

Forever

By Michele Dutcher

Xam climbed the stone path leading up the hillside. He drew a breath when he saw a man-made cave, uttering “The Mantle of the Judge.” He slowed as he stepped inside, allowing the darkness to soothe him, as much as was possible. He opened his eyes and a soft glow brightened the room, revealing five semi-circles carved into the wall of the cave. Within each of these sat what appeared to be semi-transparent, androgynous, humans.

“My search for you has been exhausting,” said Xam.

A pentagon appeared between the man and the five. “We have discovered that humans often find their own answers while on their journey. An answer found by oneself is much better than that given by another. When someone does appear at our doorstep, we know they are desperate for an answer. You may ask your question.”

“My mother is Armasis of Luna, as you know.”

Of course they knew – these five were the Artificial Intelligence beings overseeing five planets. “The Alliance is well aware of who she is and knows she has been slated for deactivation.”

“I am here to oppose that verdict. Certainly the verbal ravings of an old woman with dementia can not be so harmful as to demand death.”

“In truth, the alliance would not be killing the woman – rather it would be withdrawing the gift of eternal life. When we offered forever-life to your family, it was with the understanding that they would uphold our laws. Your mother will be transported off-world to live out the remainder of her natural life.”

Xam nodded, affirming the totally logical answer given by the one called the Eternal Judge. “The fault lies not in my mother – rather in the act of crime done by my sister, and she is dead. Her action was simply an act of protest against the absence of the possibility of change within the Alliance.”

The room darkened into a reddish hue. “Your mother carries the seed of disorder that sprouted within your sister, giving birth to the evil action.”

“This action will not happen again – as I tell you again, my sister remains dead.”

“As long as your mother is among us, there is the chance of social entrophy. You knew our axioms before you asked to live within our realm.”

One by one the five representatives spoke in turn. “Entropy is the foe.” “Information must be preserved.” “Life must be preserved.” “Energy must be preserved.” “Order must be preserved.”

The voice of the pentagon echoed off the sides of the cave: “Your sister disobeyed all of these axioms and your mother is in danger of disobeying as well.”

“Certainly there can't be that many people who might be swayed to commit the same evil by talking to my mother. There can't be that many people who are that desperate.”

The pentagon was silent for almost a minute. “Every time your sister's name is mentioned the danger of disorder increases.”

Xam's countenance brightened for the first time. “I could talk with my mother, making sure she never mentions my sister's name again.”

“Her dementia will prevent that. The physicians tried to dig out all memories of her daughter, but the evil is still there.”

“Give me leave to try,” pleaded the man who looked to be forty but was actually well over 600 years old.

The five spoke in unison. “You have our leave to try. Have no doubt that saying the name will result in a resending of Forever-life.”

Planet Gegton 3524 A.T.

The elderly woman pattered around her kitchen, much as any mother is likely to do when a son comes to visit. “Sweetheart,” she said while pouring liquid into a cup, “would you go get Pam? I think she's on the porch.”

Xam took the pot from her hands, motioning for her to sit. She did as directed, upset by his insistence. “Mom, we must talk. Look at me.” He drew a breath. “I can't get my sister – do you remember why?”

The woman looked at him blankly. “Have I done something wrong, dear?”

“Mom, my sister killed herself.”

“No, no, you're wrong. Pam is on the porch outside. How can you say such a thing?” She tried to back away.

“Mom, she killed herself five months ago.” He watched as a horror of understanding swept over her and she began to weep. “Mom, mom, you must never say her name again. The council is listening all the time.”

She looked up from her tears. “If I never say her name again, how will people know that someone as good and gentle as Pam ever existed?”

“It was evil for her to commit suicide and now it is a crime for us to say her name.”

She fought the notion, crying as Xam held her. Finally she relented, regaining some control.

“Mom. You must promise me to never say her name again. If you do the Council of Five will take you from me and I’ll never see you again, forever.”

She nodded weakly. “I won’t say her name again, I promise.” The old woman straightened up. Her son sat back in his chair, giving a sigh of relief. “I took Steise to Ferjuk for her birthday.”

His mother began to drink the tea. “How is Steise?” The woman suddenly looked around. “Dear, where’s Pam? Could you go out onto the porch and get her?” The woman disappeared.

Xam sat alone for a while in the empty kitchen. He began to sob into his hands. Then his sobbing stopped as he rose to his feet, lifted his fist, and shouted: “Pamela Greylag second child of Armasis of Luna, princess of the royal line of...” and he was gone.

The End