

## SULIMAR GETS NEWS

I left Galrana's feedshop at midnight with the sweat running down me like salt rain. Now I had to clean up for De'Ann, my own lady, before she came in from her nursing hitch upcity. Up the screwstair five levels, off into Scratch Crevice and my cubby, and I slammed the door, yanking off my soaking slipsuit with the greenburg smell clutching it. De'Ann was already late, and I was frantic and confused, with Galrana's hug still hugging me, and then I saw the note.

"Suli, please please forgive me. It's not something I could help. Linderus came back."

My legs got soft and the exhaustion grabbed me and I sank into a cushion on the floor to read the rest.

"I know you've done everything you can. I tried so hard to forget him, and you did your best. Bless you always. But he needs me, and I love him, and that'll never change. I know that now, and I have to go with him. Please forgive me.

"I'm just a short-life woman anyway. You'll find another one, a lot better than I've been to you. Look in the upper stove cabinet – I left you something special. I'll never forget you and how wonderfully you treated me.

"Please don't let anger eat you up. I've been weak and stupid, and I know it'll hurt me. Don't be like me.

"With love and sadness, De'Ann."

I sat in the big cushion for a long time letting sweat run down over the letter and dissolve its words. My thumbs rubbed until most of the writing was a bleary mess and the paper was soggy. I ripped it into limp shreds and tossed it against the wall. Another damn lovely day.

Never mind that she'd been slaving in the Transellas mines. Never mind that I'd taken her in, right here, when she was lying beaten in the City understreet. Never mind that I'd listened to all her pinings for Linderus, the big guy in the coll who'd pulled her from the mines and brought her here only to run off to coll militia service and leave her.

Never mind how much I'd fallen for her. She'd stuck one up inside me anyway.

I clawed my way out of the cushion and went to look in the kitchen. In the cabinet was a long knife in a beautiful scabbard. The knife handle was carved steel, a sculpture of a man and a woman embracing. The blade was a dark blue with reddened edges, and was delicately scrolled on both sides in the pattern of a tall evergreen tree.

A note lay under it. The note read: “This belonged to a man in Transellas. He gave it to me when he died. His name was Virdiando. He was Darko Hejj Coll like you.”

I held up the knife in the kitchen light. It was no good for cooking – the blade was long and straight-edged down to a sharp point – but it couldn’t hurt to have on the streets. And if the pain got too much I could always...

I sheathed it again. Not a chance. Now I won’t be spending a stack on some bitch. Now I can start working more and saving for a buyout. I’d get a second job. I didn’t want to think about Galrana just then. I’d buy out of the City, and I’d find them... no.

My head whirled. I went back in the front room and plopped in the cushion. After an hour or so, I got up, threw away the stinking slipsuit, washed from scalp to toes, and put the knife carefully away next to my bed. Now it was time to get some control of my life. I headed out the door toward Aswar Tyrae. Another job, here I come.