She - A Naval Cadet - Ajea

A scene in which Avonlea learns that her application to the Aegis Navy has been accepted.

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Av opened her eyes. Faint light traced the narrow confines of the hotel coffin with each rhythmic pulse of the message light. Unlike the nerve twisting snarl of the impending alarm, it aroused her to instant alertness. There were only two calls that would have found her here, and neither was to be ignored. Wrapping the sheet around her torso, she reached for the com panel. A glance at the chronometer reminded her to cancel the alarm before accepting the call. It would not do to have that electric monster start screaming in the middle of the call. Three staccato taps later, she lay back under the glow of the monitor as the call was patched in. She had a moment to wonder who she was going to have to speak to in this ridiculous position before the image resolved itself into the face of the young officer who was her admissions advisor at the academy.

“Did I call at a bad time?” he asked.

“No sir, not at all,” she smiled politely. She folded her hands over her midriff and pretended that there was nothing unusual about carrying on a conversation flat on her back, stark naked save for a distressingly thin sheet, with her hair in a snarl where it had escaped from her braid. “It’s just about time to crawl out of this coffin anyway.”

He chuckled. Av guessed that he must be familiar with the joys of having “all the comforts of home” stuffed into a measly two cubic meters.

“Well then, you will no doubt be happy to hear that as of this morning your request has been approved. Your application has been revised. You can report to the dorms at your earliest convenience today,” he smiled at her look of relief. “I have to say, it was not easy to get you transferred onto this semester’s list. Your family...”

“House,” Av interrupted out of habit.

“...House, pardon me. Your House had made all of the proper arrangements of course, but specified a later admission date. Your request for early admission, while not impossible, did present some logistic problems coming as it did on such short notice. However, in light of the expense involved in requiring you to wait out until the start of your scheduled term—whether you remained here or returned to Angel Colony—I was able to have you bumped to the top of the waiting list. It took until the last minute, but you got your slot. Congratulations,” he beamed.

“Thank you, Lieutenant Mitchel,” she smiled. Over the last few days she had been growing more and more worried that her gamble would not pay off. It had taken almost all of the credit she could scrape together to just to buy a working passage to Sol, what little profit she made on that three month journey had barely been enough to pay the rent on the sleeper and file her request for admission status adjustment. Fortunately the accommodations included a meal once a day or she would have starved by now.

“No problem, Ms. Sinclair. You already have the information packet for this term. That will tell you where to go to get checked in and what the orientation schedule will be,” Av nodded, noting the use of the terrestrial version of her father’s clan name. Lieutenant Mitchel cleared his throat and went on, “You have a busy week ahead of you. When you get yourself settled in please call my office and see if you can get an appointment to see me before Monday. If we don’t get together by then, you’re going to be on your own to figure things out for a few weeks. I promise you, that won’t be fun.”

Av signed off, and sighed deeply as the interior illumination dropped to phosphor afterglow. So far so good. For a while it had looked as if her hopes were in vain. Of course, until she had checked in, there was still a chance that the other call would catch up with her. That thought was sufficient motivation fo brave the chill of the corridor. Av released the catch and slithered out through the access at the foot of her compartment. The hexagonal arrangement of the cells was predictably disturbing, but familiar to anyone who had worked in the abyss. As was the necessity of having to dress and undress out in the corridor. Av slipped into a kimono, provided by the hotel to guests who would otherwise end up stalking naked between sleepers and the facilities at all hours of the day and night. After checking the lock, she turned from the access to her cell and followed the corridor to the washroom. Her path led her out of the dark confines of the sleeper block out onto an upper level balcony of the terraced atrium that was the real attraction of this hotel.

She stopped to soak in the view, combing out her braid with her fingers as she leaned over the railing to peer into the artificial chasm. Even this early, swarms of bodies were negotiating the layers and tunnels of this man made hive. After scanning the familiar features of fountains, waterfalls, gardens, arbors, and sculptures, Av turned away from the railing and continued. As always, there were a handful of tourists who stared at her as she negotiated the lightly crowded corridors. By way of her father’s mother—a quarter Japanese, a quarter Irish, and half Scots—Av was one quarter Terran. The rest of her was pure Exotic, as her most distinctive feature boldly advertised. To say that her hair was red, was perhaps an understatement. Ajean and terrestrial genes had combined in her to produce hair the precise color of freshly spilled blood. A mystery of genetics almost as hard to explain as the origins of the Exotic races, and their human compatible genome. In the eight hundred years since Terrans had first set foot on Ajea, no firm hypothesis had been submitted on either side.