david aes \av \manuscript notebook

“what’s wrong with her?”

“she’s in heat.”

“what!?”

“calm down. there’s nothing you can do but ride it out. just be glad you aren’t a boy, you’d be losing your mind, because your body wouldn’t know what to do with itself. *av’yn* is hell on males.”

“what’s wrong with being male?”

“what is *av’yn.”*

*“av’yn,* can be translated as *self-conception.* *av* is literally translated as change, but conceptually means rebirth. and to answer your question, the problem is not being male, it is being avon. all of our kind are genetically programmed for asexual reproduction.”

“and … they don’t have the proper equipment.”

“yes … and no.”

“so?”

“*av’yn* is the result of an initial peak in the hormone that prevents our bodies from aging. when our metabolism shifts out of its growth stage, our bodies start producing this hormone. it is released into the bloodstream in a flood. this produces detectable side effects—typically drowsiness, constant arousal, erotic dreams and infertility—and often lasts for as long as a year. after the onset of heat, hormone levels peak following an annual rhythm, probably cued to certain environmental factors, including pheromone response.”

“for males and females? it is the same?”

“for males and both types of females the hormone surge produces three primary effects. it acts principally on the most non-specialized cells of the body, provoking a regression to embryonic state in some. these retrogressed cells enter the blood stream. this is where the secondary effect of the hormone becomes important, altering muscle tissue, triggering the development of follicles. unless the embryonic cells make it into these follicles, the body’s immune system will inevitably dismantle them. within the follicles, the presence of an embryo triggers the release of hormones and secretions which first render the embryo dormant and then encase it within a pearlescent mantle.”

“why is this such a problem for males?”

“because first heat is ended only by self impregnation.”

“what?!”

“yes, anvea, you will go through this too. you will conceive of yourself, and you will be both mother and daughter. the first time is always strange, but that is the nature of avon immortality.”

“mother *and* daughter. they will be of one mind?”

“yes.”

“and this would happen if she were a boy, too?”

“yes. in the old days a boy would face an abdominal pregnancy, with surgical delivery. some boys would choose a surrogate mother and have their *ayvo,* or embryonic self transplanted. that was the basis for marriage in our culture.”

“i don’t doubt it. he would be aware of being inside her. i can’t think of anything more intimate than that. god.”

“why didn’t you ever tell me?”

“i tried. you didnt want to be told that you were different from your friends. you have spent so much time among humans, focusing on similarities between them and us to blind yourself to the differences. it’s always been like that.”

“i think if you had told me that my body would impregnate itself...”

“i don’t know that it will.”

“but you said...”

“i described the normal course of *av’yn.* if you are normal, you will indeed become pregnant, and you will be born in your own image. what i tried to tell you many times before was that when the time came you would go into heat. you never wanted to hear that part, and so we never got past it. of course, while the onset of heat is inevitable, self conception is not.”

“so, then, maybe i wont get pregnant.”

“don’t sound so relieved. if you don’t get pregnant, then you will also never come out of heat. so, you see, knowing you, i decided that it might be better to leave it alone until it came up on its own. otherwise you would have worried yourself to pieces dreading your fate.”

“thanks.”

“i wasn’t going to let you go through this alone. i am going to be as close to you through this as i can manage.”

“are you looking forward to this?”

“not really.”

“afraid?”

“i don’t know. uneasy. i never thought i would be going back home.”

“that. do you even remember what happened?”

“i have nightmares sometimes.”

“things will be different this time, i assure you.”

“i think i’d rather keep my virginity.”

“i told you, sexual initiation is only part of the rite of passage. there are things about who and what you are that you need to learn about among your own people. for most avon, this is an adventure one dreams of all of one’s childhood. try not to dwell on the past.”

“i’m not. you should be telling me not to dwell on the future.”

“you’ll be fine.”

“all of my friends will be starting in the academy this year. by now they all know my admission was delayed for *mating season*. ‘fine’ is not the word that comes to mind. i am never going to live this down.”

“it’s beautiful.”

“better than that, it’s unregulated. we don’t have to use dampers or sleepers on the surface.”

“that will be hard to get used to.”

“well, it’s also addictive, many psionics, after experiencing nature with naked senses, find themselves unable to endure the sterility of space or the interference of dampers on a regulated world. that is why the colony keeps growing. not because so many psionics want to adopt our way of life, but because they can’t bear to leave.”

“before you go, i have to ask you something.”

“yes?”

“if avon are so open about sex, why was it so important for me to remain a virgin? why did i have to spend almost seven years denying my sexuality? i mean, you knew i was going to go into heat, and as a result i would inevitably take part in *arla liymb,* so it is not like i was saving myself for somebody special.”

“who says you aren’t? this is not a sexual free for all. just because you are free to engage anyone you want anywhere you choose, does not mean you should do so without discretion.”

“probably not. but my point is, why couldn’t i have been discrete before? i missed some wonderful opportunities, because your warning was so strong. tell me there is a good reason for the sacrifice.”

“i am sorry. i didn’t mean for you to deny your sexuality, i just wanted to warn you against indulging in sexual experimentation.”

“yes, but why?”

“i really don’t have time to explain everything. i can tell you that an accidental pregnancy would have been disastrous for you, and contraceptives would have been even worse. i know you use the psi method, but accidents can happen. i know i scared you with a long list of sexual risks, but what it all boiled down to was this, if something had disturbed your hormone cycles you could have gone into premature heat, or you could have gone sterile.”

“and these would both be disasters?”

“not counting pregnancy, which would be only a tragedy.”

“a tragedy. okay, don’t try to explain everything, just tell me, besides the obvious, what was at risk?”

“your agelessness. your immortality.”

“never mind, i’ll just have to wait for the long version. i played it safe, and i think we can leave it at that.”

“don’t worry, they teach you all of this before the start of *arla liymb.”*

“good morning, i have been waiting a long time to meet you.”

“i don’t believe it. i mean, i didn’t realize … it’s real. you’re real.”

“i certainly hope so. i guess i didn’t tell you.”

“i could have guessed, but i didn’t. are you really my mother?”

“your mother and i are the same person, in essence, but there are differences. like, i am not your mother. i am your sister.”

“well, that’s just a semantic difference isn’t it?”

“i think i have a lot to explain to you. first, lets get you situated. we’ll have plenty of time to discuss the mystery of avon nature.”

“well, just explain that part. how can you be the same person my mother is, and call us sisters?”

“um. well. how do i explain it? annae and i are each an expression of the same soul. one soul, a shared mind and spirit, but physically, despite identical genes, we are independent. being in separate bodies, we have separate attentions, distinct perspectives, and different experiences.”

“different memories.”

“exactly. see, in my mind, i am my own daughter. but in my memory, i am her daughter, and she is my mother. so, you can see why i would think of you as my sister.”

“it sounds insane. how do you really know who you are?”

“that’s too hard to explain. you’ll figure it out for yourself soon enough. that is what you are here for, and to that end, i am your chaperone. i told you i wasn’t going to make you go through this alone.”

“actually, my mom said that.”

“true, but i was paying attention.”

“ah. so, with you as my chaperone, all my mother has to do is pay attention, and she can keep tabs on me. sneaky.”

“oh, no. i’m not going to be your keeper. as your friend, and sibling, i promise to keep your affairs secret unless you say otherwise. … yes, we *can* keep secrets from each other.”

“this is going to be very weird.”

“

“

“you’re a natural.”

“not really. i’ve been studying in a *jen* all of my life. it was hard fitting avon and human schooling together, but i realized that i wanted this. it was worth the trouble.”

“her mother wanted her to have some kind of avon upbringing, but her career made it almost impossible for her to manage it herself. you don’t even have a rank do you?”

“no. unofficially i am equal to *na’mao*, but i also have *kai* equivalent disciplines as a psionic.”

“a pure avon school would never have gotten you so messed up.”

“i don’t recall having any particular problem with human psionic training. if anything seems likely to mess me up, it is *mnai*.”

“the sexual arts do present unique challenges, but once you have mastered them you are almost certain to attain the ideal of *nai*.”

“actually, according to tradition, she *has* to attain *nai* if she is to pursue a naval career like her mother.”

“i do?”

“yes. you know the code of the spheres.”

“the codes apply to me? but … i am not recognized at any rank.”

“stay here for a week. i am sure you can pass the test of *mai*. that will establish you as a master of *naio* through the devotion of *ma*.”

“*na’mai.* that means she has to have a traditional *mna*.”

“is that a problem?”

“we’ll know after i tell her what a traditional *mna* entails.”

“

“

“i have to what!?”

“relax. i did it. there is nothing to be ashamed of. actually it is an honor to be taken under formal witness.”

“it’s perverted. i have no intention of being deflowered in public.”

“that’s your human thinking. sex is a beautiful, sacred act. *av’mna* is not some kind of squalid sex show. it is a ceremonial ritual under the guidance of a wise and experienced *da’mnai*.”

“i can’t believe i come from a society where priest and prostitute is the same job.”

“

“

“you know, i had a real clear idea of what i wanted to do with my life. i want a career. i want to do something to contribute, because i believe in what the aegis is about. i don’t mind all of this, but every time i try to accept this part of myself and go on with life, it just gets more complicated. i really don’t know if i can do this!”

“av, dear, i know you are afraid. that is not a problem. the problem is, you are not being honest about what you are afraid of.”

“what?”

“you aren’t afraid of sex. i know you are not familiar with this kind of open sexuality, but you know it doesn’t intimidate you.”

“and how would you know that.”

“av, i have been watching you for a long time. you are not a self conscious person. you are adventurous and confident. but you are also a very private person.”

“…”

“it had to be hard growing up like an outcast. always hiding your differences, pretending to be just like everyone else around you. how long did it take for your protective camouflage to become a habit?”

“you sound like my mom.”

“yes, well. she only nagged you about it because i brought it to her attention.”

“thanks.”

“i’m sorry. i didn’t like seeing you so lonely all the time. my point is, you are here now. let go of your disguise. you are not an outcast here, you are just like most of the rest of us. just be yourself.”

“so, if i am, what am i really afraid of? what is this anxiety i feel?”

“performance anxiety? stage fright?”

“…”

“

“

“relax, there is no pressure.”

“i can’t. nothing personal, i can feel their eyes on me.”

“you are very pleasant to look upon. surely this is not new to you? no. i see it is not. are you afraid?”

“no. i think i really want this. how can you be so calm? for that matter, how can you be aroused with an audience on one hand, and a shivering, nervous girl, who is anything but aroused, on the other.”

“one, i am not here for them, and two, you are such an interesting set of contradictions that i can’t help but be stimulated.”

“your confidence is inhuman.”

“just think of it as dancing. we may hold the center of the dance floor, but really, there is just you and me. nothing else matters.”

“you know what, this really should be dancing. would you?”

“my pleasure.”

“…”

“

“

“i’ve never seen you before.”

“what are you doing? hey!”

“i mean, i have seen you around for the past couple of weeks, but i don't remember ever seeing you before that. who are you?”

“you’re … sitting on my arm.”

“yes. are you in from the provinces?”

“your … genitals are hanging all over me.”

“hm. so, they are. i know, you are from off planet.”

“will you get off?”

“no. i am not hurting you. so, what planet are you from?”

“you’re just being obscenely rude. would you at least cover yourself!”

“i have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“i beg to differ.”

“you act like a human. not that you are. of course. i’ve never met a human in heat before.”

“and how would you know?”

“that you are in heat? you’ve tainted the whole pool. you taste wonderful.”

“this isn’t happening. get your dick off of me, or i’ll remove it from both of us.”

“what? are you going to rip it off with your bare hands? please try, you’d be amazed at how well attached it is. that is, if you’re not afraid to touch it. or were you planning to use your teeth?”

“ow! you son of a bitch.”

“what a pity. you can’t reach. i guess i do have to give you your arm back. ah, ah. not so fast. i am still waiting for your answers.”

“answers!”

“yes. i answered your questions, but you never answered mine.”

“as if i would have anything to say anything to a man ambushing me in the pool.”

“hm. she doesn’t have a sense of humor, either. still, she is promising. we’ll just have to get our answers elsewhere. delicious”

“you’re a real bastard.”

“i enjoyed meeting you too. there you go. run away now.”

“

“

“there you are. i wanted to tell you all day how proud of you i am.”

“what are you talking about?”

“your *av’mna.* last night. hey are you okay, you look troubled.”

“some guy cornered me in the pool.”

“ah.”

“not like that. he was very aggressive. and mean. i think he’s been stalking me.”

“i’m sorry. i shouldn’t have left you alone.”

“i can take care of myself. it was surprising more than anything. he was sarcastic and overbearing, but he wasn’t quite violent. good looking too. pity.”

“that happens sometimes. *av’yn* makes some males very aggressive.”

“has anyone ever gotten raped?”

“i have heard of some violent encounters. usually it doesn’t get as far as rape within the community. one of the reasons individuals choose to have sex in the open is so that if things start to go wrong there are witnesses to intervene. usually rape only happens in the wild areas.”

“well, i guess i’ll try to stay out of the woods.”

“you think this guy is a threat to you?”

“i don’t know what he is. i’d rather not find out the hard way.”

““

you were waiting for me to come out.”

““

“don’t worry about it. the important thing is you waited. as your spiritual body merges with your physical body, you will stop aging. if, however, you had engaged in sex between menarche and rut one of two things could have happened. your sexual activity could have triggered premature rut, and halted your aging significantly earlier, or you could have gotten pregnant, in which case you would have arrested the onset of rut altogether, and lost the chance to become ageless.”

““

“however much avon and human resemble each other, we are the product of different evolutionary paths.”

““

“you would think that sex would be less confusing for humans; they only have two sexes after all.”

““

“you evolved from a prey species. why else would you have a symbiotic reproductive cycle?”

“symbiotic reproductive cycle?”

“sure. i really can’t guess how it developed, but i’d say it is a species survival mechanism. your bodies produce seeds, which are embedded in your flesh. when an ancestor fell prey to its primary predator, possibly a pack of animals of equal or moderately larger size, she would be devoured, and the seeds would be ingested. the interesting question is, how did the embryo reach the womb of the predator host?”

“maybe it didn’t, maybe it just implanted in the abdominal cavity and chewed its way out when the time came.”

“i doubt it. if the fetus had the capability to tear its way out of the host, it would also have the ability to tear its way out of a natural parent, as well as the instinct to do so. that is a negative species survival trait, and then some.”

“the thing i can’t figure out is what kept the predator from eating the little changeling after it was born. i mean, if we are talking about predators and prey here, don’t you think the host mother would notice the difference?”

“humans astonished avon civilization when they discovered us. it was as if they had stepped out of our mythology. it took hundreds of years to resolve the paradox of humans as they appeared among us, and the myths and legends of a race of animals our star faring ancestors bred with to escape an evolutionary dead end. the alyn of myth, the consort race of the lyn, were primitive humans. humanity is the mother race. we share part of our genetic and spiritual destiny with humans.”

““

“mmm. well. i suppose i can tell you now. you went into heat as a result of a spiritual metamorphosis—a sort of puberty for the spiritual body.”

“spiritual body? spiritual puberty?”

““

““

““

slithering out of her nightshirt, she squirmed into a body sleeve, tunic and leggings. she found her tall boots and overcoat in the entry, and with economic haste, soon found herself sealing the door behind her. the specter of dreams retreated as she locked herself safely out in the night. turning her back to the door, she was mildly surprised to note that the evening storm had made its advance during her brief panic. the moonlight had become diffuse and weak. she toyed with the notion going back in for her great cloak, but resigned herself to the whim of the weather.

she was mildly afraid that she would retreat back to the lonely comfort of her apartment if she opened the door. she was substantially afraid that if she gave it a chance, sleep would trap her again. so, setting her teeth, she stalked out into the darkened estate.

she did not have anywhere to go really. her only thought was the need for action. she did not want to dwell on the nightmares, or the memories from which they took their substance. she deliberately turned away from thought. she needed to fix on the present, and that called for nothing more complicated than the feeding of her ever hungry senses. to get her blood flowing, she set off at a brisk pace.

there was a music in the motion. the fast beat of her heart and the slower rhythm of her echoing footsteps set a complex tempo. the wind whistled and moaned along the broad arcades, underscored by the rattling hiss of the rain. the crack and grumble of thunder dominated, reaching inside her chest and abdomen to caress her vulnerable parts. in the silences between, she could hear the endless passion of the surf, stroking the beaches, and thrusting among crevices and fissures of the rocks.

the sharp bite of ozone, and the spice of new rain, laced by the primal life-scent of the ocean, were taunting and arousing. her nostrils flared as she drank in the heady mix. it sharpened her perceptions, opening her mind to her body, transforming flesh into some sensual flame. her muscles moved beneath her skin like tongues of heat and light. every motion created friction, her own clothes gripping and sliding around her in a binding caress. it was maddening. it was wonderful. it was unbearable. her senses were overloaded and her whole being craved for release.

the memory of long stroking caresses, evoked by this simple consequence of movement, provoked an unbearable response. the kindling of unwanted passion drove her even further from the comforts of her bed. away from the stately arcades and galleries, across the shoulders of the plateau, and down the craggy face of the sea cliffs. her exertion somehow fusing the weave of sensuality, allowing her to surface from the seductive assault on her senses. in spite of herself, her mind began to churn with troubling thoughts. a clean wind roaring over the beach cut through the folds of her clothing, to clear the cloying somnolence of heat. the cause for her return, the reason her sleep was visited by demons she had left behind on this world, drew her thoughts into focus.

biology had forced her to face her alien heritage. the overwhelming onset of heat had proved the lie of her adopted humanity. the metabolic changes that would decide her path to immortality had impelled her to submit to the traditions of her avon nature. she had made it this far on pure momentum. perhaps the forces that had brought her to this point had already pushed her too far. her human tainted mind still struggled in shock over the ease with which she had passed her initiation. her humanity struggled to accept her public de-flowering at the hands of a priest.

she wondered if her reactions to her awakened sexuality were natural. did all avon experience the world with such deep, carnal passion during heat? did the sexual sophistication of her native culture make those who grew up exposed to it more immune to the effects that were swallowing her? had years of identifying with a human peer group damned her with human insecurities?

in spite of herself, she also wondered if it was really just part of her madness. maybe she had experienced so much pain in her short life, that any moment without pain was pure pleasure—and any moment of pleasure was doomed to be more than she could bear.

the days were gone, where she could wander through the night wondering if making love would be as wonderful as opening herself to the sensuousness of the world as she moved through it. her heat had taken away the innocence of the world’s embrace. her humanity threatened to turn the wonder of awakened senses into something sordid and ugly.

“i think i’m in love.” the strong arms enfolding her tightened. it was uncanny they way they fit together, she thought. she stroked her fingers along his forearm, stunned as she realized that her impulsive words had been the first spoken by either of them since they had met. it was almost frightening in a way. what she had just done was so unlike her that it summoned up serious questions regarding her sanity. so great was her preoccupation with the strength and mindlessness of her passion, she missed the signifigance of his response.

“to think, if i had chosen to be female, i would have missed this. i would have missed you.”

she heard the words, but she was not really listening. the matter would have slipped past her if the words had not found a sore spot in her unconscious thoughts. as they kissed and caressed, the words gnawed at her. they stirred in the undercurrents of her passion as he made love to her again, salting her pleasure with the memory of resentment. even as she rejoiced in her womanhood, it secretly tormented her. how could she ever forget that she had been found unworthy of the ideal sex from the moment of conception. there was no shame in being born half sexed, like a human. except she *had* been ashamed.

circumstances had taught her to feel so.

ideally, her sex did not diminish her promise. her potential was as great as anyone’s. no one ever denied that. realistically, however, it placed her at a disadvantage. in spite of the fact that all individuals had the same opportunities in avon society, a female had almost no chance to attain the ranks of ideals and uniques. it was just one of those things, being part of a culture where contraception was taboo, and abortion a capital crime. it was not a conspiracy, but it was common knowledge that the over half of young women initiated during *av’yn* ended up married to her sexual mentor. again, more than half of those who continued their education, and became mentors in their own right during the next *av’yn,* ended up as courtesans and concubines to some house or a court.

anathnae had been afraid of her sex. ashamed by the desire to be in a man’s arms, loving him, wanting a part of him to take root within her and grow. how could something that felt so right, that sang of such wonderous, perfect fulfillment also haunt her with the dread that price of her love and the lives of her children would be her own life?

it was this fear that had driven anathnae to pursue her naval career. she wanted, no, she needed to pit herself against the challenges of life, and discover herself through acheivement. she ached to be in a place where she explore her potential. among people she need not fear to explore her sexuality with. after all, it took a great act of will for an avon and a human to conceive a child. almost as great as it took for an *av’avon* to conceive of herself. as soon as she *had* conceived and given birth to herself, she had left, leaving her daughter-self to fulfill the obligations of her heritage and sex.

anathnae smiled, as waves of pleasure broke across even these deep rooted thoughts. given her fears and apprehensions, it was truly astonishing to find herself in her present position. impaled on a man about whom she knew nothing, save that she was utterly and hopelessly in love. certainly “in love” if she had heard his words correctly. if he, too, had been born female, their meeting would have been a tragedy.

but, she suddenly realized, that was not precisely what he said.

her thoughts suddenly whipped along several diverse tracks, the largest part of her consciousness grasping at once the depth of her folly, while scattered bits of her attention revisited the particulars. among avon, there were those who had the ability to conceive of themselves, like her. but not all avon shared this gift. for some, the physical and spiritual changes of maturity produced a different effect. for them the male and female principles mated in a way that was irreconcilable. these were the ones who could not conceive of themselves. the ones for whom sexual potential was fused back to back. their only hope of realizing a sexual identity was to...

her eyes flew open, pleasure dissolving into cold panic. “wait. did i hear you right? did you just say *if you had choosen* to be female...?”

she was rolling over to face him, and he smoothly shifted himself on top of her. her stunned speech was smothered under his kiss. when he released her mouth, he apologised, “forgive me, i wasn’t thinking. it is not a human reality. i forget how sensative you are to the differences in our sexuality. it must be hard to imagine, having a choice about ytour own sex.”

“you must be joking! you can’t possibly mean to tell me you are va’avon!? an aesalyn!?” she demanded.

“i’m surprised you would know the distinctions. i’m impressed.”

she stared into his eyes, and realized that it was not a joke. her reaction was pure reflex. a desperate fear drove her out of his arms and across the room. her body trembled as part of her mind waited for the old ones to strike her down for violating the covenant. with each breath she cursed herself, and wondered how she could still live. the only possability was that she had been obscenely lucky.

he was obviously crushed, and confused. he rose from the bed and tried to approach. again, the deep ingrained fear caused her to flinch. he sagged back at her reaction, and turned his face away. in a stricken voice he stammered, “i... i thought you knew... that... i was avon. that i was an alien. i can see now you thought i was human.” he turned back toward her. “what lies have you been told about aesalyn? do you think i forced you to feel passion? do you think i used you? do you think i made you feel love?!”

her head was shaking in denial. in a small voice she cried, “no. it’s not you. you don’t understand...” she began, and realized how true it was. he didn’t realize it yet. he had made the same assumption she had. he had assumed she was human. he didn’t know what they had done. very carefully she backed away from that revelation. “i don’t know. maybe it’s me... there are some things... i didn’t expect... just... there’s something i don’t understand!”

“then why? why are you acting like this? does it change anything, knowing what i am? can you honestly say your feelings for me now are any different than what they were before i admitted what i am?”

“no. i’m sorry. i just... i just need time to think. i need time to figure this out. i don’t even know what to tell you. how to explain...” she started gathering her uniform together. as she slithered into her clothes, she started to cry. she knew she had to tell him, but could not bear to. this was the curse of the old ones. her love for him would never die, nor his for her, but the covenant commanded them to deny all affection between them. to do otherwise would only lead to their destruction. as she finished putting herself back together, she finally approached him.

he still sat magnificently naked on the edge of the bed. the material of her uniform sheathed her from the top of her throat to the tips of her fingers and toes. the fire of his touch still seared her skin through the impenetrable cloth. she kissed him, with all her aching heart, and whispered, “i do love you. i will always love you. it scares me. i have to stop, i have to think. please say you understand.”

he looked into her eyes, seeing the depths of her turmoil. “i don’t care how long it takes. i will wait for you to come back to me.” his arms slid around her as he stood. crushing her tightly, he added in a fierce whisper, “take the time, as much time as it takes, because i can only survive letting go of you once.”

she was an outstanding cadet at the academy.

anathnae was an ensign in the aean (the aegis of the establishments’ association navy) on active duty, when she confronted an unexpected pregnancy. anathnae had made an honest mistake. unless certain measures were taken, avon normally were not fertile with humans. unfortunately, her new lover was not human. her second pregnancy threatened to destroy her dreams of independence, but what she learned about the father forced her to accept the consequences. he was va aesalyn. each of them had made the same assumption, that they had coupled with a human, so neither had thought of the covenant, nor of contraception. and if the covenant had been right, they would have destroyed each other. the life she had conceived should never have existed. understanding what she had conceived, it became the most important thing in her life.

anathnae was transferred from her post without comment, when she revealed her condition. her lover, the father of her triplets, remained behind, and would advance in his career while she waited out the pregnancy in limbo. he was never enlightened to the cause of his love’s transfer, nor of the fruits of their labor. he could not be told. what they had done was a capital crime among their people, and ignorance was the only protection she could offer him.

anathnae made a deal with the aea to prevent the children’s paternity from being discovered, offering the aea access to avon embryos for the first time in history. the procedure involved removing the embryos from her body, to be force-twinned. as a result of this procedure the three embryos each became registered citizens and genetic donor parents. anathnae took advantage of embryo-stasis to stagger the births of the triplets, delaying the birth of each one in turn just enough for her body to recover. the aea acceded to her request to obscure the mechanics of these transactions, as part of their original agreement to get access to the embryos. as soon as she was able, she returned to her career while her children were raised in a navy crèche.

the triplets were born male, androgynous female and female. they were raised as single parent navy brats. they spent part of their time in a crèche school with visitations by their mother when she was on leave, and they shared vacations. when av was five years old, they went to their mother’s native home for her brother’s naming. during their stay, they were caught up in a massacre, and of the three only av survived. she suffered devastating multiple-traumas—witnessing the massacre, her mind was in full rapport with her siblings during their deaths. her sister was hacked to pieces before her eyes, and her brother paralyzed protecting her from a fall down a catacomb airshaft as they fled the slaughter. they were trapped for days, and he died in her arms. before she was rescued one of the slayers tracked her down and assaulted her. power she did not know she possessed came to her defense, but memories of that moment of terror ended up repressed to depths reached only by her darkest nightmares. the dead bodies of her brother and her attacker were both entangled in hers when they found her. av spent more than a year in autistic shock, followed by traumatic flashbacks and nightmares plaguing her recovery even after her return to her crèche environment after her naming two years after the tragedy.