

From a Science-Fiction Collection

Birth

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She was adrift in a glass cocoon that floated like sleep through the reaches between galaxies. The loneliness was so great her eyes couldn't hold all the tears and they drifted into weightlessness and dispersed, misting the portal. Yet, there was nothing to see and nothing to feel but the great void.

From behind her regret were the memories, and she relented and let them wash over her as a release from the timeless emptiness of the voyage.

Gregor had been her succor, her reason for joy. He was a warrior of the avant-garde; a renegade media guerrilla. He painted wild pictures on the web, made outlandish video tapes and spam mailed them to thousands. He was wanted by the police of a dozen corporations and sought by the Tribunal for a host of misdemeanors.

Oh, they could laugh --she and Gregor. Drink cheap wine till dawn and do crazy things. Sometimes the fun was so great, she couldn't catch her breath. Her rib cage ached from laughing. A pain grew across her cheeks from having them drawn back in so much mirth. By first light they would collapse into coughing fits, their fingers stained with illegal tobacco and level three marijuana. Later they would make love and breakfast on forbidden things, like possum, 'the other white meat.' What fun.

The pregnancy had been an accident. And that was the end of Gregor. She chased after him in a parking lot. "I'll get a pill and end it, no sweat, really," she told him. But he didn't want any discussion of it.

"Kara, this is, like, draggin' me, girl. It's draggin' me. I can't deal with it, it's messin' with my work," he said.

"What work?" She asked, ending her role of being his confidante and play-mate. Standing still in the middle of the night, barely two weeks pregnant, and more serious.

"What work?!" He raged and finding no verbal explanation for all the things he thought he had explained to her, simply slapped at her. He missed, but it hurt her just the same. She stepped back from him and from her life since leaving her parents.

The next man, was the opposite of Gregor. His name was Frank and he was anything but frank. He had no direct explanation for anything, especially of

himself. Perhaps that's why he had appealed to her; he said practically nothing. Where Gregor was 24 hour entertainment, Frank was a man with barely a sentence.

The only thing he did speak to her about, in solemn solicitude, was why she should take a job with Cyber-Finance. She should cut her hair, dye it one color, remove the tattoo from her chin etc. Other than that, he was good for going to a flick, and you know, getting it on.

She followed his advice, possibly because the subsidy from her parents was getting smaller and partially because she had few ideas of her own. The tattoo (Gregor's idea) came off. Her appearance became more 'four corner' as they said on the street. She got a job with Cyber-Finance, which she hated. Frank was thrilled. He insisted she share the outside access codes because he wanted to rob the place.

She contended that there was nothing to steal in her work-area but some terminals, and they were selling on the street for barely two quid a piece. But he was adamant.

Kara didn't confront him. She hadn't said anything about the baby. Yeah, it was still in her; and it wasn't even his. What difference if she gave him the codes? Some of the space-heads that worked at Cyber Finance had the codes written on their wrists so they could remember them.

He showed up one night with a stocking on his head. He was so funny looking, that Kara, stood from her terminal and started laughing as if this was a gig of Gregor's. She expected somebody to be taping it. It wasn't meant to be funny. Frank had a multi-barrel, Micro-16 in a shopping bag. A security guard stepped off the escalator as Frank cleared the outside door. Frank opened up. The weapon on full auto got away from him and put a hundred rounds into the Solaris90 Supercluster behind the wall, killing two network administrators and Cyber-Finance's master data-base. Kara stood screaming amidst the mess, "What the fuck are you doing?! You crazy asshole!"

Like Gregor, Frank had limited room for criticism. He pointed the weapon at her and pulled the trigger. The magazine was empty. "Shit!" he hissed through the mask.

Her parents could only afford an attorney with limited experience. Cyber-Finance lent their entire legal staff to assist the prosecution. The fact that she was pregnant was barely admissible as a mitigating factor at sentencing.

That was where the memories became the most bitter. Wearing the hospital gown that was open in the back.

"What about the baby? It's still in me," she said.

"Not to concern yourself," they told her, strapping her into the support

systems, and starting the IV. They wore masks and scrubs. The only thing visible was their eyes. Shapeless people doing their jobs.

"I'm going into the blackness, aren't I?" She asked glancing at the stainless steel doors at the far wall, hoping to see her parents, Gregor maybe.

"You might get pulled in, you never know," one of the technicians said. "You could end up becoming a goddess to some tribe of primitives a million light years away..."

"But there's not, like, a lot of chance of that is there? If there were you wouldn't be sending criminals up there would you?" She asked. "I mean most likely I'll go forever and then get sucked into nothing, right?"

"We're almost through, here," one technician said.

"Hold still Kara," another technician instructed as a catheter was inserted into her urethra.

"Ouch."

"That's it," the last technician said.

"What's it like?" she asked, overwhelmed with sorrow about losing everything.

"What's it like?" The technician repeated. "It's like going back to before you were born."

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