Mothership

A Science Fiction Story

By Maryanne Peters

Chapter 1 Crime Scene

They stepped out of the travel pod Line 3 at Ring G and headed towards Spoke 4. The structure curved away in front of them, the dull pale green coloring this ring as horticulture and life support.

“We should record from here,” said Troy. He adjusted his body cam and checked his microphone with a standard sound check.

“Agreed,” said Boo. He would do the same. They were professionals. Two different traditions of law enforcement perhaps, but both depended on facts. Facts to be collected, understood and interpreted. That is how crimes are solved. That is how criminals are caught.

G3 was the quadrant, and the Suite was G3:23. A plantation, one of about one hundred on Station Zarathrustra, a space vehicle under the joint control of people from Planet Earth and people from Planet Gamid – the Gamidians making up 40% of the personnel aboard. People like Boo.

Security and Law Enforcement was one of those areas where mixed teams were standard. One of each species. Troy and Boo.

What made it easy for some was the fact that the Gamidians were so similar to the Terrans. Only their pallid almost grey complexion and the fine white blond hair marked them as different in appearance.

From the very first encounter biologists had remarked on how similar the paths of evolution had been on two planets hundreds of light years apart. From the primordial soup to the amphibians and then mammals capable of withstanding and adapting to climate change, to primates in trees developing hands to use tools, to the development of societies, cultivation, civilization, science, space travel. Hair on the head, eyebrows, five fingers and five toes. DNA as a building block almost identical. Only a few internal organs varied. Gamidians seemed to carry these over from a predominant amphibian phase.

Others might remark that the differences were more mental than physical.

As they turned into the room marked with the tablet “Crime Scene” that difference became evident from the first statement.

“Not one of ours,” said Boo. It was his attempt at black humor. He was enjoying some aspects of human behavior, but this was surely the worst place to do that.

Even before they saw the victim they saw the blood splattered over the walls. There was no sign of a struggle other that the dying convulsions of the bloody victim, and Troy guessed from the smeared blod that they would not have lasted for long. Death would have been from the first few stabs. The rest were just fury.

He knew what Boo was saying. Gamidians could kill and did kill, if cornered or compromised, but if it was Gamidian stabbing there would be a single wound, well targeted and resulting in immediate death. There would be no rage, no emotion – it would have purpose.

This room was evidence of blind rage.

There were two junior security officers guarding the door – a Terran and a Gamidian as mandated.

“Has Dr. Hale been called?” Troy asked them. He was referring to Jacob Hale, a physician and the forensic pathologist.

“He is on his way,” said the Terran.

“The victim’s identity plate has been removed,” said Boo stopping over the body. “Do we know who this is?”

“It will only slow s down by a few hours,” said Troy. “We have DNA all over the place, so I will take a swab. But if the killer is buying themselves a few hours, he must be running. Give us an estimated time of Death, Boo.”

Boo extracted his pocket thermometer to check the body and room temperatures, and paused for a moment to calculate.

“More than six hours ago, would be my guess.”

“He could be at the other end of the ship by now,” said Troy. “We will need to get an accurate time of death and check transport and surveillance logs for people leaving the scene, but we need an identity first. This person knew his killer.”

Boo held up the vial of the sample he had just taken from a wound. All DNA was on record. Troy ensured that his body cam caught all the details of the room, but the body would not be disturbed until the pathologist had done his work.

Outside he checked the numbers on cameras in the corridors and on Ring G main access.

“Human emotion is a fascinating thing,” said Boo, as Troy worked.

“It is the cause of a lot of tragedy in human society,” said Troy.

“But also the source of your art and your rich culture,” said Boo. “There is anger but there is also joy and love.”

“You have that,” said Troy, noting up some details on his wrist tablet.

“We have attraction, and we have the sense of comfort and satisfaction, but I feel that we are denied many things that you Terrans take for granted.”

“Let’s take the sample back and get that ID,” said Troy. “And on the pod, you can tell me why emotion is a good thing.” He put a hand on Boo’s shoulder as the set off. He enjoyed working with Boo. Like a lot of partnerships it got off to a rough start, but they knew one another now, and they knew that they had one another’s back.

“Can I ask you for something, Troy?” said Boo.

“Sure, pal. Whatever you want.”

“Would you share some genetic material with me?”

Troy laughed. “You want some of my genetic material?”

“You are the best human I know,” said Boo. They had reached the pod station. Troy did not know what to say in reply to the compliment, so he said nothing.

They sat down inside the pod and Boo said: “I am entering into a reproductive phase. I want the best for my children.”

Troy looked at his partner, but he seemed distracted looking at the massive structures of Station Zarathrustra rushing by as they accelerated, and the blackness of space beyond revealing how insignificantly small it all was.

Chapter 2 Physiology

“Seventeen stabs wound, but dead after two.” Jacob Hale could be counted on to be blunt. “Some force so I would guess a man. No sign of anal dilation so a male lover is less likely. Perhaps a rival for the affections of a woman lover in common?”

“Now you are doing my job, Doc,” said Troy.

“Where is your grey buddy?” asked Jacob. “Not joining us for my initial report?”

“He’s getting the ID on this guy,” said Troy. “But while he is not here, can I ask you what you know about Gamidian reproduction?”

“Ah, now there’s a question,” said Jacob. “The truth is that we know very little. I think that people are entitled to keep such intimate details to themselves and in this case a whole species have chosen to do that. It is not as if we could observe them mating even if we wanted to. We have respected them from the moment of first encounter, and they have respected us. But perhaps you have seen your partner naked in the locker room. They are like us. They have males and females. They have sex. There are pregnancies, but a much shorter gestation period.”

“I had heard that,” said Troy.

“They have generative and regenerative metabolism that is much greater than ours, and it includes the ability to grow back some limbs, and maybe other things besides. To be honest I have attended to some Gamidians in trauma cases but they do their own surgery.”

“I know they are different physically … something about amphibians?”

“It is incredible but it just goes to show that intelligent life always requires a similar path. We started as amphibians too, but from reptiles we evolved quite quickly to mammals so that we could use warm blood to exploit more environments. The climate and vegetation on their planet took amphibians into the trees before they developed the mammalian traits of warm blood and hair. And now, here they are, looking almost the same as us.”

“Can they use or DNA?” Troy had said yes. He had agreed to give Boo some of his “genetic material”. It seemed to Troy that it would be as easy as ejaculating into a vial.

“RNA and DNA have turned out to be the building blocks of the universe,” said Jacob. “Genetic codes are generally the same, but we carry with us a huge amount of background DNA that is really just a back catalog of evolutionary history. Their back catalog will be very different from ours, but I would guess that the operative material is much the same. To be honest, I have no idea.”

Troy’s collar com beeped Boo’s tone. He opened it in speaker mode.

“I have the ID,” said Boo. “I will meet you back at Ring G the station on Line 5. It seems that there is a woman involved.”

“Dr. Hale is saying the wounds are consistent with a male assailant,” said Troy.

“I am not ruling out a powerful woman,” Jacob called out, after having heard his name mentioned.

“If it is not her, she will know the man,” said Troy. “if it is not a wronged woman who has killed this guy, it will be a cuckolded man.”

“I am not sure that I know that word,” said Boo.

“I can be there in ten minutes,” said Troy

Chapter 3 Emotions

Troy stepped off the pod and could see Boo standing some distance up the curve of Ring G. There was a mirror on the wall and he was looking at himself in it. Troy hurried towards him.

“Are you alright, buddy,” Troy asked. “You look different. Is your hair longer than it was a half hour ago?”

“It’s the reproductive phase,” said Boo. “Do you like it?”

“Like it? What are you on about. Who is the dead guy and who is the woman?”

As Boo turned to him Troy could see other differences, but he was not quite sure what they were. But he seemed to have his partners attention. Boo was looking at his wrist tablet and walking.

“The victim is Astro Harriman, a water technician, and he is recorded as living with Juliette Keisen-Jones for the past 3 weeks,” said Boo.

“We are going to visit her?”

“We were going to visit her place of work but I called ahead and was told that she had left in the company of Pablo Keisen-Jones two hours ago.”

“Don’t tell me,” said Troy. “I am guessing not her brother, but her ex-husband?”

“Love, jealousy, envy, anger!” Boo sounded pleased. “This case has everything!”

“You are getting very strange, Boo.”

“Do you think so?” Boo sounded pleased.

“Is this the place?”

“Yes. It is secured. We will need to use our override.”

“Ok. Cameras on. Weapons out. For the record based on information in hand and in pursuit a potentially dangerous suspect we are using lock override to access … what is this unit number?”

“G5:46,” said Boo.

“G5:46,” repeated Troy. Then, placing the sound placer on his wrist against the door he shouted: “This is Security. We are armed and armored. We are coming through this door. Stand back and release any weapons. We are prepared to use deadly force!”

“Overriding lock … now!”

The door opened. It was a residential unit – what was called for some historical reason “a studio”. They saw her first. The main lighting was off, but her face was lit by a lamp. There was an arm around her neck. There were still traces of blood on it. Behind her they could see a man and in his hand was a sharp weapon held to her neck.

“Pablo is it?” said Troy. “We are here to help. Just calm down. We don’t want anyone else to get hurt, do we? We need to get you help. It’s been a bad day right? Look, my name is Troy. This is Boo.”

Boo was just supposed to acknowledge that he was part of the process. Troy was the Terran. If he was going to talk this desperate man down off the brink, he would lead.

“You love the woman you are holding, don’t you?” said Boo. “You don’t want to lose her, do you? You want to make things right – maybe we can help? You don’t want anyone else to touch her – we can understand that. It was his fault. It is not her fault.”

Troy would have liked to kick Boo in the shin, but he had a dead on this guy. He could take him out if he had to. Where had this chatter come from? It was most un-Gamidian.

“Let’s just relax,” he said.

“It is my fault,” Pablo whimpered. He was shaking. The sharp point of his weapon, seemed to scratch the neck of the terrified Juliet. “It is nobody else. She can never love me after what I have done. My life is over.”

The fact that he pulled the weapon away made Troy lose his mark for just a second, and that was all Pablo needed to turn the blade on himself. Despite the physical shock of the first wound he was able to pull it out to let the fountain of blood stream forth, and to plunge it in again, before slumping back and releasing his ex-wife.

She leapt from his fading grasp and rushed over to Troy

Boo calmly reached for his collar. “Control, we need trauma assist to G5:46,” he said. “And we have another death here. Self-inflicted.”

Troy held her. He was not happy with Boo, but he would not say anything in front of the victim, but as Boo came over he saw something he thought that he would never see.

“Hey Boo, are you crying?”

Chapter 4 Reproductive Phase

With Juliet in the hands of the counsellor and Dr. Jacob Hale en route, they could return to Security Control to enter up the details. Initially they were quiet, which was unusual. Boo had always been more talkative that most Gamidians, but there was something not right as far as Troy was concerned.

Even as the sat at their work stations entering in the data of the day’s events into the files, Troy though that he could see more changes happening then. Boo’s blonde hair seemed to have grown even more.

“I am not saying that we could have prevented him from killing himself, but why did you launch in to the negotiation?” he had asked on the ride back. “And were you getting emotional?”

“On Gamid we learn to be rational first,” said Boo. “But we are not without emotions. It is a more female response. It is particularly active in the reproductive phase. It helps in bonding with children. We do bond in the same way, you know.”

It did not make a lot of sense to Troy. There were Gamidian women aboard Zarathustra but curiously much less than 50% of their species. They were known to be more emotional, but that was only by comparison to their men.

It was true that the suicide would have been hard to stop, and all in all while two deliberate deaths in one day was a long way from normal, these were clean, from a paperwork point of view. The blood spilled had caused a mess, but that could be recovered and recycled with the bodies. The files were clean. Not prosecutions required. Only one victim to be looked after. No significant questions.

“It has been a lesson on the power of emotions,” said Boo. Troy had to agree.

Head of security offered them a late start for the morning shift. He assumed that they might wish to drink alcohol. They took it, but Boo had to apologize.

“I am sorry Troy, but I will not be ready tonight. Can I come to you studio in the morning? Then we can do what we discussed. The collection of genetic material.” The last sentence was a furtive whisper with a smile.

Troy tried to get him to go out for just one drink, but in the end he went out with the general group while Boo went home. As he said to the others: “It has been a strange day for sure, and everybody deals with their own shit in their own way.”

His way was to drink a little too much. When he got home he fell into be and sleep like a rock.

Still, his head was fairly clear when he was aroused by the doorbell. It was early. It could only be one person. He went straight to his coffee dispenser using the kitchen master control to unlock the door.

“It’s open Boo,” he called over his shoulder. He heard the door open and close behind him. He said: “This coffee will only be a few seconds.”

He turned and there was a Gamidian woman in his living area, plumping up the cushions on his couch as if she had been there before. Gamidian women would normally wear the same work uniforms as everybody else on the space station, where the visible figure and straight blonde hair that was usually a bob cut or longer, would them as female. But this woman was wearing a dress and her hair was curled, the way a Terran woman would dress for a daytime social function.

“Excuse me?” It was almost as if his presence was being ignored, to he drew attention to himself.

She looked up and smiled. Troy reached behind himself for the support of the kitchen bench. Surely if it had not been there he would have fallen over. The woman that he was looking at was Boo, or a female version of Boo. A very attractive female version of Boo.

“I’m sorry Troy. This tidying urge is another thing. Reproductive phase behavior.”

“Uh-huh,” said Troy, the natural affirmation when you cannot close your mouth.

“You are still in your boxers! That is good. And I and wearing something stimulating. The transfer of genetic material should be very easy. We should have coffee first and then do it.”

She walked into the kitchen light. The grey Gamidian eyes seemed to have acquired a blue tinge and much greater size, or perhaps it was the makeup she was wearing. The lips too were so much larger and painted glossy red as if wet and inviting penetration.

“What the fuck is going on?” said Troy. But he knew what was going on. He was … stimulated.

“I spent all last night changing into a form that would please you, to match the gonads that have been transforming over recent weeks. I am now ripe. We can do it … the transfer I mean.”

“This is you, Boo. What the fuck is going on?”

“It’s the reproductive phase I told you about. You have seen me changing. But the internal process began months ago.”

“Like you are one of those …? Is it surgical?” Troy was looking his partner up and down.

“No, there is no surgery. This is natural. I am Gamidian. When some of us enter the reproductive phase our gonads change. This is who I am now. Do you like what you see? This is a very Terran outfit. We would normally wear something gender neutral, but I am not seeking more Gamidian genes for my offspring. I want the genetic material you agreed to give me.”

“You want me to jack off into a cup so you can get pregnant?” Troy was flabbergasted.

“No!” Boo said it with such force that Troy was relieved. There had been some misunderstanding. It would not be the first in their friendship, but it seemed that everything else was. “No, the best way to transfer the material is by coitus,” said Boo.

“Coitus?!” Did that word mean what he thought that it meant.

“Perhaps alcohol would be better than coffee,” said Boo. He knew where that was stored so he walked past Troy to the cupboard. Troy could smell scent. Her bottom was on display as she reached up for a bottle. “But it is to early for drinking, is it?” She had a bottle in each hand.

“Boo, I need to understand this. Coffee. Yes. But what has happened to you? Or who are you?”

“I am still Boo, but a female now. I can reproduce, if I receive sperm. Even human sperm, our scientists say. I want my progeny to have human traits. I like humans … more that I like Gamidians.”

“Why have I never heard of this?”

“Reproduction and sex changing is private and personal. There have been many changes of sex among Gamidians on this ship, but they have been within our teams, and not mixed teams like ours. It is not a secret, but we do not publicize. It is a fact of our biology, because of our volume of amphibian DNA. It is the same DNA that allows for us to regenerate tissue – it also allows us to modify tissue … like these.”

Boo pulled at the neckline of the dress she was wearing to show her breasts. Troy found himself aroused again. This was not something that he was used to. He would not normally react this way.

“And the way you are dressed? And your hair?”.

“That is to please you,” said Boo. She smiled. Was he that easily pleased? He discovered that he was.

Chapter 5 A Mate

He watched her hand pour out the coffee. It was different. Before Boo had strong hands, even though they were not large. He recalled that he had noticed some difference in those hands days before. He was an investigator, trained to observe inconsistencies. Now the evidence that he had disregarded was being collated in his head. Yes – small changes had been going on.

“Will you change back, after the reproduction?” he asked.

She sat down, crossing her legs and arranging the hem of her dress. It was an overtly feminine gesture.

“I am not sure that I want to. In human society motherhood is a female thing.”

“But you are not human, Boo. I would have said that you were close, but now … now this. I am not so sure anymore.”

“I would like to be more human. I want my children to be.”

“Yesterday you saw the worst of humanity. People driven to murder and self destruction. You saw crippling jealousy and fear. Why would you want any part of that? Humans admire Gamidians for their lack of emotion.”

“I don’t, because I am one,” said Boo with some sadness. “I see joy and laughter in human society. We have nothing like that. The best we can hope for is contentment, which is just smug satisfaction. For true happiness I would happily bear a little sadness. And I want love. We only have a mother’s love, which is why I have been more emotional that you are used to during the reproductive phase. Forgive me for that, partner?”

She looked at Troy pleadingly. It was not to apologize but to ask for Troy to accept a new reality.

“Hey, you’re still the same person right?” said Troy.

“Except different,” she smiled. “Prettier, and maybe sexier?”

“Hey, Pal … we can’t have a relationship. I mean, we are friends. We are still working together – right? Like, as colleagues we don’t … we can’t … fuck, Man.” Troy reached for his coffee as if it was a life-ring in a wreck and took a slug.

“Troy, I want your sperm. Not because you are just any human but because you are the best human I know.”

“I could do the cup thing,” Troy volunteered.

“Coitus is better,” she said. “No equipment is necessary. I want to keep this private. Is that too much to ask?”

“This is going to be difficult for me,” said Troy.

“Is it?” she said. She stood. The dress opened at the front and fell to the floor. She was wearing a bra – an old-fashioned bra that had no place on a spacecraft – all black lace and bows, with matching panties that confirmed that Boo’s anatomy was female. Troy may have gulped – he certainly took some breath. She let him look for a minute before she reached back to undo the bra. It fell to reveal two perfect orbs.

“They just grew like this,” she said. “Terran size. Bigger than Gamidian girls. I think because I wanted what you can give me.” She was examining and massaging the breasts. Troy was getting an erection. It could not be concealed in a pair of boxer shorts. She glanced and must have seen it.

She reached for her panties and rolled them away from a small tuft of blond hair. “I have moisture,” she said, with what sounded like surprise. “And you have turgidity.”

Troy stood up and walked over. He softly put a hand over her mouth.

“Stop talking like this is some kind of science experiment,” he said. “I am going to do this, because … , well I am going to do it. She looked at him with those eyes. Not his eyes, but hers. And yet he knew her as well as anybody on this structure floating in the middle of nowhere.

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. He picked her up. She was a light as he hoped she would be. He carried her to his bed.

Chapter 7

Chief of Security Hiram Garfield opened his door from the console on his desk. He waved troy inside.

“You don’t want Boo in with us, Chief?” said Troy.

“No. It’s a personal matter,” he said. And when the door was closed he added: “It is sort of about Boo.”

If this is about our relationship Chief, you know that it does not affect our work together. We are still working effectively.”

“You are my best investigators,” said Hiram. “But now we need to discuss this maternity leave. He is entitled, or rather “she” is entitled. I am really having trouble with this, but now I understand that over the past 5 years we have had 17 Gamidian sex changes that we knew nothing about.”

“It’s a strange thing, Chief, but I can assure you, it is total,” said Troy. He was grinning. Hiram could only guess. In his case Mrs. Garfield had been less than friendly of late.

“This short gestation is a strange thing too.” Hiram shook his head. “You get used to the idea of 280 days and they reckon 200?”

“It may be different for these kids, as they are a mix.”

“Boo tells me that you have moved in together?” He let the question hang.

She wants the babies to be born into a nuclear family,” said Troy. “Gamidians tend to be more collective in child rearing, but that’s not what she wants. She admires the Terran way. We talk a lot about love. She wants a close family. She wants to feel what we feel.”

“It’s not always roses,” said Hiram, picturing the angry exchange at his home unit that very morning.

“She welcomes a bit of bad with the good,” said Troy. “It makes the good that much sweeter.”

“It does that,” said Hiram. There was a new vision of his wife in his head, and a plan for when he got home – how to bring a smile to her face – something to make things sweet again. That was the was she was.

“But things are good between you? I mean, can I say that you relationship has a strange history?”

“We were colleagues long before we were friends, and friends long before we were lovers.”

“When you were both male.” Hiram completed the sentence.

“It turns out that on Planet Gamid male and female can be just temporary. Their language has no gender. They have no gender roles except motherhood, and that is available to everyone. Some choose it, and for some it just happens.”

“It just happened?”

“To be honest Chief, I haven’t asked. But she did say that attraction to somebody can bring about this change. I don’t know if that is what did it, but she has changed. She is a woman now. She is my woman, and will be the mother of my children.”

“Well, I am just letting you know that leave is approved, for both of you. Congratulations.

Chapter 8 After Birth

“They are sleeping now,” he said. He climbed back into bed and she pulled herself close to him.

“You will be able to go back to work,” she said. “But I want to stay home and be like a real Earth mother.”

“If you only knew how funny that sounds,” he said. He kissed her and held her close. He said: “I have had some files sent through. You know that guy in navigation has ne groping women again.”

“Maybe he just needs to find a good Gamidian girl,” she said. “Like you.”

“Or find a Gamidian guy who he can turn,” Troy teased.

“Love always finds a way,” she whispered in his ear. “That is what we say about it. If two people belong together, love will find a way.”

“I thought there was not enough love on Gamid for you?” he said.

She sat up and pushed him down. A hand reached down and found his sex.

“Is there enough love here for me?” she said. She straddled him.

“You only gave birth 12 twelve days ago.”

“You need to learn more about Gamidian powers of regeneration,” she said. Her tight entrance found his swelling penis and it grew hard inside her. She was tight and he knew what joy awaited them both, but they would take time. They rocked gently as the Station Zarathrustra revolved and hurtled through space, until they shared their own little supernova right there.

They lay back and looked at the imaginary stars created by this collision of heavenly bodies.

“I suppose that Castor and Pollux are not really boys at all,” said Troy. “They are really of indeterminate sex?”

“I hope that they will be boys in the mold of their father,” said Boo. “But if the right man comes along, who knows what might happen. We can let them choose or we can let it happen. Sex is not permanent for our kids"

"Just promise me one thing,” said Troy “Promise me that you will stay female.”

Again, she drew close to him. That was answer enough.

The End

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