Avatars - 3

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It had been late in the afternoon when Alex and her father arrived at the Morgan home. By the time the question of the engagement had been settled it was early evening. A celebratory mood had taken over at that point, as the adults gathered for drinks and conversation. The older girls had made some refreshments and the party had moved outside to observe the two young girls and their efforts to beat each other up. Initially they had run out in concern, but they all recognized sparring when they saw it. Both girls were extremely athletic, and would have gone on for hours if Virginia had not noticed the sun resting on the horizon. She announced that dinner had been forgotten, and gave the girls an hour to wrap up their exhibition while dragging Kim and Naomi in to help her prepare the food and table.

After the intense exercise, the girls had tremendous appetites, so they did not have to be told twice to come in and eat. After wolfing down their first serving, Alex turned to Alexandrea and complimented her performance. It was simple praise, but from her it was profound. There were not many people who challenged her in martial arts.

“I’m really not that good,” Alexandrea differed. “I’m more into gymnastics, with enough time spent on martial arts to be able to defend myself.” She smiled though, and reached for a serving bowl to refill her plate.

“Well,” Alex persisted, reaching for the next bowl, and following her lead, “you really know how to use your body. It gives you an edge when you fight.”

“Yes, well,” Alexandrea shrugged, grinning to cover the aches and twinges as she moved her arms, “you didn’t have much trouble beating me.”

“It was a lot harder than it looked. Don’t sell yourself short,” Alex insisted. Alexandrea nodded her head, with a little tilt. Instead of protesting her modesty further, she smiled and dug in. Alex shrugged and devoured her own second helping. The rest of the table conversation was about the engagement, which both girls tried to tune out. At one point, Virginia told her husband about Naomi’s stunt with the camera. He turned to the middle daughter and told her sternly to develop the pictures herself and let him review them or he would find the film and destroy it. Alex quickly interjected, since the pictures were of her, she had the right to see them first. They were the first pictures ever taken of her, and she wanted copies of all of them, decent or not.

The group laughed over a number of the day’s more humorous events, including the fact that Victor had set the whole thing up, and that it went off so much better than he had imagined possible. Eventually, everyone finished and began to filter out of the room. On the way out, Alexandrea caught Alex by the arm and said quietly. “Thank you for the compliment,” she gave her an appreciative smile, and referred to her own protests, “I was only trying to say I will never be as good as you are.”

“Thank you,” Alex returned, with deep feeling. She grinned wryly and worked her arms and shoulders to loosen the stiffness that had set in while they were eating. Shaking her head, as Alexandrea winced in sympathy, she asserted, “That was a hell of a workout.”

“I know,” Alexandrea agreed, looking up and stretching. She suddenly wrinkled her nose and stood. “We could both use a bath. Come on,” she grabbed Alex by the arm again and started dragging her down the hall. Alex let herself be carried along until Alexandrea led her into the bathroom she shared with her sisters.

“What?” she looked around uneasily. “Together?” she raised her eyebrows, but her voice went up on its own. Alexandrea gave her an odd look and pulled her shirt over her head. Then she grabbed Alex’s shirt and smiled. Alex grabbed her hands to stop her.

“We’re both girls,” Alexandrea reminded her, and used her thoughts to do what her hands had been prevented from doing. It was the first time either of them had used psionics in the other’s presence. As Alex’s head came free of the shirt, Alexandrea patted her face and added, “Besides our bath is ruled by Japanese convention—wash stalls and hot tub.” She did not mention group bathing, which was what the Japanese were particularly notorious for, but then Alex was one of those people who did not need the explanation. Alexandrea caught the chagrined look she gave at the thought and laughed, “You’ll love it.”

“I don’t know,” she replied warily, watching the other girl continue to strip down.

“Oh, don’t be a baby,” Alexandrea chided. She plucked at Alex’s clothes with her mind, spurring her to undress. To keep the other girl from ripping her clothes off of her, Alex finally conceded. Once again, the question of body modesty was irrelevant; she had been caught in the nude already before the entire family. More, this was a psionic household. Everyone in it was equipped with perceptions that made clothing about as concealing as clear glass. An open mind tended to see everything, and tried not to look at anything it was not immediately concerned with. A psionic realized that a person could only pretend to modesty. In private people were shameless, but privacy was an illusion. A psionic learned to place integrity above modesty. Otherwise, she would be paralyzed all the time for fear of shame.

“Wow,” Alex breathed, when she straightened and they confronted each other naked. “We really are identical,” she added, studying the other girl intently. Alex felt a bit shy, but Alexandrea obviously shared her curiosity about how deep the resemblance between them was. The boy in her suddenly roused and for once he did not make her feel threatened. Just a bit more excited than she might otherwise have been. She laughed as she realized that was in fact the opposite of the truth. “Otherwise”, she reminded herself, would have meant “as a boy” when confronting the strangeness of her new condition. Maybe she really was a girl, to think that so instinctively.

“I saw that when you were doing your little strip tease,” Alexandrea confessed, not privileged to the thoughts that distracted Alex from her own comment.

Reminded of the scene she had been in earlier, she protested, “It wasn’t my idea.”

Alexandrea chucked, leading her into the shower stall. Alexandrea conferred with herself, amazed at the juxtaposition of foreign and familiar in the scene. Alex glanced around, noticing that there were several showerheads, and an equal number of fixtures set low where they could be reached by a person sitting on one of the stools scattered about the stall. She went to one of the spaces and turned on the water, sighing as she slipped into the cool stream. “Here,” Alexandrea came up beside her, handing her a bar of soap and a scrub brush while she turned the next faucet on. After rinsing her self down, she turned to Alex and commanded, “Scrub me down real quick and then I’ll do you.”

“That’s okay,” Alex refused politely, “I can bathe myself.“

“I can wash you faster and more efficiently,” Alexandrea insisted. She reclaimed the soap and brush and lathered them up. Then, she pushed Alex out of the fall of water, and applied the foaming brush to her body. Habit compelled her to regard Alex’s body as she would her own, and the liberties she took with herself startled and put the neo-girl a bit off guard. She tried to shy away, but Alexandrea maintained a firm grip and persisted, assuring the girl in calm tones, “Trust me, I know what I’m talking about. I never shower alone if I can help it.” Alex bit her lip as the brush moved expertly over her body. She jumped and tilted, falling back against the wall as the brush paused and warm fingers probed intently into her genital region. “Hey, don’t fall down,” Alexandrea cried, putting out her other hand to prop Alex up before she could slide down into the tiled basin.

“I’m sorry,” Alex gasped. “I’ve never been touched like that before.”

Alexandrea’s eyes snapped quickly to Alex’s face, and she studied her intently. “You’ve got to be kidding,” she demanded softly in surprise. Her fingers moved again between Alex’s legs as she emphasized, “This is something you simply have to wash.” Her fingers worked firmly, but smoothly over and through the delicate folds of flesh. Alex squirmed, but she could not tell herself that a proper washing would not necessitate such stimulating contact. False modesty cried out for her to say something, but she did not want the incredible sensation to end. Alexandrea was looking intently into her face, but Alex could not keep her eyes open. “You can’t really mean you’ve never felt anything like this?” Alexandrea demanded unbelieving.

“Oh,” Alex gasped as a brilliant spike of pleasure pierced her brain. Her arms slapped back against the shower wall, a scramble to keep her balance, though it only felt like the world had moved. She gasped, “God! Stop. Uhhnn.” The exquisite torture abruptly ended. Alex sank down to the floor, quivering as the echoes tingled through her body.

“Wow,” Alexandrea murmured, sinking down to a stool next to her new friend. “I guess you haven’t. I wouldn’t expect that from a boy.” Picking up the brush, she went on to the areas she had not reached yet.

“It was different when I was a boy,” Alex groaned.

“That’s not what I meant,” Alexandrea corrected. Alex’s pubic region had been the last thing on Alex’s upper body she had paid attention to. She scrubbed the girl’s legs down as she continued talking, “I can’t believe you weren’t curious.”

“I was too curious!” Alex exclaimed. She struggled to think of a way to explain the strange dichotomy of being a girl possessed by a boy’s intense passions. “That was the problem. It’d be like being molested by my own ghost.” That was too close to the truth.

“What a notion,” Alexandrea winced. Alexandrea was shocked to learn Alex had resisted the temptation to explore her new condition. “Alex, girls masturbate too,” she asserted gently. “Thinking like that, you’re just going to cause yourself a schism.” She finished with the legs and feet and reached for the spray fixture attached by a flexible pipe-hose to the lower faucet. She ran the water over her hand, waiting until it was warm before turning it on Alex.

“I think I already have,” Alex admitted. “Whenever I get aroused, it’s like I am trying to be two things at once.” She shook her head. Her confusion over the strange conflict was painfully evident. “According to my father, this happened because I need to *be* a girl. I find it difficult when my own sex brings the boy in me to the surface.”

“Maybe,” Alexandrea mused. She rinsed the other girl’s body off and reached for a bottle of shampoo. As she worked the thin gel into Alex’s hair, she expressed her personal opinion on the matter. “I don’t think the boy in you would have survived it, if you had really gone at it.” Alex squinted up at her, then turned around to allow the other girl easier access to her scalp. Alexandrea worked the lather down the incredible length of Alex’s hair, expounding on her theory, “This is one of those ‘curiosity killed the cat’ situations. An orgasm is the one thing certain to erase all doubt that you are a girl.” Alex considered that gravely as her friend finished her job.

In a way, she could almost see Alexandrea’s point. It was not so much that sex as a girl might be the end of Alexander, but the experience would fully integrate what had been with what now was. It was the pattern she had been following all along. Each new realization drew her deeper into her new perspective. She was developing female instincts, but that was more a matter of letting go of her male assumptions. She would have to give that some serious thought, she told herself, as she sensed that Alexandrea was done with her hair. She turned around and reached for the soap and brush to return the favor.

Alexandrea had collected the items and dropped them into a wash bucket. She caught Alex as she tried to stand, planting her hand square in her midsection and commanding, “Lie back.” Alex quirked an eyebrow and began to comply. She tried to sit back up as she felt Alexandrea slipping down between her legs and spreading them apart.

“Wait,” she began, but Alexandrea pushed her firmly back.

“Alex,” the girl leaned over her, gazing intently into her eyes. The calm and compassion in Alexandrea’s face and voice eased her apprehension, “you need this, and I think it’s better for you if you don’t do it to yourself. You know?” Her hands moved artfully and Alex moaned. Just a simple touch and she was pinned by an ache rooted deep within her. Alexandrea leaned forward and kissed her on the belly, murmuring on, “The boy in you has a better chance of surviving if you don’t pull the trigger yourself. Listen, we agreed to be friends. That’s all this is, a friend helping a friend. Like setting a broken leg, but far more enjoyable.”

Alex swallowed, as lips joined fingers in evoking the strange music within her. Alex silently agreed that it was easier to submit to Alexandrea’s attention than her own. It was not possible for her to say no. In a hesitant, but determined voice, she sighed, “Okay.”

From the moment she had changed, the map of her genitalia had been a part of her constant awareness. The nested folds of delicate skin had been teased by the fabric of her clothing and the friction of movement. She had enjoyed a kind of freedom from the confinement imposed on Alexander’s genitals, even as she suffered the inconveniences of breasts. The little bumps and jolts of life did not compare to the special attentions of experienced fingers, lips and tongue. She was electrified, her body felt tightened and limp at the same time. The level of sensation that would have brought Alexander to a climax merely teased and tormented. There were too many nerve endings, all demanding attention and the pattern and progression to release was unknown to her. Her brain protested that, while the waves of sensation were incomparably pleasing, they were not to die for. That little death that she was panting and crying for would not come.

The fingers that massaged and tempted the fragile guardian of her vagina, warming and stretching the delicate skin so that the slender digits could probe past without damaging it, finally eased through the natural slit in her hymen. Alex realized and understood the caution of Alexandrea’s effort, and turned her mind inward. As she felt her way into the very cells of that partition, she noted that there was a natural fault. There, she would rip before the first intruder. There, she commanded the cells to abandon their hold on one another. Alexandrea paused as she felt the flesh part under her fingers, and then the door stood open. Her fingers probed the bloodless wound and then plunged into Alex. A million nerves screamed in satisfaction, and Alex gasped as the tide began to mount.

Alexandrea could not sustain a constant attack on the mountain of Venus. She varied her attention, rocking forward to assault her belly, reaching up to caress the girl’s breasts, sliding down to tease the insides of her thighs, a kiss, a lick or a playful bite, or leaning her cheek against one for a moment’s pause. Alex’s body was demanding a man, but Alexandrea would not go to that extreme in passion when the matter had not even been soberly discussed. Alex had shuddered through several orgasms without even realizing it, waiting for the explosive release a male body had conditioned her to expect. Such a pinnacle could be reached, but not easily. Many girls never learned the trigger to ejaculation. Alex, because she expected it, demanded it, certainly would.

Alexandrea slumped onto her friend’s belly in exhaustion when it finally came. Alex panted, struggling to sit up after a moment, and Alexandrea pulled back. She was surprised when Alex leaned forward, put a hand behind her neck and pulled her forward again to receive a deep and passionate kiss. As thanks went, it was absolutely delicious, and she returned it with equal passion. When they parted, she sat back and grinned.

“Congratulations,” she drawled, beaming proudly. “You’re a girl,” she affirmed whole-heartedly. Alex was still caught in an ecstatic state, embracing herself in wonder that she could feel anything so intensely in the flesh. “Quick,” Alexandrea shivered, and slid the bucket towards herself. She retrieved the soap and brush and handed them to Alex, “wash me down, it’s cold and I want to get into the tub.”

Alex did not move. She was staring at Alexandrea with an expression that made her heart pound. She was captured by that gaze. The face was so familiar, but the look was one she had never seen. She blinked in shock when those eyes dropped, breaking that strange connection. Alex carefully collected the items from Alexandrea’s hand, strangely careful not to touch her skin. “I may be a girl,” she said softly, powerful tension coiled within the muted tone, “but there’s enough of a boy in me that you should think twice about letting me touch you. Especially with what I know now,” she warned.

Alexandrea blinked and her temperature rose. Something in the girl made Alexandrea suddenly picture her father. She sucked in a breath as she realized that, despite age, sex and gender, Alex was a man among men. There were intangible qualities that defined a man, and this girl in front of her possessed them. “Alex,” she breathed, a matching force beneath her gentle voice, “you owe me that much at least.” The look of warning in Alex’s eyes now promised. Alexandrea offered Alex’s masculine curiosity a less threatening outlet. Alexandrea held up a hand, asking to be lifted to her feet, and instructed, “But save it for the tub. I’m freezing.”

Alex complied, taking her hand and helping her rise as she did. She lathered up the brush, and proceeded to scrub her down with economical haste. While she did not dither, her touch was neither shy nor innocent. Alexandrea, standing beside herself as Alle, had touched herself this way, knowing and intimate, but it was quite different knowing that it was another person in that body. It was seductive without being distracting. Alex did not intend to keep her from the warm waters of the bath. She completed rinsing Alexandrea down, and rinsed herself off again before following her to the sunken tub.

The bath was as wide on each side as Alexandrea was tall, and almost as deep. Standing—or sitting reclined on the shelf—the water came up to her chin. The water was very hot, but mild compared to Japanese standards. Alexandrea sank into its embrace gratefully, “Mmm. That’s so much better.”

Alex slipped in behind her, slipping her legs to either side and pulling Alexandrea back against her body. One hand remained firmly against Alexandrea’s belly, while the other slipped down to caress her inner thigh. Before fulfilling her promise, she whispered into Alexandrea’s ear, “Are you sure you’re okay with this? We’ve only just met,” she reminded gently.

“And now we’re getting acquainted,” she smiled, placing her hands over Alex’s. Alex relaxed against her and sighed deeply. Alexandrea felt a sudden surge of concern. This was going faster and farther than she imagined ever moving with another person. Playing with herself had tuned her to a different pace, and suddenly she felt apprehensive. She turned her head, straining to see Alex’s eyes, and asked, “Am I making you feel uncomfortable?”

Alex’s eyes twinkled, and she hugged her with her arms and legs, while asserting, “Far from it. This is just so new to me. I don’t want to rush in and screw everything up.”

“That’s a good instinct,” Alexandrea responded, reassured. They were a lot alike she was beginning to realize. Alex was probably way too hard on herself too. She passed on the advice Alle had given her, “Don’t use it to confound your other instincts. I’m not a pillow. I’ll tell you if you’re doing something wrong. If you don’t listen, then—that’s when you’re screwing up. Understand?” She felt the girl nod against her shoulder, and smiled to herself.

Alex slipped out from behind her. Alexandrea was surprised at her strength; Alex lifted her bodily out of the water. She set her down on the edge of the tub. Before Alexandrea could protest that it was cold, Alex pressed against her midsection, ordering, “Lie back.” As she did, she felt hot water flowing up over her body from the tub. She gasped. Telekinesis. The water gave the touch of Alex’s mind the heat of a lover. Combined with the cold air, and the median warmth of Alex’s fingers, lips and tongue, Alexandrea’s nerves were taunted by overwhelming contrasts. Alex had found a way to give her something as strange and wonderful as she had been given. Something she could never have given herself. The touch of the unknown.

Alexandrea savored her afterglow in the hot embrace of the tub. She had hoped it would engulf her own heat and quiet it, but instead she continued to simmer with passion. A paradox, to feel so much tension and yet not be tense. Her body was like molten lava, intensely charged but fluid and sedate. Mere proximity to Alex was arousing her, and she needed to think. She needed to talk to herself, discover what she was feeling and what it meant. She needed distance. She did not want to go. Her instincts were at war, they were telling her to run, telling her to float across the pool and meld herself to this wonderful person who had come into her life. If she were not careful, she would find herself doing both. She ordered herself to make a strategic withdrawal.

Alex stirred and tried to rise with her when she climbed out of the tub. “Relax,” she urged, gently. “Stay here, I have some chores to do,” she lied easily. Alex watched her with open admiration as she dried off and slipped into a bathrobe. Alexandrea loved it, the feel of her eyes. Trying not to run, she crossed over to the door connecting her room to the bathroom. She turned as she reached it, orienting Alex, “This is my room here. Please knock before you come in.” She opened the door, and then remembered the other rooms that opened onto the bathroom. Leaving Alex in the bath, she was giving her a license to explore her released sexuality with a false assurance of privacy. The girl needed to be warned, “Oh, and don’t worry about getting caught playing with yourself in here. My sisters and I have an agreement. Our bathroom, our rules,” she declared with quiet pride. “Sex is just play, by our rules, and my sisters can teach you a lot if you ask. They won’t offer unless you appear to be comfortable with yourself.”

“Isn’t that a bit, um, incestuous?” Alex grinned, bemused at the suggestion.

“What? You think one of us is going to get another pregnant?” Alexandrea demanded, reading the genuine concern under the playful retort. She shook her head. Alex was a stranger in a strange land. She did not have the instincts or the experience to judge what she had gotten into. “You have a few things to learn about being a girl. We protect each other. Especially sisters,” Alexandrea paused to assert. She tried to convey the philosophy of her household succinctly, “Sex is an art, it takes time and effort to master it, and you need someone safe to learn from and practice with.” Alexandrea smiled to herself, *Wait until Kim confronts her with the Kama Sutra!*

“Is that what you’re doing with me?” Alex asked meekly.

Alexandrea sensed the uncertainty, and her heart fluttered at Alex’s sudden air of childlike vulnerability. “It’s what I’m willing to do for you,” she rephrased, putting as much reassurance into her voice as she could without betraying her affection. “A girl must learn to use sex, otherwise she’ll end up used by it.” She clung to the door, pressing her head against the doorjamb for a moment. Her own integrity compelled her to add, “If you think there is something more serious going on, or you feel like there’s something more than sex going on—well, that calls for different rules. Don’t hesitate to bring it up.”

Alex studied her, sensing something behind the words, but Alexandrea’s face and body language did not reveal it. She would not dare peek into her mind. Did the girl suspect the effect she was having on her? Alex kept the question from her face and replied easily, “I won’t.” Alexandrea smiled and then vanished behind the door. Alex waited a moment, to make sure she would not reappear, and then slid over onto the shelf. She thought about getting out of the water but the cold air would not temper the arousal she had been hiding. Alexandrea had offered her the best suggestion, and she thanked her silently for giving her the assurances she needed to take it. She stretched out on her hands and knees, reaching under herself to cup a hand over her mons. Before, the boy in her had been aching to explore her; now Alex explored herself shamelessly to distract him from another.

Alexandrea had been stunned to find her mother waiting for her in her room. Her heart had leapt at the sight of her. She swallowed it back down as she leaned back against the door. Her mother studied her intently, and Alexandrea quickly asked herself what she might have overheard. It was a silly question. Her mother could oversee everything that occurred within the house without leaving her own room. For that matter, there was not much in the world her mother could not see if she put her mind to it. That was probably what had brought her to see Alexandrea. Alex had been noisy, but then again so had she. They had been begging for someone to comment. She squared her shoulders, and stood up to face judgment.

“Alex?” her mother’s question suspended Alexandrea’s worries. Her mother was asking who she was. An unnecessary request except for when she was resolved to respect her daughter’s privacy. It was her way to tell her daughter that she trusted her judgment.

“Alexandrea,” she identified herself with a smile.

“Good,” Virginia said, smiling. “Can I talk to you for a moment?”

“Sure. Um,” she gestured over he shoulder and informed her, “Alex is in the bath.” Virginia raised an eyebrow and then gestured for her daughter to lock the door. She then tapped her head lightly, to indicate that she was guarding against eavesdroppers. Alexandrea noted that and crossed over to her bed. “Thanks. What is it?”

“Anne or Alle?” Virginia asked again, making sure. Alex had not yet been introduced to Alexandrea’s other self, and Virginia wanted to know if she was out and about elsewhere. In general, her family was always prepared to see two of her wandering around. That had contributed to the misunderstanding that greeted Alex’s arrival.

“Both,” Alexandrea confessed.

“I see. Have you introduced Alex to Alle?”

Alexandrea considered the question. Either her mother really had not been watching her, or she was being very coy. “No,” she admitted, adding thoughtfully, “I’ve been giving her my full attention. I didn’t want to distract her with two of me.”

“Were you intending to,” her mother pressed, “at some point?”

“Oh, I suppose I’ll show her,” Alexandrea mused. The comment she had made when they first met had made that much necessary, but there were other reasons to tell her. “Explain it before she can catch me in two places at once,” she clarified. “Why?”

“Well, I was more concerned with what you announced before,” Virginia confided. Alexandrea had come a lot closer to unifying herself in the week following her birthday. Her mind still turned away from whatever secrets she had tucked within her other, but those were the only secrets remaining. She had pulled herself together, and her family was still adjusting to the fact that there was often only one of her around. Her expressed intention was to return to being only one person, to be singular in herself. “Are you?” her mother asked, meaning, was she still committed to that goal.

“Well, there is still a split,” Alexandrea confessed, “but I meant it when I said I was trying to heal it. Being in two places at once is useful but I don’t want to *have* to be. I’d like to be able to just be one person when I want to.” Her inability to explain the matter to herself had forced her to give her family such vague assertions. To compensate, she made her intentions plain, “That’s why I am staying singular as much as possible.”

“Good. With Alex here,” she elaborated meaningfully, “we’d appear to have three of you running around.” She frowned cheerfully. “That could cause problems. If there is only one of *you* running around it is easier to tell people that Alex is just your twin,” she explained.

Alexandrea nodded, finally realizing what the conversation was really about. Virginia was simply conferring with her before hatching up some scheme to present to her husband and his guests. Given the resemblance, and the fact that Alex did not other wise have a proper background or identity, Alexandrea’s dual identity offered a unique and convenient cover. “Sounds smart,” Alexandrea assured her mother that she was comfortable with the idea. “Was there anything else?”

“No. Just be discrete if you need to split up,” Virginia requested, standing up.

“I will,” she promised. She considered the matter quickly and analyzed how to deal with it. She nodded her head as she saw an immediate necessity, and expressed it to her mother, “I’ll talk to Alex about it and make sure to coordinate with her if I do.”

“Excellent,” Her mother patted her on the head and let herself out. Alexandrea jumped up and ripped off her robe. Across from her, the air shimmered as a mirage took form, solidifying into her other self. Anne threw the robe down and jumped into Alle’s arms. Alle caught her and carried her to the bed. Alexandrea’s passion inhabited them both, and she felt the deepest gratitude for the fact that she could find such release in herself.

Alex was too focused on what she was feeling to notice as the door opened silently. She found herself wishing she had taken her father’s advice and devised a means to double herself. The boy in her wanted Alexandrea so badly, and she would have been happy to offer herself in the other girl’s place to soothe him. Instead, since she dared not force herself on Alexandrea, she supplied the hands and the feeling, and the boy lost himself within her.

“Alex,” Kim’s voice cut through her distraction. Alex flinched, rearing up to brace herself on the edge of the bath. She was half out of the water, trying to disguise her thrashing as an attempt to climb out of the water. “No,” Kim stopped her, “you don’t have to get out.” Alex sank back, looking up at her. In spite of what Alexandrea had said, her instincts had moved her. Caught in such an act, she blazed as crimson as her hair. There was no approbation on the older girl’s face as she announced, “Mother told me I’d find you in here. She asked me to tell you, you will be sleeping in Alexandrea’s room.” Alex felt her eyebrow shoot up. Equal parts of excitement and apprehension surged up with them. *Sleep with her?* Her heart skipped. *Sleep with Alexandrea; that would be*—she cut off the thought. Kim was responding to her surprise, explaining, ”She has a queen bed, so there’s plenty of room for both of you.”

“Where’s my dad sleeping?” Alex asked, trying to distract herself.

“He’s staying in the guest bedroom,” Kim responded. “There are two double beds, but since you’re a girl,” she pointed an open hand to the obvious, “we figured you would be more comfortable in a different room. You and Alex are both girls—and in any case, you’re engaged—so there’s no problem,” she smiled, and folded her arms. With a tilt of her head, she asked confirmation, “Okay?”

“Sure,” she squeaked, sensing an unstated endorsement. “That’s fine.” She composed her face, hiding her thoughts behind the awareness of being closely watched. Kim tilted her head the other way and then squatted down to her level. The girl looked deeply into her eyes, reaching out to caress her face. She gave Alex a knowing smile and the younger girl knew that her recreation had been well observed. Kim proved true to Alexandrea’s assertion, brushing Alex’s lip with a finger and projecting a silent question.

Alex tried not to answer that question. The mood she was in made her welcome such a distraction too willingly. She dropped her gaze shyly.

Kim caught her chin and lifted her head, restoring the connection. “I see Alex told you the rules,” she noted. Alex saw that the offer in her eyes was retracted.

“Um,” she shifted under the water, running a hand along her thigh. “Yes.”

“Don’t be embarrassed,” Kim pleaded. “It’s perfectly natural.”

“I’ve never had a place of my own,” Alex replied, stumbling on an honest excuse for her awkward behavior. For most of her life, she had been camping in the open or a guest in other people’s homes. On one hand, it had made her naturally frank and self confident, while at the same time exposing her to a confusion of differing household customs. “I’m used to guarding my privacy,” she explained simply.

“I understand,” Kim smiled warmly. She flicked a finger over Alex’s lip again, and then stood up. “I’ll leave you alone, so you can finish up.” As she reached the door, she turned around and regarded Alex with another conspiratorial look. “Don’t take too long, Naomi will be coming in about fifteen minutes, and she’s a bit impy,” Kim warned.

“I noticed,” Alex drawled wryly. “Thanks.”

Alex had endured enough embarrassing confrontations in one day to compel her to dry and dress quickly. She slipped out of the bathroom just as Naomi was coming in through her private door. They exchanged courtesies, and Alex excused herself swiftly. Instead of trying the door to Alexandrea’s room, she went out to the hall and made her way towards the living room. On her way, she passed by the door to the den, Vincent’s private library and home office, and a voice called out. “Ah, there you are,” her father called. Once he got her attention, he waved her into the room. He set aside the book he had been scanning and pointed her to the couch. “So, what do you think?” he asked, studying her carefully.

Alex did not have to wonder what he was really asking. “I like her,” she admitted frankly. It was safe to admit now that most of her apprehensions regarding the fulfillment of her family obligation were fears of the unknown. Her introduction to her fiancée was proceeding down a path she could never have predicted. Alex did not think the two of them would have been so open with each other if she had still been a boy. Her father was waiting for more, and she shrugged, safely summarizing her impression of Alexandrea, “She’s very friendly. I think she can teach me a lot.”

“I’d expect as much from my daughter,” he smiled. “I’m curious what my son thinks.”

“I haven’t changed that much,” Alex sniffed pointedly. Speaking as a boy, she was not about to be so forthcoming. She gave him an honest answer without betraying that she had developed a rather strong attraction to Alexandrea. Alex was willing to let him figure out on his own how much of her male perspective she still retained, particularly in matters of sexual orientation, and interest. “Her family thinks she’s a tomboy, but she is *entirely* female. You were right. She is the girl of my dreams,” Alex admitted cautiously.

“Think she can make a man out of you?” Victor leaned forward eagerly.

“Maybe,” she evaded, showing half a smile. An echo from the bathroom danced through her mind, and the smile evolved into a mischievous grin. “I suspect she could make me be whatever she wanted,” the girl admitted, adding diffidently, “If she tried.”

Victor leaned back and considered. He was willing to admit that he was putting pressure on the boy, trying to provoke him into rising and asserting himself. He could even admit that his motivation ran contrary to his child’s best interest. He shook his head mentally, and confessed his true fear, that history was repeating itself. No amount of pressure could prevent that, though. He frowned and took a step back, “I know it seems like you’re under a lot of pressure. There is the obligation, but don’t sacrifice your own development over it. This marriage thing is really a matter of convenience. As long as the two of you are committed to producing children,” he stressed, while shrugging, “it doesn’t matter how you go about living your lives. You have options; you can be a father or mother, married or single.”

“Then why was it presented as it was?” Alex begged.

“Oh, there are other factors,” Victor admitted, remembering the stick and the carrot that had plagued his own youth. “In addition to offspring, there is the matter of your inheritances. If you two marry, legally,” he emphasized, clearly defining the catch, “then you will inherit a tremendous amount of money, as well as real property and assets.”

“Why wasn’t that ever mentioned?” Alex pressed, raising an eyebrow.

“I didn’t want you turning down true love for money,” Victor answered simply. Alex did not understand how hard Vincent and Victor had worked to give their children room to exercise some free will in the face of their inherited obligation. “All of those other girls would have been acceptable, and you were given the chance to choose love among them,” he elaborated on their earlier conversation, adding pointedly, “but none of them would have qualified you for your inheritance.”

“I see,” Alex nodded thoughtfully. “So, what kind of wealth are we talking about?”

“Your mother would say ‘Enough’ but it really is quite impressive when you start trying to write it all down,” Victor chuckled. The two of them put their heads together and began their first serious discussion of the legacy that had been set-aside for the family that fulfilled the objective of the Avatar Families. Victor had always been frugal in the information he gave Alex, regarding the ancient breeding program, the true history of psionic development, and the reason why so much had been invested in producing one perfect human being. The story was rooted so deeply in the past it was mythos. Alex lost track of time and whipped her head around to check the clock when her father announced, “It’s getting late. You should go to bed.” Victor rose smiling, and gave her a hand up from the couch. He was surprised when the girl hugged him impulsively as she stood.

“Goodnight, Dad,” she beamed. “I love you, and I forgive you for your evil ways.”

“Go on,” he said gruffly, pushing her back gently and sending her out the door.

Alex slipped quietly into the room, expecting Alexandrea to be asleep. She had undressed and slipped into the bed before realizing that there were already two bodies in that bed, and that they were obliviously wrapped around each other. Her alarm faded immediately as she remembered Alexandrea’s comment about “another twin”. Alex blinked, she had absorbed that, and many of the comments she had heard spoken by Alexandrea and her family members had supported the initial remark, but she had not been introduced to the other girl. Alex considered announcing her presence, but there was more than enough room for her to curl up on one side without disturbing the sleeping twins. Besides, that extra body neatly damped down the initial excitement of sleeping in a bed with Alexandrea. The fact that the available evidence also supported the assumption that the twins were in fact the same girl did not change that. Until and unless that assumption was confirmed, Alex refused to draw that conclusion.

She was simply too tired to try to pursue her profound interest.

Alex took comfort in the fact that they were in the same bed, and drifted happily off to sleep. In the arms of oblivion, she returned to the bath and was startled when she awoke to the sounds of her dream. She did not connect the sounds of passion to reality for a moment as she rolled over and looked at her bedmates. In the dark, she initially thought that Alexandrea had noticed her and was thrashing about to make room in the bed. Alex had been curled right at the edge, and slid gratefully into the offered space. But Alexandrea did not become still. Alex opened her eyes again and stared in mute shock and disbelief as she realized what was happening. She remained mute as Alexandrea finished having sex with herself. When the two bodies disengaged, and one of them rolled on top of Alex, she suddenly snapped. She was out of the bed in a flash, but her mind was stuck in that moment.

Alex had blinked up into a face she recognized painfully. It was Alexander’s face. She was sucking in a shocked breath, a hot wave of hunger surging through her at the feel of his body, pressing hers down into the mattress as he rolled onto her. The instant was eternal, and she marveled at the way he fit against her. The immediate response of her own body, the awareness of his manhood brushing her thigh and dropping so perfectly between her legs, held her spellbound. Stiffening as it sensed where it was, resting on the opening to her body, it pressed against the threshold, and teased her folds apart. He almost entered her as he pushed himself up in surprise to gaze into her face. She had not yet consciously adjusted to the fact that Alexandrea had a guy in her bed, but her mind was insisting that could not be Alexander’s face. In a heartbeat, she knew who he was, and she sensed in that instant that he did not know who she was. He was aroused and interpreted her flushed and anxious face as matching arousal—and she was aroused, no doubt, but aroused in fear as well. As he gathered himself to thrust, she moved.

Alle had rocked back on top of Anne in the violence of her withdrawal. Both of them became instantly aware that there had been a third in their bed, and turned to confront her. Even in the dark, the girl seemed to burn bright red, as she panted against the far wall. In shock, in fear, she spoke without thinking. “Your sisters were right. I am perfect for you. You can marry me and pretend you are still doing it to yourself.” Anne and Alle flinched visibly. Alex was clapping her hand over her mouth in dismay, watching the boy curl around the girl, turning his face completely away. There was no way to take it back, and Alexandrea’s pain was so obvious Alex simply slipped out of the room.

As she stormed though the house naked, she calmed down. Where was she supposed to go? If she went to her father and asked to use the other bed, she would have to explain. But what could she say? It seemed her assumption had been confirmed. Alexandrea had looked out at her through both sets of eyes. She had already confided that she had mastered the translation of the sexes, and Alex herself had admitted what the combination of those two abilities would inevitably lead her to do. Her own self-honesty made her hasty comment an unforgivable insult. What was her excuse? The girl in her had been ready, but the boy had torn her away. Her instincts had clashed so thoroughly she did not know which side of her had uttered that damning statement. Her heart was still pounding. It had been a close call, a single thrust away from sex, but it was her own fault for going into a stranger’s bed naked.

For that matter, she criticized herself soundly; she had gone in *hoping* to have sex—just not anticipating she might find herself in the receiving role. She thumped her head against the wall and went back to apologize.

Slipping into the room, she found Alexandrea alone, crying in her pillow. When she tried to touch her, Alexandrea sat straight up and slapped her hard on the face. She stiffened and admitted, “I deserved that.” Alexandrea almost told her to get out of her room, but stopped as she sensed Alex’s profound remorse.

Alexandrea slid aside, making room for Alex to sit down beside her on the bed. As she did, Alexandrea sat up, turning to face her, while wiping her face with trembling hands. Alex caught her hands, pulling them down and using a corner of the bed sheet to mop her face. It brought to mind her father’s gesture. The look on Alexandrea’s face must be what her father had seen as she looked up at him, startled by the gentle touch.

Alex swallowed her pride, closed her eyes for a quick prayer, and spoke her peace. “I had no right to say that,” Alex began, unsure how to phrase her apology. As she found herself explaining, her voice rang with confession, more than excuse. “To be honest, I was just scared. I was that close to being nailed, and it spooked me,” she confided. Alex sighed at the look of compassion that dawned in Alexandrea’s face. She met the girl’s eye and shook her head. “I am an idiot,” she declared. “I should have just let it happen. I wanted it. I needed it,” she repeated, using the very words Alexandrea had used in the shower. She finished drying her friend’s face, hoping they would still be friends. Alexandrea caught her hand, holding it silently, urging her to spell it out. Alex understood what she was asking for, and continued to explain her mixed up feelings, “I thought it would cost me every hope of going back to being a guy. I was so mad at myself for stopping you I could have strangled myself. I opened my mouth and—I guess I spoke the truth,” she squeezed Alexandrea’s fingers, trying to intercept the pain that flickered briefly in her eyes, emphasizing, “but in a way that could only hurt.”

Alexandrea shifted her weight and regarded her more carefully.

Alex covered Alexandrea’s hand and looked her straight in the eye. “What I meant was,” she swallowed, digging deep for her honest impulse, whatever truth had rested at the depths of her confusion, and surprised herself by saying, “I liked the idea. I understood what you had, and I only wished I could be that for myself. I mean—if you want me—if looking like you makes you want me—“ she swallowed again, as the boy in her sensed what she was really offering.

She lay back, exposing her vulnerable belly, opening her legs and pulling Alexandrea forward into the gap. “I am yours,” Alex declared. She saw that Alexandrea understood she was offering more than her body, and committed herself fully in a rush of words, “If it pleases you, if it excites you, if it interests you at all, it pleases me. If that is what you want, it would make me happy to give it to you. If you want more than that, I hope I can give it to you.” It was not, she realized, a declaration of love. After her unbearable slip, it did not seem possible to offer that, or ask for it in return. And yet, she was offering even more than that. In a desperate bid to repair the sudden rift in their friendship, she was offering to sacrifice her very manhood for the privilege. “I am yours,” she repeated intently, “If you want me.”

Alexandrea sucked in a shuddering breath, amazed at what she was hearing. At the same time, she was overwhelmed at her response to the offer. “Oh, I want you,” she declared in a husky voice. Her hands fell on Alex possessively as she continued, ”I did not think I could possibly keep my hands off of you. You had such an effect on me,” she shivered, “I had to do this. It was the only way to keep my hands to myself.” They emphasized her point, stroking over the silken skin, dancing but unable to break contact with Alex’s body.

Alex sighed and relaxed, abandoning herself to sensation.

“I never expected you would come in here and see,” Alexandrea confessed. Alex was stunned. Had she not been told of the sleeping arrangements? Had her mother simply assumed she would understand? Alexandrea did not address it. Instead, she referred to the moment of discovery, Alex’s startled jump out of bed. “If you had not stopped me, I don’t think I could have stopped myself,” she confessed gently. “I don’t know if I could cope with that,” she added even more softly.

Alex sat up, as she sensed the caution in her voice.

Alexandrea met her eye. She was confessing a concern which still applied. “I would feel so bad if I ruined you for ever being male again,” she declared passionately, gripping her tightly and going on with a hint of pain, “and feel so guilty because it would not change the way I feel about you if I did.” Alex stared at her in surprise, and Alexandrea shook her head. “I don’t understand it. I have only known you for a few hours, but if you never changed, or if you changed entirely I would still feel this way about you. I mean,” she struggled to express what had dawned on her in the bath. “I feel like this because you are you. It was something in your eyes. I don’t know if it’s love or what, but I can’t get it out of my head. I just broke down and cried my heart out because you left, and I did not know if you would ever really come back.” She caught herself, drawing in another deep breath and brushing a new rivulet from her cheeks. She blinked to focus her eyes and then reached out a hand to caress Alex’s face. Her hand fit the pattern of tingling that still burned in her cheek. An apology of her own emerged as she met her eyes again and murmured, “I am sorry for hitting you.”

Alex took Alexandrea into her arms. After trading blows, and then apologies, Alex was a bundle of aching nerves. Nuzzling against Alexandrea’s cheek, she whispered, “Be my Alexander. Take me.” Alexandrea hesitated, and Alex told her flat out, “If I fear losing my manhood so much, it might very well be that it was never mine to keep.” Alexandrea pulled back to study her face. For the first time, one of them reached into the other’s mind. Alex opened herself, accepting that thrust as willingly as she would the other. Alexandrea only probed deep enough to see that it was not bravado or self-deception behind Alex’s words. She was brave though, Alexandrea noted, tasting the depth of her fear. Alex explained her revelation as Alexandrea carefully withdrew from the folds of her mind. “ You accepted me as I am,” Alex pointed out, implying that such had been a novel experience, elaborating further, “for *who* I am—I think it’s time I did the same.”

Alexandrea took her friend’s face into her hands and leaned forward. It was a kiss that promised friendship and welcomed her as a lover. In that passionate exchange, an intercourse more equal and intimate than coital sex, they admitted to each other that this went beyond playful sport. Alex moaned as she pulled away. Alexandrea stopped her, before she could demand another kiss. “There’s something I need to do first,” she said, pushing Alex onto her back and placing her hands over the girl’s belly. “I need to show you how to protect yourself.” Alex felt the probing of her body, and her attention descended to observe as Alexandrea’s awareness moved through the cells of her body.

Alexandrea noted her attention and wove Alex’s thoughts into her own. Sharing her understanding and experience with the specific arts through which the females in her family had taken responsibility for and control over their reproductive potential, Alex learned how to diagnose and maintain the cycles of her fertility. She was amazed to learn, in the shared consciousness, that her natural regeneration produced a state of almost constant fertility. The lining of her uterus, normally subject to accretion and sloughing, existed in a state of constant regeneration. As a consequence, she would not have a menstrual period unless she simulated it. On the other side, she was always ready to receive a fertilized egg, her own, or that of anyone who dared to teleport one into her. She had never even imagined that danger, but Alexandrea was constantly aware of it, and urged her to think on it carefully. Reproduction was as important to psionics as it was to normals, and a psionic did not have to even touch her to get her pregnant. A man could find the woman who’s genes he wanted, take one of her ova and plant it in Alex’s body, after or even while fertilizing it with his own seed.

In a subjective sense, years of training and experience were exchanged as Alex was instructed in how to monitor her own ovulation, and detect the intrusion of any foreign matter into her uterus, and to destroy it instantly as she must destroy her own ova except in the instance where she fully and truly intended to become pregnant. Alex identified and found a single fertile ovum that had been released sometime within the proceeding day and a half, and Alexandrea supervised as she captured the tiny cell in her thoughts and dismantled it. Once she had seen that she had done it, and done it right, Alexandrea pulled them back to the waking world, slowing their accelerated thoughts to the normal passage of time, and proceeded to explore the possibilities of a kiss. From there, as a young man, Alexander took Alex by the hand and proceeded to open her mind, and then her body.

As they recovered from the first thrust, Alexander confided, “I broke my own hymen, but *now* I can say I’m no longer a virgin.” What Anne and Alle had practiced on each other had stood Alexander—Alexandrea as a boy—in good stead during his first coital union with a unique and separate person. By himself, Alexander had known sex as a perfect act, but only with Alex had he tasted the mystery of intercourse.

Alex smiled up at him and made her own confession, “I always meant to get my start from a girl with more experience.”