Avatars-12

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Confronting Jean

The night and evening before had been busy, but the day ahead would be even busier. Chris could only claim to have gotten more sleep than the others, in truth she had washed up and nested down only a quarter hour before the others joined her. They only slept for an hour or two, and then were up again. For a psi, it was possible to regenerate with only an hour’s sleep. Jon bounced back so quickly the others thought she was beginning to tap into her psi. Jon corrected them; chi was also useful for restoring and maintaining proper health and balance. They started talking about chi, but that brought up martial arts, and Artemis jumped up and slapped herself

Just as her own change had taken the edge off of her martial arts, Chris and Jon would be suffering the same difficulty. Rather than allow them to discover it the way she had—in a fight—she dragged them all out on the lawn for a quick retraining session. She condensed the lessons Jack Hunter had given her, and passed the essential points on to them. As they practiced, an audience formed of men arriving to work on the house. They were discrete, and tried not to be noticed for fear of startling the naked girls and ending the show.

The girls finally did notice the men, and quickly retired to the pool. They were fortunate that they had not been using psi, but they had been addressing Jon by her given name. A couple of the men confronted Jon about that, and she thought fast. She explained the French pronunciation of the name Jean, and her friends caught on immediately. Since the presence of the men forbade the use or open discussion of psi, the girls retreated to one of the upper pools and discussed the proposals of Artemis and Athena’s fathers.

The four of them were unhappy at the intrusion, since the idea had been to spend the day working with Chris and Jean on psi. Unable to fight it, they switched topics when they sensed the men coming into earshot to plans for the coming Friday night. They were relieved when Vincent showed up and explained that the young men who were working on the house were all members of the Families. There had been some normals among them from time to time, outside contractors, but the main crew were all distant relatives making extra money while enjoying the opportunity to work with their hands and in certain cases their minds.

They had not been informed as a test, to see if they would be discrete in the presence of strangers. They had done well, and were now free to exercise their minds within the walls of the atrium. The men would act as spotters and inform them if an outsider came in, before they could be spotted. While he was there, Victor showed up, and the two of them were dragged aside by their daughters. It was a quick private exchange. Vincent almost excused himself, but the subject of chi was brought up, and he stayed for the discussion.

Chi was a related phenomenon, but differed from psi in significant ways. Chi was mastered through physical discipline, or rather mental discipline over the body. Chi was energy harvested from the world, from matter and energy, and closer to emotion than thought. Psi was innate, personal power, and was summoned from within. Only with great difficulty could psi be harvested from other sources and harnessed by an individual. Chi could only be harvested from other sources, from the energy that constantly bled out of the manifest world. The law of entropy assumed that the bled energy was irrecoverable, but in truth it pooled and flowed and could be tapped from its original sources or the reservoirs it eventually settled into.

Jean was finally able to explain why she had been so sensitive to psi. The bleed from psionic energy was a perfect fuel for chi. Just being around the three psionic girls all night had kept her chi batteries fully charged, and allowed her to shed fatigue and function efficiently in a quick nap and stay charged through the intense physical activities of the night and the day. The other three girls became very interested in chi, and could now share Jean’s frustrations as they struggled to tap into that unfamiliar resource. The two men assured them that once they digested the matter, they would realize that potential almost effortlessly. They were making the same mistake with chi that Jean was with psi. Looking as hard as one could only made finding it harder than it had to be.

Chris was feeling fairly comfortable with her psi, at this point. The four of them decided that it would be safe enough, and wise in light of the men’s advice, to take a break. They went to the old house to clean up and change clothes. Following lunch, they headed out to the mall. It was Jean’s turn to be outfitted. At the mall, Lauren and Morgan jumped in, following introductions to Chris and Jean. Lauren and Morgan found Chris and Jean intriguing, an odd mix of self-consciousness and self-possession. They were not awkward about being female, just a bit shy and naïve. In matters that did not remind them of their physical condition, they were as bold and adventurous as ever.

In an odd encounter, when Jean lagged behind the others, she found herself confronted by the kind of guy she would have made heroic efforts to befriend as a boy. He was obviously athletic, and seemed to be the kind of guy who got along very well with girls. He spotted her in a store and struck up an easy conversation. He noted that she was new to the area and invited her to a party the following night. Jean initially thought it might be a bad idea, but her quirky and adventurous nature rebelled at once at the thought that someone might not approve. too bad for them, it was her decision, and her answer was yes. They exchanged numbers and parted company.

Jean kept the encounter to her self. If she announced that she was going on a date her friends would undoubtedly tease her. They did not know it, but they were still treating her more as a guy than a girl, and it had not been until that boy confronted her that she had really been made to feel like a girl. It aroused her curiosity. Artemis’s offer was still on her mind, but for some reason her attitude toward Jean made her feel like a guy in a dress. She felt no urgency to sleep with a guy who saw her as a guy. She had no idea what sort of reaction she would have to a guy who saw her as a girl.

Not yet, but she intended to find out. They finished their shopping and returned home, by parental request, for dinner. Dinner was a pleasant affair—Jean took the opportunity to explain the name change and muse aloud about making it official—followed by an intense discussion of the night’s sleeping arrangements. Chris and Jean wanted to go back out to the new house, but Artemis and Athena needed to go to school the next day and could not join them. Or not entirely. Athena’s other could go with them, since two of her could not go to school. Artemis almost objected to being left out, but Athena reminded her that they could stand to enjoy an evening alone together.

Athena left with Chris and Jean, while staying behind with Artemis, after dessert. Neither group got much sleep. There was too much temptation to play and sex was the one activity that never got old. Athena was curious about Artemis’s progress, wondering how long she would need to balance her two sides and when she would face the decision about which side she would commit to. Artemis confessed that she did not know. Her own thoughts had been more about the resemblance between them, how chance, and common ancestry, had made them perfect twins. Athena tried to debate the term, but Artemis shocked her by saying she had checked it out. They were genetically identical.

It raised a haunting question. Did they dare have children together? A detailed examination, possible for a psionic, revealed that there were no risks. Genetically, they were both perfectly clean. Their child, if they had one, would be identical to them, due to the fact that their codes were thoroughly reinforced. They really were the culmination of a thousand years of selective breeding, they had become an archetype. Only by breeding out would that perfect reinforcement be compromised. Their parents had to have known it, and it explained why they had schemed to hook them up.