

The Touch of a Stranger

Heroes Lost, part 3

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She'd been walking up and down the corridor outside Ivanonva's cabin for almost an hour. Every time she passed the door she stopped and looked at it, trying to force herself to knock. Silently in her mind she rehearsed what she was going to say. Silently in her mind she imagined the indifferent response. Once more, she walked past the door.

The first thing Avon became aware of was a terrible pain in his head. The second was a lesser but still awful pain in his ribs. After that, many things came at once. He was lying somewhere hard, cold and smelling of fear. Unless someone had been doing some very tasteless redecoration while he was out, this wasn't the Liberator's sickbay. Which meant that something was very wrong.

Every time she passed the door she could feel the mind inside. Small, but glowing. Faintly glowing. She hadn't seen the glow at first. Hadn't dared to see it. She had missed the companionship of another living mind ever since her sister died on Saurian Major, and having the hope of it first given and then snatched away would be more than she could stand.

The next time she came to the by now well-known door she stopped. Inside, the alien telepath seemed to be laughing at something. As good a time as any to interrupt. Before she had time to change her mind she knocked on the door.

Captain Sheridan sat on one of the slanted minbari beds aboard the White Star, looking at Delenn sleeping on the one next to him. The locals had offered to let her use their significantly more advanced sickbay, but she had wanted familiar surroundings more than anything else. He could well understand that. She hadn't told him exactly what had happened while she was a prisoner, but he could imagine. How he could imagine. He could see he hurt in her eyes, he could feel her flinching at the slightest touch. No matter how much he wanted to do something, to make it all right again, there was nothing he could do. Except sit here, watching the nightmares parade across her beautiful face, watching with impotent rage seething inside him.

The mind in the room turned its attention to the door.

It is I, Cally, she told it. The door opened, showing the mostly bare little room. Ivanova stood with a hand near the door controls.

"I heard that," she said, a touch of accusation in her voice.

Of course you did, Cally replied. *You're alive*.

"Alive? Yes, as you can see. I move, I breathe, I get shot at. Dead people don't do that much."

Cally laughed a little. *No, I mean you are alive like this*, she said and sent the experience of a telepathically active mind.

There was a silence. "So, I'm a latent telepath. I don't like to talk about it," she said, and while she spoke she sent a feeling of being hunted, of having to hide.

She didn't mean to send that, Cally thought. With that little control, she must have been alone all her life. Sympathy welled up.

Please?, she said. *I just want to talk. I've been alone among the dead for so long*.

"How is he?", Blake asked.

"I don't know," Jenna replied, bent over the unconscious Avon's bare back. "Cally should be doing this, she's better at it." She straightened, putting down the medical probe she'd been working with.

"I think he'll be all right, though. The broken vertebrae are fixed, as far as I and Zen can tell, and most of the tissue damage is cleaned up. Now we just have to give the neural restoratives time to work. Or we could get him to a hospital and have it all done properly by someone who knows what the hell she's doing."

"If he doesn't get better in the next day or so, we'll think about it."

"Well. Ok." Ivanova gestured towards a chair and laid her book aside with a determined motion. "What do you want to talk about?"

Not like that. Think to me. Please, Cally sent.

Ivanova concentrated visibly. *Like this?*

Yes. Thank you. She hesitated a moment. *You've never had someone alive showing you the way, have you?*

Earth...that is, our Earth... isn't very hospitable to telepaths.

Cally sat down on the bunk, beside the smaller woman. *The dead never quite trust us. May I show you what you're doing wrong?*

He'd only just realised where he must be when he heard someone near push the buttons on a wall comm set. Pretending to still be out cold seemed like a good idea, so he did.

"Will you get your butt over here sometime today?", an irritated voice said. "Her Supreme Bitch-Queen wanted this done quickly."

"Mind your tongue," came over the comm, "the walls here have ears. I'm on my way. What's to be done?"

"Carrying a prisoner to her quarters. Maybe you'd better bring a stretcher, by the way, he's sleeping like a baby."

"Prisoner in her quarters, eh? The old Supreme Commander must be spinning in his grave. Out."

Some time passed, which Avon spent furiously trying to figure out a way to get out of the situation he was in. But nothing even vaguely reasonable came to mind, so he decided to stay as he was. Maybe opportunity would come knocking.

Easy. Keep that block down. Noone here is threatening you. Keep it down. Relax. That's good. Feeling of approval. *Now stay as you are and send me something.*

Image of sun rising over dry, red desert.

Beautiful! You'll have to tell me where that was. Now try sending a word, still keeping those barriers down. There's nothing to fear.

Mars. Syria Planum.

Maybe we can go there some time.

Sense of hilarity at impossible suggestion.

So what if it's in another universe. You came here, didn't you?

Glad of it now. Not been this relaxed since Quick so quick image of slender female body naked against her *well, ever.*

Amusement. *What was that, now?* Acceptance. Appreciation.

Lust. *Just a friend. Gone now.* Sadness. *Miss her.* Intense longing.

Comfort. *Come here.*

So long. Alone so long.

Come here.

Not a word spoken, Ivanova leaned into the waiting embrace.

The heavy steps stopped and there were sounds as of someone making a collapsible stretcher ready for use.

"Ok, let's get this show on the..." The guard's sentence trailed off.

"What?", the other one queried.

"That's Space Commander Ger!", came the answer.

That's *who?*, Avon thought, just barely able to keep playing unconscious.

"It is?"

"That, or his identical twin brother."

"What does she want with him half-naked in her quarters?"

"Don't be naive, Ferri."

Short pause. "Oh."

"She's just using us to play out some damn aristocrat sex game. Makes me sick just thinking about it."

"She'll have us shot if we don't obey, though. Or worse."

"Things aren't like they used to, that's for sure."

There was a shuffling of feet, and Avon felt himself unceremoniously thrown onto the stretcher.

"Heavy bugger, ain't he?"

"Don't complain. It could've been Group Commander Velys."

"No way she'd take that fat pig to her bed!"

"You never know with the aristos."

He did his best to ignore their inane chatter as they carried him away.

I tried my best to dislike her. She was psi corps, one of those who killed my mother. But I couldn't. I could see her confusion. See how badly she fit in with them. They hurt her, even though she was one of them, and she became a sister in distress.

Cally slowly stroked her back, undid her hair.

So we became friends, then very close friends. Then lovers, although I didn't realise I'd loved her until it was far too late. The Corps had already killed her then. And that's pretty much that.

Her words were mixed with images of a taller, blonde woman. Laughing. Teasing. Moaning passionately. The feelings which came with the images were intensely erotic. Cally didn't even try to block. Instead, she kissed her new friend's neck lightly, almost tickling her with her lips.

Yes. Nice, came semiconsciously from Ivanova. *Good,* Cally sent and let her tongue play against smooth, sensitive skin.

They tilted the stretcher and dumped him on the thick carpet.

"Shouldn't we tie him up or something?" the younger guard asked.

"Let her do it herself. I'm not playing those games," the older one answered, and then they both left.

Avon sat up. His head still ached, and his ribs felt as if he'd been hit by a pursuit ship. He could see clearly, though, and nothing seemed to be broken, so he guessed he was relatively all right. Of course, being stuck in Servalan's bedroom

inside Space Command, clad only in briefs and socks, wasn't very high on his list of desirable places to be. But it could have been worse. He could have been in one of the interrogation rooms, sans briefs and socks.

It seemed likely that Servalan would show up quite soon. Not that he knew her very well, but she hardly seemed the type to wait longer than necessary for her entertainment. He set about preparing for her arrival.

Cally felt Ivanova's hot breath against her shoulder and the beating of her pulse against her lips. At the same time she could feel it from the other side, firm shoulder against the side of a head, the moist trail along a neck. Her mind caught the wish to feel the warm mouth carefully nibbling an earlobe. She complied, and was rewarded with a small, slow burst of pleasure.

Ivanova giggled. *You do just what she did.*

Nibble your ear?, Cally asked as her mouth continued exploring.

No, silly. Do what I want before I know I want it.

The benefit of living lovers.

Vague question. *?you sound as if we?*

Perhaps.

Even more vaguely. *..good..*

With a languid motion, Servalan pressed a button on her comm panel.

"Yes, madam?", it replied.

"I will be unavailable for the next 24 hours, possibly longer. No matter who tries to reach me, tell them to leave a message or call again later."

"Yes, madam."

She got up from behind the desk, left the office and walked towards her quarters. Maybe she should have given instructions to let calls from Blake through. It would be amusing to see his expression. But no, he could wait. Everyone could wait. No one would dare censure her anyway, she had enough information squirreled away to bring just about anyone important down. And now she had the means to get Blake as well. She pushed the open button by her door and stepped through. There was just enough time to start feeling annoyed that the troopers hadn't done as she ordered before something hard hit her and everything went black.

Ivanova turned her face, inviting a kiss. Lips against lips, tongue meeting tongue.

You don't taste any different, she sent. *How alien are you, really?*

Amusement came back at her. *How many aliens have you tasted?*

One, she answered.

Cally broke the kiss and looked at her, surprised. *Really?*

Her turn to feel amused. *Delenn. Not very alien, but enough.* As her mouth was now unoccupied she sent it exploring what was visible of the not so alien woman's chest. There wasn't much of that, so she started making more.

We're not alien at all, really. Apart from our telepathy we're ordinary humans. But as you know the dead have a hard time accepting us, so once upon a time my ancestors left earth and struck out on their own.

Cally's top was bare, but Ivanova saw no reason to stop there. Distantly, she felt that she was using all her four available hands to do the undressing.

Servalan woke, and her first thoughts were that the soldiers responsible for this would die. Slowly, painfully and along with their families. Judging from the smell, she was still in her quarters. She was lying on her bed, arms and legs stretched out and fastened with the suitably placed manacles. She knew the position well, from the perspective of a spectator. It wasn't quite as much fun from this side. Which she had of course thought of long ago. Slowly, carefully she felt along the chains holding her arms for the miniscule bumps that were the emergency release mechanisms.

"I took the liberty of disabling those," she heard Avon say. Silently, she swore. Openly, she put on her most becoming smile and opened her eyes. He was sitting backwards on a chair by the foot of the bed, looking at her.

"Avon!", she exclaimed. "Fancy meeting you like this."

He smiled. "Not quite what you had in mind, is it?"

"Perhaps. What are you planning to do now? You still are in the middle of Space Command, you know. If you kill me you'll never get out of here alive."

"I realise that. So, for the moment, you'll keep on living."

"May I ask how long a moment? I think I have a right to know."

"I don't know, actually. We'll just have to wait and see when my message is picked up."

"And in the meantime?" She suprised herself by realising that she actually was nervous.

"I think we can figure out something to do," he said, and as she saw his gaze travel along her body nervousness changed to arousal. Maybe this could be quite interesting, after all.

I was born in a laboratory in Auron's largest colony. I had two sisters, of whom one is dead. I am the eldest, by three minutes and because my incubator was the one closest to the lab entrance.

Skin touching skin, lips against lips. Ivanova's mind felt strange. On one level, she was totally absorbed by physical sensations. On another, she clearly heard Cally talking. She opened her eyes and looked down at herself, still dressed, gently biting a nipple. Using one pair of hands, she begun undressing herself.

I don't remember when our training started. My earliest memory is of trying to make the needle of a meter go higher. I never could make it go as high as Zelda and Miri could.

As she slid off her uniform pants, one of the hands gained a will of its own and slid a couple of fingers inside her panties and along the wet folds of her sex. She pushed against it, wanting more.

On our eighth birthday, the technicians told us we were the best of the Auronar. That we were, so far, the crowning achievement of a century-spanning project in genetic engineering. Better would come after us, but they would all be our daughters. Not directly, not physically. But by mother DNA Synthesizer and father Reverse Transcriptase, they would be. We were a step on the Auronar path to godhood. We felt so very special, and we worked so much harder.

She let the errant hand push a finger into her, working it in and out in a steady rythm, while the other hands finished the undressing. A mouth alternated between a couple of wonderfully soft breasts. She'd lost track of what body part was whose, but

she was fairly certain that the breasts getting the mouth's attention were larger than the ones she usually had. Not that she cared. As the last piece of clothing vanished, she sent a hand to caress the just revealed pussy.

"Do you have anything particular in mind?", she asked.

"What were you planning to do to me, once you got me here?", he countered.

"Nothing really bad," she answered.

"Then that's what I'm going to do to you." His smile sent shivers down her spine.

"Do you mind if I enjoy it?" It was more habit than anything else that kept her voice from trembling.

"Not at all." He got up from the chair and approached her. In his hand she could see a pair of scissors. She could well imagine what they were for. Tempting as it was to protest, she kept silent while he cut her skirt along the side. As he did so, his hand slid along her bare leg, stopping just short of her groin. He pulled the skirt off her, and soon the top and underwear followed.

"You like this, don't you?", he said, idly running his fingers over her stomach.

"Perhaps. Why don't you let me loose? We could have much more fun that way."

"And you could ring an alarm, or stab me in the back. I think I'll stick to what I know I have." The fingers left her stomach and curled around her breast.

Cally stopped talking for a moment, and helped Ivanova rearrange their bodies. Leaning against the wall put a limit to what they could do. Lying down was much better. The mouth that had been taking care of the breasts could easily travel down over the stomach, past the bellybutton and finally reach an oh-so-sensitive target. As the tongue began its work, Cally's mind again went afloat on the sea of sensation.

It wasn't until we were fifteen that we discovered that we weren't alone. There were several other groups like us. We felt like we had fallen from uniqueness. We still trained hard, but the motivation changed. We no longer worked for Auron, but for ourselves.

One body was fast approaching orgasm. Together, they slowed down, kept it below the threshold. Turned, and let the other body receive the kisses and caresses. Everything came through as intensely erotic. Not only the licking, but the feeling of firm thighs against eager hands and the way a blanket stuck to an arching, sweaty back.

Miri and I were the worst. We trained for war, for physical action. Zelda was, and still is, the healer and nurturer in our triad, so she rarely joined us physically. But she was always with us telepathically. That way, we were never apart. We were three who were one, like the ancient goddesses Miri read about in the library. Miri, the maiden huntress, the uncatchable one who kills. Zelda, the protecting mother, she who heals. I, the wise crone, not so strong in healing and war but possessing the wisdom gained over a lifetime. So we were, and so we thought we would always be. Until Miri made a mistake and was exiled.

Ger woke. He tried to ask where he was and why it was so dark, but only incoherent moans left his mouth. Someone stepped up beside where he was lying.

"Easy, easy," a male voice said. "It's me, Vila. You're safe back on the Liberator. You were hit in the back and your spine was hurt. Jenna's put you back together again, but you've been given some stuff that's supposed to make your nerves grow

back, and it's messing with your entire nervous system so you may not be able to talk for a while. There might be other effects as well, Zen said, although he didn't specify what."

Liberator. He was aboard the Liberator. "Back on the Liberator" the rebel had said, so they obviously thought he was Avon. A hand lifted his head a bit, and a straw touched his lips. He eagerly caught it and sucked. Water, blessed water.

"Not so fast, you're still very weak. That shot knew where it took."

It certainly did, Ger thought. It must have been the Supreme Commander who shot him, just so that he could get aboard easier. And she must have refrained from telling him so that he wouldn't be afraid. It was a brilliant plan, and he would do his best to live up to her expectations. He loved the Supreme Commander, and would rather die than let her down. It was a great honor to be given a mission like this!

"It's painful, isn't it?", Vila said. "Here, let me wipe away your tears."

All impressions of the world around them were gone. All that was, was themselves. Bodies pressed closed, touching seemingly everywhere at once, climax rapidly closing. As arousal increased, barriers between minds weakened. Ivanova remembered Miri, mirror image of herself, standing in a vast storage room far below the Biotechnology Center, knife held high, fluorescent lights reflecting in the slick blood covering her arm. Fingers pumped in and out of a slick, hot hole, tongues beat on clitorises, they were rushing up the sharp slope to release and mind begun to meld into mind. They remembered the short minutes after the court had pronounced Miri guilty of wilful murder when they had decided that Cally would go with her and Zelda remain. Zelda could not bear leaving her charges, she was always like that.

Everything burst in a cold flood of ecstasy, and for a few short moments two became one.

Avon sat beside Servalan, looking at her face. His hand lay between her legs, moving rhythmically. Her hands opened and closed, opened and closed, straining against their bonds. Her face was flushed, eyes closed, mouth panting. After a short while, she tried to press her crotch harder against his hand, but he simply let it follow her movements. Her breasts danced as she moved her entire body in a futile attempt to gain release.

"I. Won't. Beg," she managed to get out between gasps. He simply smiled.