Avatars-17

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Confronting Victoria, and Adopting a Daughter

The next day, a Sunday, they all rose early to slip over to Xanadu. Athena awakened first, and split into her self and Ares, so Athena could slip into the bath while Ares cuddled in bed with Artemis. Artemis asked Ares if there was some way she could take Athena’s place without tripping over herself. Ares had wanted to ask her the same question, and they tried an experiment. Opening their minds to each other, they traded experiences and memories, copying themselves into each other. It was a hundred times more erotic than sex, and they had to go at it just to relieve the tension.

Chris and Jean awoke to that music and asked what had bitten the two of them. They replied that they had better not engage in mental intercourse if they could not go at it in the flesh. Artemis had embraced Athena so deeply that she fooled Athena’s other when she went into the bath. Because Athena had been out of the loop, Artemis had to do it again, so that she could be Artemis. When it was done, Artemis was Athena as much as she had ever been herself. A separate Athena, to be sure, and no less herself. She was a different soul, a different awareness. That was all there was to tell the difference.

It came out at the breakfast table, and the adults looked at them in shock, congratulating them in shaky voices. They were now more deeply married than the most binding ceremony could wed. A wedding ceremony had just become a technicality as far as they were concerned. The fact that Artemis had embraced both sides of Athena only meant that she now had a wife and a husband. The tragedy, if they wished to see it as such, was that they were now locked in the roles they had adopted.

Artemis was now Athena, and Athena was now Ares and Artemis. Any other arrangement would only be an act. It was a stunning revelation, but the moment they tested it, it proved true. On waking up, they had all been unfinished. On embracing each other, they had given themselves so completely that they had finished each other off. Not fatally, but in the sense of absolution, of purification and perfection. Doubling their life experiences through each other. Athena considered herself, gazed deeply into the hearts of Artemis and Ares. After careful soul searching, she found nothing objectionable about her new state, and her thoughts were so intimately woven into her mates’ that she knew they too were deeply satisfied.

While the three of them wandered away in a daze, Victor turned to Erin and announced that he had found a solution to her problem. It had occurred to him the day before, and he had consulted his wife about it. They were adopting her. Erin was stunned. The bit about what Athena, Artemis and Ares had done had not penetrated her, but this drove right home. She asked him to explain. Victor told her that in his younger days, he had fathered a woods-colt daughter. The girl had tracked him down after running away from an orphanage where she had lived since her mother’s death.

The poor girl had done all the research, confronting him with letters and bills and a birth certificate, all linking his name with her mothers. He had resolved to take her in when her own powers did her in. She had manifested them in the orphanage, under extreme emotional stress, and had never been disciplined. Other psionics had noticed her, and chased her when she ran from them. They killed her trying to subdue her, and he had arrived too late to do anything about it. He could not take revenge on the ones who killed her, she had been extremely dangerous and they had only intended to kill her as a last resort.

There had been no need to bury her; she had teleported herself into a rock wall. The kind of mistake that instinct normally prevented, but she had fought the instinct in her desperation to escape. There being nothing he could do for her, he collected her things and sent them to his wife for safe keeping. Her legacy would be Erin’s. His wife had taken the fastest flight to come out and meet her new daughter, but he urged her to keep it to herself, since Artemis—Athena he corrected—would likely run for the hills if she knew her mother was coming.

When everyone was ready, Athena, Artemis and Ares were rounded up and dragged over to Xanadu. By the time they arrived, the altered trio was all eager to test the effect of their marriage on the abilities they had possessed. They found that they could isolate the specific abilities of their original selves, or apply the gestalt and perform on a level they had never reached before. One surprise was that the new Athena now also had a double, and she was not married to Artemis and Ares.

She seemed to have benefited from the union, however, expressing the combined traits of all three, while being unique to herself, apart from their trinity. On examination, she proved to be the new Athena’s other, differentiated on the understanding of the union the potential to split had derived from. The original Athena had possessed a fault-break, which had enabled her to split too. Whatever it had been, it was now the division between her sexes. Artemis urged the new aspect to retain her independence, and to regard Athena as her home.

Her concern had been that she might feel obliged to take on the male aspect of Artemis-Athena. It was not necessary; Ares had assumed that aspect of the original Artemis. The girl accepted that, and then posed a vexing question. Everyone had come out with a name but her, as confused as they were by the perspective shifts they had all experienced—what was she supposed to be called. Even the usual names they used publicly, Alexander, Alex and Andrea, were taken. It was observed that she was essentially a copy of Athena—sticking exclusively to their present associations—so she was Alt Athena, and could go by Alt for short.

Everyone had retired to the pools when Victoria showed up. Alt and Athena spotted her a mile away and were both panicked and excited. They were not, and would never again be her son, but they were now the daughter—daughters—Victoria had always wanted. To replace the son she was losing, she was gaining the best son in law there was, although technically it would be the other way around. She actually had to remind herself of that. Among other things. She slipped out of the pool to swamp her mother in a twined embrace, Alt moved with the same instinct, and equal vigor.

Victoria had not been told about this, but she recognized at once that her son had become twin daughters. She examined them intently, spotting the child she remembered. She warned Victor that he had a lot to explain, but since she had gotten the good news first, as it were, she promised not to beat him to hard to get it out of him. She then asked to meet the girl she had been told about. Erin came up shyly and introduced herself. They talked for a bit, and Victoria embraced her warmly and with full approval.

Erin beamed as beatifically as Alt and Athena, confiding that their mother was perfectly wonderful. Victoria abandoned them only to share a few words with Victor, and to talk to the Morgans’ about swapped children, marriage arrangements—to make what they had already done official—and living arrangements. Xanadu solved that last issue; it was designed to accommodate multiple families, on the assumption that the Morgan daughters would never leave once they were allowed to move into that paradise. Victoria had to get to know all the kids more or less from scratch, so she approached Ares and embraced him as a son.

On hearing the house rules, she stripped down and joined the kids in the pool. Having been informed of the difference between Alt and Athena, she cornered Alt for female talk, getting the unbiased view from her of her daughter’s love and sex life. Athena was finding that Ares and Artemis were discussing how to divide her up, and jumped into the conversation wondering at how she loved him-her twice as much. They surprised her by joining together and giving her a single person on whom to focus her attention.

Mated, Ares and Artemis were perfect. A perfectly androgynous mind in a body that was male or female at will. Athena could still return the favor, her own mind was just as androgynous, for all she was a singularity and they were a duality. Her mind suddenly stopped trying to quantify and qualify. She was in love. She could finally admit that. She finally said it. Ares divided and together they returned it. Finally, they could talk about it. They had given up all they had originally possessed, and looked at each other from opposite sides. Ares finally whispered, *You truly are perfect for me. I can make love to you and never have to pretend I am making love to myself.*

They held on to each other, and watched Alt, as she swam away from her mother and joined the trio she could someday belong to. Chris and Jean took her into their circle with enthusiasm, and from where Athena stood, they seemed to compliment Alt so well. Artemis said she was seriously considering giving Alt her own identity, not in the way the three of them had exchanged—it would not be necessary for her now—but just step into Ares and let Alt follow her heart with a place in the world.

Athena turned to her and reminded her that she was Alt, Alt would hear through her. Artemis smiled and explained that she would not necessarily hear. Athena would be able to keep her secrets and her privacy, and make plans for her other self in the same manner which she had manipulated her own Athena’s destiny. She had never imagined she would end up where she was, patting Ares on the shoulder, but if she could have imagined it, she would have aimed for it.

Lauren and Morgan showed up in the afternoon and stole Ares away from Athena. Alt proved that she could jump back into Athena by simply teleporting from where ever she was when needed. Since Lauren and Morgan had not been in the original Athena’s secret she had decided to keep herself a secret as well. The four older boys showed up right behind those two girls, and divvied themselves up. One of them was already attached to Kim, two of them made a beeline straight to Artemis and Athena, and the last one joined Chris and Jean. Naomi was keeping Erin to herself, whenever she could steal her away from Victoria.

The next morning, Ares jumped into Artemis, to join Athena at school. Victoria had gotten up to eat breakfast with them and then see them off to school. Athena was still so thrilled at her mother’s reaction to her that she would rejoice all week. Artemis reminded her that she owed Keith an apology, and perhaps even a make up date. A debt she inherited with the name and responsibilities of Athena. To make it up to him, Keith demanded that she con her twin into joining her on the next date, so that all three of them could have a good time. She told him she would.

Ares actually came out to watch the twins’ gymnastics practice, and see if Hunter spotted the trade. He had proven he could tell the girls apart once he had confronted the fact that there were two of them. He did spot the switch, discretely asking Athena why she was pretending to be her sister. Athena pointed to the boy in the stands and explained that he was engaged to Athena but they, the girl Hunter recognized as Artemis and the boy, were in love. Of course, she added, he thought she was Athena. Hunter chucked and shook his head, and laughed outright when she asked him how he was able to tell them apart. She had thought she was mimicking her sister perfectly. He told her that one word said it all. Mimicking. He could always spot a faker, body language gave everything away.

Ares noted, afterwards, that Keith had not made an appearance of his own at practice. How could he or the girls have known that Keith had been called to a meeting of the Wild-Psi’d. Eric-Keith, AKA Dragon, was confronted with the data on Athena, Artemis and their friends and revealed that he had been aware of Athena’s potential but had never established if it were active. Hunter had given him no reason to suspect that he considered her active; his present role was a typical scouting role, if evidence came out proving her active, he would have to act immediately to keep her away from his brother.

Ares, Athena and Artemis went home to find out how the day had gone for the others. Victoria had informed them that morning that she and Victor had an appointment with a lawyer to establish Erin’s identity and arrange for a formal adoption hearing. Vincent had also approached Jean with a cover identity, something a bit sketchier than Erin’s but which could be strengthened if it became necessary. Athena had inherited a driver’s license, and so Artemis, Ares and of course Chris and Jean, were all going to go in to reacquire their own driving privileges the next day.

The Morgan house was going to get a reputation as a halfway house for displaced and recovered children. Officially, they had rediscovered Artemis, a long lost twin sister, and they had helped reunite Erin with her long lost father, with Jean they had taken a poor homeless girl and discovered her sketchy origins, and of course they were helping a transsexual girl start her life over again. Athena suggested the family consider officially becoming a half way house, since there were bound to be more psionics who would need to adjust their whole lives as a consequence of awakening to psi.

The next day was a break from the normal routine. The day following they would go back to Chris, Erin and Jean—and Ares—spending their days together, working on mastering their powers in the mornings and going out together every afternoon while Athena and Artemis—in their switched identities—were stuck at school. The date with Keith was looming somewhere on the weekend horizon, so Athena found herself with a day pretty much to herself. It was about time she went hiking. Instead of a heavily trafficked park, she headed over to the San Francisco Peninsula and ventured into the watershed, thousands of acres of protected forest and pristine reservoirs.

She did not notice her tail; her mind was still high with wonder and excitement at the change in her life. Her concern was with spotting and avoiding rangers as she cut through the woods like a goddess, or a wood nymph as she almost immediately discarded her clothes. The young man who followed her could easily keep up with her and mask his presence. He captured her exploits with a soundless, high fidelity digital video camera, relishing the response of his friends when he presented the evidence they had needed to make their decision about her. The poor camera quit after a few hours, but he continued to observe her as she frolicked through the woods, stretching her mind, and made notes.