

Eggs

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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.

Waking

Rashi rolled out of bed as the data poured in through his link. Yes, he concurred; based on current encephalographic and endocrine trends, they had fifteen minutes or so before Predictor 23 was awake and aware.

Or at least as awake and aware as Predictors got, he mused as he verified the status of his team; the rest had been alerted. He moved quickly through security and then through the isolation fields to the antechamber, the last barrier between the outside world and the reduced gravity of the environmental chamber containing his patient, his client.

“Caroline,” he said, nodding to his colleague in the antechamber.

She smiled and nodded in reply, “Rashi... Are we in for a wild one this time?”

He shook his head. “We’ll know in a few minutes. Thank you for waiting.” While she could have entered without him, she had waited, or so he chose to interpret her presence.

“Of course,” she replied with a smirk. “Shall we?”

Together they moved through the antechamber door into the world of Predictor 23.

The holoscreens forming the walls and ceiling of the chamber gave the illusion of a small clearing in a wooded glen. The air moved on citrus-scented breezes with the sounds of rustling foliage and twittering birds.

And in the center of the clearing floated Predictor 23, known to a very few as Joshua.

Joshua floated in reduced gravity, cradled in unseen support fields, physical umbilicals emerging along his back to tethering him to support equipment in the short pillar behind him. A single large polycrystal rested on his forehead in a simple crown.

Rashi and Caroline approached, acolytes and attendants bowing and scattering.

Joshua's eyes were open, but like the polycrystal centered on his forehead, they seemed dull and empty. For now.

Rashi and Caroline approached, Rashi on the left and Caroline on the right. Each commanded links to bring up the displays pertinent to their arts in the air behind Joshua.

Rashi was momentarily distracted and annoyed by noise from the cluster of attendants. Fools -- what did they know? Most of them thought he and Caroline were akin to witch doctors. Few understand the difference between their arts, between the psychoneurologist and the neuropsychologist. As different as night and day!

The displays changed. Joshua started to move. Life filled his eyes; light filled the polycrystal on his forehead.

Rashi and Caroline touched Joshua, connecting with him and with each other.

Joshua made the gurgling noises he made when he woke up.

"Good morning, Joshua," Caroline said sweetly. "How are you?"

Joshua moved his arms, his head, and looked at them with young-old eyes. His body was chronologically fifty six years old. Mentally, emotionally, who knew how old he was? Even to Rashi and Caroline, the two who had looked into him the most, such questions weren't relevant. Joshua didn't exist in the same way, in the same plane, that they did.

"Blue," Joshua said. "Blue Lady!" He flapped his arms; the displays confirmed the energy and agitation Caroline and Rashi felt.

Rashi and Caroline both saw the image in Joshua's mind. They both recognized a caricature of The Lady Blue, a caricature razor-sharp in its accuracy.

"Would you like to speak to The Lady Blue?" Rashi asked.

"Yes! Yes! Blue Lady! Eggs! Blue eggs!" Joshua cackled, flapping his arms.

"We will call her, Joshua," Caroline assured him. "Rest until she arrives..." She touched him, caressing and soothing as she calmed his mind. Rashi pushed links, calming his body.

As Caroline sang a soft lullaby, Rashi turned and summoned an acolyte.

The acolyte approached, bowing, stopping when the protective field glared red -- to take another step would mean death -- only Rashi and Caroline were allowed within.

"Summon The Lady Blue," Rashi told the poor soul. "Advise on her expected time of arrival."

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The acolyte went wide-eyed. Summon? One of the most powerful persons alive?

“Now!” Rashi hissed, and turned back to his charge.

Request

Miriam sat in her private study, forehead furrowed in thought as she studied information projected in the air around her. Hmmm... Recast this one, organize that one a little differently, correlate and pull in more...

Yes, she nodded. She now knew *what* they were doing, but the more important question was still unanswered -- *why*? Simple market manipulation -- but why? Greed? Or something more complex? She started sending a series of requests to far-flung groups and individuals, weaving a web to bring in more information.

As she reviewed the final message, a soft chime sounded. Barely averting her gaze, she brought up the caller information -- one of her senior staff.

She took the call voice-only. "Yes?" she said, her tone of voice clearly signaling this had better be important.

"My Lady," a voice replied, "If you are interested, a Predictor is available to speak with..."

Miriam stood quickly, pushing the link to send her final message. "Yes!" she interrupted as she walked to the door. "Priority transport to pick me up on the roof, priority clearance to the destination! Do it! Now!" She knew from past dealings that a Predictor wasn't "available" to speak with her -- more like a Predictor had "requested" her presence, or so its attendants interpreted things, just as she'd been sending "requests" to others... She'd been trying to involve a Predictor on a matter of some importance for months, placing polite but repeated requests, requests which so far had gone unanswered.

"No time for that!" she told an attendant rushing to her with armfuls of formal clothing. She wanted to meet this Predictor while it was still interested. And if it meant making her appearance wearing only her favorite robe and sandals, so be it! Besides, if she wore anything formal, their security would strip her anyway. Her! Supposedly one of the most powerful people in the System! She smiled fiercely as she rode the lift up to the roof, allowing a pair of attendants to tidy her hair. It was good to be given a broader sense of what is actually important, she mused to herself, but not *too* often.

She smiled more as she arrived at the rooftop and saw the transport waiting. Her staff had handled this one well; one of the small transports, fast and unobtrusive. An aide opened the rear door and she boarded. They lifted from the roof as the door was secured.

She nodded to the senior security aide sitting across from her. "Travel time?" she asked.

The young woman glanced up briefly as she made the query. "Sixteen to eighteen minutes, My Lady."

"And when did my summons arrive?"

The security aide raised an eyebrow. After a pause she answered, “We received the communication nine minutes ago, My Lady.”

Miriam was impressed -- they’d moved quickly! She’d been afraid it had taken an hour or more for someone to work up the nerve.

She noticed the aide looking surprised at the way she was dressed, or not dressed...

“My dear,” she explained, “when Predictors are involved, it is *we* who are called, and time is of the essence.”

The aide nodded.

Miriam closed her eyes and settled back into the seat, focusing... She quickly inquired as to the staff involved in handling the “request” and sent each one her personal thanks.

She started to focus on her problem, but recognized she was still agitated. Query and response -- fifteen minutes to their destination.

Focusing on her breathing, she allowed her mind to wander for a moment as she centered herself. Predictors... Still one of the philosophical questions of the age -- Leaders, Ship Captains, Predictors -- do we *see* the future, or through force of Will, do we *select* a future, *cause* it to be? As a Leader, she’d been in situations where she *knew* which way to go in a situation. And interviewing Ship Captains -- they saw a multiplicity of paths through the Void, and chose one.

Predictors? She was a Leader. She’d spoken with Captains, worked closely with them. She’d made Jumps wearing a Flight crown, experiencing as much as she could. But she didn’t have the Talent. Predictors? She’d worked with them in the past. Living in their own worlds, that’s for sure! The sense she had from working with them, from being touched by one, was one of floating in spacetime, drifting, occasionally sensing something more interesting...

So frustrating! When The Lady Catherine made the first Great Jump, so many Predictors sensed it -- their Predictors, the Spacer’s Guild’s Predictors, certainly others. Yet the reports were so varied, so jumbled. Even after the fact, it was difficult to make the connection between the event and the Predictor’s reports. The discovery of Captain Fred -- the first male to make a Great Jump -- the same mishmash. The attacks on Pentecost and New Haven -- the Predictors saw that as it happened, maybe a little before, not long enough or with enough specificity to do anything. It was, she mused, like the Oracles of pre-Dawn history; the Oracles made their pronouncements, and it was up to you to decipher them, to decide if they were in any way a response to your question.

And her question? It centered around the Great Captains, New Haven, Adam and Celeste, their children, Peter and Joan. What was clear? What did she know? Something destroyed Pentecost. Something attacked New Haven soon thereafter. The attacks on the two

systems, even though separated by seemingly vast distances, were essentially the same; it was reasonable to conclude that the attackers had been the same. Whatever had attacked New Haven had been destroyed. Adam and Celeste were involved; their son Peter lost, along with tens of millions of others, their daughter Joan saved. No further attacks had occurred, supporting the conclusion that the attackers of Pentecost and New Haven had been the same, and had been destroyed.

What was unclear? So much! *How* were Adam and Celeste involved? *How* had the invader been destroyed and New Haven saved? Rumors, wild stories... The heads of the bedamned Guild knew more than they were telling... Or did they? They may know part of *what*, but she was convinced they didn't know *how*.

She felt certain about part of the *what*... It wasn't incredible, it was supported by data and analysis. She'd teased out the information, made her deduction, with a Leader's sense, verified it, and buried the information so no others would be able to follow the same path.

Anomalies, so much starts with small anomalies... She recalled a history lecture from when she was a student at Cambridge, so many decades ago. Decades? More like centuries! The lecturer told the class that a famous physicist in the pre-Dawn era had advised students not to pursue physics, as there were at that time only two problems left to solve -- the advance of the perihelion of Mercury, and the photoelectric effect.

One man solved *both* problems, unleashing the double-edged sword that was the power of the Stars, giving Man the ability to leave his home -- or to destroy it.

The anomaly she'd found -- New Haven, as with most civilized worlds, had families of artificial satellites used for weather modeling and control, location services, and the like. Particularly for providing location services, their orbits were very precisely characterized.

Yet after the attack, *those orbits had changed, slightly*.

A technician dutifully noticed the anomalies, recorded them, corrected them, and went on with the tasks of healing a wounded world. Of what importance were a set of minor orbital anomalies when hundreds of millions had died, a major portion of the planet destroyed?

Yet her Leader's sense pounced on those orbital anomalies. At first, she didn't know why. Yet she *knew* they were the key.

She recalled running and rerunning the data, stepping in small increments of time, watching the families of satellites move slowly, deviate, deviate again suddenly, and settle down again -- perturbed, but settling.

Why?

All the wild rumors... Arguing with her parents as a child -- why did she have to study physics and mathematics, if she was to be a Leader? Her father told her that she had to study

physics and mathematics to discipline her mind, and to understand how the Universe worked. Her mother added that those who do not know how the Universe works are called savages.

Finally, she formed the question, and gave it to the artificial intelligence handling the simulation.

She knew: the satellites were held in their orbits by a gravitational force proportional to the product of the masses divided by the distance squared. The orbits changed, so the force *must* have changed. How could the force change? One of the masses changed. The Leader's leap: assume the planet New Haven disappeared from its orbit, and reappeared some time later. The mass goes to zero during that interval, and therefore the force changes. Question: how long an interval is required to produce the orbital anomalies observed?

The artificial intelligence quickly presented her with an answer: 1.36 milliseconds, plus or minus 0.012 milliseconds. Stepping through the simulation, the orbits progressed, the planet disappeared and the orbits shifted accordingly, briefly, until the planet reappeared. The sudden reappearance of the planet shifted the orbits back, the step-function generating the additional perturbation recorded in the data.

Not wild rumor -- somehow, the planet of New Haven hadn't been present in its orbit for about 1.36 milliseconds. Hard data and Newtonian physics said so.

And she *knew*, with that Leader's sense, that Adam and Celeste were involved. Their presence was the difference between the complete destruction of the Pentecost system, and the failed attack on New Haven.

And if they could Jump a planet -- a planet! If they could Jump a planet, what else could they do? This new generation of Great Captains -- children and grandchildren of Great Captains -- what were the limits of their Talents? How could these talents be used to the betterment of all? How could these talents turn to destroy them all?

Adam, Celeste, and Joan swirled at the center of her questions. Of Adam and Celeste, the Guild reported they were continuing their research mission. Which was to say that Adam and Celeste reported to no authority and did what they bloody well pleased. Oh, they helped, and helped greatly. Of Joan, she knew the Guild was making inquiries, looking for experts to work with Joan, and her parents.

Miriam had studied psychology; she needed to understand how *people* worked. It was easy for her to see how all involved could and most likely would be emotionally scarred by New Haven and the loss of the young Peter. And what troubled her more: the fear of an unbalanced, even vindictive Joan, the child of parents who could move worlds...

"We arrive, my lady."

Miriam took a breath, letting it out slowly as she opened her eyes. She felt centered, even though she knew she was stepping into the unknown.

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She pressed the button to open the door, stepping out onto the landing pad even as her escorts approached.

Miriam met her escorts halfway to the door. “Let’s go! What are you waiting for!” she chided.

Audience

“Doctors, The Lady Blue has arrived,” an acolyte said, bowing and withdrawing from the antechamber.

“That was quick,” Caroline muttered.

“When I was young,” Rashi mused, “my sister kept a spider as a pet, a black widow, small and poisonous. She kept it in a small enclosure. We watched it move slowly, spinning its webs, so slowly, so delicately. Then we gave it some crickets to eat, small live insects. We learned that the spider can move *extremely* quickly -- when it wants to.”

The chime of the antechamber entrance sounded.

Rashi turned to the opening door and was astounded. He knew of The Lady Blue, and had seen holos of her at various functions. He knew her chronological age to be at least 270 years; records from that period were somewhat unreliable, and deliberately obscured when such personages were involved. He and his colleague were considered young at around 140 years, and both had adopted the appearance of a youthful forty or so.

But in swept a woman looking to be barely thirty! Not a girl, as the powder blue robe she wore, with obviously nothing underneath, displayed a body more appropriate to a seductress or professional courtesan! Her hair was pulled back in a simple ponytail, much as Rashi’s was.

But her eyes -- so piercing and so blue! Eyes filled with intelligence, command, such fire!

“My Lady,” Rashi, managed to say. “We are honored by your presence, and...”

“Let’s get on with it,” Miriam interrupted curtly. “We know *who* summoned *whom*.”

Rashi heard his colleague chuckle. “As you wish, My Lady,” he said, bowing slightly.

Miriam sighed. “Miriam among us, please. What do I need to know? I’ve not worked with this one before.”

Caroline was impressed, particularly with the ease their visitor had regained composure. “My Lady, Miriam,” she said, “please follow us in. The wards will recognize you and give you a yellow marker field. Should he gesture to you, for you to approach, it is important that you wait for us to guide you. We cannot control the wards, and while they are programmed to put up a red field as a warning, they may act without doing so.”

Miriam nodded. “Thank you for your warning. Will I be allowed questions?”

Rashi answered. “We do not know, My Lady. It is best if you have the issue foremost in your mind.”

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“I am so prepared,” Miriam told them. “Is he comprehensible?” She knew that while everything that went on in the inner chamber was recorded, she would not be given any recordings of what transpired.

“At times, he is,” Caroline mused. “Afterwards, we will meet with you to interpret. That is our custom, and the best we can offer. Please understand this interpretation is a two-way street; we will need your assistance. We may also be delayed somewhat, but we will meet with you as soon as is practicable.”

Miriam smiled and bowed. “Thank you Doctors, for your skill, dedication, and patience. I pray yon Oracle grants my boon. I am certain, in any event, it will be a memorable experience, and I hope that if nothing else, it will lead you to a better understanding of your Mystery.”

Rashi was impressed. “My Lady, we wish more who enter here had your understanding.”

“Yes, My Lady,” Caroline agreed. “If you would follow, and take care of the gravity gradient as we enter. We will position you, then move to him. While it may take him a while to become alert, situations may change rapidly.”

Miriam followed the two doctors into the chamber.

She paused and stood where indicated, and looked at the Predictor. She saw past the bloated, distorted, hairless body floating before her, sensing the presence of a being who existed in a different realm. She looked into his eyes and saw not emptiness, but depth -- similar, but so different! Such depth! Decision, action -- as she exhaled, she focused on her problem and fell into that depth.

Rashi and Caroline approached Joshua once more, making visible and more detailed the displays they’d had projected into their minds. He was ... coasting, on the edge of awareness.

Suddenly!

They sensed Joshua become fully alert, his polycrystal blazing! He flapped his arms excitedly, calling, “Blue Lady! Blue Lady!”

Miriam struggled to remain calm as she felt suddenly dizzy, her mind buzzing, her mental protection brushed away as if a layer of dust!

Joshua cackled in excitement. “Blue Lady! Eggs! Blue Lady three eggs! Three!”

Caroline signaled her concern to Rashi; their charge was more excited and agitated than they’d seen before. “What are they, Joshua? What are the three eggs?” she asked.

Joshua cackled more. “Three! Eggs! Blue eggs! Big eggs! Big big big!”

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“What is the first egg, Joshua,” Rashi asked.

“Glass! Joan!” Joshua responded. “Look through glass to find Joan!”

After a pause, Caroline asked, “And the second egg, Joshua? What is the second egg?”

“Agha Lux! Dark then light! She sends her away! Away to take away the sins of the worlds!” Joshua cackled, flapping and spitting.

Rashi was becoming very concerned and through the link he shared with Caroline, they prepared for emergency sedation.

Caroline concurred with Rashi. She stroked Joshua, trying to calm him. “That’s very good, Joshua. What is the third egg? Can you tell us about the third egg?”

Joshua laughed with such glee! “Egg! Her egg! She drops it! She has to keep it! Has to! Has to keep it! Has to keep it or else...” Joshua suddenly pulled his arms in close, closing his eyes tight, turning his head, wailing.

Rashi and Caroline recognized an acute fear response. Caroline reached in with her mind as best she could to calm him. Rashi initiated medication, joining in trying to calm their charge. Caroline gripped Rashi’s arm, trying to steady herself through the mental onslaught. Joshua wailed and shrieked, radiating tidal waves of fear. Seconds of roiling, churning fear, both of them holding on to Joshua, physically and mentally, riding through the onslaught, hoping to ride through the onslaught.

It was over.

Rashi and Caroline verified their own observations with what the instruments told them. He was sedated, resting.

They stepped back, turning, checking each other, both had survived the shock.

Two acolytes had been in the chamber. Both were unconscious, suspended in catch-fields. One looked to have vomited.

They moved to The Lady Blue. She floated inert in her catch-field, pale, eyes glassy.

The chamber’s containment had held; Rashi gave orders calling in others to attend to the acolytes while he and Caroline took The Lady Blue to an adjacent treatment room.

Interpretation

Miriam kept her eyes closed, sensing the presence of two people. Correction -- the presence of two caring people. She lifted her hands slightly, turning out her palms. Warm hands held hers. She breathed slow and deep.

She opened her eyes, looking to the two doctors.

Rashi monitored her readings return to a nominal range. He was impressed with her ability to recover from such a shock so quickly. But then again, that was to be expected of one such as she. "As you requested, My Lady -- a memorable experience for us all," he intoned.

Miriam laughed out loud, still holding their hands, and was soon joined in her laughter.

After a bit, they helped her to sitting, moving to sit in comfortable chairs around a small table.

Miriam felt almost recovered. "Yes, doctors, as I requested... Now can you help me understand it?"

Caroline asked, "Can you tell us what you experienced?"

Miriam nodded. "When I looked at him, his eyes -- I saw that they weren't empty, they were deep, so deep." She took a breath, remembering. "The Leader's sense -- I acted without hesitation or doubt. Gathering my problem in my mind, I jumped into that depth, giving myself to it. What happened next? He... He swept past my mental defenses as if they weren't even there, yet where he looked, where he sensed -- again, so deep is the only way I can express it. The shock of it -- when I was young, a teenager, there was a kidnap attempt. The house I was staying in was flooded with a gas, a drug. I didn't know it, but my body had already been altered to protect me against such. I never completely lost consciousness, but I was immersed in a tingling, a buzzing. The same in there, immersed in it. Then you brought me here."

Rashi and Caroline exchanged glances.

Caroline took Miriam's hand and squeezed it gently. "Not empty -- deep. You have given me an insight I should have had the first time I was in his presence," she whispered.

Miriam smiled and bowed slightly. "Consider it a down payment. What happened? I thought I heard him talk about eggs, three eggs. But that's all."

Rashi sighed. "As you may appreciate, interpreting the Oracle is tricky and error-prone. We know from working with him that eggs usually refer to errors, mistakes. He sees you making three mistakes, three errors, big errors."

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Caroline frowned. "I'm not so sure. They're big, I agree. But I sensed something else -- decorated eggs, festive eggs, painted and jeweled, searching for them, joy in finding them. Happy and humorous."

"Easter eggs?" Miriam suggested.

Rashi shook his head. "Quite possible. My colleague has a far better empathic connection. But we agree, three events?"

"I agree," Caroline said. "And the first one, you are looking for someone named Joan?"

Miriam said, "Yes, she's central to the issues."

"You find her by looking through glass," Rashi told her, repeating but not interpreting.

"What does that mean?" Miriam asked. But as she thought... "Oh! I find Joan by going through Felix Glass! He worked with her parents, and probably with her!"

Rashi pushed his links. Felix Glass was a renowned child psychiatrist on Canticle. "Good," Rashi said. "The second egg, event, someone named Agna Lux, something like that. His speech was becoming more garbled. Do you know that person?"

Miriam pondered. She rolled the words through her mind... She let them roll on their own... Memories of a cold room, cold and damp, bad lights and poor print... "Not a name! It's Latin, an ancient tongue!" She gasped, "Lamb of Light?"

Caroline wasn't sure she was following. "You send her away, to take away the sins of the worlds."

Miriam squeezed the hands in hers, looking up, looking out... "It's Joan -- she's of Siren stock, covered in white fur. Lamb of light. But I send her away? I want to talk to her!" Miriam paused, gasped again.

"Are you all right, My Lady?" Caroline asked as their guest went pale.

Miriam shook her head, looking up, looking into the distance, moisture filling her eyes. "Yes... It fits... Latin, one of the Old Tongues -- *Agnus Dei Qui tollis peccata mundi...*"

Caroline shook her head in wonder and whispered in response, "*Miserere nobis...*"

"What?" Rashi queried.

Caroline looked to Miriam. "My Lady, Miriam, what goes on in this chamber is *not* recorded." She looked to Rashi and said, "Old, so old -- Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the worlds, have mercy on us."

Rashi shook his head in wonder.

“I send her away?” Miriam asked again.

“That’s what he said.” Rashi said as he glanced to Caroline.

Caroline nodded. “The last one is the most troubling, and the most confusing, My Lady, Miriam. He started out so excited, so happy -- again, I had the sense of happiness, brightly colored and decorated eggs, particularly with the first one. The way he flapped his arms -- he does that when he finds something funny. With the second one, there are multiple feelings -- you might think it is a mistake, but it must be done. I sensed amusement and great irony. The third egg is a big egg, something big, important. This one, he referred to it as *your* egg. An egg you drop. I don’t know what that means. And it starts with that same sense of humor, of irony... But... This is the troubling part, My Lady. While he says you drop the egg, he also says you *must* keep it. I don’t know what that egg is, My Lady, but you *must* keep it when you find it. The consequences of you not keeping that egg, whatever it is, were so frightening that we had to sedate him.”

“But you don’t know what it is?” Miriam asked.

Caroline shook her head. “Your egg. You drop it, but you have to keep it. That’s what he said. I infer that you will have a choice as to keeping it or not. And it is *very* important that you keep it.” She paused and sighed before continuing. “We may get more from him later on this; I don’t know. If we do, rest assured I will personally call you. I’ve never seen him so animated, and then so frightened.”

“I agree, My Lady,” Rashi added somberly. “When we lost Pentecost, and then part of New Haven, he was frightened, but not to the degree we witnessed today.”

Miriam shook her head. “More frightening than the destruction of an entire system?”

“Do you have any additional insights?” Caroline asked.

Miriam sighed. “I’m open to them, but nothing is forthcoming...” She snorted, then continued. “I sense, I know, that it centers around the problem, dealing with the Spacer’s Guild. I tell you this in confidence, of course, to give you context, in the hope you may have something to add. Joan, daughter of Great Captains Adam and Celeste, survived the attack on New Haven. Her brother Peter died. Felix Glass worked with Adam and Celeste, and would be a natural to work with Joan. Yes, I want to talk to that girl. More than that, I want to know that she is safe and well. I share the fear our friend in there had; I fear for us all. Does that help?”

Rashi and Miriam exchanged looks. Both shook their heads.

“My Lady, we promise we will remain attentive to this. You may hear from us again.”

Miriam sighed, closing her eyes momentarily. “When you call, use the phrase, ‘Lamb of Light,’ and you will be connected to me immediately.”

Caroline sensed something large looming around them, her eyes filling with moisture. “My Lady...” she whispered, her voice cracking.

Miriam looked to Rashi, then to Caroline. She squeezed their hands. “I know...” She smiled, an impish smile. “It was I who wished for a memorable experience. Perhaps I should have wished for a dull one instead?”

The three chuckled.

“My Lady,” Rashi said, “that is not our lot in life.”

Miriam sighed and stood up. When the others stood as well, they exchanged hugs. “No,” she said with gathering strength, “as others have noted, we are called on to take up burdens commensurate with our abilities.”

“At the very least,” Caroline agreed.

Miriam sighed again. “If you would show me out? Rest assured, Doctors, whatever this third egg may be, I *will* keep it.”

Rashi and Caroline watched as The Lady Blue paused and looked far away for a moment. They saw in her depth and strength. They saw a smile form on her face.

Miriam shook her head. “I sense -- I know -- when it happens I will recognize it and act appropriately. And I sense that it will change my life, more than anything I have done before.”

She sighed again. “I beg your leave, honored Doctors. My presence here has been too exciting for us all.”

Rashi and Caroline walked The Lady Blue to her transport. They separated with another hug, a warm, human hug suggestive of the bond formed among them.

Back in the security of the antechamber, Rashi sighed and looked to Caroline. “Do you have any idea what it is?”

Caroline’s eyes widened. “Other than enough to get lesser people mindscrubbed and turned out tending flowers? The third egg? Not a clue.”

Visitors

Doctor Felix Glass returned to his desk with a fresh cup of tea. He smiled and sighed as he sat down, the familiar creak of his chair, the sounds of the centuries-old mechanical clock hanging on the wall reassuring him that he was home.

And home meant piles of work, he reminded himself. Back to the life of the teacher, the counselor, the doctor, the healer. Cases to review, students to lead, correspondence... With a sip of tea, he returned to the tasks at hand.

How his life had changed, he mused, putting aside a file and selecting another. Reviewing it, thinking, pondering, he became aware once more of the light from the crystal in his forehead flickering, throwing color onto his cluttered desk.

Crystal and crown, and the crystals that appeared some times in his hands and feet -- gifts from Joan. The one in his forehead, visible all the time, was an eye allowing him to see, to see into bodies, minds, souls. It was also a hand, allowing him to reach in and touch, change, heal. What an important part of his practice it had become! Starting on Dita's ship, healing Dita and Raphael, working with Joan. And back on Canticle, working with patients, colleagues, and students, able to see so much, do so much.

He smiled, sitting back as the light from the crystal flared brighter for a moment. And it was also a window into him, into his soul. One of his colleagues chided him after the thesis defense of a Ph. D. candidate, he'd been inattentive during the proceeding, and the crystal showed it.

On Almost, in the arms of Lady Yanu, it flared with such brilliance, such intensity -- the intensity of their passion. She told him how it flared in passion, or when they argued. She told him of the softness and peace it radiated when she suckled him and sang him lullabies.

He sighed and shook his head -- another challenge, learning to master a telltale.

But after a short period of work, his communicator chimed. He answered, but the message came up text only! Why? University relations at the spaceport? A group of men here from Manhome, *demanding* to see him! An attached message, from University counsel, reminding him that according to the treaty of ... they had no authority on Canticle. If he wished to see them, he could. If he didn't wish to see them, he did not have to.

How many were there? Seven. What did they want? They weren't saying, other to insist loudly and rudely that they *must* see him, *immediately*!

Felix frowned. He had a dinner appointment with colleagues in half an hour.

He queried, how did they arrive? On their own ship, an unmarked, unscheduled ship. Its armaments had been secured. That surprised him -- an *armed* ship?

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He pondered for a moment, and followed his intuition. No sense hurrying a meal. He sent that he would meet with them in three hours.

They insisted -- *immediately* -- was the reply.

Felix queried as to the safety and security of his correspondent, and was relieved to read that they were quite safe, and found the situation highly amusing.

Felix replied that his visitors could see him in three hours, or never; their choice.

Reluctant agreement.

He paused to ponder a bit more. Here, or there? Here felt better. Fine, he sent, reception was authorized to give them his address in three hours time.

Done, and his visitors had been warned to behave, or they would be told to leave.

Felix thanked his correspondent, did one more review, and made his way to dinner.

Returning from an enjoyable and productive meal, Felix was drying wine glasses in his kitchen when a voice boomed *through* his cottage.

“Felix Glass! The Lady Blue demands your presence, Felix Glass!”

Felix was startled -- he’d thought his cottage quite solid and secure! And if the voice was that loud inside, what were his neighbors hearing!

The voice continued, repeating. Felix startled, made to rush to the door, but paused. Crown and crystal flared into brilliance. The professional part of him analyzed -- a highly amplified and shaped voice, rich in subsonics and supersonics, carefully designed to instill fear and obedience. The problem with such tricks was, once discovered, they only piss people off.

He walked calmly to his door, dishtowel still in his hand. He opened the door and stood on the step.

“Felix Glass!” boomed the voice.

Felix pointed at the almost three meter tall, gaudily armored and uniformed man flanked by three shorter but similarly gaudy individuals on each side and said simply but with authority and command, “Quiet!”

His crystal and crown flared as he spoke, and the speaker was silenced.

Felix looked at, and into the speaker. What a sad, sad, sight... Inside that gaudy outfit was a two and a half meter tall man, boy really, obviously from a light-gravity world. The uniform/armor barely held the poor lad up in the comparatively stronger gravity of Canticle.

And the shiny surfaces imitating armor? Thin plastic with a reflective coating, and not even a very good one. And the center piece, the chest plate, ah, that's the trick -- a microphone next to the lad's mouth fed a speech processor and amplifier which drove the sound reproduction field generators in the chest plate.

"What do you want, fool?" Felix demanded.

"Felix Glass!" the voice boomed, "The Lady Blue demands..."

"Quiet!" shouted Felix, pointing with the dishtowel still in hand. Crystal and crown flared and the speaker went silent once more.

Felix looked deeper, more closely, and smiled. He pushed his links to verify, then reached in through his crystal and adjusted the speech processor, lowering volume, and... "That should be much better," he remarked to nobody in particular. "Now what do you want, boy, and quit repeating yourself!"

The imposing figure spoke again, but instead of a deep commanding voice booming out, the sound that emerged was that of a giggly little girl.

"Felix..." The guard captain paused. "Felix..." The same giggly little girl voice repeated.

"Much better," Felix nodded with a smile. "But you're repeating yourself, boy! I know who I am! Get to the point!"

The figure straightened up and pointed a polished and tasseled gloved hand at Felix. "The Lady Blue demands the presence of Joan, daughter of Adam and Celeste! You are to accompany us..."

"You have no authority here," Felix interrupted, speaking quietly. "What does Your Lady want?"

"The Lady Blue demands..." the voice giggled.

Felix waved a hand dismissively. "Get to the point or bugger off! You and Your Lady have no authority here! Now what do you want? I've got dishes to dry."

"Felix Glass, The Lady Blue demands to know the whereabouts of the girl Joan, daughter of Adam and Celeste."

Felix smiled. Hard to make demands in such a voice, but then, that just confirmed his choice had been a good one.

"So? I don't know where she is," Felix replied truthfully.

“Felix Glass, The Lady Blue demands to know if you can find or contact the girl Joan.”

Felix shook his head. “Compound and poorly worded. I don’t know.”

After a bit of thought, which must have come difficultly and painfully to the young guard captain, he asked, “Felix Glass, The Lady Blue demands you find the girl Joan and tell The Lady Blue of her whereabouts!”

Felix nodded. “Better, a *little* better... No.”

Quicker this time, “Felix Glass, The Lady Blue demands you contact the girl Joan and tell her that The Lady Blue demands ... wishes to speak with her immediately!”

Felix tilted his head in thought for a moment. “No. Why does she want to talk to Joan?” Indeed, why did one of the so-called Lords and Ladies who thought they ruled the galaxy want to talk to Joan?

Cleansing

Joan closed the wooden chamber door behind her and sighed. She could relax, rest, for a moment. She'd cleansed quite a few worlds of her brother's presence, but this was the first inhabited world she'd followed him to. Oh, he'd moved on, she was still many steps, many jumps, many worlds behind him, but she was catching up.

But on this world, the things he'd done to the people, their pre-industrial societies... He'd brought out levels of pain and suffering that should have taken centuries to develop on their own. She'd cleansed the bulk of the stain, but so many damaged groups and people remained. Almost too much for her to handle.

No, it was too much for her to handle on her own. She couldn't afford to spend the time healing every one, or most of them, or any more than the selected few she'd dealt with.

But abandon them? She wasn't ready for that, either. Yet she *had* to move on, following her brother, cleansing his path, another step on her path to saving and healing him.

But how? She searched her heart.

Then she searched her mind.

Felix -- Doctor Glass. He would know, and he knew people who could help. She smiled, looking through the personalities and memories she'd incorporated. She could see cadres of psychologists, anthropologists working their way through this world, helping, studying, healing.

She looked at the thinned and oiled hide stretched over a rough-hewn frame that formed a window in the little room.

And she laughed -- look through Glass to find the answer!

Initiative

Miriam sat and fumed. She decided -- she hadn't gotten to where she was through inactivity. And this wasn't the time for subtle, indirect approaches. Such approaches were appropriate for those renegades on Barker's world -- draw them out into the open, carefully, slowly, where they could be examined, and *then* squash them like bugs.

But here...

She'd sent a group of her personal guard to Canticle. Ideally, they'd bring back Joan. She didn't think that would happen. More likely they'd get what information they could from Doctor Felix Glass, or bring him back so she could talk to him. That's what the Oracle, the Predictor had said -- look through Glass -- the first egg. But somehow, she didn't think this step in and of itself would get her the information she wanted -- a necessary but not sufficient step. They wouldn't arrive on Canticle for another few days, depending on how many jumps their Captain needed. Damn Guild anyway; so few Captains who could make the really long Jumps.

So she acted boldly and decisively. Who in the Spacer's Guild should know the most of these matters? Lord Raphael Gulliermo Tanaka, as head of the Guild, certainly should! And she knew, Raphael had been to Canticle, left Canticle with Glass, and then appeared a few days later in the Manhome system, setting off histrionics from Predictors with even minimal Talent. But what those Predictors were hysterical about, nobody was sure just yet. At least nobody who could explain it to *her* was sure. Possibly Lord Tanaka knew.

There was one way to find out!

She had met him socially and professionally over the years, the decades. At the formation of the Spacer's Guild, she and her fellow Lords and Ladies couldn't think of a better person to head the Guild. He had integrity, drive, and compassion. He looked to the long term, and to the betterment of all.

She smirked; she wasn't going to test his integrity, more his ability to compromise. That and his performance... She was glad he was one of those who took care of his body.

Such efforts at arranging meetings among the so-called high and mighty usually fell into one tail or the other of a highly bimodal distribution -- which is to say very easy or damn near impossible.

This one was *very* easy, almost as if it were meant to be, she mused as she waited politely as an attendant put her first call to Lord Tanaka directly through to him.

"My Lady," Raphael said with a suitably formal bow as his image appeared before her, "How may the Guild and I be of Service?"

Miriam smiled; this could be quite enjoyable -- Raphael looked very good.

“My Lord, Raphael,” she offered, moving to personal forms, “I wish to meet with you to discuss a matter of interest and concern to us both.”

Raphael raised an eyebrow. “And that is, Miriam?” He too could be personal.

“New Haven, the family, and particularly the surviving daughter,” she said, balancing the direct with the indirect, unsure of how many were monitoring this conversation, or how widely it would be disseminated.

Raphael nodded. “I am interested. What do you propose?”

Miriam knew the holoview that Raphael was seeing, and how much of her it showed. Her posture was one of openness, invitation. “I propose you join me for dinner. I will share with you what I know, what I have learned, what I have deduced, and what I fear. After that, I will be open to your suggestions.”

Raphael smiled, a rakish smile, and ran his eyes suggestively over her holo. “Miriam, are you attempting to influence me?”

Miriam laughed. “My Lord Raphael, if you will allow me, I will put everything I have into your seduction. And I promise to you, My Lord, that I will take nothing from you except our mutual pleasure. From the moment our dinner ends, until we break our fast the following morning, I will ask nothing from you of my quest, but give all that I have and take all that you can give for our pleasure. This is my offer and my promise, Lord. What say you?”

Raphael smiled broadly, taking a breath and letting it out in a lusty sigh. “Miriam, My Lady, I accept your gracious invitation. Shall we say tea time, day after tomorrow?”

Miriam bowed her head briefly. “Thank you, My Lord. I will send a car for you. You have our pledge of your safety and security.”

Raphael bowed slightly, and looking into her eyes responded, “I know I will be safe in your arms, My Lady.”

Miriam allowed the flush she felt to become visible. “Until then, Raphael...”

Interlude

<dinner and conversation between Miriam and Raphael>

Convergence

Miriam slowed the motion of her hips as she sensed Raphael approaching another orgasm as she rode him. She was finding it difficult to focus, enjoying her task, both of them in a haze of pleasure. His hands gripped her waist again, pulling as she swirled her hips, bringing sounds of passion from them both.

Felix shifted his weight as he stood on his porch and pondered. As much as he didn't want to believe it, the tall one was the brains of this outfit. And he seemed to be having difficulty accepting "No" as an answer.

"Felix Glass," the giggly voice said once again, "The Lady Blue demands to speak with the girl Joan!"

Felix waved his dishtowel dismissively. "She's not here, child!" A persistent child, at that!

Joan walked to the clearing behind the set of ramshackle buildings. She turned and faced the twin moons, knowing many eyes were upon her. These people -- so superstitious -- let them believe what they will. At least she had balanced out the darkness left by her brother. She raised her arms as she looked into the Void, looked for Felix. She found him -- and others? She smiled as she took a slow, deep breath. This was going to be fun! She lowered her arms as she exhaled, and Willed herself there.

Felix felt something, someone familiar approaching. He looked to his right...

And Joan appeared, surrounded in a cloud of living light, wearing a tunic of rough cloth.

Felix fell to his knees.

Joan turned to the soldiers. "I am Joan. What do you seek?"

The tall one knelt on one knee, bowing his head in respect. "My Lady Joan, The Lady Blue wishes to speak with you."

Joan stepped closer. Even on one knee, head bowed, he was far taller than she was. "About what?"

The speaker hesitated, but replied, "I do not know, My Lady."

Joan nodded. "When does she wish to speak with me?"

This time the speaker didn't hesitate. "Immediately, My Lady!"

Joan turned and gave Felix a fierce smile. She turned again to the speaker, and sat on his bent knee. "Immediately? She wants to speak with me immediately?"

"Yes, My Lady!"

She glanced once more to Felix, grinning mischievously. "Then let's go see her, right now!"

Miriam rocked her hips slowly, savoring her own orgasm as she felt Raphael fill her once more. This one felt special somehow. She touched him, cooed to him, looked into his eyes; soon she would be asleep in his arms.

Alarms sounded! She felt the protective catch-fields snap into place!

She saw red alarm fields surrounding two intruders. No, the guard captain she'd sent to Canticle, and a small Siren child! Joan! Weapons fired automatically, without effect, then stopped!

Joan took a step away from the guard. With barely a flicker from the crystals in her head and hands, she disabled the weapons systems. "You wanted to see me?" she asked the lady on the bed.

Over the din of the alarms, Miriam screamed, "Get out! Get out of here!"

Joan smiled, gestured to Miriam, and bowed. "As you wish, My Lady. I wish you peace..."

Joan and the guard captain vanished.

Miriam released her grip on Raphael slightly, even as the adrenalin rush hit her. Raphael was trying to move underneath her.

Miriam caught her breath, and started to laugh. She'd done it! The girl had been here, and she'd sent her away! The second egg!

Miriam canceled the alarms, canceled the alerts. She bent over and kissed Raphael. "We are all right, My Lord." She moved to his side. "Hold me, please."

Raphael pulled her closer, inhaling the perfume in her hair. He kissed her and held her tight.

Felix watched six supposedly trained men scramble around chaotically. “I believe they went to see The Lady Blue,” he told one of them. “That’s what she wanted, wasn’t it?”

And as they babbled, Felix felt it again. He pointed to a spot on his lawn and said, “Watch! There!”

Joan and the guard captain reappeared. Joan walked to Felix, who picked her up in his arms. The guard captain was surrounded by his men.

“Captain,” Joan said, “Your Lady wished to see me, is that correct?”

“Y... yes, My Lady,” came the hesitant still giggly reply.

“And we saw her, and she sent us away, is that correct?”

“Yes, My Lady.”

“Then you have completed your task and should return home. Thank you for your devotion and your service.”

He stood for a moment, then turned and led his men back on the path toward the University.

“Just like that?” Felix asked Joan.

She laughed. “Of course not!” She hugged Felix. He put her down.

“Doctor, I have a most interesting problem to discuss with you. Some of your colleagues will be interested as well.”

Felix opened the door to his cottage. “Perhaps we should discuss it over tea, My Lady?”

Joan walked into the cottage, followed by Felix, who closed the door behind them.

Over breakfast, Raphael asked, “Who were the visitors last night? I didn’t get a chance to see them.”

Miriam paused. “My guard captain, and the girl Joan. They were only here briefly.”

Raphael put down his knife and fork. “Here? Where are they now?”

“I imagine my guard captain is on his way back from Canticle. As to Joan, who knows?”

Raphael sat back.

Eggs

Miriam nodded. “Yes, confirmation of so much -- I sent that man to Canticle, and I presume he arrived there. She brought him here, through multiple defenses, presumably in one Jump, and I don’t recall seeing any Ship. I presume she took him back in the same manner.”

Raphael sighed. “Yes, so it would seem...”

“And her parents, albeit in an act of desperation, Jumped the entire planet of New Haven. My Lord, the implications of these events, these talents, are most troubling.”

Raphael nodded. It was the only confirmation he would give, yet it was sufficient. He picked up his knife and fork. They continued breakfast, and their discussion.

Miriam hugged Raphael as they stood on the veranda later in the day, then walked him to the waiting aircar. With another brief hug and kiss, she saw him off.

She sighed, watching the aircar disappear into the distance. She heard and felt staff scurrying behind her, able to move about freely once more now that their guest had departed. She checked house status. She snorted and shook her head. What difference did such defenses make now? Multiple screens and catch-fields? In addition to all the supposed defenses of Manhome? To those who could Jump from planet to planet? The girl could just as well have sent a bomb, a hungry, snarling bandersnatch, a swarm of poisonous ... Miriam shook her head. No, for now they had to rely on hope, a positive view of human nature, and the rarity of such Talent. Miriam had never been one to pray, but as she watched the sunset, she silently hoped that such talents would only be given to the pure of heart.

She turned. She should shower, clean up, and return to her office... She closed her eyes and hugged herself through her robe, feeling and smelling his presence, feeling his presence within her still. Last night had been special... She laughed softly -- in more ways than one. She’d shower later.

She didn’t shower until the following morning. She allowed the shower to dry her, and decided to brush out her hair herself. As she stood in front of the mirror, looking at her naked form as she brushed, she felt ... different. Rounder, softer somehow.

Something had changed. She called on house systems to scan her.

The brush clattered to the marble floor when she received the results, her hands pressing against the cool marble countertop to steady herself.

Moisture filled her eyes as she moved her hands lower on her body, holding... Rescan, she commanded -- same results.

But how? She shook her head as the tears flowed. Head raised, smiling through the tears, she knew how, and when it happened.

The third egg, *her* egg -- she dropped it. That’s what the Predictor said.

Eggs

She pulled up a chair and sat, her legs suddenly weak. She cradled herself, her womb as the tears flowed. Yes, it was *her* egg, and she'd dropped it. And oh yes, she was going to keep it! She laughed and cried. Yes, she was going to keep it!

Looking at herself in the mirror, her vision clouded by the tears, her inner vision showed her ... Some would find it scandalous by modern mores, but she would carry her son herself; this was more than a "job" or task for a surrogate! She saw herself, her face glowing with the mask of pregnancy. And she saw a man, her son, standing on the bridge of a Ship, a bridge familiar yet strange, a bridge lit by the living light from the polycrystal crown in his head, and standing beside him ...

Too much, it was all too much! She gasped, clearing the fleeting visions from her mind.

In Progress!
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Eggs

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