Psi Potential - Angel Colony

Opening and escalation from the Angel Colony project.

pages ∙ words

**.·. Fear**

One aspect of telepathy occurs naturally in a latent community. Two minds thinking in the same direction occasionally fall into phase. I had felt it that night as he considered voicing his feelings regarding that first step into the unknown. O’Neal’s only outward response at the time had been a knowing smile. I had no idea what sort of commitment I had made, and in his own way he knew it. He’d faced the same choice himself. Now that the decision was made I felt as if I had just stepped off the edge of a cliff. I didn’t have to pry to know that he understood that feeling. We shared the thought. O’Neal did not know how to express it, so he sipped his tea and nursed his smoke for a few minutes, and stared past me, into the rain stirred garden.

The quiet tenor of his thoughts that evening had touched me and led me to make a mistake a few weeks later when I had caught up with him in Oregon. He had left to return to his duties, both for the navy and the project as they strove to make exodus a reality. I had informed the project of my intention to volunteer for exodus barely ahead of receiving the orders he had warned me of. As a volunteer I was granted time to put my affairs in order before returning to the project for briefing and assignment. But I caught up with him soon enough, and eventually we found an afternoon to talk again. Having shared a point of view, I supposed I thought that entitled me to eaves drop a bit. Of course that implies that I gave the matter anything resembling thought.

In fact I was simply indulging an impulse. Part of the matter was that I was fascinated by latent minds. It is kind of like trying to imagine the colors a blind man sees by touch. An active can easily use his ability to know what a latent feels about his blindness, but doing so ensures that the active cannot honestly understand that feeling. I have never been unable to perceive the universe directly through my mind. I could block out or withdraw my attention from my perceptions, but the thought of not having them gave me the cold shakes.

When we met that day, we agreed to quit the confines of the massive research complex which accounted for the livelihood of the families which lived on the reservation. I was delighted, despite some lingering ache, to be able to tramp around my old stomping grounds. The air was clear, and the meadows were lush. We had come to the top of a rise, when he stopped to indulge his vice. That is when I committed my *faux pas.* At first I just looked and studied what could be seen from my perspective.

like most people, he had psi potential curled up in an autistic knot within him. The great irony of human existence was that psi potential was not rare at all. That evolutionary leap had gone unnoticed, probably back in the dark ages, because more than ninety-nine percent of those who had detectable potential were so overwhelmed by the input that they recoiled from it. The potential typically atrophied throughout infancy and childhood. I was thinking too loud. He frowned. *Actually, psi potential often continues growing even in latents like myself. The problem is that integrating that potential with my adult mind would unhinge or shatter my perception of reality.*

I pulled back at once. “I’m sorry,” I apologized, slightly horrified with myself, “I didn’t mean to overlap.” He shrugged. Again, a man used to telepaths. He may not be able to initiate telepathic contact but he obviously accepted it—or at least was used to it. He did not get excited about it, he just responded to the stray thought wandering around in his mind. I felt a kind of wonder, remembering what it was that had made us friends before the tragedy. “you just take it in stride, don’t you?” I commented. “did it ever scare you? Did you have to adjust to it or were you always this calm about it?” I suddenly had to ask. I had no way to understand his position.

he looked at me and answered, “Arden, it scares the crap out of me. When it happens, when I think it could be happening, when I wish it would happen—if I think about it at all it terrifies me. If I ever went active it would be the end of me, because I would have no idea where I began or where I ended. I wouldn’t know who I was anymore,” he confessed with a rawness in his voice.

I understood that he was afraid. I did not understand his fear. “how do you deal with it?” I asked in a subdued tone.

“that is simple,” he said, “I *deal* with it. Fear is a wonderful thing; it gets your attention and tells you that there is something in your environment you don’t dare take for granted. Fear is only a dangerous thing when you combine it with desire to take everything for granted. A person who fears fear inevitably destroys everything around him trying to eliminate every possible threat before it can present any danger to him.” He pinched out the cigarette he had been smoking and gestured for us to take the path into the woods. When we were out of casual view from the complex, he opened a subject I had never been able to fathom. “why need a man fear a telepath?” He asked. He paused before proceeding to provide an answer, “telepathy takes away too many things from a man, some good and some bad. Telepathy takes away our isolation; it proves to a man that other people have minds and that other people are real. Hence it proves that a man is not just dreaming all of this,” he waved at the forest, indicating reality at large. “it takes away our privacy; it enables two individuals to communicate at a perfect level of understanding, god willing that they both possess compatible views of reality. Hence it implies that a man is not unique.

“it takes away our sovereignty; it presents the problem that two minds linked in perfect understanding become one mind, which threatens a man’s identity.” He took a couple of steps along the path, and fell silent. I felt a queer sensation, because I could almost understand that fear, although from a different side. Up until the day my mother died, our thoughts had been so intertwined, it *had* been impossible to figure out where I left off and she began. The greatest part of my bereavement had been the amputation of this wiser part of myself which left me feeling like nothing more than the ghost of my mother. I shook off that line of thought and returned my attention to him. Clearly there was something on his mind. I waited, careful now not to invade his thoughts. When he looked up at me and posed his next question I felt a cold finger trail along my spine. He asked, “would you have fled, if you had not decided to go along with this operation?”

“why does that question disturb me so much?” I evaded, reading the intensity of his gaze. I forgot my uneasy thoughts of my mother as I considered the implications of his question. “I almost think that you feel it would have been necessary. Why would it matter? Is it something to do with what you said—about how they could coerce me or even force me to comply?”

O’Neal confirmed that suspicion with the slight shadow that entered his expression. But the words to express a more comprehensive answer came to him with more difficulty. In detail, he described to me certain developments in field-technology and nano-technology, and the politics behind them. In spite of the fact that human survival may ultimately be dependent on the active psi capabilities possessed by a growing percentage of the population, political measures had initiated legislature to bar all but the weakest of actives—active class one and the lower end of active class two ratings—from unimpaired access to the surface of inhabited worlds.

in anticipation of the fears—the realization of the true scale of psi capability—that would cause most governments to recognize psi actives as unendurable threats to the safety and security of the entire planet, measures were designed to force actives rated above certain capabilities to voluntary submit to various control programs designed to damp their power down to tolerable levels. The strongest measures promised to flatly outlaw the presence of proscribed actives from the surface of the planet, but even the least aggressive proposals were more strict than the reservation system. Various methods and treatments were being developed to restrict or fully subdue the capacity of actives with proscribed ratings who were present on the surface of the planet. The technology already existed to readily destroy any active who violated the codes taught on reservations, ironically derived from the advances that actives themselves helped develop for the benefit of all mankind.

among the methods under development was a synaptic lock or neural leash. Developed from augmentation research, a class of nano-viral programs developed for genetic surgery, a neural leash is essentially designed to turn a subject’s own body into a prison. The leash is designed to render an active psionic artificially latent by manipulating synaptic pathways to selectively restrict the processing capacity upon which psi potential depends. In layman’s terms, it disrupts the brain making it harder to think. The leash is not very subtle given the complexity of the brain and lingering deficiencies in psiono-neural medicine. Another project on the list is a damping field. Based on the advances my mother contributed to, it is an interface transmitter keyed to the characteristics of the psionic body-mind interface which exclusively generates destructive interference. The project to which I’d been recalled was deeply involved in developing these toys. Which had a lot to do with *why* I was actually recalled.

O’Neal laid it out plainly. “assigning you to the operation exodus is just an excuse. They expect you to fall apart the minute you set foot outside the atmosphere on account of the trauma of your mother’s death,” he explained. “what they want is a test bed for these other projects. Since they expected you to fight the assignment, they expected that they would be free to use ‘whatever means necessary’ to deliver you to your assignment. Any resistance on your part and they could have started in with the big guns—justified by your classified rating—and truss you up tight.” He glowered, “it’s a self fulfilling prophesy. They are going to create the threat they fear by trying to destroy it where it doesn’t even exist.”

I was furious. I had my thoughts locked down tight and strained to ground out my temper lest it lash out around me in a tempest. Through clenched teeth I cursed, “how do people so afraid of the future end up being the one’s who dictate how the rest of us go forth to meet it?”

he shrugged. “I really don’t understand it myself. Politics is played in the interests of power not responsibility. Special interest groups,” he pointed out, “have been building their power-bases on growing sentiment against actives. The new conservatives pounced on this simply to stir up anti-psi sentiment to shore up their positions with their voting blocks.” He sneered his opinion of this example of partisan politics, strangled the life out of a group of ferns and then dropped them in a heap with a sigh.

“so what do you expect me to do?” I growled. “I can’t fight them without giving them what they want. I can’t submit to it freely either. I’d rather die. Are you saying that I should have run away, or was that even feasible? They would have hunted me down, and eventually they would have me where they wanted me, so running away wouldn’t do me any good either!”

he was calm again. “you are going to do what you already decided to do. You are a volunteer for a vital and sensitive position in a project with even higher priority. That should rip the rug right out from under them,” he smiled. I drank in the sight of my childhood wonderland, hoping to save it in memory, because I was starting to understand that leaving earth forever was a good idea.