

Allemande

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A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

Sitting in a public room of the hotel, waiting... I'm a research physicist -- why the hell am I at a sales conference in Chicago? I know, it's supposed to be a benefit, an honor of some kind. And the sales folks are happy, having a researcher to show off to current and potential customers.

Okay, parts have been fun.

But I've been sitting on my can for half an hour, waiting for those sales clowns to show up with their prospects for a dinner deal. I'll give you another half an hour, and then I'm bailing...

More people walking through the area, something interesting/unusual about them... I took off my glasses to get a better look.

Holy crap! Their eyes are *glowing*... And the area of the floor with the people congregating in it, just milling around, is filled with a pulsing glow... Some of them -- marks on their foreheads?

I closed my eyes and rubbed them a bit. Should have brought the other glasses as well.

I screwed up in my lab a year or so ago. I'd been working on a new dye for broadband tunable lasers. I screwed up and got sprayed in the face, eyes, nose, mouth, and hair with my advanced fluorine-based dye. The good news was that it didn't kill me. It did have a very weird side-effect, though -- afterwards I could see into the infra-red and ultra-violet. Over a period of a week, my eyes became wide-band and more sensitive. Not that I'd told anyone about that, though. I made up eyeglasses with special filters to reduce light levels, and particularly to filter out UV and IR outside the "normal" range.

Even wearing them, things look odd -- women's makeup and hair coloring look particularly garish. Clip-in hair pieces tend to stand out. Clothing too, some times it's little things like the thread used to sew a garment together glowing, other times it's UV or IR markings on cloth. Differences not apparent to "normal" vision really stand out. And without them, exposed to the full range...

One of the things that really causes me pain is the UV brighteners in detergents, particularly the "whiter whites" crap. That's why I'd been wearing the glasses, to keep from getting headaches.

But this was really, really weird! Some of the people -- the well dressed ones, the ones with that air of superiority, attractive, men and women both -- their eyes glowed. Some glow from the hands as well? Harder to tell, but definitely the eyes.

And the area a little off the center of the room, filled with people and that pulsing glow... Was there a connection? Some of them seemed to have ... marks on their foreheads? Hard to tell from here, with the glow, and the other distractions.

Some walked through the area, not even slowing down. Some though, seemed drawn, caught...

I walked closer. Yes, some of them had marks on their foreheads. They were far-ultraviolet marks, invisible to "normal" vision. Some had smudges, little spots, others had lines down the middle of their foreheads, like someone had drawn them with a fingertip, still others had larger oval marks. And all of them, men and women, looked kind of spaced out. The glow seemed to be emanating from a thing in the ceiling; it was hard to tell. While my retinas may be responsive to a wider wavelength range, the lenses in my eyes weren't too good at focusing outside the "nominal" range.

Stepping into the glow -- like walking into a fog bank, a mental fog bank. I felt the tension draining out of me, my shoulders going down, the muscles in my forehead relaxing. It felt like ...

I stepped through quickly, out the other side, and sat down, my heart racing suddenly. It felt like the drugs the dentist gave me before having my wisdom teeth out, tranquilized and then some. I closed my eyes again, resting my head in a hand, breathing slowly, waiting for my heart to slow down.

I watched for a while. Some people, hotel staff and such, walked through the glow zone with no apparent effect. The folks with the glowing eyes didn't seem to mind, either. Others seemed drawn to it, stepping in, almost like they were caught.

Yes, caught -- a man with glowing eyes went into the pool, and found a young woman. Pretty, but skinny for my tastes. He took her by the hand, turning her a little. Their eyes locked, a smile forming on her face, and a more purposeful smile on his. He nodded, raised his other hand, and touched her forehead with a finger -- leaving a glowing mark! He turned and led her out of the glow, further down the hall!

That pattern repeated, with men, women, couples with glowing eyes wading into the pool and fishing. Some seemed prearranged, reunions rather than initial contacts. Yes, those were the ones with marks on their foreheads already.

One woman, my height or a little taller, full figure, eyes glowing. God, I could almost feel myself falling into her eyes. But she picked a young woman, holding her in her eyes, making her shudder as she touched the side of a breast, her forehead, leading her off down the hall... To what?

The glare and the eyestrain from trying to focus was getting to me; I put my glasses on again. I turned to watch people coming into the area. Yes, after a while I could tell which ones were the glowing eyes, the hunters, and which were the hunted, slipping my glasses down a bit so I could peek over the tops to confirm my guesses.

"Oh my, what do we have here?"

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I turned to the sound of a woman's voice, turned in my seat to face a full, perfumed bosom inches from me as she leaned over to take my hand in one of hers. The sight, the scent, her warmth were breathtaking.

"No, up here, my pet..." she whispered, her other hand raising my chin so I looked into her eyes.

Glowing eyes that held me, enveloped me in a fog.

"My! What *are* you?" she whispered, squeezing my hand.

I was hers, that's what I was. Hers now and forevermore.

"Vanessa," a man's voice said from nearby yet from far, far away.

"Alan, look what I've found!" she said excitedly, still holding my hand and my chin.

"Vanessa," he said in a depreciating tone. "We need to begin."

She smiled, and her smile filled me with more joy. She looked at me closer. "*Urbakt?* Alan?"

A hand touched my head, a man's hand, turning me, looking in his face, a strong face, glowing, probing eyes. "Interesting, yes," he said, and released me.

Released me to fall back into her again. She released my hand. Still holding my chin she touched my forehead with a finger from her other hand. Her finger, her palm glowed slightly as they passed my eyes. "Yes, very." The touch of her finger on my forehead filled me with warmth.

She touched the sides of my head with both hands, holding me, leaning closer. Her hands, surrounding me in that fog again, drawing me closer to her bosom, where I wanted to be. She kissed my head and it was like a spark shot through me, from the base of my spine to the top of my head!

She whispered something I didn't understand, her voice far and near at the same time.

They were gone.

My head cleared -- how long? The holding pen was almost empty, only a few people milling about. A glowing-eyed couple strode purposefully into the area, taking one each and striding through, down the hall. I turned back to the entrance, looking further down that hallway, feeling something -- a group approaching?

"Here's one, quick! They're coming!"

A man's voice, a hand pulling me up and out of my seat, a woman taking my arm and walking me quickly to a side door and into a small room. "Wait until they pass," she whispered. She was unmarked, unglowing.

The man took one of my hands, squeezing lightly, then looking in my eyes. "He's not one of us?"

The woman turned me to her. She closed her eyes and touched my forehead. "They marked him, yet let him go? Why?"

We were in a little room, perhaps two and a half meters on a side. There was a mirror on one wall. I moved closer to it. Where were my glasses? Looking in the mirror, I saw the glowing smudge on my forehead -- marked. I tilted my head forward a bit -- another mark on the top of my head where she'd kissed me. The larger marks on their foreheads -- from being kissed? What did it mean?

"What's going on? What's this all about?" I asked.

The woman looked at me, smiling. "We just saved your life."

What?

The man sighed. "Do you think the others got anyone else?" he asked.

She replied, "Don't know -- don't know how long they were here."

I looked at my watch. "At least an hour; at one point there must have been thirty people in there."

Both of them gave me strange looks.

"How many ... hunters?" the woman asked.

I thought for a moment. "A dozen? Fifteen or sixteen? Five or six couples, the rest singles. Why?"

The man asked, "You could ... identify them?"

My turn to give the weird looks. "Yes, and the ones they'd marked."

He raised his eyebrows; the woman sighed and took my hand, feeling, squeezing it.

"What are you doing?" I demanded, pulling my hand away from her.

She shook her head. "You're not one of us..." She held out her hand. "Here, feel."

I took her hand. "For what?" I asked.

"Base of the index finger and middle finger," she said.

"Ssh!" the man whispered insistently.

I felt her hand, remembering how the woman had held my hand -- just a few minutes ago? Her hand felt different, the space between the bones. I took one of the man's hands -- same thing. More of a space, and something in it, than with my hands. The shape of the bones felt different. Yes, remembering how the woman had held my hand, I held theirs the same way, feeling... And both of them snatched their hands away!

"What?" I asked, hissing at them.

The woman looked shocked. "What *are* you?" she demanded.

The man said, "I think it's safe -- let's make a break for it before the cleanup crew sweeps through."

He opened the door slightly, looking out. "Let's go!" he hissed, pulling me along. I grabbed my glasses off the side table near the chair I'd been sitting in.

We ducked through a door marked "Authorized Access Only" into the back hallways of the hotel. We weaved around, popping out near a side entrance, on to the street where he hailed a cab. We piled in, he gave the cabby an address, and we headed off.

"What?" I started to ask, but was quieted by the woman. "Wait," she hissed.

We pulled up to a brownstone in what I assumed was a fairly good neighborhood. The woman hustled me out of the cab, up the steps, and into the building. Sounds of people, like a party. Interesting smells -- perfume? Where was I? We went down a hall, passing a large parlor with a few men and a few women -- one with her leg upon a table? A man eating her? Is this a bordello? Pulled down the hall, downstairs to a room with more men and women.

"Where's Paul?" a man asked.

"I'm Paul," I answered.

The woman with me said, "Taking care of the cab."

"He's it?" another woman asked.

The one who had been leading me shook her head. "We got there late; he's the only one we could save, and ..."

The man who had been with us came in, closing the door behind him.

"Well?" one of the seated women asked.

Paul, the other Paul, made a gesture of despair. "We did what we could once we found out where they were. He says ..."

“What the fuck is going on?” I interrupted. “Somebody start giving me some answers, or I’m out of here!”

The woman who’d spoken earlier stood up and touched my forehead. She gave me a weird look. “Your name is Paul?”

“Yes, it is. And what the hell is your name, and what’s going on, back there, and here?”

She shook her head. “Sorry, Paul. I’m Denise. Have a seat. This is going to be a wild ride.”

As I sat down, she did that thing to my hand, briefly, so I did the same to hers, as the woman had done, and she responded by snatching her hand away and taking a quick step back.

“What the hell is going on?” I demanded again. Looking around, six women and three men, including the pair who’d brought me.

One of the other men stood. I backed to the door.

He held up his hands. “Paul, I’m Roger. We mean you no harm, in fact we’re trying to help, and to understand... If I may, I’d like to touch your forehead.”

“I’m marked, if that’s what you’re after,” I told him. “Okay, go ahead.”

He reached out slowly, gently, barely touching me.

I held out my hands and said, “I’ll trade you...”

He felt mine and I felt his. When I touched him, I felt him almost jumping back. I felt the lump/separation thing in his hand.

“Why do you respond like that when I touch you?” I asked.

He looked at me with wonder, shaking his head. He turned more to the others. “He’s not one of us, yet he’s marked, and coherent!”

“So fucking what!” I shouted. “He’s marked, too, and seems pretty coherent.” I pointed to the seated guy who’d spoken earlier, and had a big glowing mark on his forehead.

The guy I’d pointed to jumped like he’d been stuck with a cattle prod! The woman sitting next to him managed to get a hand to his forehead as he tried to evade her. “He is!” she shouted. The guy tried to get away as people swarmed on him.

And I took the opportunity to slip out the door! I ran back down the hall the way we’d come -- but did we come down these stairs, or the next ones? Shit, I couldn’t remember. I ran up the stairs. As I turned a corner, I heard shouting in the hallway behind me. I took stairs a few at a time!

Damn, and exited into an unfamiliar hallway! Felt like I was up too high as well! Another stairway at the other end of the hall, going down. I took a breath. Slow down.

Doors on either side of the hall, numbered and *Gott sei dank* closed. Through the window at the end of the hall I saw the street. If I remembered correctly, it exited near the front door. Down the stairs, out the door to the street, and run like hell.

A door in front of me opened, a woman stepping out. She saw me and pointed something at me. My eyes stung as a mist hit my face. I raised my hands, but the stinging turned into a buzzing as I fell forward, never hitting the floor.

"It's okay, honey, you're safe," a woman's voice said through the dissipating grayness.

My eyes stung as I opened them. A hand on my shoulder -- a woman's hand. I was on my back, on a bed? Blinking, she was sitting next to me.

"You're safe, honey. I know it's been a wild ride, but you're safe. I'll explain if you'll let me, and I've got some questions as well. First one, how are you feeling?"

I took another breath. "My head hurts, eyes sting. Other than that, and confused, okay I guess."

"Fair enough. We're a little confused as well. From what Mary said, you can identify them, and tell if someone is marked?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm sorry -- please call me Angela. We've rifled your wallet; you're Paul Harris, from the West Coast. What brings you to Chicago, Doctor Paul?"

Her hand on my shoulder actually felt good. "I'm a physicist -- I don't do the 'doctor' bit. Here for a trade show."

She nodded. "You can identify them? And those they've marked?"

I nodded. "Their eyes glow, and some times their hands. The marks -- on foreheads -- also glow." I took a breath. "I can see into the ultraviolet -- their eyes, the marks -- I see them as UV glow. Same for the catch pen, a pulsing UV glow."

She frowned. "Catch pen?"

"In the hotel, where people were gathering, the marked ones, the ones they took away." I moved a bit, feeling stronger, clearing my throat. "And just who are 'they' and who are you? What's going on here?"

"Ultraviolet -- we'd never thought of that. It fits, though, energy leakage..." She sighed and

shook her head, smiling to me. "Paul, I'm afraid you've fallen down the rabbit hole..."

"I got that idea... What was the ruckus downstairs? What's going on?"

She nodded again. "I'll give you the short version. In the beginning, when the world was new, a god walked among us. On his visit, again, cutting the story short, he slept with three women, who bore him sons. From those three sons descended the three races that fill the world. The ones you see with glowing eyes -- they are the children of Jarl, who would rule us all, the wizard kings and queens. We are freemen, the children of Churl. And the rest, thralls, ..."

"Slaves," I whispered, interrupting.

She nodded. "Yes." She sighed again, picking up my hand, touching, feeling. "And you, my friend, are an enigma."

"*Urbak? Urbat?* Something like that, she said," I told her.

She sat back, a look of wonder. "*Urbakt*," she said.

"That's it," I agreed, "What's it mean?" I reached for her hand.

And as I touched her, she jerked back!

"Why do you do that!" I asked, frustrated.

She shook her head. She looked shaken, confused?

"*Urbakt* -- a connection, bridge, key, maybe... Why did you touch me like that?"

I shook my head. "That's the way *she* touched me, back at the hotel."

She nodded, relaxing a bit. "Paul, that's how ... *they* ... touch people, to take them, to mark them."

I nodded, sighing as I remembered.

"Can you tell me what happened? What she did?"

I nodded. "She touched me. She took me with her eyes, with her touch. For that short time, I was hers. I wanted her, I wanted her breasts, to be smothered and lost in them. She touched my forehead, and kissed the top of my head. Then they left."

"They?"

I nodded. "She, and the man with her. Vanessa and Alan."

She nodded.

I tried to sit up, but a wave of nausea swept through me and I fell back, closing and covering my eyes.

She touched my shoulder again. "Paul, have you ever met or seen someone like those people before? That you can remember?"

I shook my head, and it didn't make me feel any better. "I'd remember, and I haven't." I opened my eyes again. "What's going on? Why me, why bring me here, and what went on downstairs?"

She nodded. "They ... gather periodically. We knew they were gathering tonight, here, in Chicago, but didn't know exactly where or when. We were looking, to try and save who we could, learn what we could, without being caught ourselves." She looked at me intently, shaking her head. "We saved you, but why did they mark you and let you go?" She sat back, frowning. "Some think you're ..." She shook her head, then continued. "Downstairs, you unmasked a plant, a spy. We knew we had a leak, but we didn't know... Up to now, we thought once marked, a person became a complete thrall, incapable of independent thought or action."

"So, you can tell if someone is marked?" I asked.

She nodded. "But only by ... touch, essentially -- by touching or almost touching. And we'd so fervently believed... Incorrectly... How long had he been that way?" She sighed. "We'll never know."

I managed to sit up, moving up against the wall, shuddering at the implication of her remark. "Warfare between the groups?"

A mixture of smirk, smile, and sneer filled her face. "*We* think so, but *they* still treat us like mice invading the barn. Or so they've made it appear. But now we know better... They evidently have some respect for us, and we'll teach them more."

"What do they want?"

"Everything," she said simply.

"And what do you want?" I asked.

She raised an eyebrow. "For all of us to live free, of them."

I shook my head. "Where do I fit in to all of this?"

She looked me in the eye and said, "I don't know."

I looked at my watch -- almost eight. "I'm starving. What now? And who are you, by the way?"

She smiled. "Some might consider me a leader of the freemen, but we're all just pests, right? Just mice in the barn... As to what now, were you staying in that hotel?"

I nodded.

"Don't think it would be wise for you to return tonight." She smiled more. "But we can take care of that." She stood up.

"Paul, thank you for your patience. I'll send someone for you in just a minute. Please? We'll take good care of you."

I nodded. I didn't think I could make another break for it anyway. She left and I flopped back on to the bed.

A knock on the door? I sat up, slowly.

Two young women came in, a milk-chocolate colored beauty, and a brunette. Both were very well built. "I'm Tasha," the black woman said, "and this is Karen. And we're going to take you for the best deep dish pizza on the planet, aren't we, girl?"

They helped me up off the bed, generously, even squeezing me between them. "You okay with that, honey?" Tasha asked.

"Sounds good to ..." I was interrupted by them squeezing me again, Tasha looking in my eyes as she did, and smiling.

She chuckled. "Mama said to watch you close and take reeeel good care of you, and that's what we're going to do."

I was walking better by the time we got to the street. The cold air actually helped, but the streetlights... I felt in my coat, and got my glasses. Much better. Of course now I want to make another pair, one which will let in more of the UV.

About a two block walk to a major street and a jumping pizza place. A *very* large man standing by the front door, and a crowd waiting to get in.

"Raymond!" Tasha called out. "Mama called." Tasha took one of my arms, and Karen took the other.

Raymond bowed a bit, opened the door, and waved us in.

"Hey, how do they rate?" someone in the queue hollered.

We were shown to a table in a back corner. Karen ordered a meat special and a pitcher of beer.

The ladies were well known, and I guessed they showed up with the occasional visitor... They

talked to me about the weather and various other inconsequentials. The pizza was great; we had a salad to go with it.

There was still a queue waiting to get into the place when we left. The cold air felt great.

“Could we take a little longer walk back so I can stretch my legs?” I asked as Tasha took my arm once more.

She chuckled. “Don’t worry, honey, you’re going to get plenty of exercise, we guarantee!” Karen took my other arm and bumped her hips into mine. But we did walk back along a slightly different and longer path, entering a side door of the building and walking up two flights of stairs.

We entered a room nicer than the hotel room I had. Tasha stood behind me and whispered hotly in my ear, “Why don’t you go clean up, honey...” as she slipped my coat off.

What a trip! I cleaned up in the bathroom, using the loo, brushing my teeth, washing my face and hands. I still had a glowing spot in the middle of my forehead, and a larger one on the top of my head.

When I opened the door, the bedroom lights were dimmed. Tasha and Karen were both wearing robes, and I had a hunch they didn’t have much on underneath them.

They helped me undress, making me delirious in the process. Karen sat with me on the edge of the bed. Tasha stood in front of me.

As she slipped off her robe, she whispered, “Mama says you need somethin’ special,” and pulled me to a full breast.

They worked me over I don’t know how many times. I don’t know how many times I went to sleep in someone’s arms, only to wake passionately. I couldn’t get enough.

I’d never been shaved by another person before. I’d never been shaved by a naked woman, while leaning back against another naked woman.

But then they dressed me, and delivered me to a sunny breakfast area downstairs, where I was led to a table with Angela, and seated.

“Good morning,” she said with a grin. “Sleep well?”

I shuddered a bit, and she chuckled.

“Thank you for the hospitality,” I replied, taking a sip of juice. “And what now?”

She nodded. “We’ll deliver you to your trade show. After that, we’re not quite sure.” She looked to me intently. “We don’t know what your future holds in store.”

I nodded. "But it may be exciting," I surmised.

"And all that implies," she confirmed.

We ate a nice breakfast.

"How do I get in contact with you, or your ... friends?" I asked.

She got that contemplative look again. "Paul, you're a wild card. For a while at least, you're going to be on your own."

I frowned. "Which means you know how to find me."

She nodded.

"Any hints?"

Another sigh as she raised her coffee cup. "Vipassana, acupuncture -- the Seven Dragons. You're in pretty good health and condition now; improve on that."

I shook my head, folding my napkin. "And if they come for me? Do I run, or do I open my arms?"

She smiled and took my hand. "I don't know."

We hugged. I thanked her again.

In the hallway I met up with Denise from the night before. She had my overcoat. Standing next to her was a blond woman, a real looker.

"Do you need anything from your hotel room?" Denise asked.

Did I see a bruise on her face? "Yes, my show bag and badge. We're still early."

She nodded. "Okay. We'll go over together, and Phyllis will go up and check," she nodded to the blond.

We took a short cab ride to the hotel. We went to the gift shop while Phyllis went upstairs with my key. She returned fairly quickly, nodding to us. We followed her back to the elevator and upstairs.

My room looked like I'd left it. I looked in the mirror -- the spot on my forehead was still visible. If anything the one on the top of my head was brighter! Weird!

Gathered my stuff, and headed down in the elevator.

In the lobby, I held out a hand to Denise. She took mine. Without trying, I could feel the spot in

her hand. "Take care of yourself, and thank you," I told her.

She smiled, a rueful smile perhaps. "Thank you -- for everything."

"Hey Paul!" a man's voice called from across the lobby.

As I turned, Phyllis smirked and stepped into my arms, giving me one hell of a whole-body kiss. "I may see you later," she whispered in my ear, then stepped away, waving a bit and smirking.

I joined the sales guys, who were shaking their heads.

One of them said, "I was going to ask how you did last night, but..."

I smiled. "You bastards stood me up, so I just had to make do."

"Did a lot fucking better than we did," the other muttered.

Riding the shuttle bus to the show floor, yeah, they'd gotten tied up with customers, and it had been a royal pain in the ass. When they asked what I'd done, I smirked.

What I hadn't done was get a whole lot of sleep! I was tired, and when lunch rolled around, I was starving! I spent a lot of time talking to customers and potential customers. I knew the ground rules; I wasn't allowed to schedule field visits; those had to be done through the field working with my (labs) management. Still, it's good to talk to real people every once in a while.

Went to a very good steak house for dinner. No Phyllis at the hotel when I got back. Oh well... I laughed at myself, but sobered up as I saw the glowing spot on my forehead once more.

The night before I flew home, Vanessa visited me in my dreams -- she touched my face, whispering to me, drawing me to her perfumed bosom, and I woke up coming so intensely... I staggered to the bathroom to clean up, startled by the spot on my forehead glowing, pulsing, and the brightness of the spot on top of my head. Still down the rabbit hole! Checking in at O'Hare for the flight back to San Jose and home. The gate agent, and older gal, smiled as she handed me my boarding pass and such. "Doctor Harris, there's a package waiting for you in the lounge, sir."

I looked at my boarding pass -- first class? I'd been upgraded? Okay... "Thanks," I told her, and queued up for the insecurity theatre.

First class lounge, with a little more than an hour before boarding -- and it wouldn't be a cattle call for me this time! Hurray for that! As I checked in at the lounge, the gal there said, "Oh, we have something for you..." She pulled a five by seven inch or so bubble-pack envelope from below the desk.

"Thanks," I told her, and went to have a seat.

The envelope was addressed to me, with my flight number and seat on it. Something small, a little bulge in part of the envelope. What was it? One way to find out...

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Inside was a plastic sandwich bag, sealed, and a little white card. The white card had writing on one side -- "*Think of me -- Vanessa.*" Looks like it was done with a fountain pen. The bag -- a handkerchief? A woman's handkerchief? Suspicion -- I held it up to my nose, squeezing a bit. I closed my eyes as the scent filled me, the scent she'd been wearing.

That fog filled me for a moment.

Then I went cold. She, they, know who I am, where I live. Both sides do.

Fuck.

What now?

I put the bagged handkerchief back in the bubble-pack, put that in my carry-on, and stood up to get something to drink.

Gigue

Dichotomies, that's what I came back to. Pick a dimension, an aspect of life, and I had both extremes it seemed. Extremes, driven to extremes...

My research was going well; I was getting results. But the business group supposedly interested in it had the attention span of a seven-year-old hopped up on a liter of Mountain Dew.

And my working relationships with people -- I could tune in, be so attentive, and was better at understanding what was going on. Yet Linda, one of our young postdocs, and Bea, a lab tech, were flirting with me constantly. Bea was coming on to me pretty strong.

Insights and surprises, that was the theme, in my work and my life. Finding insights, yet so many surprises, both at work and in relationships.

I started yoga again, three days a week at the company fitness center. I could feel the energy in some poses, and when I looked at myself in the mirror, I could see that glow on the top of my head, and see it grow stronger. I learned to move the energy up and down my spine, through my palms and the soles of my feet.

I could "see" the glow on the top of my head, that smudge on my forehead, but my lab instruments didn't detect anything -- very weird.

Dichotomies: insight yet surprises. Some things I didn't understand -- a glow I could "see" but my instruments couldn't. Feeling calmer, stronger, but what was it that seemed to draw those women?

Through a work recommendation I connected with a local therapist who did Chinese medicine and massage, and also hypnosis. She helped a great deal. That thing Vanessa's voice had done, close and far away at the same time, I learned that was an indication of deep trance.

The acupuncture and massage work helped. She could tell something interesting was going on. From yoga, I felt like there were areas in me that were dark. She interpreted that as chi blockage. Whatever her interpretation, she cleared them. Intense!

When I mentioned "Seven Dragons," she nodded and told me she couldn't do it, but knew someone who could -- and I wasn't ready yet, but I would be.

Those dichotomies, so intense! Relaxing on the massage table, breathing through the intensity of her elbow working up the side of my spine, releasing deep muscles.

The combination of things, yoga, acupuncture, call it energy work, I don't know... It brought changes. I felt stronger, more solid. What had been a small glowing spot on the top of my head grew; sometimes it felt as if my whole spine was glowing. And our morning yoga teacher had to remind students that strong fragrances and revealing clothing were not appropriate in yoga classes...

I thought I could avoid the distraction, attention, and even competition for me by seeking out

different venues, different yoga studios. One instructor was mechanical, insisting on positioning that restricted energy flow. Not for me. A small studio, a small class, I was optimistic. Caroline, the instructor for the level 2-3 class, was a Scandinavian woman with clear pale skin, large eyes, superb posture, and an incredible figure. As a new student wanting to join a more demanding class, she wanted to make sure I was ready for the class. That's why I arrived early; I understood her concern. I did the opening sequence I'd been doing, a sequence that helps me warm up and get the energy flowing.

As I stood in Warrior II, arms extended, breathing fire through my body from my palms through my spine and to the soles of my feet, she touched me. I felt the simmering hunger in her.

Or did I kindle it? I knew I could, with a look, a touch, a breath. One reason for yoga was control; I needed to learn control. I had to learn to control it, whatever "it" was, for my own good.

Sitting with friends at lunch, my mind wandering, not paying attention, seeing a pretty woman walking through the cafeteria, feeling the energy and lust rise in me, our eyes connect, and the next thing I know this woman who I've never met is in my lap kissing me passionately in front of everyone else...

Or leaving a store, passing a folding table staffed by leeches, one asks if I want a free personality test... The bile, the energy rose so fast in me! The look I gave him -- he turned pale and staggered back to lean against a wall, clutching his chest in fear.

I needed to learn control. I had to learn control. Yoga, from "yoke," body, breath, mind.

Others arrived for the class and we started.

One other man in that class. It was sad-funny; occasionally as I observed others, I'd see him going all out, really pushing. Why? That's not what yoga is about!

Caroline asked me to stay after class for a while; she thought a different class might be more appropriate for me and wanted to explore.

We started out, just the two of us in a smaller room, with a normal enough opening sequence, except that we did it with more energy than in the class. Then on to more advanced poses.

I was in a variation on pigeon, left leg extended back, right leg folded in front, up on my arms, extending through the spine, eyes closed, breathing through the intensity. She positioned me, moving my rear leg, my hands a bit.

And then I felt her pressing against me as she straightened my hips, then lifted my shoulders. I felt her weight on my bottom, her breasts pushing into my back. Letting my head go back, breathing deeply, I felt her hot breath on my neck. As she lifted my shoulders, her breasts pressed into me more. As I breathed, I could almost taste them, feel them, feel myself smothered in them.

In a flash I was on my back and she was on top of me, kissing me, pressing into me. I could feel her hunger, and as I touched her breasts and her bottom, I felt my hunger grow as well. I held her bottom and she pulled her knees up, grinding herself on my growing hardness. But I was so hungry...

She must have sensed that, putting a hand beneath my head, and squeezing me to her breasts.

I mouthed her breasts through her leotard as I held her waist and hips. She ground against me, moaning and shuddering.

Then she pushed away, moving to all fours above me.

I relaxed on the floor. Saved by a flash of resolve... Control...

But she pulled me to my feet, to a back room in the studio, to a futon on the floor, rolling atop me once more. It wasn't long... It wasn't long before we were naked and she was impaled on me. It wasn't long before I was devouring a nipple as we squeezed each other and she rode me. It wasn't long before she was moaning and quivering, coming around me, doing delicious things with her hips as she smothered me, encouraging me to come as I pulled us tighter together.

I managed to get out of there, after a while. And I didn't go back, for a while...

I tried to identify the perfume on Vanessa's handkerchief. I took it (still in the bag) to a high-end store, Nordies, and their high-end fragrances area. I found a young cutie to help me, and asked if she could identify it. She took a little sniff, then a big one, her eyes locked on mine. Nostrils flaring, pupils dilating, a blush and a tremor running down her -- she nearly raped me on the store floor! I got out, sealing the bag. She ran after me, giving me a card with her phone number on it, and another hug and passionate kiss. Pamela.

The two days later, back at the same mall, Valley Faire, in the Apple store -- looking for a new case for my iPod. A feminine voice asked, "Can I help you find something?"

Turned my head, still crouched down a bit, to see a beautiful full bosom filling a black Apple store shirt. Stood up to see pretty green eyes and a nice smile.

Something clicked, and as I inhaled, I could see, feel, taste, smell her. I could feel her with my whole body, feel my tongue curl around a firm nipple, feel her legs squeezing my head, feel her weight on top of me, feel my hands pulling at her waist as we trembled at the edge of orgasm.

Her eyes half-closed, goose bumps running over her arms, her nipples tightening visibly as a blush and a sighing moan spread through her.

I told her in a whisper she was beautiful.

She mentioned that she got off in an hour. I asked if she would be interested in dinner. Oh yes; I think she was interested in far more than dinner.

Jen -- we had dinner together, a snack in the food court, really. Walking to the car park, she stopped and turned to me, closing her eyes, pursing her lips, opening her arms...

I did it again, letting that flash fill me as I slid my hands along the sides of her breasts, feeling

the electricity as my fingertips pressed gently into her, pulling us together and kissing.

We were going to go to her place and pick up some things, then go to mine. We ended up on the floor at her place, then moved to her bedroom.

Five weeks, almost six, that's how long it lasted, we lasted.

The intensity between us -- sometimes so hot, so passionate. And yet other times, just as intense, I learned to open up, to let go to her. Giving myself to her, especially in the morning, so fulfilling for both of us. For both of us -- I learned to listen, to feel and recognize her needs, and try to fill them.

All those aspects, all those dichotomies, blending together. Yoga and meditation, learning to direct the energy, to move it. Our lovemaking, building those fires, yet learning to let go, to relax into the intensity.

That was the path to control, not blocking it, but learning to use it, and learning to let it use me.

Yet we were two different people, and outside of the passion we shared, we didn't have that much in common. Maybe we didn't want to make that much in common, I don't know. She took vacation to visit family and friends in Los Angeles. We both understood it as a convenient parting.

I went on a two week meditation retreat, stark, severe, and enlightening. In one sense, the emptiness made how I'd grown and changed more apparent.

Returning to the world, moving through all those dichotomies once more...

And one dichotomy, a big one, illusion and reality... What is real? What is illusion? I'd learned so much through hypnosis, some of those experiences seemed so real. The spots on my forehead and top of my head -- flaring so bright in yoga, or making love, yet lab instruments can't detect what I "see."

And the dreams -- Vanessa visiting me in my dreams, her eyes, her scent, falling into her eyes, coming so intensely at her touch, waking in the dark, still filled with her scent, my heart beating wildly.

A few weeks later in yoga at work, more pieces moved together.

I was working with our instructor, Kimberly, a five foot tall dynamo. She was helping me in an intense pose, helping position me as we let gravity assist and do the work.

The light came on over my head -- not too bright, but there nonetheless. Behold the duck! I started laughing softly, eyes still closed, lifting my chin, expanding my chest, lengthening my spine.

Yes, behold the duck!

Serene on the top, paddling like mad underneath! All those dichotomies! And yoga -- intensity and relaxation both! Massage -- working at staying relaxed during intense work.

That's the key -- the duck is *both* serene *and* paddling like mad -- *both*! In yoga, as Kimberly tells us so many times, "relax into the intensity of the pose" -- intensity *and* relaxation both! It's not an *either - or* world, it's a *both - and* world! That's the world I need to live in! To experience, to grasp, both! All those dichotomies, extremes -- inseparable, like sides of a coin. And control? Control is *active*, controlling the *use* of my gift. Not using it isn't control, it's holding back, it's being anal-retentive. Skills are honed through use, muscles strengthened through exercise.

Relaxing into child, Kimberly pressing on my back, coaching my breathing.

"It's an honor to work with you," she whispered.

When I got up, she was gone. I showered and went back to the grind, to life.

Interim

Saturday morning, done with my two yoga classes, I decided to stop by East-West Books in Mountain View for a copy of "Dew Drops on a Lotus Leaf" by Ryokan. I wanted the pocket size.

Looking around, finding the section, zeroing down to the shelf, and ... Ah! They have one!

I reached for it, and as I did, met another hand reaching for it as well.

The owner was a little shorter, black hair with red and blue streaks, brown eyes, a full figure.

"Go ahead, I already have a copy," I told her.

"So do I, I wanted the small one," she said.

"Me too."

She looked more into my eyes, inviting. I hadn't done it in weeks, not since two steamy nights with Pamela... I looked into her eyes, took a breath, and let the feelings wash through me. Sexual feelings, but satiated feelings. Her nostrils flared, she blushed a little, and she kept eye contact.

I wound my fingers around hers and drew her hand closer. The feelings intensified, and I let them flow through me, through us as I kissed her hand. I watched her nipples tighten and heard her growl. She squeezed my fingers.

"I'm Paul," I whispered, our noses inches apart.

She curled one corner of her mouth. "I'm Wendy..."

"What can I do for you?" I whispered.

"What would you like?" she responded, eyes full of lust and promise, slipping her hands around

my waist and pulling our hips together.

Feelings of comfort, afterglow. "Suckle me to sleep in your arms," I whispered to her.

She sighed and shuddered a bit, maintaining eye contact. "Oh, I'd love that."

We left the store without the book, returning to my place, making love on the floor in front of a crackling fire in the fireplace as rain pelted the windows.

Fleeting seconds falling into each others' eyes become hours of passion, days and weeks, the delicious rhythm of contentment.

We fit together, not just in bed or on the floor, but in other areas of life. Walking together, talking together, holding hands and watching the sun set, moving the trash and recycle bins to the curb and kissing in the cool of the evening standing on the street.

She wasn't interested in yoga, she tried the Saturday morning beginner's class for me, but it wasn't for her, and I didn't force it. But she did go to the massage/acupuncturist. Don't know what passed between them, but I cherish them both.

Yes, great change comes in periods of great turmoil, but the rice grows during periods of tranquility. I grew. I deepened and rounded. I learned to control my gift.

Control? What I'd attempted before wasn't control, it was constipation! Holding back! I walked around holding back, so constipated, and every so often I'd lose it, and make a mess! I learned to work with it. I learned to moderate it, and I learned to focus it.

I learned to moderate it, particularly during yoga classes, to minimize the disruption I caused. I stayed focused and calm, radiating calm, if anything. I learned to enjoy it. When I got home, particularly after one of the evening yoga classes where we still had the occasional difficulty with women throwing themselves at me, Wendy would meet me at the door, our eyes would lock, and I'd take that breath, breathing her in, sweep her into my arms, or set her aflame and let her take us as she wanted... It only took once for us to remember to close the door behind me, laying naked and satiated on the living room floor, wondering where that cold draft was coming from...

After a week, she moved in with me. Both of us grew. She grew, more focused, more poised, and at times more aggressive. I learned by letting go to her.

What had been a hard edge, a sharp and ragged edge in me softened.

Contentment, fitting together. Rhythms blending together, the rocking of her hips, the cycles of the tides, the waxing and waning of the moon.

Wendy called; she wanted to show me a dress at Macy's. Okay, I'll meet you after work.

I drove to the mall after work, swimming slowly through rush-hour traffic. We met there once a

week or so. Parked and headed upstairs to the usual place.

Seemed to be a gathering at the entrance to Macy's where we usually met, mall security hurrying past me.

Wendy! I saw her, people around her; she looked like she was in trouble, in panic, eyes wide.

"Wendy!" I called out.

She turned and saw me.

And screamed! She backed away, her face contorted, pushing people out of her way, stumbling into the corner of a kiosk, which only alarmed her more.

I hurried to her, pushing through the crowd. A man to her left said something, touched her shoulder, and she turned on him in fury, clawing at his face!

"Wendy!" I called out again, trying to get to her, the crowd backing away from her.

She retreated, screaming incoherently, bumping and running into things, making a mess of another kiosk. A mall security woman reached for her and Wendy sprung back, stumbling, screaming, backing up, trying to run, her face a mask of panic and terror.

"Wendy!" I called again.

She looked at me, her face twisted. She turned and lurched/lunged away, toward the railing surrounding the second floor atrium.

She hit the railing and went over head first. Screams rose up from the floor below.

I broke to the right, for the stairs, pushing people out of the way. As I went down, I looked to the floor below, twenty feet or so.

She'd hit a metal table and chair, knocking both over. A woman stood screaming a few feet away. I reached the turn in the stairs, taking a few at a time, vaulting over the side of the stairway for the last five to eight feet, running to her side, pushing through people.

She turned, still moving, still trying to get away -- from what? She turned to her back and saw me.

Part of her saw me. Her face contorted more; her head looked strange, something draining from her nose?

Two uniformed guys rushed up; one of them said, "C-spine."

I backed away a bit. A crowd gathered. One of the security people asked, "Who is she?"

I said, "I'm her boyfriend," and tried to give them as much information as I could.

Paramedics showed up and loaded her onto a backboard, putting a collar around her neck. She was incoherent and combative. They took her to a nearby hospital; I followed in my car.

I gave the hospital the information I had once again, helping with insurance info. Yes, we were living together, and her parents were on the East Coast. I'm the best you've got for next of kin.

Through triage to ICU -- broken ribs, skull fracture, no signs of internal injuries, possible spinal damage, concussion and possible brain damage?

Once she was settled in a room in the ICU, I went in. Spoke with doctors and police. No, I don't know what happened; I'd never seen her act like that. Someone reported her to mall security; evidently she'd been acting strange, so one of the female security people approached her. That person quickly called for backup, and more backup. Backup arrived about the time I did and everything went to hell.

One of the docs had questions about her recent behavior. Nothing unusual, no meds that I knew about, prescription, over, or under the counter. We'd been living together, happy, no fights.

I went back to sitting with her. I didn't understand it. I sat there, going back to breath, listening to the beeping of monitors, the hissing of oxygen.

Some time later, I heard her moving. I stood, but stayed out of her vision. She flopped around, clawing at the I.V. lines in both arms, moaning and reaching for the mask on her face. I hit the red call button, stuck my head out into the hallway and called, "We've got a problem here!"

I rushed to Wendy, holding her wrists. She vocalized incoherently, thrashing more. Nurses came in. I did something, breathing, pushing calm into her. She settled a bit. I let go of her wrists. She became combative again. I did it again, touching, holding her, pushing calm into her. One of the nurses said, "Whatever you're doing, honey, keep it up." The warmth and love I'd felt in her wasn't there anymore; all I felt was jagged edges, the sharp jagged and broken metallic edges of madness. I tried to give her the love and warmth I felt for her. She settled down. One of the nurses injected something into one of her I.V. lines, and I felt her muscles relaxing, the sharp edges of madness drifting off.

She'd damaged one I.V. line. They restarted it, taping her up. They got out cuffs and restrained her to the bed, red things on her legs and blue ones on her arms.

I finally sat down again, wiping the tears from my face. I felt the edges forming in me, too, those sharp metallic edges on the corners of my tongue, my taste, the feeling of angles on the backs of my arms and my thighs, the feeling of something coiling up.

Sitting, waiting... Some hours later, it happened again. This time she seemed to go more combative, not really conscious, much quicker. Same drill -- hit the call button and calm her until the nurses sedated her. The Wendy I'd known, and loved, wasn't there anymore, just shattered pieces.

They showed me a recliner at the end of the ward. That's where I collapsed.

Days of hell, living in ICU. Wendy would partially regain consciousness, start battling, and I'd help calm her while they sedated her yet again. One of the docs and I called her parents, letting them know she was in the hospital, in serious condition. Hell of a thing to do, only the third time I'd spoken to them on the phone. They made arrangements to fly out as soon as they could.

More interviews with staff. We got to know each other. They were helpful and supportive, calling me in to help. They didn't understand it; I didn't understand it. I didn't understand how she could struggle and thrash so much with broken ribs -- I'd bruised a rib a number of years ago, and could hardly lift my arms for weeks. They didn't understand it either, other than as a measure of her madness.

They did more tests, scanning her head. Skull fracture, but no other evident problems. Back to the chair, collapsing once more.

I woke to beeping, alarms -- Wendy! I got up, trying to clear my head. moving closer.

But the entrance to her room was full of people and equipment. An ICU nurse pulled me back to the nurse's station.

"What?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Paul, she woke up, more disoriented than before, and as she struggled, she went into cardiac arrest. We ... they ... they're doing all they can..."

I dropped into a chair nearby. I was out of tears. After two and a half days, it was over. I imagine ICU folks go through this all the time, but evidently this was a hard and different one for them too. We had an impromptu gathering with two of the hospital's support staff, trying to talk through it. So many questions. Why?

We'd done what was needed for paperwork already. I didn't know what else to do. Her parents were on their way out from the East Coast; they'd be landing at San Jose in what, six hours?

Sitting again, waiting for someone to sign off yet another form. Looking around, pictures on a bulletin board, one picture had a person with red glowing eyes.

That's when it hit me: *I could have saved her.*

I'd gone part way each time I calmed her, pushing away the madness. I could have saved her -- I could have kept pushing, pushing away the broken shards, the madness, and made her my thrall. I could have kept her as my thrall, but instead I let her die in madness.

Equally clear: *Someone had done this to her.*

This had been a challenge to me, a test. And how had I handled the challenge? I hadn't even recognized it! But that too had been a decision! But how would I make, have made, that decision,

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consciously? For her, or for myself? Would I rather die in madness, or live as a slave, a pet?

Meeting her parents at the airport, giving them the news, unable to explain. We met at the hospital with the medical staff. They couldn't explain it. Carlson, one of the ICU docs, told her parents that one of the few things they were sure of was how much I loved and cared for her.

Having her parents here forced me to keep moving, to at least go through the motions. Taking them to the apartment she hadn't visited in months; the lease was almost up, we'd moved her out. So many loose ends to tie up.

But we worked through them in a few days. I put them back on a plane, with hugs and tears.

And they told me once again, as others had, and still did, "You did all you could."

And I knew that was a lie. I could have saved her.

But I was too stupid to see it, until it was too damn late, and she was dead.

End of Part 1
Rev 2008/09/20

Allemande

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