugged that thought to her. Her friend was Samantha and that was remarkable but, as remarkable as Sam was, the important thing to her was they were friends. Real friends.

"Gerry, did you know that you're a latent sensitive?" Sam asked. "I think that may be why you've been so interested in the subject."

"Huh?" was Gerry's response.

"What we just shared wasn't just me. That was you too."

"Uh," Gerry managed.

Sam could feel her tension and uncertainty. Somehow, Gerry had suppressed her talents. There had to be a psychological or physical reason for this but Sam suspected that this contact was going to allow her to bloom. She felt responsible for Gerry and she vowed to help her through any trauma that could result. "Don't you worry, Gerry. It's ok. I'll be with you every step of the way." She hugged Gerry comfortingly.

Gerry felt stiff, almost rigid but she relaxed into the hug and became soft and compliant. "Thank you, Sam. I have the feeling I'm going to be needing some help. I do feel different. Almost like I've been asleep and, now, I'm waking up."

"In a way, you are. Now, you take it easy with yourself. You're thirty five years old and you are just becoming aware of your full potential. Don't push yourself. Most sensitive children have years to grow into their talent. There's no rush here, you know."

Gerry nodded. "I guess you're right but I want to open up and feel the whole world. I'm just too scared."

"No, don't do that, Gerry. The world is a very big place and there is so much suffering and so much happiness and so much everything. A lot of the training that sensitives get concentrates on learning how to turn all of that off. Please don't rush yourself. Here, let's link...." Sam established a link with Gerry. She opened her mind and let it range free, reaching out into the teeming masses of the city. She, in essence, turned the volume down for Gerry, but it was all there. Gerry experienced the petty desires and jealousy of millions in a teeming city filled with desire and jealousy. She felt death and the pain of terminal illnesses, birth and the agonies of juvenile discovery. The grasping petty desires of the street junkie, the lofty flights of fancy of concert composer, the hope of a new bride

and the despair of a man putting a gun in his mouth and pulling the trigger, she let Gerry briefly touch it all.

She felt Gerry's nails digging into her back and heard her soft moan. Sam slowly drew back until there was only the two of them and she filled Gerry's mind with the affection she felt for her. A quick, playful, erotic twinge and she dissolved the contact.

"Oh, I never...." Gerry gasped. "I had no idea."

"Gerry, I filtered that for you. Some telepaths stumble into that and never come back. At one time, that meant insanity but, now, we can usually turn them off. A prime med-path has a good success rate at shutting their talent down but they can never use their talent again. There are risks to the talents. Sam smiled. "There is no free lunch."

They talked until three am. The realization that five am was rapidly approaching and Gerry had to be at work is what finally what ended the conversation. They finally managed to drop off to sleep.

Gerry turned off the alarm clock and sat up in bed. "Oh, I can't believe I have to be at work in an hour and a half, " she moaned. "I need more than two hours sleep."

"Want me go get your motor running," Sam asked.

"Oh, Sam, please!" She turned and stroked Sam's cheek. "I love sex with you but not now!"

Sam laughed. "I didn't mean sex, silly. I'm not a med-path but I can stimulate your endocrine system and make you feel like a million dollars. You'll sleep like the dead tonight but you'll be feeling good all day."

"Really? You can do that?"

"Sure can? Should I?"

"If you can do that, absolutely! I was thinking I'd have to take a stimtab but really didn't want to. Do it." Gerry felt a thrill go through her body but she figured that was more anticipation more than anything else. "Well, I've really go to be getting moving. You stay there. I'm going to take a quick shower."

Sam watched Gerry return from her shower. She was slightly damp and toweling herself dry. The ends of her short hair were damp and she was briskly rubbing her hair. Her profile was to Sam and she was enjoying the sight of Gerry's long lean body.

"You know you are beautiful, don't you?" Sam asked smiling.

"Oh, stop that. I am not," Gerry protested. Her face reddened and quickly spread down her breasts.

Sam laughed. "I can't believe it! Your tits turn red when you blush," she blurted and was suddenly in the dark. She removed the damp towel from her head and tossed it back to Gerry with a gentle underhand toss. "You know, you're quick, too," she said. "Oh, how do you feel?"

"I feel fine, why?" Gerry responded. "Oh... I see. Hey, I feel fine! I'm not sure how you did that, but thanks. I sure feel better than I did ten minutes ago."

As Gerry was leaving for work, Sam stopped her. "Now, you don't do anything different today. You go to work and do your job just as you always do. Tonight you come home and crash. If you want to, you can vid me but you don't have to. You are going to need sleep. Ok?"

Gerry turned, "Ok, I hear you. Now, come over here and kiss me good bye."

Gerry was typing a synopsis of her firm's recommendations when it hit her. She'd hit a prime telepath in the face with a wet towel. Her coworkers may have wondered why she was sitting at her terminal trying to suppress laughter.

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Carla stared intently at Sam. "You look a little ragged, lady. Rough night?"

"You don't know the half of it," Sam responded. Sam gave Carla a fairly complete account of what had happened the past evening.

"Ok, I'll admit it. You are just full of surprises. But you told her you are a prime... You told her you're an agent... Sam, have you totally lost it?"

"I know what it sounds like, Carla, but it's really not. I trust this woman. I trust her every bit as much as Kayla trusts Adam. I've even been in her mind by her invitation. Carla, read me." Sam dropped all her shields to Carla, even those that are normally held for politeness.

When Sam's shields went down it was almost impossible to not read her but Carla make the conscious effort to sense all she could about Sam. Moments passed and her face flickered several emotions. "Ok, Sam, shields up." She snickered. "I always wanted to say that." Carla pursed her lips. "Ok, I am throughly convinced that you are convinced. I'll admit that, over the years, you've been right a lot more than you been wrong." She thought about it. "In fact, I can't think of a time you ever been absolutely wrong. You miss things at times, but your calls have been good."

"I thank you for the vote of confidence."

"Well, you are our fearless leader. That's why you make the big credits. Seriously," Carla continued, "you feel this way, I'm inclined to go with you and not question it. All I ask is that you stay alert. If she's some sort of plant or working you, be alert. She did approach you, remember. That she's a plant is not impossible."

"Carla, I've been in her mind. I could not miss it if her personality was a plant."

"No, of course you couldn't. But you could miss the fact that the idea of the meeting may not have been totally hers. You could miss it if there was a deep implant made that is time triggered. You could miss it if what is going to be implanted into her mind hasn't been placed there yet."

"Damn, Carla. And I thought I was paranoid," Sam exclaimed. "But you're right. Let's assume that she's being used. I've got to protect her. If she's being used, she doesn't know it. She's an innocent. She's also a very sweet latent and we need to help her develop."

"Then let's yank her out of there," Carla suggested. "We've done it before to protect a latent."

"I can't!" Sam almost screamed. "The overriding need for the information that she can provide is what started all of this. She is one person. There may be hundreds, thousands or who knows how many lives at stake. We've risked our lives to handle this situation. How can I try to save her and jeopardize all that we are risking our lives for?"

"Ok, Sam, then we protect her all we can."

"How? How do we do that?"

"You know the steps. We implant blocks, we scan and re-scan, we train her what to look for. We make her as paranoid as we are."

"Oh, Carla, I don't want to do that to her. She's so excited and bubbly. We can't ruin her life."

"We won't ruin her life, Sam. We're going to offer her what she's always wanted. You can do it. You can bring her in and make her love every second of it. You know we have one of the most exciting jobs in the world and she's got a chance to be a small part of that."

Gerry's vid to Sam came a six thirty. "Oh Gerry," Sam had exclaimed, "were you run over by a truck?"

Gerry gave a tired laugh. "I was fine until I walked in and sat down to vid you. Then I just seemed to melt. You said I'd crash, and you weren't kidding! Thank you though for one of the most interesting days of my life. Oh, Sam, I've got to go. We'll talk later, ok?"

Sam smiled and waved as Gerry disconnected the call.

Carla looked at Sam accusingly. "You stimed her, didn't you? Sam, were you showing off?"

"No! I wasn't showing off!" Sam haughtily replied. "We only got two hours of sleep and she had to go to work to write up the TC position."

"Two hours! Just what were you two doing all night?" Carla asked behind an evil snicker.

Sam felt her face turning pink and said nothing. She self-consciously wondered if her breasts were red.

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Gerry saw Sam as she stepped out the elevator. Her face lit up and a bounce appeared in her step. As she approached, Sam realized how tall Gerry was. She was certainly a striking woman Sam thought and wondered why men weren't crowding around her. Her long stride rapidly closed the distance between them. "Oh, I'm so glad you came. I've got so much to ask you that I'm about to burst."

She opened her door and girlishly pulled Sam in. She closed the door behind them and pushed Sam against the door and gave her a very enthusiastic kiss, along with a light link, that left Sam very surprised and vaguely excited. Sam has never been the recipient of

such enthusiastic attention. It was very flattering and, somehow, disturbing but Sam realized she liked it. Gerry broke the contact and pushed back. "Hi, short stuff, I missed you," she said smiling.

"Hi, yourself, long-tall. I missed you too." Sam grinned. "But we got business to attend to." Sam opened the case she was carrying and removed a small round device which she sat on the coffee table near the middle of the room. She flipped a switch on the side, an after a brief cycle up hum, it glowed silently and mysteriously.

"That is a passive intrusion detector. If any scan or active device hits this room it will flash, warning us. I'm not sure how cautious to be. Too much cautions raises flags just as too little leaves you vulnerable."

"I guess it's like you said. There isn't any free lunch." Gerry looked concerned but not too worried.

Sam realized she was going to have to be careful in introducing Gerry to the reality of the situation. She wasn't sure how much and how fast Gerry could accommodate to her new situation. She worried because, at thirty five, Gerry should be a functional teep and she wasn't. There had to be a reason for that but Sam wasn't sure how to find out. "I think I need to ask Liz for help," Sam thought.

Sam nodded in agreement to Gerry's statement. "No, and because of that, we do need to take precautions."

"Precautions," Gerry echoed.

Sam nodded again. "Yes. I'm going to ask you to let me scan you each time we meet. Do you mind that?"

Gerry looked at Sam with a "come hither" look and smiled. "You can scan me any old time you want to."

Sam had to laugh. "Ok, you. Then let's do it. You just sit back, relax and leave the driving to me."

Gerry leaned back in the couch and closed her eyes. "Like this," she asked.

Sam looked at her and thought, "Damn, she is beautiful." "Yes, that's fine," Sam replied. Sam made a light link and felt Gerry's welcome. "She's learning fast," Sam thought.

There is no way to describe exactly what scanning someone is like. Sam like to think of it as going through a house and looking at what's there. If a person is cooperating, all doors will be open and you'll feel welcome. If the person is resisting you, doors will be locked, things will fall on you and you'll feel a hostile presence.

The house of Gerry's mind was a nice place to be, Sam decided. It was light, airy and pleasant. Then Sam came to a small back room where the door was shut and didn't want to open. Sam didn't try to force it. Simply asked Gerry to open it for her. The door seemed to creak open and Sam was able to enter a dull, dingy musty room that felt horribly wrong.

Expanding her mind to encompass this wrongness Sam began to get a sense of what it was. This was a childhood trauma and it was the basis of why her talent had never developed. Sam wasn't sure if she wanted to know what was there or not but she was sure that she had to remove it. This is what Liz was so good at. Sam wondered if she should try to remove it or leave it for Liz to do. She started to withdraw but the buried trauma started to expand and "escape" the "room" it was in. Sam blocked it, feeling somehow soiled from the contact, and realized that she had to finish what she'd started.

Sam encompassed the trauma, and with the strength of a prime, removed it from Gerry's life forever. It was now a part of her existence and was contained by her will where it could not harm her or anyone else. She'd have to ask Liz what to do with it but, for the moment, it was not a problem. Gerry was totally unaware of what had happened. She was content, feeling Sam's presence in her mind, and comfortably drifting in a semi-slumber state.

Sam gently eased out of her mind and allowed herself to return to full personal consciousness. "That's all, Gerry," Sam announced.

Gerry blinked. "That wasn't bad. It was kinda nice, in fact."

"Gerry, while I was scanning you I found why your talent never developed," Sam informed her. "I removed it."

Gerry wrinkled her brow in confusion. "What are you telling me?"

Sam smiled at her and dropped her shields. "Read me," she said.

"What?" Gerry asked in a low voice.

"I said read me," Sam said. "Do it!"

Sam felt the reflexive probe and then the warm presence of Gerry in her mind. She could feel Gerry's confusion, pleasure and excitement. Sam looked at her friend and smiled at her. "You're doing it," she told her mentally. Gerry saw her own eyes widen in response to Sam's statement through Sam's eyes. One of the oddest thing a new telepath experiences is to see herself through the eyes of another. It is an unsettling experience.

Sam formed her own link to Gerry. They were now in two way communication. Gerry did not have the shields of a mature telepath not the skills of the primes and high level sensitives Sam was used to communicating with. She was open, eager to learn and just so nice to be with. Sam remembered the basic protocols she'd been given by Liz so long ago. She mentally gathered them and gently put them in Gerry's mind. They'd open and unfold over the next few hours and become part of her experience, just as they had for Sam.

Sam withdrew and mentally asked Gerry to leave and resume verbal. She got the cutest mental pout but Gerry unhesitatingly did as asked.

Gerry was the first to speak. "Wow, you are something! Every time we meet you just keep surprising me and making my every dream come true."

Sam could feel herself getting deeper and deeper into a situation she really didn't understand and had no control over. "Oh, Gerry, you know that can't keep up. All I've

done is help you realize your own potential. You have always been a very special person. You just didn't know it."

"Yes, Sam, you've done all that but you've done more too. You've treated me like a real person. A real person! Not a piece of meat, not a freak, not a side show. You saw me and you saw me! It feels so good to be seen." Gerry sighed and leaned back on the couch and closed her eyes.

"Wow," Sam said.

Gerry sat up and opened her eyes. "I'm sorry to tee off like that. But you have no idea what it's like to be six foot one and look down on men you find attractive. I walk up to a lot of guys and I'm tit to eye ball with them. I can run a 4.2 minute mile, a 10.3 second hundred meters, and I used to practice archery. Sam, I can draw a hundred and twenty pound bow. Do you know how many men can do that? I scare the hell out of men but I don't want to be a weak little kitten who has to lie and cover up what she is. You make me feel safe and appreciated for what I am. No wonder I like you so much!"

Sam laughed. "Are sure we're not related?" She told Gerry about her early memories and how she was brought up in schools and never had a family. She told Gerry how she'd killed the man who tried to mug her, and for the first time, she cried about it. "Gerry, I was a vegetarian. I didn't want to take the life of anything," she sniffed. "It was over twenty years ago and I still remember it." Sam realized that Gerry was holding her and it felt so good.

Sam let out a big sigh and straightened up. Gerry looked at her and smiled. "You never told anyone, did you?" Gerry asked. Sam shook her head no and smiled. "But I just told you."

"Hey, Gerry, you need to get to bed and get to sleep. When we were linked the second time, I gave you an implant. You are going to start knowing things you've always wondered about before too long."

Gerry literally bounced with excitement. "You did! You gave me an implant. Oh my... I've got an implant from a prime telepath," she whispered in awe. She was finding it difficult to comprehend what her life had turned into.

Sam grinned at her. "You sure do and bed is the best place to be when it opens."

"I like the idea of bed. Are you going to be there with me? In case I have any questions, of course?" Gerry asked in her most innocent fashion.

Sam gave an evil grin. "You can't lie to a prime. You want me to ravish that sexy body of yours." Sam projected a wave of lust towards her and watched her nipples harden through the fabric of her blouse. "Damn! You are hot, Gerry but, no, I should not be here. This is best done by yourself. Shortly, you're going to have things other than sex to concentrate on." Sam continued. "Now, I, on the other hand, will have a bed all to my self and nothing to occupy my time except thinking about those cute little tits of yours."

Gerry laughed. "Little... Little?" She cupped her breasts and jiggled them. "These are not little I'll have you know. She rubbed her nipples with her thumbs making them

firm and erect. Sam suddenly realized that she felt the sensation in her own nipples. She was feeling the sensation of Gerry's sensitive nipples being rubbed and it seemed to radiate down her stomach and reach deep between her legs. She felt herself becoming moist.

"Oh," She gasped. You're projecting. "Naughty girl..... Oh, your nipples are sensitive..."

Gerry was aware that her nipples were more erogenous than average and she was finding the effect on Sam incredibly stimulating. Sam was standing, with her legs spread, eyes closed, and her head thrown back. She'd crossed her arms and was gripping her breasts while pinching her nipples.

She felt Sam form a link with her and the additional rush of sensation brought both of them to the very edge. Gerry was sitting on the couch so she squeezed her legs together intensifying the building pressure between her legs. She squeezed and rubbed her thighs together. Oh, that was so good. Time seem suspended for a moment.

Sam was absolutely motionless with a blissful expression on her face. Gerry ran her hands down her body and forced her hand between her clenched legs. She slowly opened her legs and ran her hands up her silky thighs. She was watching Sam reactions to what she was doing. As her hands worked towards her crotch Sam began to tremble.

Gerry felt her breath coming faster and faster. She pushed the fabric of her panties aside and allowed her middle finger to slide into her body while caressing her clitoris with her thumb. Sam gasped and made a strangled sound. She dropped to her knees and reached between her legs and began simulating herself. They stared into each others eyes as they climaxed together.

As their orgasms faded, Sam slumped to the floor to lie, spent. Gerry, on the couch, drifted in a ecstatic haze. Minutes passed and Sam slowly sat up. "Gerry, you are a bad girl. But damn if you're not so very good at being bad."

Sam stood up. "Ewww...." she breathed. She wiggled her skirt up and peeled her panties down and stepped out of them. She grinned self-consciously at Gerry. "They're too wet to wear," she admitted.

Gerry laughed at that comment. She uncoiled from the couch and reached Sam in two strides. She firmly hugged Sam. "You are precious," she said running her hand under Sam's skirt, feeling her soft moist warmth. She sighed and returned to the couch and heavily sat down. "Oh, I see what you mean. I'm beginning to get the effects of the implant now" she said distractedly.

Sam nodded. She turned off the intrusion detector and put it in her case. She wrinkled her nose at her wet panties and put them in the case too. They grinned at each other. "I'll see you later," Sam said and left Gerry's apartment.

Gerry nodded but her eyes were focused on infinity, and her attention was clearly elsewhere.

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Carla looked up as Sam came into the apartment. "Hey! You're home early. I thought you'd be spending the night with Gerry."

Sam put her case down and went into the kitchen area to get a cup of tea. "Carla that woman is going to fuck my brains out. Every time I get near her we are having orgasms. She's incredible."

Carla laughed. "Oh, I can't believe this. Horny, randy Samantha complaining about too much sex. Are you getting old, girl?"

Sam froze and seemed to consider the concept. "Nah," she said shaking her head, "I'm just out of practice. That bit with Adam got my juices flowing again. You know, we all seemed to dry up, there, for awhile."

"I know what you mean," Carla responded. "I guess our hormones run in cycles. Guess we shouldn't worry. We know we still can."

Sam, sipping her coffee, nodded in agreement. She then related the experience of Gerry's latent development and told her of removing the trauma and placing the implant.

"You have been a busy girl. Next you're going to want to make her an Academy operative," Carla commented.

Sam wrinkled her forehead. "No, I can't see her as an operative but you'd be surprised at her capability. She has a good legal mind and is inside the Washington legal system. I'm thinking, if she had allegiance to the Council, she could be very useful."

"Are you willing to use this lady like that?" Carla asked.

"Oh! That came out wrong. I'm not going to use her! I mean, she may be useful but I'm not going to use her..." Sam's voice trailed off. There was silence as Sam's mind churned and Carla said nothing. "I see what you mean," Sam finally said. "This is trickier than I thought."

Sam spent a restless night. She'd drift off and find herself in an erotic dream about Gerry and it would shift and she'd find herself in the midst of death and destruction.

In one horrible dream she found herself in the park of so long ago but, instead of her being the quarry, she was the hunter and a terrified Gerry was the prey. The odor of a fetid swamp filled her nostrils and she was running, running as fast as she could, but Gerry seemed to always be just out of reach. She wanted to stop but the men on either side of her would never stop, and she had to protect Gerry.

Her feet began to get heavy and the ground seemed to be swallowing her legs. She was falling behind, and she saw the men grab Gerry and begin beating her into submission. Gerry's screams became weaker and weaker until there was only the sound of grunting and slobbering. It looked as if the men were tearing her body apart and eating her. One man held her beating, bleeding heart up and began eating it as if it was a ripe apple, blood dripping down his face and onto his hairy chest.

The disgusting sound of wild animals feeding on helpless prey filled her ears.

The men were gone and Sam had finally been able to reach her friend and as she gazed down at the torn and bleeding body, she realized that she was seeing herself. She was the mangled remains that lay on the rocky ground.

Sam awoke screaming with a concerned Carla running into the room to help and comfort her.

"Sis, you look like crap," Kayla told her.

Sam stared blearily at her sister. She managed a wry grin. "Trust me when I tell you I feel far worse than I look," she croaked.

Sam felt the comforting presence of her sister enter her mind. She just relaxed into the presence of her sister and then she let the incidents of the past few days flow to Kayla. Kayla sat heavily down. "Ah!" she exhaled. "Sam, we gotta link with Carla," Kayla said aloud so Carla would know what she was suggesting.

Sam didn't protest but it was Kayla that had to initiate the link. From linking with Sam, she knew how to do it, but this was the first time she'd been the initiator. There was a brief moment of accommodation as Carla fitted her talents to Kayla. This configuration was new to her too.

The triple link was better than two but had limitations. Kayla projected what she'd received from Sam to Carla and felt her concern. Kayla mentally poked Sam to get her to form her part of the link and she tardily responded. The additional contact strengthened the link and seemed to energize Sam.

Carla began using her talent to calm and sooth both Sam and Kayla. Kayla had become almost as stressed as Sam. Sam had some very disturbing memories stimulated, was very concerned about Gerry, her responsibilities and how she should proceed. Kayla got all that via a mental link and, being Sam's clone, was more affected than any other person would have been. Carla, via the link and Kayla's projection, understood the nature of the problem and could feel their tension. Though she was not a telepath, the link gave her access and capabilities that she'd normally not have. She was working hard to heal both of them without affecting their memories or judgement. It was a fine line to walk but this is what Prime Carla was so very good at.

Minutes passed and Kayla relaxed, the muscular tension that had formed seemed to melt from her frame. She managed to maintain the link but she was straining and the strain could be felt in the link. Finally, Sam relaxed. Her tensions released and she slumped back into the couch. Kayla allowed the link dissolve.

Carla shakily smiled. "You done good, girl. You done good."

Kayla straightened up. "My sis can get herself all screwed up, can't she? Look at her. Now she's sound asleep."

"I don't know how she does it," Carla said. "She seems so fragile at times but, when the chips are down, she's solid steel."

"She's sure never let me down," Kayla observed. "I wonder if Gerry has any idea what a wonderful friend she has."

The modern law office was very efficient. Clerks worked at terminals that had access to a library law references, no more huge rooms filled with dusty books. Legal secretaries could call up templates by reference ids. Life had become more simple but more routine. Life for the lawyers was very similar. Billing, client acquisition, preparation of position papers, filing of motions and trials were all relatively unchanged. Technology changed but people remained the same.

Gerry was very good at her job. She had learned to pace herself and could pick up some free time by pushing herself and then relaxing. Her natural ability was sufficient to keep her production statistics among the highest in the office. She had finally managed to get to bed with the data and emotions from the implant whirling in her mind. Sleep was almost a welcome relief. She'd awakened early, as always, taken her morning run, showered and was sipping her morning coffee when the events of the previous evening came rushing back to her.

She felt good. She didn't notice anything dramatically different, but as she thought about implants, she understood what they are and knew how they worked. She wasn't sure, but she figured she could probably perform a simple implant if she had to. She felt that she'd known this stuff all her life which caused her to chuckle. It became clear that's how implants worked.

She shuffled through subjects that she'd been curious about all of her life and found that she understood all of them. She was shocked to understand that she had not only knowledge about subjects she never even heard of but she comprehended them so completely and thoroughly that she was certain she could do them. She checked and found the shield Sam had implanted for her. She played with it and found it easy to control. Slowly lowering her shield, the obnoxious mental noise of the workplace became obvious. "No wonder telepaths shield," she thought, raising her shield back up.

Gerry happily spent the day balancing between considerations of her new talents and the normal work of the day.

As she got into the elevator, she realized that Sam was waiting for her at her door. A thrill of anticipation went through her. Meeting with Sam was always an adventure. Stepping out of the elevator she said, "Hi, short stuff, I missed you."

"Hi, yourself, long-tall. I missed you too," Sam rejoined.

"Ooooo, you look like you had a rough night," Gerry observed. "You ok?"

"Oh, I'm fine now," Sam replied. "You should have seen me this morning."

Again, Gerry swung the door open and pulled Sam in. Pushing her back against the door she kissed as before. She quickly realized that Sam wasn't in the mood and she

backed off. With a very concerned look on her face she asked Sam if something was wrong.

Sam reached up and put her hand on Gerry's cheek. "Nothing's wrong between us. I really did have a bad night." She quickly pulled Gerry to her and firmly kissed her on the lips. "Now, offer me some coffee and we need to talk."

Gerry took the hint and began preparing coffee. Sam set up the intrusion detector and sat on the couch waiting for her. "Here you go, Sam," Gerry said offering her a steaming cup of black coffee. She sat a bowl of real sugar on the coffee table and watched while Sam busied herself sweetening the coffee to her taste. Gerry felt pleasure wash over her as Sam sipped the coffee and smile.

"That's, good Gerry. You make a nice cup of coffee."

Gerry beamed with pleasure. "Ok, and, now, you're going to tell me what's wrong, yes?"

Sam nodded.

"Can we link to do it?" Gerry asked.

"I'd rather not, Gerry. I'm still sorting out a lot of stuff and I don't want you to get the wrong impression. Something you've got to understand... You look at me and you see a prime telepath. I look at me and I see one messed up lady." Sam grinned. "We're both right, you know. Now, here's some reality for you. Your latent talents are blooming and, if you wanted to, you could go to any teep organization and get membership and employment. Or, you could continue your life and enhance it with the talents you've discovered."

Gerry was shaking her head. "No, no, no.... No, Sam. That's not the way its going to be. You are trying to simplify it far too much. It's not that simple and you know it. I did some research today. While working on another position paper, I was able to access all of the archives I needed to realize what the TC AND IL are doing. You do know they're working together, don't you?"

Sam nodded.

"I also realize that this is a real situation and there's a good chance I can actually help you. You can't ignore the fact that I can help you save a lot of lives, now can you? I'm volunteering."

"Oh, Gerry, now you know why I had such a bad night. I didn't want to ask you to take the risks. These are some mean bastards. If they discover what you are doing your death could take a very long time." Sam flashed what they had done to Kayla to her along with the pain, fear and shame of violation that Kayla had experienced.

Gerry gasped and almost collapsed onto the couch next to Sam. "Oh, Sam, they did that to you?"

"No, that isn't me, that's my sister," Sam corrected her. She ten years younger than me but we are almost identical.

"That poor girl. Is she ok, now?"

"Yes, a med-path beyond prime helped her."

Gerry picked up on that instantly. "Beyond prime?"

Sam grinned sheepishly. "That sort of slipped, but now you know how much I trust you."

"Beyond prime?" Gerry repeated.

"You are now one of three other people that know of the existence of this person," Sam smiled. "For security reasons I'm sure you understand I'm going to have to tell you that you don't have the need to know more."

"Meany! But yes, I do understand," Gerry admitted. "So what now?"

"Well, for starters, I need to scan you, ok?"

Gerry closed her eyes, relaxed and opened her mind to Sam. Since Sam was only looking for changes, the scan went much faster this time. Before she withdrew, Sam opened her mind to Gerry and they spent a few minutes just enjoying the company of each other's minds. Sam gave a deep sigh and broke the mental contact.

"Are scans always that nice," Gerry asked?

Sam shook her head in the negative. "No. A scan can be an act of violence and violation. A bad scan would make violent rape seem like fun. A bad scan can cause insanity and death."

"Oh," Gerry said. "Could you show me just a little bit?"

"Gerry, I'm an accomplished martial artist. Suppose I break your leg a just a little bit?" Sam wondered if all telepaths chewed their lower lips when stressed.

"I see. That was silly wasn't it," Gerry answered. "I'm sorry. I just wasn't thinking."

Sam chuckled. "Don't worry. I once asked the same question. I got the same answer you just did. My response was almost the same as yours. It seems that history does repeat itself."

"I guess I seem like a silly child to you, don't I?" Gerry asked.

"Of course not, silly. You know I wouldn't go to bed with a child." Sam grinned.

"You are anything but a child and you are certainly not silly! "

That made Gerry feel better. She'd spent her life feeling uncertain and one thing she did feel good about was her sexual experiences with Sam. Telepathic sex left very little room for duplicity or deceit. Gerry felt safe with that and Sam's allusion to it bolstered her confidence. "Ok, you've scanned me now what?"

"Now I ask you if you want to join us."

Gerry waited but Sam didn't say any more.

"Um, Sam, who is us."

"I can't tell you."

"What do you do?"

"I can't tell you."

"If I don't like it, can I quit?"

"No."

"What'll happen if I do."

"You know the cliché."

"You'll have to kill me?"

Sam nodded.

"Really?"

Sam nodded.

"Are you kidding me?"

"Have I told you anything but the absolute truth so far?"

"No."

"Then I'm not kidding you now. This is very serious."

"Ok."

"Ok, what?" Sam asked. "It's very serious or you'll join us?"

"Both," Gerry responded offering a shaky smile.

Sam took a very deep breath. "I sure hope this is the right thing," she muttered under her breath. "Well, Gerry, welcome to our ranks."

"What now? What does it take to make me a member?"

"You're a member, now, Gerry. I'll need to show you around and really try to explain to you what we're doing, but you're a member."

"That easy? I don't have to be approved or anything?"

"Gerry, I just approved you."

"There's no vote or anything?"

Sam shook her head. "I voted. That's what counts. You are now a member of an organization that is internal to another very secret organization." Sam smiled at the sound of that. "Not only that, but you have just become a part of what we call the inner circle. There were five of us. You are the sixth. You'll have to meet everybody and get to understand what we do and how we do it."

Gerry was listening raptly.

Sam continued, "We call ourselves the council and the members of the council are the heads of the major sensitive oriented organizations. The Jedorans and the Conserves are two that you've probably heard of. There are others and membership delegates are permitted based on membership of the organizations. We allow twenty members so you can figure the math necessary to determine how many organizations are permitted to be part of the Council. It is a parliamentary type organization whose ulterior motive is to promote harmony between the organizations and provide a common direction beneficial to talents. We do that. We also work behind the scenes. Our tools are the truth, the law, and when necessary, direct force."

Sam paused to catch her breath. Gerry just waited for her to continue.

"We have the resources of our outer cover agency and that is sanctioned by the President of Planetary confederation, The President of The United States of the Americas, the Interplanetary League." Sam paused again.

"What's your relationship to this organization," Gerry asked Sam.

"Ah, I'm the boss."

"What's your relationship to the Council?" Sam asked.

"I'm the boss, to be blunt," Sam replied.

Gerry sat thinking about the implications of what Sam has said. In her job, she encountered speculations about interventions that had occurred in the cases of certain clients, things that seemed unexplainable but has always brought a smile to her face because she saw justice being done. Rumors abounded about a secret organization that intervened and that could not be touched. Those in the know would whisper, "Academy," but saying it aloud was simply not done.

Gerry looked at Sam and silently mouthed, "Academy."

Sam smiled and nodded.

Gerry closed her eyes and shook her head. She was beginning to feel dizzy. Things she'd grown up with, thinking they were fairy tales, were being presented as fact. Not only was she being told they were true, she was being told that she was, now, part of it. But more than words, the reality of her mental contact with Sam and her own developing abilities were indisputable. She wanted to believe it all but her rational mind was rebelling.

She lightly linked with Sam and let her confusion flow to her. If what she was being told was true, she was in the room with one of the most powerful people on the planet. If it was a lie, this Sam person there could be anything but Sam had been so good to her.

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Gerry spit out grit and mud and jumped to her feet. She only had three more miles to run and she could take a break before the martial arts class. As she was discovering, the Academy was very real and she was part of it. A month's vacation at an Academy "resort" had sounded like fun. She jumped over the low barriers without even breaking stride. She realized she was getting good at this. The warning whistle sounded and she went flat again. Something passed over her head and she jumped up and started running again. She's always been a good runner and this was actually fun.

Thirty minutes later she was sitting at the edge of a pleasant green clearing. She had no idea where she was but it was warm and pleasant. She guessed Washington would be getting cold and miserable by now. Sam had been telling the truth when she'd said it would be a southern "resort." Gerry grinned. She had to admit that Sam always told the truth.

She didn't know the man approaching. "Hi, Gerry. I'm Mack. Sam asked me to give you some personal instruction." He grinned. "Many long years ago I trained her and look where she is today."

Again, Gerry found her self in awe. Everyone knew Sam, it seemed. Sam was a legend. Sam almost seemed to be the Academy. Knowing and talking to Sam, Gerry realized that she had always understated her position and influence. Gerry sighed. She'd

held and made love to this legend. Briefly, her knees went weak and she wished she could be with Sam this night.

"Gerry, you should pay more attention to your shield," Mack commented. Gerry felt her face turning fire red and remembered Sam's comment about her breasts but she did make her shield as solid and tight as she could.

Mack smiled at her and invited her to join him on the grass. As she stood up to join him, she had to smile at his expression as he realized how tall she was. "Wow," he exclaimed. "Sam said you were an impressive lady and she is right!" With those long legs you are going to be awesome."

Gerry loved it. In this environment, people were looking at her and seeing what she could accomplish and not judging her by some narrow conventional standard. For the first time in her life, she was actually feeling like she belonged someplace and she was loving every minute of it.

Mack had shown her several variations on several kicks and she was mastering them quickly. She was spending intervals linked with Mack and his mental instructions and his physical demonstrations were accelerating her learning. She'd take some basic martial arts when she was younger and she realized she'd learned more in an hour and a half than she had in two years of conventional training.

As they were finishing Gerry got a crazy idea. "Mack, can I ask you a crazy favor?" Gerry ask him.

"Sure," he replied. "You can ask but you have to realize I won't promise you what my answer will be."

"Fair enough. I've been getting a lot of training and I'd really like to know how good I am. Could we go flat out and you tell me honestly how I'm doing?"

Mack was clearly considering what she'd said. "Ok. But you've got to realize you're probably get sore spots out of such a contest. I'll not deliberately damage you but the possibility exists. We are turning out bodies into weapons and when you play with loaded weapons, it's possible to get hurt. You sure you want to do this?"

"Oh, yes! I really want to know and I trust you."

"Gerry, this is not about trust. In such an encounter, things can happen. Are you understanding me?"

"Yes, I am Mack. I understand you perfectly. Let's go, ok?"

They performed a formal bow and Gerry was so very glad she never removed her eyes from her opponent as she'd been taught. A kick towards her face was the first sign the contest had actually begun. Gerry straightened and took a long step back, using her height to her advantage. She executed a leg sweep which Mack did have trouble avoiding. Her long legs had surprised him with their reach.

They were facing each other and Gerry was carefully maintaining an angle approach to Mack. She did not want to offer this deadly human any easy target. Several times he'd stepped towards her but she'd backed him off with her superior reach. He stepped towards

her and she jabbed but this time he grabbed her extended wrist with both hand and stepped to her outside. She realized that he was going to flip her and, to relieve the pressure on her arm, she did a forward flip. The flip actually cause Mack to miss the kick he'd been aiming at her stomach.

As she landed on her feet she tried to free her trapped wrist but he used his grip to immobilize her as he took her down with a leg sweep. She felt her arm being extended and discovered her self in an arm bar with one of his legs across her throat and one under her breasts. As he arched his back, she could feel that her elbow was going to break. She quickly slapped his leg twice signaling surrender.

He immediately released her and they stood and bowed to each other. "How did I do?" she excitedly asked shaking her tender arm. "How'd I do?"

Mack grinned. "You did ok. If we call ten really bad and one really good, I'd rate myself as about a three and a half. The average person would come in around nine. You, my young student are somewhere between five and six. On the street, you be a definite bad ass."

Gerry wondered if Sam had ever been in this room. Here vacation palace was spare but functional. It looked like a picture she'd seen of a military barracks from the last century. A small fan was stirring humid air and she'd just taken a shower so she was quite comfortable. As always, she was tired and knew she'd drop off quickly. She stretched on the top of the sheet and prepared to go to sleep.

A soft tap on her door brought her to instant attention. No one had ever knocked on the door at this time of night. She quickly got up and slipped into a loose, light robe and cinched it at the waist. She opened the door without a second thought. She felt safe here.

She was facing an older woman about five foot seven. She was neatly dressed and quite pleasant in appearance. "Gerry, Gerry Cooper, right?" she asked.

Gerry nodded. "Yes, ma'am." She smiled. "That would be me."

"May I come in. Sam asked me to talk to you."

"Sam? Is anything wrong with Sam?" Gerry asked, instantly getting concerned.

"Oh, no! I'm sorry. I didn't mean to alarm you. It's just that your days are so busy. I thought a nice evening chat might be nice."

"Oh," Gerry said with relief in her voice, " please sit," Gerry said indicating the only chair in the room. She sat on the bed.

The lady sat. "My name is Liz. Has Sam, by any chance, mentioned me?"

Gerry sat on the edge of her bed in a state of semi-shock. Liz has asked for permission to scan her. Gerry had hesitated. After all she really didn't know Liz. Liz had seemed to understand instantly and had soothed her. "Don't you worry," she'd said. "I've helped Sam, Carla, and Kayla many times. I can absolutely promise you that I won't harm you."

Somehow Liz inspired trust and Gerry found herself agreeing to be scanned. Gerry quickly realized that she was being scanned by an someone who's talents vastly exceed Sam's. It didn't take a genius to realize that Liz was the "beyond prime" that Sam had mentioned. Liz had smiled and nodded and she could feel assent in her mind. She relaxed and let herself drift.

The events of her life to seem to unfold in front of her. She saw the trials of her childhood and the tears she'd shed when she reached six feet tall in the sixth year of school. Year after year passed and she saw it all, and through it all, she could feel a warm comforting presence with her and the all pain gently left her psyche.

Gerry awakened with a start. Liz smiled at her. "I've given you several implants that will mature at different times." Gerry started to say something but Liz held up her hand to silence her. "Your talents are more than you or Sam suspect. Don't rush or push yourself. You're going to surprise everyone." Liz continued. "But me."

Gerry beamed. She felt that she'd received high praise. This whole experience was going so well for her. She wanted to pinch herself to make sure she really wasn't dreaming. A bruise here and there was more than worth it.

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The flight back to DC was on a sub orbital transport. The Academy sure didn't mind providing first class transportation. Gerry was in the best shape of her life, she was well toned, her reflexes were sharp and she had more energy than she'd ever experienced. Very few people ever experience peak physical condition and that is their loss.

Gerry felt the low frequency vibration of a commercial maglev drive approaching full power. She found the experience of deceleration to be thrilling. Harmonics played their fantasy tunes in the compartment as the lean transport settled into it's landing bay.

Sam saw Gerry before Gerry saw her. A six foot woman with a tan is not hard to spot in Washington DC in November. Sam watched her long stride consume the distance between them. She'd thought Gerry was a good looking woman a month ago but the time at the Academy Training Area had made her bloom. Gerry finally saw Sam and she beamed. She moved even faster, closing the remaining distance between them at an alarming pace. She hit Sam like a hurricane. She grabbed and hugged her, lifting her off of her feet and swinging her around. She put Sam down and grinned. "Hi, short stuff, I missed you," she said smiling.

"Hi, yourself, long-tall. I missed you too." They both laughed. "I really did miss you," they chimed in unison. That got another round of laughter and people were beginning to stare at them. "You know," Sam said, "aren't we supposed to be keeping a low profile and being security conscious?"

"I've heard rumors to that effect," Gerry responded. "Let's get the hell out of here before they make us."

Sam had driven her personal hover car. It was parked in a no parking zone and there was a traffic control officer standing next to it. As they approached he touched his cap. "Have a nice evening, now, Miss Smith."

"He's one of ours," Sam mentioned as she gained altitude. Sam loved the landing maneuver that she'd perfected on a hover cycle. She'd get to her destination but at an altitude of some significance. This would vary depending on the circumstances. Tonight Sam was conservative. She was less than a thousand feet over her destination when she killed power.

A hover craft is essentially a flying rock held aloft by the application of power. When power is lost, it resumes the flight status of a rock. With no forward motion, that is to plummet straight down.

Gerry had total confidence in Sam but the sensation of free fall was surprising. An excited "Eeek!" escaped from her. The moment free fall started, the crash avoidance computer came to life. Only a few seconds passed when the mini-navcom calculated the timing and amount of thrust to stop the craft at a three inch elevation, the normal dismount elevation. The sudden activation of the engines and the application of maximum thrust was almost as exciting as the sensation of free fall.

They looked at each other and grinned. "Now that was a thrill," Gerry enthused.

"I thought you'd get a rush out of that! I love it." They got out of the hover craft and Gerry looked around. "Where are we, Sam?" Sure looks like DC but I don't know where I am."

"My place," Sam said. "Any agent just back from a mission needs to be debriefed. Protocol, you know," She replied grinning.

Sam was standing looking up at Gerry. Their eyes met and they smiled at each other. Sam's face softened and she stepped up to Gerry and pulled her toward her. She stood on tiptoe and gently kissed Gerry on the lips. A few moments passed and the kiss became more intense. They broke the kiss but continued holding each other for a time. Finally, Sam stepped back. "I really did miss you," she said. "Now this way to my digs," she said and set out at Sam speed towards the doorway.

The elevator took only a few moments to arrive and they stepped in. "Ok, you get to see something few do. Watch this," She said pressing seven twice and close door. The elevator began moving but the floor indicator did not change. The door slid open and Sam stepped into the hallway, closely followed by Gerry who is absorbing everything that was happening. "Welcome to my floor," Sam said.

Gerry looked around and saw a narrow hallway with only one door. "Your floor?" she asked in awe.

"And now, I want you to meet my crew," she said. "Come over here and say, 'Door open.'"

Gerry looked at her questioningly. "No, I haven't lost my mind. I want to key the door to your voice," Sam said. "Just use your normal voice but as a command."

"Door open," Gerry said firmly. Of course the door unlatched and opened a bit, allowing them to push it open and walk in.

Entering, Gerry was met by a comfortable domestic scene. Carla, who Gerry had met at the club, was bringing a tray containing cups into the room and putting it down on the coffee table. Kayla was sitting on the couch with her legs folded beneath her and to one side. "Hi Gerry," Carla said brightly. "How's our latest Academy graduate?"

Gerry started to answer when she saw Kayla. Gerry had never met Kayla. Sam had told her they were twins but seeing them in the same room is not the same as hearing about them. She stopped dead in her tracks and looked at Sam and then at Kayla. Carla laughed and broke the moment by saying, "Hey, Gerry! You've just been hit with the Sam/Kayla Effect. Don't worry, you'll get used to it."

Sam took Gerry by the elbow. "Come on. Have a seat, partake of my favorite beverage and relax. You've had a busy month and now you get thirty six hours of rest, then," Sam smiled, "back to the grind."

Sam and Carla were particularly interested in Gerry's recounting of her training experiences. Like old soldiers everywhere, they were thinking how much tougher it was when they did it and hearing about it put them in a nostalgic mood. They both enjoyed Gerry's tale about her experience with Mack. "He trained me, you know," Sam said.

Gerry laughed. "He did mention that. He also said look where it got you. Oh! He asked me to mention that he'd heard you're getting soft and he'll bet you an evening at Finnegan's that he can run the legs off of you."

"Oh, he said that, did he? Tell me, how did he look? Is he still trim?" Sam asked.

Gerry nodded. "Yes, trim. And Sam, he did run the legs off of me. I think he's battery operated!"

Sam and Carla both laughed. "Yes, that sounds like Mack," Sam agreed. "Guess I'd better start training if I've got a race coming up. Carla," Sam said turning to face her, "Don't let me over sleep tomorrow. I'm going to need to resume my morning runs." Sam caught the glances that Kayla and Carla were exchanging. "Hey!" she said, "He's just as old as I. And besides, I'm not all that old and you both know that I'm of superior manufacture!"

That got laughs from Carla and Kayla but Gerry was confused. Sam turned to Gerry, "I'll have to explain that comment later. Let's call it an in joke but I will explain, promise."

Finally, after consuming great quantities of ginger tea, Carla stood up and said, "You know, some of us have to work tomorrow. This is one person who is going to head for some sleep." Turning to Gerry, "nice to meet you again. I'm sure we're going to be spending a lot more time together, now."

Everyone did the appropriate good nights and Carla vanished into her room. "I should be going too. Adam is planning a training session for me, tomorrow, on nunchucks. I want to be sharp for that," Kayla said.

Good nights and good byes and Kayla was gone. "Wow, it's like being in the room with a mirror," Gerry observed.

"We might as well retire too," Sam suggested. "If you don't mind spending the night with me, you can stay here, or I..."

"Oh, Sam! You know I want to spend the night with you. For the past month I've been dreaming of a night with you," Gerry said.

Sam smiled a big smile and sighed. "I was hoping that was what you'd say."

"You didn't know?" Gerry asked. "Sam, open your eyes! We do have some connections. Don't you know that I care for you?"

Sam sighed. "Gerry, I haven't had much luck with the people I care for in my life. Carla is my only real friend and Kayla is my sister."

"Well, I think you have a wonderful friend and a great sister. You've also got me and I'm wishing you'd at least point to the bed room so I can get out of these clothes and slide between some sheets. This has been a long day, you know."

Sam was instantly contrite. "Of, course, I'm sorry! This way," she said heading in the opposite direction from Carla.

Gerry stepped out of her skirt and peeled off her sweater. Sam watched appreciatively as she removed her clothes. "Ummm.." Sam said, "Don't you ever wear underwear?"

Gerry turned a little pink, "Not today," she said. "I was thinking about tonight."

"Oh, you little tart! Are you trying to seduce me?" Sam asked.

Gerry did a full turn showing Sam her entire body. "Don't you think all the exercise has toned me up?" she asked. "Look how firm my tits are," she said cupping her breasts. Sam took a sharp intake of breath. "And look," Gerry continued, "My stomach is much more flat and defined." Running her hands down her stomach she bent and grasp her thighs. "I think I've always had good legs but the last month has certainly made them better," she said smacking her thighs displaying how solid they are.

"Gerry, you do look good," Sam said stepping forward and taking her in her arms. She ran her hands down Gerry's back to her firm ass to the soft flesh of her inner thighs.

Sam felt Gerry's hot breath on her neck. "Get naked and come to bed, Sam. It's been a month."

Gerry rolled over in her own bed. The return to her own apartment was so normal as to be anticlimactic. Judy had said, "Hi, you're looking good, bye, see you later." Yes, it was time to get up and go to the office. Gerry crawled out of bed and dutifully put on her running shorts and went out to do two miles. The Academy had given her an appreciation of what physical fitness was all about. It was great to be able to accomplish things that normal people couldn't do but it was even better knowing that you were the best you possible.

She knew she was a good runner and always had been. Her Academy training had made her better but she figured she'd never be in same class as Mack. Gerry was mildly

distressed about Sam. They'd gone running together the previous morning and she'd realized that she could leave Sam in the dust any time she chose. As they approached the two mile mark, she'd wanted to increase her speed and push herself but Sam's rasping breath had concerned her and she hadn't pushed it. Now she had to figure a diplomatic way to tell Sam she didn't want to challenge Mack until she could do at least ten miles and look fresh and chipper at the end. Mack could do that and if Sam couldn't, she was going to be really embarrassed.

A quick shower after her run and she was feeling on top of the world. She was looking forward to her first day back at the office. This time, she was going back as a real "secret" agent. She actually pinched herself to make sure she was really awake.

Sometime, yesterday, had been spent on briefing her on the current status of the TC conspiracy, yesterday, and she felt prepared. Another crisis was coming. Intelligence had determined that the incident was being planned for a moon colony but no specific target had been identified. She hoped that her assignments today would allow her to gather something useful. She was the office expert in this area that the TC was dealing with and there was a good chance. Gerry shivered. Life was too weird.

Gerry had learned to shield and sense at the same time. Unless someone in the office could shield, she was totally unobserved. As trained, she did a visual, and feeling safe, inserted a data crystal into her terminal. She did a Telnet to an agency computer and the agency computer quickly assumed control over the terminal, effectively blocking it from the network she was on. She prepared a file list and the agency computer transparently downloaded the data from her network and copied it to her data crystal. "Amazing," she thought. "I never realized how easy it was to steal data from a network." She typed the close command and the agency computer terminated contact after removing any traces that the connection had ever been made.

She smiled to herself and stood to go home. It was much later than she'd realized, well past rush hour and November dark. Her building was eerily silent. As she walked to the elevator her foot steps had a hollow sound. The whirl of the elevator approaching her floor was surprisingly loud.

Stepping out of her building, she realized that a cold front was moving through. Morning had been quite warm and now it must be nearly freezing. She pulled the collar of her jacket up around her neck and wished she dressed warmer. She faced into a brisk wind, put her head down and took off down the dim street with a rapid stride towards the cab stand.

"Freeze and very carefully hand me your purse." She figured the object in her back was a weapon and she froze as instructed and raised her hands. She felt panic rising but her training asserted its self. A quick probe and she found no shield. He wanted her purse but not for the money in it. He'd been paid to get her purse.

"Ok," she said in a voice laced with fear. "I'm not going to argue over my purse. You can have it," she said pulling the strap of it over her head, slowly turning and holding it

out to him. As he reached for the proffered purse, she stepped to his outside and clubbed him in the side of the neck with a surprising hard fist. He went down like a sack of wet sand. He had totally underestimated the length of her reach and the speed with which she could move.

She looked around and saw no one in the area. The quick exchange had gone totally unnoticed. She dragged him into the alley from which he'd emerged and quickly and professionally removed every thing he was carrying and put it into her purse. She started to put a mental block on him and she realized the truth was better than any fiction she could plant.

She stepped back and looked at him. He was breathing normally, was dressed neatly but not expensively. The object in her back had indeed been a weapon. It was a cheap gel gun that any small time criminal could own. Picking it up using her jacket to keep from touching it, it went into her purse with the rest of his belongings. You never know. There was an outside it could be registered, she thought.

She tried to probe him but didn't know how to get beyond the blackness of unconsciousness. He stirred and she realized it was time to be getting out of there. Besides, she was freezing.

She hadn't even gone home. She went straight to Sam's. In the lobby, she went into a public vid and called Sam's ID. Carla answered and was surprised to see Gerry. The background of a public vid was even more surprising. "I need to come in from the cold. What should I do?"

Carla didn't hesitate. "Just do it. Get your ass up here."

As Gerry headed to the elevator the doors slid open and three laughing people got out. Gerry slid in, and as the door slid shut, pressed seven, seven, door close. She felt a wave of relief wash over her as the door slid open and she realized she was in Sam's hallway. Door open, she said and entered sanctuary.

Carla and Kayla came rushing towards her. Gerry was amazed. She knew it was Kayla and not Sam. Shields down Kayla said and Gerry lowered her shields. She arranged the information Kayla needed and directed her to it. Gerry was surprised. Kayla's mental touch was very light and delicate. She didn't really know what to expect from a scan. To this point, Sam and Liz had been her only experiences.

Kayla smiled at her. "Ok, as Carla would say, "Up shields, Scotty."

Gerry reestablished her shields. "Scotty?" she asked.

Kayla laughed. "You'll have to ask Carla about that. And be prepared to spend a lot of time on the answer. Now, give me a moment while I pass this to Carla." Kayla and Carla linked and Kayla projected the information she'd gotten from Gerry.

"Not bad," Carla said approvingly. "Smart, too, not going back to your apartment. I'd guess that's not a good place for you to be alone, tonight."

Gerry looked around. "Sam's not here?"

"She should be in shortly. Have some tea and relax. We can take a few minutes. Other than nearly getting your head blown off, how'd your first day as an agent go?" Kayla asked.

Gerry was rapidly feeling better. The praise she'd received felt good and the matter of fact way they were handling the situation made her feel that, somehow, this was to be expected. Carla put a hot cup of tea in her hand smiled at her. Her hand only shook a little as she raised the cup to her lips.

Sam poked through the items on her coffee table. "Nothing," she said. "Nothing to make an id on. Want to bet the numbers on the gel gun will come up null or stolen?" she asked no one specifically.

"Oh, sure," Kayla responded sarcastically. "Like I need to lose my hard earned money."

Gerry and Carla had to smile while Sam glared blackly at Kayla who was not in the slightest bothered by the evil look.

"Oh!" Gerry exclaimed. "I got the data. With all this going on, I almost forgot. I was able to get what you asked for." She held up the data crystal, which she been carrying in her small skirt pocket. All eyes focused on the crystal.

"Oh yes!" Carla said. "Oh yes, this is the baby I want." Gerry handed it to her and Carl took it grinning. "Come to mamma. Mamma is going to teach you to talk."

"Carla, on the outside chance these numbers can tell us something, run them and do a DNA scan too. Oh, a fingerprint check couldn't hurt, either." Sam suggested.

"Can do," Carla said scooping up the suspect weapon with a plastic bag and headed somewhere into the depths of Sam's apartment.

Gerry watched her leave. "You are most certainly going to have to offer me a guided tour of this place," she said. "People walk away and vanish for hours at a time."

Sam laughed. "It has sort of grown since I first moved in. Would you believe this is my first and only apartment? This place is the closest thing to roots that I have. I'm sort of sentimental about it."

"Aww, that's sweet," Gerry commented smiling at Sam. An undefined grunt seemed to come from Sam's direction. Gerry grinned and said nothing.

Sam carefully landed her hover craft on the landing pad of Gerry's complex. This time the landing was so gentle and unobtrusive that a pigeon sleeping on the edge of the roof didn't even stir. A hand held sensor remained passive. She nodded. "Ok. Let's check your apartment and see what's happening. The chose to take the stairway to her floor. As they reached the 17<sup>th</sup> floor, Sam looked at Gerry and squinted in her direction. "You haven't even broken a sweat," she muttered. She wiped her forehead and tried to look fresh.

The door to the floor would only open from the inside. Sam took a device from her pouch and inserted into the locking mechanism. A whir and a click and she pulled the door open. "Helps to have the right tools," she commented.

Gerry's door was the second to the right. As she approached the door, there was an obvious problem. The problem was obvious if you were looking for it, that is. There was minor damage done to the locking mechanism and scuffs on the door knob. As they approached the door a faint odor of burning flesh became apparent. Sam flashed the impression of Gerry handing her the key to the door and Gerry responded instantly, handing Sam the key. Sam waved her to the knob side of the door and whispered, "I don't sense anyone but being cautious can't hurt."

Sam opened the door, squatted low to one side and pushed it open. Silence and a much stronger odor of burned flesh met her. Gerry gasped. "Oh, no. Judy!"

"Shit," Sam muttered and rolled into the room, a very large 45 in her hand. The room was silent. Gerry was right behind her and she turned the lights on. The first thing that was obvious was that the room had been wrecked. In one corner, the body of Judy was crumpled.

Gerry ran over to her and felt for a pulse in her neck. While her body was still warm, it was cooler than normal. She knew that her roommate of the past two years was dead. At the moment, the sadness of a life cut short was what Gerry was aware of. Soon, the realization that Judy was dead because of her would hit. Gerry's first day on the job had just become a day she'd never forget. She felt Sam's hand on her shoulder. The human contact seemed to help a little but she realized this was a pain that would never completely go away.

Gerry's eyes were red, her nose was inflamed but she was toughing it out. Sam had called an Agency team in and they sifted the place. If there were any clues, they were Agency property now and would be thoroughly analyzed. After that, the local police were called and Gerry and Sam were simply two ladies that had returned from a shopping trip to find a tragedy. Now, back at Sam's companionship and tea seemed to help a little.

"You're spending the night here," Sam stated flatly.

Gerry nodded. "Thank you," she replied. She really was scared to go back there and, even if she felt safe there, she didn't want to be alone.

"Gerry, I am so sorry. I blew it, Sam said. I had forgotten all about Judy. I knew there was a good chance that they'd hit the apartment. That's why we went back so carefully. I had just completely forgotten Judy. She was never there when I was and I just didn't make the connection." Sam shook her head and sniffed. She sighed and put her head back on the couch and closed her eyes for a few minutes.

"I wasn't thinking either, Sam. She was my roommate and I knew she was going to be home, home," she repeated, almost choking on the word, "tonight. That place will never be home again." She put her head in her hands and was silent.

Kayla and Carla looked at each other. Even though she was not an empath, Kayla could feel the sorrow. She'd never met Judy but she'd become fond of Gerry and Gerry's suffering was affecting her too.

"Ok, you two," Carla spoke firmly, "cut it out. Neither of you killed her. This is a war and the enemy killed her. Innocents die in a war. It happens. It's sad and it hurts, but it happens. Not stop feeling sorry for yourselves and start concentrating on making the one's who did this pay the price." Carla was not a projecting empath for nothing. She gently took their grief and slowly turned it to anger. At this point, anger would be more productive than grief.

"You do have a way with words, Carla. Take my advice and never run for public office." Sam produced a wry grin. "You are right, though. Someone will have to pay and I'm just the one to collect!"

"I should have killed the son of a bitch. He was lying right there in front of me and I should have killed him.

Carla didn't tell her then, but she had killed him. His carotid artery had ruptured and he'd bled to death. The police had it down as a mugging. They just didn't know that he was the mugger and not the muggee. It had been on the evening news, a short piece to fill a hole before a station break. She decided she would save this delightful little piece of news for a later time when Gerry could properly enjoy it. Carla did have a vengeful streak in her nature.

The apartment was absolutely silent. "Everyone is asleep but me," Carla thought sadly. She gazed at the dark, cold view outside of her window. She'd only been with Judy that one time, but Judy had been a very pleasant companion. She had touched Carla as and where very few had and that made her special. Carla mourned that her life had been cut short in such a violent manner. She probably came into the apartment at the wrong time. Carla sighed. Possibly she never even knew what hit her. At least Carla was hoping that was the case.

She watched moisture crawl down the window pane from the light rain and felt moisture running down her cheek. Her face was somber and her mood was black. She inhaled a shaky, deep breath and looked for a star, but with the storm overcast, it was black, black, black. "Like my mood," she thought.

A soft tap, tap, tap, sounded on her door. The gentle sound simply did not penetrate her mood. Again, the soft tap, tap, tap. Carla grimaced and half turned. "Come on in." She was surprised to see Gerry slowly come into her room.

Gerry approached Carla and they stood facing each other, neither speaking. Carla looked at her and wondered what was wrong. She lowered her shields so that she could better sense her. There was a brief moment of confusion and she felt a warm caring presence enter her mind. It felt good. Carla felt Gerry's arms around her and realized that she was sobbing. "Damn, it hurt," she thought. It was like a scab had been removed from

a festering wound. Through years of intrigue and violence, Carla had helped and healed everyone. The events of the day, while not significant on a cosmic scale, had wounded Carla deeper than anyone expected.

Carla felt secure and cared for. The pain seemed to ease from her being and she was beginning to feel sleepy. She felt a brief surge of curiosity but relaxed. The pillow under her head was so comfortable and a soft kiss on her lips seemed to give her permission to relax. Sleep claimed her.

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Morning was a buzz of activity. Everyone had slept later than usual and it had been Kayla returning that had gotten everyone moving. Gerry had to rush to be able to make it to her office on time.

Everyone at the office was very nice to Gerry. What had happened at her apartment had made the morning news and the story had gone through the office in minutes. She'd never been "popular" but she was known and she discovered that she was thought well of. Most simply offered sympathy but there had been a few ignorant questions. She'd managed to field those with some degree of grace but she was going to be very glad when this day was over.

The body armor that Sam had insisted she wear was miserable. She was going to have to wear her sweater all day so it couldn't be noticed and the office was too warm for a sweater. In the first half hour, she'd removed it, figuring that putting it on before she left the office would serve the purpose. Modern body armor was a lot better than the old stuff, but still was a pain. She wondered if Sam was going to be mad.

Today she made sure that she left with the normal quit time rush. Being alone had set her up, and she wasn't going to make that mistake twice. The return to Sam's apartment, as the entire day, was uneventful.

Gerry had gotten "home" before Sam. As she approached the apartment door, she realized she was thinking of this place, that she'd only been in a few times, as home. A shiver a strangeness went up her back. "Control yourself girl," she told herself. "These are deep waters you're swimming in."

"Door open," she said and walked into the empty apartment. It seemed strange being here alone, and she knew she was alone. Gerry was beginning to rely on and trust her talent. A few weeks ago, she'd been fantasizing about sensitives. Now she was one. Her life was proving to be very interesting.

The apartment door swung open and Carla entered. She saw Gerry and gave a warm smile. "I see you survived this day. How was your day?"

Gerry returned the smile. "Yea, I did. Seems, that life goes on." She sighed. "What a miserable day."

"Miserable? You didn't really stay in that stupid body armor all day, did you?"

Gerry looked sheepish and shook her head.

Carla laughed. "Three hours?" she asked quizzically.

Gerry grinned. "Thirty minutes."

"Oh my! You are willful!" Carla exclaimed. "You're quite a gal, you know. Sam intimidates the hell out of most people but you hang right in there with her. She's hit you with every thing imaginable and you've coped. You've got my vote, Gerry."

Gerry was not sure what to say to that compliment so she did what she'd seen Sam do. She took a long sip of tea and hoped she wasn't turning red.

Carla sat next to her. "I've got to ask you a question, Gerry."

Gerry felt a sensation of trepidation.

"You came into my room last night." She reached over and squeezed Gerry's shoulder. "Thank you." She hesitated and was silent for a few moments. "For both of us, I've got to ask you, 'What did you do? Why did you come in?'" She rattled on, "It was so late. How did you know?"

The feeling of trepidation vanished instantly as Gerry remembered going into Carla's room. "Oh, Carla, you were so unhappy. I couldn't let be alone when you felt like that. You and Sam have been so good to me and done so much for me I couldn't let you feel like that."

Carla nodded. "I know just how you feel. I feel the same way when I'm about to heal someone. It just builds and builds until you can't stand it any more."

Gerry nodded. "No. I couldn't stand it."

Carla understood. "And then, Gerry, what did you do?"

"I just held you and tried to take your pain. You cried a little, I held you and I finally picked you up put you in bed. I think you were asleep when I left."

Carla sighed. "And you don't even have an idea of what you've done, do you?" She smiled to make sure Gerry didn't misunderstand. The look of confusion on Gerry's face was clear evidence she hadn't a clue to what Carla was talking about.

"Gerry, you know what telepaths can do. They can sense thoughts, some can even implant thoughts. Empaths sense, and depending on ability, manipulate emotion. You know what a med-path is. Usually the talents overlap a little but one generally excludes the others. Then there are the grade levels. A lower grade telepath can't affect a higher grade telepath without cooperation, and even them, not always. We know you're a telepath. Last night you acted like an empath. Not only that, you sensed and manipulated a shielded prime." Carla smiled again and shook her head. "You are something else. And, for me, let's not mention this, ok?" Carla asked. "Let's keep this between us."

Gerry sat thinking about what Carla had told her and she remembered Liz saying she was going to surprise everyone. Her chest felt tight and her stomach was quivering but she managed to smile and nod agreement. "Ok, Carla. If you say so."

Carla hugged her. "I say so, and thank you so much for last night."

Kayla came bounding in. "Hi guys," she said. She looked at Gerry. "See you got through this one. I told Sam she was being paranoid. By the way, how long did you last in the body armor?"

As Gerry was sipping on her cold tea, Carla stage whispered, "A half hour."

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Gerry drew her coat tighter around her. This was a hell of a way to spend a Friday night. Ok, Saturday morning actually. The wind had the bite of ice in it and at two AM there nothing to take the chill off. From the darkness of the alley, she scanned the street. Stepping out of the alley she quickly entered the building and quietly took the stairwell to the third floor. She knew it wasn't really smart for a woman to be in this area of town at this time of night but she wasn't in the mood to be smart.

The gel gun had turned up a finger print and Carla had gotten a name. A little research indicated the man, Jason White, was a private investigator in a seedy part of town. His address was as easy to find as calling up the vid list. When Carla had told her she'd killed him, her first feeling was a rush of intense satisfaction. almost glee. Now she was going to his office and was going to try to find if there was any information that would lead her to who had hired him. Find them, find who killed Judy, she figured.

Her recent training had given her the tools and knowledge how to enter his office and not trigger the primitive alarm system he had. She booted up his office computer, found his accounting program and scanned for recent payment. Her eyes widened and she located a 5000 credit payment on the day of her attack. She felt the room spin when saw then name imprinted on the image of the check. The check was hand written, not computer generated. The signature was hand signed, not a digital sig. She looked at the all too familiar signature and felt her blood turn to ice and she wanted to kill. Randolph Petty, the general manager of her firm, was going to pay the price.

She printed a copy of the image, stuffed in into her pouch. Killing the computer and reactivating the alarm system she quietly left the office. On the ground level she could sense a predatory presence outside of the office. Lightly scanning she got the impression of desperation and desire, at this time of night, a sure sign of danger. She waited.

Time passed and the person was not leaving the area. Gerry had told Sam and Carla she was going out for a walk to clear her head but they would start worrying soon. She wanted to do this on her own and she wasn't happy with the way it was going. She quietly opened the door stepped onto the street. She flattened against the cold concrete and looked for the person she could sense. Damn! She could not see him. She figured if she couldn't see him, he couldn't see her and wished she was better at this. She walked slowly, silently as possible and cautiously proceeded up the street.

She could feel the mental anticipation rise and realized she'd been spotted. A thrill of fear when through her but she controlled herself and casually crossed to the other side of the street. Another predatory attitude impressed itself on her consciousness. There were two! Gerry hesitated. She was in deep trouble and knew it. She slowly continued her

journey up the side walk, feeling the increasing anticipation. She noted an alley up a little from her, to the left. She was sure that's where the second person was concealing himself. That she was being hunted like an animal caused a wave of anger seared through Gerry.

She silently but quickly approached the alley and boldly stepped into it. Her "hunter" had not been prepared to meet her face to face. He'd also not been prepared for a flying side kick to his chest. He went flying back against the brick wall, the back of his head striking the unyielding surface. He limply flopped to the ground.

Gerry took advantage of the opening offered. She sprinted to the other end of the alley, turned onto the parallel street and reached her full speed in a few strides. No junkie was going to be detaining her this night.

Inside the apartment, she stood, semi-bent with her hands on her knees, panting for breath. Her short hair was wet and stringy with perspiration. Sam and Carla had quickly realized she was ok and were patiently waiting for an explanation.

"Decided to go for a nice three AM run through the slums of DC?" Carla finally asked with just a tinge of sarcasm to her voice.

Gerry nodded and made a conscious effort to straighten and control her breathing. "It is such a fine night," she gasped. "Absolutely invigorating."

Sam and Carla looked at each other and shrugged. "Gerry, your almost as bad as Sam. Sometime, count the scars on her body, and then consider before you go off half cocked."

Gerry reached into her pouch and held up the print out of the check. "Check this out," she said, handing it to Sam. Sam and Carla looked at it and instantly realized what they were seeing.

"From his office, right?" Sam asked.

Gerry nodded.

"Did you kill anyone?" Sam asked in a resigned manner.

"Uh..." Gerry hesitated.

"Gerry!" Carla exclaimed her voice rising in an unexpected manner.

"I don't think so," Gerry added quickly. "There were two of them and I kicked one in the chest and ran like hell. I think he hit his head and got knocked out but I don't think I killed him. Really."

Carla looked at the printout. "Wish you'd gotten the graphic on a crystal. I'd love to see it at high resolution."

"No need," Gerry said. "I recognize his signature. That's for real."

"But why?" Carla exhaled. "They couldn't have made you that quickly. You'd been away for a month. As far as they were concerned, you were on vacation. Trust, me. We had that covered every way imaginable!"

Gerry face hardened. "Supposed Judy wasn't an accident or a mistake. Suppose both of us were supposed to be killed. Judy was more involved with the IL protocols than I was. I worked on the TC stuff. Could be we have been lose ends being cleaned up?"

Sam and Carla looked at each other. That's better than anything I can come up with," Sam admitted.

"That would make a lot of sense. I wonder if there have been any other mysterious deaths at your office," Carla said.

"I want this one," Gerry said tapping on signature on the check. "I've had lunch with this bastard and he's paying to have me killed." Gerry made a growling sound at the back of her throat. "Fucker killed Judy. This world is not big enough for both of us to live in. One of us has to die," she hissed.

Both Sam and Carla could understand her feelings and attitude. They'd been there. Especially Carla, who felt herself choking up at the memory of Judy.

Sam's bed room was warm enough so that only a light sheet was needed for sleeping. Gerry was used to a cooler room but she wasn't uncomfortable. At least not from the temperature. She was lying on her back with her hands behind her head. The sheet was pulled up to her waist. She has a slight frown on her face and she'd exhaled a huge sigh.

Sam propped herself up on her left elbow and stared at her friend. She gazed at her long, lean frame and her worried face. She reached over had put her other hand on Gerry's cheek. "You look like a lady with problems," Sam gently said.

Gerry put her hand over Sam's and held it tight to her cheek. "I'm thinking," she said and paused.

Sam nodded. "I can tell"

Gerry continued as if she'd not even heard the interjection. "This whole thing feels like a dream. It is dream come true or is it a nightmare? My life is more than I could ever have expected but my roommate is dead and I've killed a man. I'm a target for murder and I was lying here seriously considering how to kill someone I've worked with for three years." She rolled towards Sam and searched her face for some sort of encouragement.

"Gerry, you been hit with a lot in the past couple of months. You've entered a very strange world where things happen quickly, affect millions and have horrendous impacts. For some reason, fate pointed its fickle finger at you." She ran her hand down her friend's body enjoying the sensation of her smooth skin. "I'm glad it did but neither of us planned it. We're just along for the ride and all we can do is try to cope and, whenever possible, enjoy the journey."

Gerry stared into Sam's eyes. "How do you cope, Sam. How can you stand it."

"I've never really know anything else. It feels like I was born to this." Sam paused and lost herself in thought for a few moments. "Oh, you poor thing! I was trained and helped almost every step of the way for years and you've been dumped right into the middle of this mess. Look, if you were ill, you'd take medicine. If you feel you are being pushed too hard, you let us know. Both Carla and I can help, you know."

Gerry relaxed a little. She wasn't sure if talking to Sam had helped or if Sam was calming her in some way but some of the pressure seemed to lift. At least, she wasn't

alone. She looked at Sam and Sam smiled at her. Sam really seemed to care for her. Maybe she wasn't just a toy or charity project. Maybe Sam actually cared for her. Her, as a person with her own thoughts, feelings and concerns.

"We'll get through this, Gerry, and you're going to have the time of your life. We're going to go places, see things and do things you won't believe." Sam got a more pensive look on her face. "The night we met, Carla and I were out for the first time in a long time. To tell you the truth, we were getting dull, routine and totally unexciting. You have brought me to life again and given me an interest in something other than work."

A tap at the door interrupted her. "Come," she said.

Carla stuck her head in the door. "Am in interrupting anything?" She sighed.

"No," Sam and Gerry echoed, "come on in."

Sam continued, "Do," Sam said. "Three friendly people will fit, here. We were just discussing how strange life is."

Carla slid into bed next to Sam and put her head on Sam's shoulder. "It's dark tonight," she said.

Gerry reached across Sam and hugged Carla. "It might be dark, but with the three of us it's nice and warm."

Sam had to agree. When Gerry reached across her to hug Carla, her warm breasts flattened against hers. She felt the stirring of sexual interest and a simultaneous pang of guilt but she felt Gerry's body responding to the intimate contact and her guilt dissolved into an awareness of tactile sensation.

Gerry's shield was down and her warm presence was pleasant. Carla, a friend for half her life, to her left, was a comfort and her mental signature was inviting. Sam reached around Gerry and rubbed her hip and buttocks and hugged her tight.

She hugged Carla with her left arm and pulled her close. Carla gave a small sound of comfort and buried her face in Sam's neck. A sharp nip on her neck made Sam flinch and sent a thrill of excitement through her body. She felt two hands roaming down her body, caressing and touching sensitive areas. She sighed with pleasure and realized her arms were pinned with the weight of two bodies, one on each arm.

Sam opened her eyes and saw Gerry and Carla exchange grins. They nodded at each other and shifted their position a little, being careful to keep her arms pinned. She felt to warm mouths, one on each nipple, and understood she was a prisoner more than willing to be held captive. She felt fingernails gently scraping the sensitive flesh of her inner thigh, slowly and playfully approaching the entrance to her body. She gasped in anticipation and abandoned herself to pure sensation.

Time passed, positions changed, and stimulation varied. Sam discovered a nipple at her lips and she gently kissed and licked the tempting morsel, then it was gone and she never really knew or cared who it belonged to. There was a sound of excitement and pleasure and she knew Carla was having an orgasm. She found Carla's breasts and held her palms against her nipples and felt the waves of pleasure coursing through her body.

She pressed her lips to Carla's and gently sucked her lower lip. Carla opened her mouth and tickled Sam's tongue with her own. Carla collapsed on the bed, threw her head back and abandoned herself to Gerry's stimulation.

Sam had never seen a woman have oral sex with another woman and she found herself excited beyond her expectations. The sight of Gerry's tongue sliding into Carla's crack was causing desire to pulse through her body. Carla was limp and exhausted. Gerry kissed her mound and stared at Sam. Sam growled and they grabbed each other.

Sam loved the feel of Gerry's warm body pressing on top of hers. She spread the cheeks of Gerry's ass and Gerry cooperated by spreading her legs a little more. The heat of her vulva radiated a sexual energy and desire which Sam obediently covered with her mouth and teased the opening with her tongue. She felt Gerry's tongue slide into her body and she gave an involuntary moan of ecstasy and bent her knees, drawing them up, nearer her body and spreading her own legs to allow Gerry complete access to her body.

They spent minutes bringing each other closer and closer to climax. Both were floating in a euphoric cloud, abandoned to sensation. All thoughts of strife forgotten. Sam felt the waves of impending orgasm and knew she was beyond the point of no return. Moaning in anticipatory ecstasy, she strained to spread her legs as far as they would go, tightening the muscles, to induce a shuddering experience when she felt an incredible sensation radiate through her body. Gerry had run a finger nail over her anus as she thrust her tongue into her vagina. The double stimulation began the orgasm but Gerry didn't stop there. She slowly inserted her finger deep into Sam's ass, teasing to increase the stimulation.

Sam totally lost control and screamed! Wave after orgasmic wave rushed through her body, radiating from Gerry's wonderful tongue to the crown of her head and to the tips of her toes. For the first time in her life, Sam was out of control, simply reacting as her body dictated, totally involved in the pulsating body of her partner.

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Gerry walked confidently into the Monday morning buzz of her office. As always, she made a quick stop by her area to grab her coffee cup and drop off her coat and headed to the office coffee pot. A little light banter but no one mentioned Judy. She wasn't sure if it was deference to her feelings or she'd simply faded from memory. She contemplated how tragedy, when it affected others, was so quickly forgotten.

Gerry knew she was looking good. Absolutely sexy, if the truth had to be told. Not too much for the office but pushing the limit of good taste and she was aware of it. She'd had the help of Sam, Carla, and Kayla in selecting this outfit whose purpose was to catch the eye of Randolph Petty. She felt a smug sense of satisfaction of planning to seduce the man who was trying to kill her. When he tried to pick that cherry, he was going to get a big surprise.

A bit of research and Gerry found an excuse to go to his office to deliver some documents that would require his hand signature. She tugged at the loose neck of her

sweater to make sure it would sag appropriately when she bent over and reveal her naked breasts. She felt a little strange not wearing a bra but it was sort of exciting too. Two months ago, she'd never even have dreamed of such a plot, let alone been involved in one.

She stood outside the door of his office and focused on him. Walking in she smiled and offered a cherry greeting. His back was to her as he was working at his terminal. He grunted a cursory response. Gerry felt a flash of irritation. She'd worked up to this, but how was she going to show him her tits if he was going to keep his back to her? Then good fortune intervened and she stumbled and, dropping the folders she was holding, caught herself on the edge of his desk.

The commotion did get him to turn to see what was happening and the sight that met his eyes was even better than Gerry had planned. The total naturalness of the pose was indisputable and very revealing.

"Miss Cooper! Are you ok?" He asked with apparent alarm. Standing, he took her arm and helped her regain her feet and balance.

"Yes, sir, I'm fine. I just turned my ankle." She wrinkled her nose. "It looks like I've decorated your office with paper, though."

She was forced to get down on her hands and knees to retrieve the documents, some of which had slid under the desk and work station. Randolph Petty very quickly joined to help her and she was pleased when she realized her sweater was having the desired effect. He was so busy watching her breasts swing with the movement of retrieving the papers that he accomplished almost nothing it getting the papers picked up but he was clearly interested in the sight that was meeting his eyes.

Gaining her feet, again with his assistance, she put the stack on his desk and apologized again. He made small talk and Gerry giggled at the right places and touched his arm and delivered every come hither signal she could think of. Later, she told Carla she'd done every thing but hand him a card saying, "screw me."

He finally asked her out for lunch and she was elated. She knew she had him on the line. Now, all she had to do was reel him in.

Lunch went as well as expected. She'd lightly probed him a couple of times and to her surprise, satisfaction and dismay, she found he had paid to have her killed. It was right on the surface of his mind for anyone to scan. She mentally shook herself. Most people never even thought about scanning or telepaths. She could also sense his interest and lust for her. She was shocked when she realized he figured he could do anything he wanted to her because she was going to be dead before the week was out. She managed to keep the horror and disgust from her face and voice. Gerry was sweetness, light and innocence as she made a date with him for that evening.

"That sleazy son of a bitch," Gerry spat. "He stared right me and planned on raping and maybe even killing me." She made the effort to calm herself and continued, "I was checking the accounting file today. He put a stop payment on the check to White

Investigations. I wonder if that was before or after he discovered 'White's' unfortunate accident."

"Easy, girl," Carla said. "You want to be calm and cool when you meet tonight. You're playing a dangerous game, here. We're going to back you up, of course, but you're going to be with someone who wants you dead! You stay in control and we'll nail this sucker."

Gerry could hear Carla's words echoing in her ears as she sat with Randolph's leg pressing warmly against hers. The meal was acceptable, the restaurant was mildly upscale and the music low key. Randolph had not gone out of his way to impress her. She looked around and considered the accommodations acceptable but minimal. Of course, her experiences with Sam and Carla had vastly widened her horizons. She was not the same Gerry of two months ago nor was she the typical office worker who would be impressed by the chief financial officer of small but upscale firm.

Randolf had not picked up on the subtle clues Gerry was radiating. Sam, a few tables away, was as tense and jittery as an expectant mother about to go into delivery. She wanted Gerry to do well and was catching every, to her eye, misstep made. "Sam, settle down. She's doing just fine," Carla whispered. And she was. Randolph was patting himself on the back on his successful seduction of Gerry. He just knew he was going to "score."

Gerry had found his mind a cesspool and she was not attempting to scan or read him in any fashion. It wasn't necessary. She knew what he wanted and it wasn't difficult to make him think he was going to get it. Gerry had never considered her self a "come on" tart but she found herself acting like one and enjoying it. The lethal thoughts running through her mind added spice to the sexual play and innuendo they were engaging in. Sam could see the flush on Gerry's cheeks and was concerned. She wondered if Gerry was enjoying this a little to much.

Gerry and Randolph stood to leave. Gerry wobbled and steadied herself on his arm. She smiled and turned her flushed face to him. "Nice wine," she said, slightly slurring her words. He slightly leered and steadied her, allowing his hand to brush her breast. She turned towards him causing the intimate contact to intensify. She smiled. "Any ideas what we can do now? It's not too late."

He offered a knowing smile and took her by the arm and they left. He said little and seemed to assume that he was in charge. He turned into a hotel and Gerry meekly followed. Her flush was increasing and her breath was coming faster but Randolph assumed this was due to sexual excitement. The thoughts Gerry was having were far from sexual.

The elevator stopped on the fifth floor and she wondered how Sam and Carla would find them. She wasn't too concerned. She was confident that Randolph would not present any problems that she couldn't handle. She really had not had much wine and her

unsteadiness was purely and act for his benefit. The flush was real. Very real, but it was not due to sexual excitement.

The plastic key opened the door and as soon as they had entered and he'd closed the door he was all over her. He removed her jacket and allowed it to lie, in a heap, on the floor. Gerry felt another flash of anger. It was one of her better jackets. He'd pushed her back against the door and was kissing and licking her neck. The time she'd done the same thing to Sam flashed through her mind but this was not the same thing. He had her blouse open and was fondling her bare breasts. Much to her disgust her sensitive nipples responded and she did feel a sexual thrill radiate through her body.

She pushed him back a pace and looked him in the eyes. "Should I let the man who intends to kill me fuck me, do you think? She saw his eyes widen. She saw alarm begin to register and then he put his hand on her breast bone and roughly forced against the door.

"I doubt that you really have a choice in the matter," he leered. "I doubt you're even going to leave this room." Gerry spat in his face, momentarily distracting him. His moment of inattention allowed a crushing knee to ascend between his legs. He grunted and collapsed to his hands and knees. Stepping around, Gerry straddled him and, leaning forward putting him into a choke hold. In less than thirty seconds the was limp.

Dragging him to the bed, she quickly stripped him naked and secured his hands and feet to the bed posts with 180 pound test monofilament. "Doesn't every one carry mono filament with them," she snickered. She felt Sam's concern in her mind. They were close enough for her to sense them. She radiated confidence and satisfaction back to her. She didn't want Sam to worry but she didn't want to be interrupted either. Gerry had plans for the man responsible for Judy's death and she didn't feel like justifying anything to anybody.

She gazed at the unconscious figure, stepped forward and grasped him by the testicles and began squeezing. It took only moments for the pain to bring him to consciousness. He jerked into full awareness and attempted to grab at the source of pain. The monofilament brought instant and cruel realization that all was not well to his attention. He groaned and looked to the right and left. He stared at his bleeding wrists and realized that he was a captive. He glared at her. "You're not going to get away with this, you know."

"Yes I will," Gerry said sweetly. "It's you who won't leave this room alive." She saw panic begin in his eyes. "Did you fuck Judy before you had her killed? Had she been on a date with you that night?" Gerry asked. She held up her right hand and showed him a small silver cylinder. "This is not a civilian laser. Do you know what it is?" She didn't give him a chance to answer. "It's a surgical laser. Guess what they're used for." Her grin cause him to blanch.

She trailed the fingers of her left hand down his chest, belly and tickled the head of his penis and fondled his balls. "Is it going to get hard?" she asked him putting a look of

concern on her face. "Aw, is it to scared to get hard?" She ran the laser over her breast for him to see as she fondled him and now it was his body that was responding. "Do you feel like this little guy is betraying you? Did Judy hold you tight and scream as she came?" Gerry was picking up flashes of what was going through his mind and was feeding it back to him.

He was rock hard, now. Gerry couldn't believe it. He was gasping and clearly in mortal fear but his penis seemed to have a throbbing mind of it's own. She stroked it with long firm strokes and it was obvious that he was approaching orgasm. He was straining and staring at what she was doing. She lowered his erect member and the first gushing spurt hit him in his face. With a flashing move, Gerry activated the surgical laser and severed his penis with one clean burn. The surgical laser was designed to cauterize the cut but the pumping of semen did not stop and it continued to reflexively spurt from the stump. Not even death will stop the spurting of semen. That's the way the body is constructed. The all important load will be delivered.

His eyes widened with horror and he moaned and the moan turned to a groan and the groan elevated to a scream. Gerry, expecting this, grabbed a pillow and muffled all sounds he was making. He thrashed and twitched and jerked. The monofilament was tearing into his ankles and they were turning into a bloody mess. It had tightened on his wrists and tendons had been severed. No major arteries were involved yet so blood loss was minimal.

Gerry heard the door open and Sam and Carla entered the room. She removed the pillow from his face and slapped him awake. "Hi, girls. I was just about to start the interrogation. I hope you don't mind if I gave him the chance to pay some debts first."

Randolf's face was a mask of pain but except for an occasional moan, he was saying nothing. "You know, he fucked Judy and then sent her home to be killed," Gerry told them.

Carla's face turned to stone. With a move so fast it was almost invisible, she drew a short dagger and plunged it into Randolf's upper thigh. He screamed again and Gerry had to cover his face with the pillow. There was more thrashing and more damage was done to his wrists and ankles but no one in the room, except him, seemed to mind.

He had stopped screaming and was staring at the stump of what had been his penis and the hilt of a dagger protruding from his thigh. He was whimpering and shaking his head like he couldn't believe what was happening to him. Carla looked at him and pointed to the dagger in his thigh. "Do you know what's that's for?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I said, do you know what that is for," she repeated and flicked the hilt with her fingers. He gave another groan of distress and weakly said "No."

Carla smiled a him. "That will help you talk. Just like you did now. We ask you a question. If you don't answer, I play with the hilt. Like this," she finished, reaching for the knife in his leg.

"No, no. No, no! No!" He said. "Please, not again, I can't take anymore. I'll tell you anything you want to know. Just not again. I can't take it."

"Oh!" Carla said. "You're much stronger than you think." She slapped the hilt again. Randolph threw his head back and bit his lips and arched his back. A few moments passed and he went limp and lie panting and whimpering.

"See?" she said sweetly. "You really could take some more."

A groan and a fear filled stare was the only response.

"But I want you to think about this. Before the night is over, there will come a time when you won't be able to stand it any more and you'll beg for me to kill you. I won't. And it'll go on and on and on. I've never seen anyone die of sheer pain. I do so wonder if it's possible. Bet I find out tonight." She paused to gauge the effect her words had on him. The spreading pool of urine on the bed was mute testimony of their effect. "Oh we are going to have such fun!" Carla enthused.

As Carla promised, he begged for death. He told everything he knew. He told everything he guessed. The told everything. The privileged communication with a lawyer ends when the information he has is the only thing he as left to bargain with. His mind was ripped apart, his emotions were ripped apart, his body was ripped apart and, finally, when he babbled and drooled and nothing was left of his mind to comprehend what was happening, Carla exercised her full strength and crushed the life from him by filling him with total unrelieved terror.

Carla sipped the hot tea and sat in on the marble coffee table. "He died hard. Very hard."

"Yes. He did. I probed him. I'm not sure which was greater: the terror, or the pain. You want it?" Gerry asked.

Carla nodded. "Yes. Every bit of it." She relaxed and dropped her shields. Gerry made the initial connection and felt Carla's cooperation. The events were recent and indelibly burned into her psyche. It was easy to pass it to Carla.

Carla froze and a tear leaked down one cheek. "He did die hard." She sat for a few moments. "No one should have to die like that." She sighed. "But he got what he deserved. I'd do it again."

Gerry nodded. That sat together in silence, each understanding what the other was feeling.

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Kayla felt chilly and when ever she felt chilly she wondered where Adam was and how he was doing. She looked at the picture of Sam, Carla and Gerry. "Three wild women," she thought. She raised her cup of ginger tea.... "To us," she toasted. "To justice."