

## Gypsy

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The drive out past Death Valley took longer than we expected, and once we left the paved road, my rented pickup nearly bogged down in sand washes several times, despite its four-wheel drive. We passed some sand-blasted signs warning of an 'AEC Test Area'. I didn't like the look of that because ours were the only tracks on the dirt road.

But Sandra confirmed we were still following Aila's detailed hand-drawn map. In the twenty years we'd been married, Sandra had never gotten us lost. And Aila's maps were as precise as anything the USGS published.

Right where Aila's map indicated, we came to the entrance of a large mine and hopped out of the pickup. The sagging, half-century-old timbers still framed the entrance, but a close look revealed an array of twisted steel rails and newly cut timbers behind them, bracing the opening. Some of the steel rails had finger-shaped grooves in the them, and others bore palm prints.

Nobody but Aila could do that. We were in the right place.

As we walked toward the portal, our boots kicked up yellowish rock tailings, the kind that showed up around uranium mines. I wished I'd brought a Geiger counter. No telling if this place was radioactive, or if the radiation could still affect us.

A line of dual-wheeled tire tracks appeared in the tailings, leading toward the mine. I followed them into the mine entrance, and saw the dim outlines of a huge motorhome parked twenty meters inside. When I got there, its door was ocked. The door was locked.

Sandra's voice echoed down the tunnel from outside the mine, "She's here, Greg."

I walked back out to see a stunning blonde sitting on the back of the pickup. It was Aila, dressed in a short green skirt and sleeveless white fur top and heels. Her hair was tousled from her flight, and her eyes were bright as she turned her head to look into my eyes.



Instead of meeting her gaze, my eyes were drawn to her strong legs draped over the tailgate. They were deceptively trim. Last week, after the Bangkok earthquake, she had held up the entire north side of a fifty-story hotel. The building's architect had told CNN that the burden was seventy to ninety-thousand tons. That made her at least half a million times stronger than any woman born on Earth.

She was also tireless. Those long legs had become the supporting pillar for the northwest corner of the tower while an army of contractors prepared a new foundation and poured fast-setting concrete. She didn't bat an eyelash during twelve hours of standing there, posture perfect, arms lifted straight over her head, that ungodly weight focused straight down her back. They finally poured the new foundation over her, burying her without air and water. They asked her to hold the tower up while the concrete hardened. A day later, she emerged from the fully hardened concrete, leaving a carefully sculpted hole, her body covered in gray dust.

The power of goddess, straight out of fantasy.

Except Aila was anything but a fantasy. I raised my head to contemplate the rest of her divine features, and caught her looking at me in that piercing way she always did. Her expression was curious yet reserved, warming slightly as an enigmatic smile came to her lips. I think she can read my thoughts, but she won't admit to it.

I had no secrets from Aila, and her feelings for me were starting to become apparent.

Sandra, who hadn't had the slightest doubt about Aila's feelings from the start, smiled and walked closer as Aila slipped off the tailgate to drift down to the soft sand. Her favorite shoes, a pair of Italian pumps, barely dimpled the grains. She drifted an inch or so higher to match Sandra's height. Although she seemed to be standing, there was clear air visible between her thin leather soles and the brown sand. With no heed to this miracle, Sandra embraced her and the two women shared a deep lover's kiss.

It began six months ago when this dazzlingly tall blonde walked into my office in San Francisco asking me to teach her some languages. That was my business. Accelerated language instruction.

I could speak a dozen languages, but apparently none that she knew. We negotiated in broken English and a lot of hand waving as I tried to sign her up and find out how she was going to pay my fees. That discussion ended when she opened her purse and poured a mound of ancient Spanish gold coins on my desk. Each one was a full ounce of 24 karat, the treasure of a long sunken Spanish galleon. Five hundred dollars an ounce for the raw gold, although the antique nature of the coins probably made them many times more valuable.

We got down to business now. She picked up a globe and pointed to a half dozen countries. I deduced she wanted me to teach her Mandarin, Japanese, French, German, Russian. But first, English.

Annoyed by the impossible request, but drawn by her golden features and the gleaming gold on the table, I tried to deduce her native language. Her accent was unfamiliar, but this was a favorite game that I rarely lost. Ten wrong guesses later, she informed with a completely straight face that it was Aleron.

"Where on Earth do they speak that language?" I asked, intrigued. I prided myself on at least knowing the name of more than three hundred languages.

She shook her head. "Not Earth. Other planet." Then a smirk crossed her face as she pulled a dog-eared Superman comic book out of her purse. "Like Krypton."

My eyebrows rose for a moment, and then I decided to play along with her joke. "And you're Supergirl, of course."

She nodded enthusiastically while smiling bright enough to warm my dingy office. She was distractingly cute. Frilly top, bared abs, phenomenally fit, dressed in a tiny skirt, legs a mile long. I continued my joke by laughing and asking her to show me how she flew. Her determined eyes narrowed at my laughter, and then, without warning, she crossed her legs Indian-style and slowly floated upward, hovering over the visitor's chair. With those shapely legs floating near my eye level, I forgot to look for the wires. I just kept gazing at the most beautiful legs I'd ever seen.

"Up here." She broke the magical spell.

I looked up and saw her pouting at me. Odd, that a woman so beautiful didn't appreciate my admiration. Maybe that's why I decided to take back some of the initiative.

"That's a nice trick you and Eileen worked out for me. Now tell me, where are the wires?" I came out from behind my desk and looked for them.

"What Eileen is?"

"Who is Eileen?" I corrected her. Lessons had started.

She lifted one eyebrow, silently asking her question again.

"My secretary. I didn't think she knew anyone who looked like you, though."

She cocked her head as if my reply were some sort of mystery. Meantime, I'd given up on the wires. There weren't any.

Instead of asking another question, she leaned forward and picked up the memento on my desk that a former employer had given me. Two pounds of solid leaded glass. No fake, as I'd used it only an hour ago as a paperweight. With total nonchalance, she slowly crushed it to sparkling dust. Then she blew on her hands, and the air was filled with a million tiny prisms, each one casting a rainbow in a dusty beam of morning sunlight.

"Pretty," she intoned as she rotated in mid-air to stand on the ceiling, blonde hair falling over the seat of the chair, waving her arms gently to make the glass dust swirl around her, coating her skin with a dazzle of rainbow sparkles.

I was too stunned to be angry. Instead, I briefly wondered what the hell I'd eaten in that grotty Turkish restaurant last night.

She floated closer, flipping back upright. She was moving fast. I tried to get out of the way, but she wrapped her arms around me and flipped the two of us out the eighth floor window of the converted factory.

I screamed in terror as we started to fall to certain death.

Except we didn't fall far.

After a mile high circuit of downtown San Francisco, I was sitting back in my desk chair, trembling violently, staring wide-eyed at Aila as if she was an alien. Which of course she was. She sat across from me, looking calm, composed and beautiful.

"You want student me? Gold enough?"

At that point, I would have taken her on for free just to get to know her. I'd had my share of fantasies about Supergirl. I still was having trouble accepting that this wasn't. A fantasy. Or that she was. Supergirl. Well, more or less.

My mind would probably still be stuttering away if she hadn't stepped to the side of my desk and grasped my left hand in hers. As her silky, warm, golden skin touched mine, my thoughts finally calmed and I started feeling secure again. I felt a funny but pleasant buzz filling my body.

I eased my hand from hers and scraped the mound of coins into my top desk drawer. There must have been five pounds of the stuff. Business had been really tough lately, what with the slowdown in travel due to terrorism.

I did my best to teach her. It was slow at first, as we had no language in common. She watched a lot of TV. That helped give us a working basis.

A month after we started, she spoke Californian English well enough to pass for a native San Franciscan. Now that we could really converse, her learning accelerated by leaps and bounds. Two months later, she spoke Mandarin better than any resident of Chinatown. She was equally fluent in the other four languages she'd requested. She went right on to learn Spanish, Arabic, K'Swahili and Hindi. She was starting on Tamil and Bahasa Malaysia.

She had incredible learning skills in other areas as well. She could read a college textbook in ten minutes and then recite the text from any page without looking. First in one language and then translating it flawlessly to the other five. She read Webster's Unabridged Dictionary in one sitting. Two thousand pages. She made a game out of telling me what page number each word was on.

As amazing as that was, she managed to turn my personal life upside down as well. I took her home to meet my wife, Sandra. Dinner and drinks and a chance for her to work on Czech, one of the languages Sandra spoke that I didn't. They seemed to get along really well. So well that Sandra burned dinner while they chatted out on the back deck. When I returned from going out for some emergency pizza, they were in the bedroom making passionate love.

Now you might think that's a problem, most men would, but Sandra and I had a rather special arrangement. We were soulmates, best friends and we'd been in love for more than twenty years. When we'd first talked of getting married, she'd frankly told me that she would be more than happy with one man in her life. On the other hand, she had some very good female friends. They would still be part of her life. It was something I'd have to accept.

That made sense to me. You didn't give up your friends when you got married. And her girlfriends were definitely interesting. She'd been a model for five years before we met. Of course, I completely missed the point of her disclosure about her friends.

I woke up on the third night of our marriage, honeymooning in Maui, to feel the bed shaking and hear the sounds of lovemaking. The lights were on. Disoriented, I rolled over to see a long-haired blonde looking back at me as she kneeled on the bed.

I recognized her as the model who was currently gracing those WondraBra ads. I couldn't remember her name. She looked like she was posing for her latest advertisement. Until I looked down and saw Sandra's face hidden between her long legs. It took me a few seconds for everything to crash home. WondraBra girl's eyes slowly closed as she rocked herself back and forth, breathing hard, breasts heaving. Sandra was working her brand of magic. I felt like a voyeur until Sandra rose to roll her friend on her back and invited me between her wondrously long legs to finish what she'd started. Half awake, half dreaming, I wasn't sure, I watched as Sandra got up and headed to the bathroom, leaving me with one of the most beautiful women on the planet, her eyes begging me to finish what Sandra had started. I gently guided myself to her as she wrapped her legs around me and I took her in a long, wet and incredibly tight thrust. She screamed and went crazy beneath me. I went from zero to the end of the universe in thirty seconds.

It was the fastest sex in my life, but it was both weird and wonderful, as much from the shock and surprise as anything else. Sandra came out of the bathroom just as I collapsed next to her friend, and laughed at the shocked and guilty look on my face. She and her friend then proceeded to inspire me with their slow, passionate loving until it was my turn again. So went the rest of the night.

Not bad for a guy who was pretty average looking. A man whose only real talent was talking in tongues.

I started to go to the gym more. Sandra and her lathesome friends were inspiring. And so very fit.

Life with Sandra was never dull. Not one single moment of our twenty years together. And now, it was like our honeymoon all over again. An outrageously cute blonde, Supergirl (I called her that), had the hots for my wife.

Maybe it was masculine ego, but when I brought Aila through our door that first time, I never expected that I would sit in the living room eating pizza while I listened to them having fun. But that's what happened. Even more extraordinary, I was feeling intimidated. I'd gotten used to the company of the most beautiful women in the world. But Supergirl?

I was imagining what it would be like to make it with a Kryptonian (which I still thought of Aila was). Sandra kissing her way upward between those gorgeous legs, my touch, my lips finding her breasts, caressing her hard nipples. Our usual teamwork. I felt myself rising, and then thought Aila's incredible strength. Better to let Sandra chart that territory without any other distractions, I decided. She was always so in control of her loving, and she had less to lose if Aila got a bit too enthusiastic. Were Kryptonians strong everywhere?

So I finished off the pizza and then slept badly on the couch. I kept drifting into visions of Sandra's reddish-brown hair mingling with Aila's blonde. Sandra's eyes, one blue the other intensely green, smiling into the sparkling sky blue of Aila's as the two women explored each other's pleasures. Her grandmother had been what we called a gypsy and what Sandra correctly called "Roma", wandering Europe and seducing stray men (and presumably women). Sandra said her grandmother was famous among the gypsies for her talent in making men forget their vows.



Aila announced at breakfast that she wanted to move in with us. Sandra was ecstatic. I looked at them both and finally nodded. I had no idea at that time what I was getting myself into.

At first, it was almost erotic torture. Although twenty years together had made Sandra and me wiser and more skilful, our bodies were wearier. And now we were in a sexual whirlwind again - more intense than our honeymoon.

But soon after Aila began to share our bed, I realized that something was happening to Sandra. Each week that passed, she seemed to lose a year of her age. After three months, Sandra could pass for thirty. And when we got a flat tire in the rain one night, Sandra changed the tire without a jack or lug wrench. She put the lug nuts back on so tightly that the garage mechanic couldn't get them off with his pneumatic wrench. She had to loosen them with her fingers while I distracted the mechanic.

I was slowly changing too. I now had the stamina and erections of a teenager, but with the patient control of a man my age. Sandra really liked that. I think Aila did too. I know for sure that I did. I was also multi-orgasmic, something I'd thought was only a myth with men. I was strong too, but nothing compared to Sandra's transformation. But bending a pipe wrench is still a pretty neat parlor trick.

After two weeks of breathless lovemaking every night, I insisted on delaying our nightly romps in bed to see a cheesy old DVD movie of a voyage to Mars. I thought it would give Aila a laugh. She stared spellbound for the entire ninety minutes without breathing, and by the end she had become addicted to Hollywood movies. She sat in front of our home theatre and watched all three of the *Lord of*

*the Rings* DVD's. Twice in one sitting. She laughed, she cried, she punched a hole in my floor when she felt like strangling Sauruman.

As far as I could tell, she never slept. She'd go to bed with us, and once we fell into exhausted asleep, she'd rise to go downstairs and watch movies all night. She bought every movie that Amazon had on their web site. For a while, UPS showed up twice a week to deliver a huge box of DVD's.

She also filled our house up with hundreds of books, also from Amazon. She read a dozen each day. After a few weeks, she was mostly reading books on history and political science. For days, she would hardly talk with us, except to make love and practice languages, sometimes at the same time.

Eventually, though, she opened up a little and told us about her home planet, Aleron. Her upbringing had been sheltered, their society reserved to the point of being ascetic. No laughter, no games, only study. No sex except as strictly required to propagate the race, and then performed quickly and without passion. She told us how shocked she'd been when she realized that the people of Earth either thought about or had sex nearly all the time. She'd just watched in amazement at first, her eyes seeing everything.

Until she met Sandra. And Sandra's friends. And the bikers at the bars. Now she was insatiable. Or so it seemed to me. But then, as Sandra kept telling me, I'm only a man. Given our bedtime activities, my feelings weren't hurt.

Her flight from Aleron was also the stuff of comic book legend.

Two hundred generations of mutation from the intense and unusual radiation from Aleron's core had driven mutations, which had then been selected, culled and ultimately combined to create an unusually powerful and intelligent variant of humanity. The last ten generations had concentrated exclusively on piling beneficial mutations for physical power on top of each other, using genetic engineering to select them from their now diverse genetic legacy. She described how her people had spawned other client races to guide and direct humanity. Apparently that hadn't gone very well. Something about the Supremis, whoever they were.

She claimed to be a member of the last generation born on Aleron, the Zel'andra. They were the culmination of their selective breeding program.

When the core of Aleron started to go critical, the Science Council resolved to send its population out to the corners of the galaxy and find the other worlds that the Seeders had visited. They believed that the Seeders had dropped humans on uncounted worlds, Aleron being one of the first.

Over the centuries, the Alerons had found marked wormholes that led to and from a hundred human-populated worlds, left behind by the ancient Galactics. But they had also found thousands of unmarked wormholes. Generations of Alerons had gone through them and never returned, but it was believed that most of them were still alive and searching for seeded worlds in other galaxies. Ready to guide and improve the genetic stock of humans wherever they found them.

During a single week, all the remaining Alerons left their home planet, leaving an unpopulated and dying world behind. It would never be known to how many worlds the Seeders had brought life, or how many of those worlds the scattered Alerons would find, but Aleron's final gift to the universe would be its last generation of offspring.

Aila had been fortunate enough to find her way into a distant and remote corner of the spiral. She'd boldly dived through six wormholes, having no idea



where they went, with no intention of ever retracing her path. There was no place to retrace it to.

When a faint, yellowish star appeared in front of her, the kind that was known to support planets with water-based ecologies, she cruised inward, eventually arriving on Earth.

A month after arriving, she walked into my office and this story began.

Shortly after finishing her language training, Aila said she wanted to go to Washington, DC. A vacation she said. We flew there on United Airlines. Just like everyone else.

The first few days, we acted like any other tourists. We visited all the monuments, the museums, the parks.

On the fourth day, Aila started to act erratically. She started to give those big gold coins of hers out as tips, which almost caused a riot in one restaurant. Then she seduced a man she met in the hotel bar, leaving Sandra and I alone that night. He was a Secret Service agent she said, and she wanted to pick his brain. I hoped it was coincidence that the morning paper reported that a government agent had been found dead on the other side of town.

The next morning, instead of rejoining us, she visited the White House on her, ignoring the restrictions and guards to walk uninvited into the Oval Office during a meeting. They tried to arrest her, but she escaped by crashing through the Oval Office window and seemingly vanishing into thin air.

An hour later, as the networks buzzed with news of a terrorist attack on the White House, she attracted attention by walking back and forth across the reflecting pool in back of the Capital. Yes, walking on the water.

When enough cameras and reporters had collected, hundreds of them, she shrugged off her jacket and proudly declared that she wanted to unite all humanity. She was going to end war on Earth by having just one world government. She'd accept the job of running that government. Temporarily.

She carefully announced her plan in the ten languages I'd taught her.



Sandra and I were flabbergasted as we stared at the hotel TV. Aila had never said a word about setting herself up as the ruler of Earth. Benevolent or not, beautiful or ugly, goddess or human, she had no idea of the political consequences of such a statement.

We grabbed a taxi and raced toward the Capitol.

When we got there, the Capitol Police were trying to arrest her, but she casually tossed the uniformed officers into the pond. One cop got off a few shots. Now I knew why she'd taken her jacket off. The slugs ricocheted with a flash from her skin. Soft skin that had previously been touched only by passionate kisses.

More police came, and more spluttering cops landed in the pond. More shooting. Lots more. Her clothing soon hung in tatters, but she seemed not to notice. The cameras did. Every network was running live coverage now.

With no opportunity to talk to Aila in private, Sandra and I hid in the adjacent Botanical Gardens to watch our new friend bring down the United States government.

She disarmed the cops first, then the battalion of guards from Fort Myer. In the pause that occurred after the last private's M-16 had been reduced to molten metal, she warned everyone to exit the Capitol building. She turned and walked toward the West Front.

Helicopter gunships came over the Mall and fired on her as she dug through the concrete and stone terraces in front of the Capitol with her bare hands, cutting deep beneath it to tear out its foundations. After the entire West Front shuddered and toppled down into the reflecting pool below, the huge dome shivered and collapsed into a pile of broken rubble and twisted cast iron.

Aila returned to the pond as every branch of the government and military concentrated their power to bring her down. The Air Force arrived with fighter-bombers, the Army with artillery and more gunships. She was soon standing in a blasted pit in the Earth, patiently repeating her demand over and over again. Turn the legal power of the government over to her and she'd bring peace to Earth.

By midnight the area for several square blocks around the former Capitol building was a blasted wasteland. The firing stopped, and a very shaken President Bush emerged from his helicopter. He and Aila talked for a long time, during which she knocked several patrolling jet fighters out of the air with flashes of her bright eyes. Pilots were parachuting to the ground all over DC. She told the President to evacuate the crew from his own helicopter. Then she vaporized it with her eyes, leaving behind nothing but a scorch mark on the ground.

At 1:00am, President Bush capitulated. The first country had joined her new version of the United Nations.

By then we'd fled from the far side of the Botanical Gardens before anyone connected us with Aila, and then drove our rental car to Atlanta, the closest airport from which planes were still flying. We caught a flight back to San Francisco.

Aila was watching TV in the den when we came through the front door. She was dressed even more eclectically than usual, a sheer green cape tied over a frilly bra and a very short brown pleated skirt. The risqué uniform of the Goddess of Earth, or so I supposed. As we stood there open-mouthed, she rose from the chair slowly, almost menacingly. Her hands were opening and closing rapidly, as if she was filled with energy she couldn't restrain. She stared at me as if I were some kind of worm, her eyes blazing.

"You guys deserted me there in Washington. What the hell were you afraid of?"

I remembered the way she'd knocked down F16's with less intense stares than she was giving me, and figured I was done for. My fight or flight responses were on a hair trigger.



Sandra spoke up before Aila decided to char me into wisps of smoke. "You, Aila. We were afraid of you."

Aila smirked, but instead of a blast of anger, she spun around and collapsed gently into her favorite leather chair. She looked back at Sandra, worrying at one of her fingernails. "I was just trying to get their attention. I didn't kill anyone. I would have protected you." Her voice was soft, pleading, as if nothing had happened in Washington.

I was still charged with adrenaline. "Have you watched the news?" I said angrily. "It's all about you. Every channel. What are you now, President of the United States? Empress of Earth? Supreme Goddess of the Universe?"

Aila's expression changed again, to a lofty nonchalance. She piped up. "I like the last title."

"You've got to be kidding."

"The President is still in power. He just works for me now. I wanted his military on my side."

"Your side?" I said angrily. "You mean the side that is going to subjugate all of humanity?"

She said nothing for a long moment, and then replied in a the serious voice I'd first heard when she'd entered my office months ago. "What would you give to never have war or violence or starvation or slavery or disease on Earth, Greg? Is there anything you'd give up to gain that?"

"You mean, is our freedom worth all that?"

She laughed. "Freedom to kill your fellow man? Freedom to starve or die of disease? Freedom to be ignorant and isolated and barbaric."

"It's been tried before, Aila," Sandra jumped in. "Uniting Earth to save it. It doesn't work. People are too proud, too independent."

"I'm different than all those other dictators and despots. You both know that. And pride is a sin."

"I'm not sure what I know right now," Sandra said. She shot Aila a poisonous look, and then turned and stalked out of the room. "I'm not certain I even know who you are any more."

Aila stared at Sandra's retreating back, stunned. "Doesn't she realize that I'm just trying to help? That I am the only hope to keep you from destroying yourselves and your planet?"

"This isn't the way," I said with a shake of my head. "Americans remember 9/11. Razing the Capitol building was just as dramatic, despite the lack of casualties. The whole world remembers Germany and Japan in the last world war."

"I'm here to stop all wars."

"Through terrorism?"

"I won't allow that either."

"But surely you realize that by inducing President Bush to sign the power of the most powerful country in the world over to you, using the threat of violence to coerce him, you've just become the ultimate terrorist."

"It wasn't like that, Greg. He's a reasonable man. He saw the light."

"Reasonable? Do you have any idea what every military officer, what every politician and government official, hell, what most of the people on Earth are doing right now?"

She tossed her head angrily, eyes flashing. "I could find out."

"Well, I know, Aila. They're trying to figure out how to get rid of you."

She laughed. "Now that's a waste of time. I'm not going anywhere."

"Because you've made yourself god."

"Goddess," she corrected. "Your title."

"Bullshit!" I shouted, my voice rising in anger. "What if they dropped a hydrogen bomb onto our house, Aila?"

She looked up at me, a hint of worry in her eyes. "I told Bush he couldn't hurt me. He'd just kill the people I love and lots of others."

"Which is exactly why somebody would do it!" I shouted. "To try to hurt you any way he could."

"That's why I'm here now. To protect you both."

"Aila, you say you love us. You probably would say you love humanity. But you can't love us as adults and rule us like we were children. You can't share our bed as our lover and wake up the next morning as our goddess."

I turned without giving her a chance to answer and followed Sandra up to the bedroom.

For the first time in many months, we lay in our bed alone. We didn't sleep. The house was empty when we finally got up.

After trying to sleep another night in that bed, Sandra and I left for Italy. We had to run away from the memories of the last few months and the daily news bulletins covering Aila's campaign to control Earth. We decided to skip visiting Sandra's mother, who had made every meeting I'd had a trial. She'd married an Italian count and had turned her back on her people, the Roma. She was a countess and she still made sure everyone knew it.

Sandra's grandmother and great-grandmothers were completely the opposite. Grounded, funny, self-deprecating and sexy. Even at 88, her great-grandmom was still seducing younger men, in this case the 70ish men of the village she lived near. Her grandmother looked young enough to be Sandra's mother. Still a beautiful woman in her 60's. She could pass for forties when she dressed up.

Grandmother arranged a clan gathering in honor of Sandra. We trekked to a clearing in the forest, with a large bonfire, blankets for sleeping, lots of good whisky, vivacious women, and handsome men. The celebration involved a lot of dancing around the fire while wearing provocative bits of clothing and a lot of gold jewelry. The clothing became sparser as the evening progressed.

We danced, seemingly for hours, before the alcohol and the sensuality began leading some of the guests toward something more akin to an orgy. Sandra fascinated the men and women, especially with her beauty and newfound youthful appearance, courtesy of whatever Aila was doing to us. I had my own charms, which two lovely blonde Roma from Prague happened to discover.

I hadn't intended to join in, but when an invitation comes in pairs, even my willpower faded. They turned out to be experienced enough in the art of love to be truly impressed. They called me superman. Which of course I was. In one way anyway.

The next day Sandra's great-grandmom wanted a full demonstration. Sandra floated around in mid-air a bit, but wobbled. She wasn't very proficient. She made it up though by defeating a dozen of the men and boys at once in arm wrestling. She lifted one of the parked vans off the ground and started to dance around with it over her head.

Her great-grandmom looked at me next, and I just blushed. I wasn't about to show her my super power. Given the way she laughed at my embarrassment, I assumed the girls from Prague had already told her.

After visiting the whole family, our stress levels had finally fallen to a level that would allow us to return home. We almost changed our minds when we reached the airport and we saw nothing but TV reports and newspapers screaming again about Aila's unwanted intervention in the internal affairs of nations. She'd apparently been very busy while we played.

A few weeks after we returned home, an envelope from Aila appeared in our mailbox, asking us to drive out to that mine near Death Valley. Enclosed was one of her hand-drawn maps. We debated all afternoon whether we should, but in the end, there was no choice. If Aila wanted to meet us, she would, regardless of what we decided. So, we journeyed out into the scorched valley, and when Aila appeared on the pickup's tailgate, we were prepared to listen to almost anything.

Besides, by that time, Sandra and I had decided that Aila needed someone to advise her, even if she didn't always listen to our advice. Plus our bed was starting to feel very lonely without her. There was something addictive about the wonders between Aila's long legs.

Her conversation with us was short and grim. A host of infuriated movements, ranging from North Korean diehards to Wahabi mujaheddin, had concluded that the best way to thwart her was to execute anyone who got near her. Aila had been retaliating, but that only made her more isolated and lonely. It was time for her to break off for a bit and get back to us. But if we were going to accompany her, we all would have to go mobile. Before we could react, she flitted into the tunnel and came out a minute later, driving that huge RV.

She climbed out to lean against it proudly.



I drove the giant rig south until we crossed into Mexico. Sandra and Aila baked brownies and laughed in the back, telling old jokes from the Roma. They made out and finally made love rather noisily. For the moment, things were back to normal. But it was hard to pay attention to the road.

Once we were in the desert and alone, Aila speeded things up a bit by using those strong legs to take us airborne. Trust me when I say it's totally weird to sit behind the wheel of a Winnebago at ten thousand feet doing three hundred knots. I

released the useless steering wheel to walk back to be with Sandra. She didn't like heights.

We flew day and night and part of the next day, eventually descending half a world away to land at a huge mansion on the north coast of New Guinea. I didn't ask how she acquired the property, but there were armed guards positioned a half mile from the house to ensure our privacy. The nearest settlement was thirty miles away.

Wearing clothing was a personal choice in Aila's villa. Aila certainly didn't bother. Nor did the dozen young Indonesian maids, all of whom were just a bit too beautiful to have been entirely Terran. Any one of them could be a Miss World. My suspicions were confirmed when two of them dove off the two-hundred foot tall cliff behind the house to go swimming in the surf far below. They flew back up to land on the lip of the cliff just as gracefully as they dove from it.

Aila and Sandra and I gradually slipped back into love, and things were O.K for a while. Aila developed a routine. She'd leave each night, and each morning Astro reported that at least one more country had joined her United Nations. She appointed a man from Switzerland as her deputy, along with a bunch of diplomats from Norway, the most egalitarian country on Earth.

By the end of the fifth month of her campaign, things were looking up. She'd ended several wars, although she'd caused quite a few casualties in doing it. Military leaders mostly. It didn't seem to bother her to kill when she felt a greater good was served. According to the news, death always came from a small steel ball, thrown as fast as a bullet, the impact point exactly between the eyes. Instant unconsciousness, no pain, death coming in seconds.

Aila had always been precise and neat.

She managed to solve a couple of old problems along the way. Starting by moving the entire Cuban population to south Florida. Millions of people, transported on large platforms a hundred meters on the side. Then she moved the Israeli's to the Cuban's old home in gigantic metal boxes that she could transport at supersonic speed.

The Palestinians woke up one morning to find they owned their homeland. And the Israelis in turn had a very beautiful island to make their own.

Terrorism faded, although both the Cubans and the Israeli's hated her actions. Whenever someone did commit an act of terrorism that harmed others, Aila vaporized their entire organization with those blazing eyes of hers. Men, women, children, acquaintances and neighbors. She seemed capable of reading minds to figure out the place on Earth that each captured terrorist held most precious. Then she would sanitize two square miles of that neighborhood. Brutal, but very effective in snuffing out further resistance.

A few weeks later she married Sandra and I. A bit unconventional, the three of us, but there are places in the world that legally sanction such things. Malaysia and Norway.

Some of the major religions accepted her as a saint or as a prophet. They reasoned that peace on earth made up for the damage to their theology. This young wife of mine had become fascinating. Fascinating, but scary as hell.

Sandra could fly very well by now, and she was strong enough to lift a couple of thousand tons on her own. I'd stabilized, and both my wives seemed very happy that I was a man of steel. That hydrogen bomb I'd worried about earlier might still do Sandra and me in, but I doubted anything else on Earth could hurt us.



Then Sandra got pregnant and we had one more thing to celebrate in our lives.

I was still keeping up the illusion that I was a language instructor, but my company, run by a friend of mine now, was growing by leaps and bounds. Aila had declared that everyone on Earth had to learn English in addition to their native language, so a billion people were studying English at any given time. She wanted everyone to be able to talk to each other. Good for business. I was making a lot of money.

Once all the countries had joined her UN, she disbanded their armies. That took more than a bit of convincing. She had to put a half million tons of military ordnance in orbit before things settled down.

Sandra amused herself by joining the arms in orbit and exercising her new powers by sending the military junk onward to the Moon. It was a bit different than her old job as a model, but the gypsy in her found it fun to destroy the weapons of man. After the armies were neutered, she and Aila amused themselves by visiting the other planets of the solar system, even diving into the nuclear fire of the sun. I started to worry less about nukes, although I found myself getting impatient for the two of them to return from Saturn's rings.

We still kept moving around a lot though. If it wasn't to avoid the news hounds and the groupies, it was to stay ahead of the crazies who kept trying to blow us up. No fun to have a bomb-laden 747 crash into your house while you slept. Not everyone thought kindly of Aila's New Order. With most of Earth now pacified, or at least in sullen acquiescence, she could refrain from action against terrorists who limited themselves to trying to kill her, or us, and who hadn't hurt any civilians. She seemed to accept that they would try.

By her third trimester, Sandra wanted to stay home and work on the house. Nest-building I realized. She went back to San Francisco.

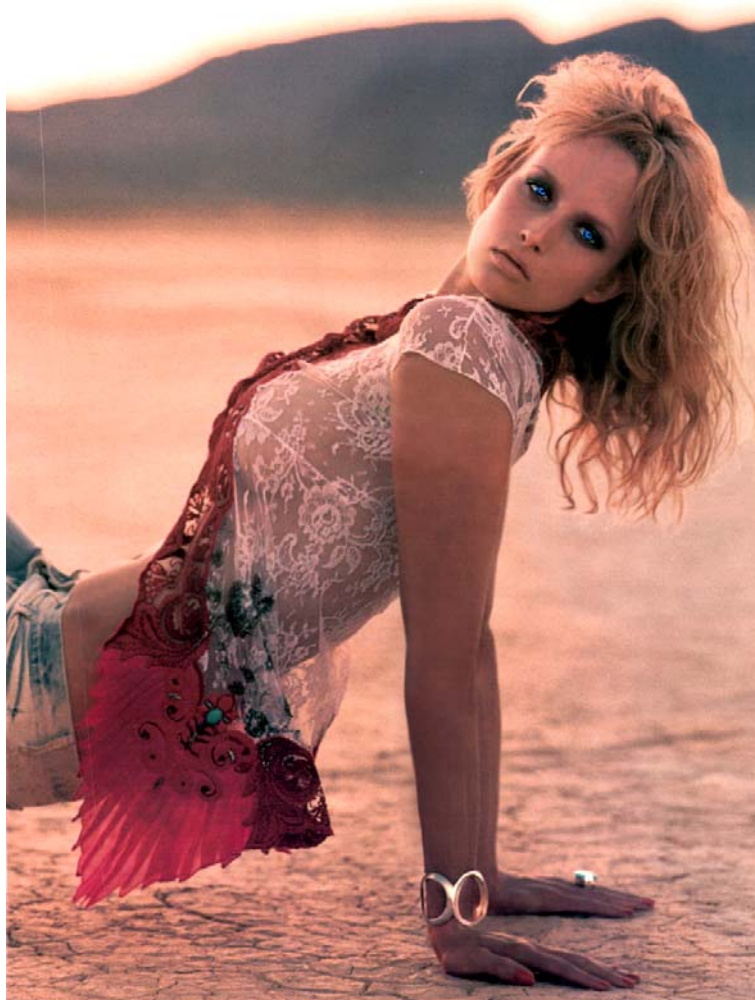
Aila and I began traveling even more, looking for rare plants and herbs to feed the growing medical firms she'd founded. The solutions to all of Earth's diseases could be found in nature, or so she kept telling the drug researchers.

She was such a paradox. Her morality allowed her to kill without remorse, yet she dedicated her life to helping the living. To heal them, to protect them from governments or organizations that would prey on them. She was an absolute dictator, yet she narrowed her culling, as she called it, to only those who would carry their violence forward in the gene pool.

I thought she was doing a good job, considering the task she'd given herself. On the other hand, I might be a bit biased. For I was deeply in love with her.

We shared our love a lot. She enjoyed sex in the desert, and the heat no longer bothered me. Miles from the nearest human or building, the tiny earthquakes from our lovemaking were harmless. For I was very strong now, and she no longer had to hold back.

It wasn't just me that Aila wanted. She was envious of Sandra in the way only a woman could be. She wanted a child too. I often found her gazing wistfully toward San Francisco, and imaged that she was watching Sandra from thousands of miles away. She was deeply interested in the progress of her pregnancy.



I tried my best to give her a child of her own, but I had no idea if cross-species fertilization would work. Alerons and Terrans had evolved separately for a long time. But Aila was inspiring as she lay back on the hard-baked desert floor and invited me to do my best.

The days were long and never boring. The only thing she did better than conquering worlds was making love to the man she loved.

Aila and I spent the week just before Christmas scouring the desert of southern Mexico for varieties of scorpions that she thought had drug potential. We found them, along with a dozen other interesting poisonous bugs as well. She'd taught the drug researchers the value of extracting drugs from the venom of such creatures. Life came from the very chemicals that had been designed to take it.

Much like Aila herself.

I also helped her clean up the Columbian drug lords and their lackeys, some slavers in China and finally a couple of small military forces in Southeast Asia. Orbital space was now littered with military hardware, from tanks to bombs to aircraft. And increasingly, warships.

I tested my strength against hers, but could find no evidence of her limits. Yet I could bend a railroad rail in my bare hands, tying it into a bow. She on the other hand had the raw strength to hug that same rail to her chest until molten steel flowed down her stomach to trace around her legs, finally pooling at her feet. I

dreamed of being that strong, knowing that each time we made love, I gained a little more of her power.

We were on our way back to San Francisco on Christmas Eve when a blinding beam of light lanced down from the sky and slammed into her back. A blaze like the heart of a star burst forth as it bent her backward, almost double.

For the first time since I'd met her, I saw a hint of pain in her eyes.



I dove for the ground as two statuesque blondes floated down to land on either side of her. Their hair was platinum and flowed down to their waists, their bodies and features so much alike that they could be twins. They wore blue uniforms and red capes, their long legs bare.

They slipped glowing energy bands around Aila's wrists and bound her.

Aila struggled mightily to break free. She cursed and then cried when she could not.

I stared, not comprehending that my goddess had been subdued by two women who were even more powerful than her.

One of the blondes turned to apologize to me for any damage Aila had inflicted on Earth. Aila was a patient in one of their asylums and she'd escaped. The visitor assured me that her people, the Gal'a she called them, wouldn't let it happen again. Not with one of their own.

I asked her about the planet Aleron, and then about the Seeders. She looked at me blankly, not understanding either word. Then, before I could ask anything more, she joined her sister and rose back into the sky with Aila hanging between them, and in a flash of light they disappeared.

My heart was racing and my head swimming when my hand phone rang a moment later. It was Sandra. She was gasping, clearly in pain, as she said, "*it's time.*"

Those last two words brought me back to Earth. Back to the woman who I'd loved for all those years.

A month later Sandra and I presided over a very peaceful General Assembly meeting at the UN. She was boldly nursing our daughter in public, a blonde supergirl from birth.

We both gave a speech.

Mine was about building stronger economies, of providing jobs for all.

Sandra spoke about the spirit of humanity, and how she wanted it to burn brighter.

I thought it was ironic that a gypsy from Europe and a language teacher from San Francisco were hosting the governments of every nation on Earth. That a wil'o'the'wisp like my wife was going to help keep all the nations bound together in love and respect. A young mother to a new world. And I was going to be like that ancient fishermen, teaching them to fish.

What would those Gal'a women have done if they'd known that Aila had enhanced her? Or me? Or maybe they knew, and concluded that taking us would only compound the damage done.

A happier thought came to mind. What was Sandra's great-grandmother thinking about the way we'd finished Aila's self-avowed task of ending all forms of violence? A gypsy and a speaker of tongues creating a world of light and love?

I suspect her great-grandmother was simply thinking, it's about time.

The End

