**Blue Destiny**

Fred White

The diaphanous creatures reminded Brandt of moon jellies. They were much larger, though, glowed with a bluish luminescence that became more intense when two or more of them intertwined their flotillas of tendrils. Several of them seemed keenly aware of his presence. He activated his holocorder. The creatures kept swerving what appeared to be eye pods. He waved at them—a reflex—and doubted they would interpret it as a greeting; but one of them began circling around him.

When the creature uncoiled what looked vaguely like an umbilical cord toward him, he jerked back, but not in time; the cord connected itself to his forehead. He tried to tear it loose, but its micro-filaments had penetrated his skin . . . and skull. His fear vanished, and now he felt a deep calm, followed by a wave of ecstasy, followed in turn by a startling insight into what the colonists must do if they wished to survive on this planet.

Brandt watched the creature retract its umbilical and swim away. He was sad to see it leave. If he weren’t underwater, he would have called it back: it was a superior being, a master of survival under daunting conditions—and only with the help of its advanced intelligence and morphology could this world truly become a new home for humanity. But he was running low on oxygen and had to return to the surface.

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That evening at the debriefing, Brandt described his experience to the other explorers. He holostreamed his encounter with the creature, described its morphology and behavior (insofar as he had observed it during that one encounter), but omitted the penetration, sensing that it could be misinterpreted as a hostile act—which, of course, it could not possibly have been. This was a superior being! Such superiority could not be conveyed in a human debriefing.

When a colleague asked him if he had had any physical contact with the creature, Brandt did not hesitate to answer no. Everything in its own time.

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A long-standing member of the Colony Choir, Brandt was singing a Bach oratorio during Community Hour when he sensed that something wasn’t quite right with him; he kept inserting words into Bach’s German libretto. They might not have been words at all. At the reception, Krane, the music director, took him aside and asked him what his problem was. Brandt shrugged, apologized.

Krane gazed intently at him. “You’re very pale, Brandt—bluish, in fact. I think you should visit Med right away.”

“The thing is, Krane, I have never felt better in my life.”

“Even so, you may have contracted something during one of your dives.” He turned to leave, but Brandt grabbed his arm. “Listen, Krane: you—all of you— need to go on a dive.”

Krane jerked his arm free. “You aren’t making sense. And your hands are ice-cold. Go to Med—now!”

Brandt would do no such thing.

Back in his quarters, he studied his face in the mirror. His face certainly did seem to have a bluish cast—which became even more apparent when he dimmed the light. And his skin tingled in a way he could not describe.

“Is everything all right, love?” Jasmine called out from behind her desk. She was the colony’s chronicler and poet laureate. The light from her monitor gave her face a waxy appearance.

“I have an important story to share with you,” he said.

“Great. I’ll be eager to hear it and record it just as soon as I finish what I’m working on.”

Brandt walked up behind her, leaned down, and spread his hands across her bare thighs. He loved that she worked naked. “I’m afraid this can’t wait.”

Jessica jerked away reflexively. “You’re freezing!” she gasped.

Brandt hoisted her off her chair, carried her into the bedroom, and tossed her onto the bed Then he pulled off his tunic.

“Ooh-hoo! Now I get it,” she said.

Brandt leaned into her. “Listen to me. You are not yet ready for this world.”

“What?”

“I’m talking about inter-species reproduction.”

He quickly pressed Jessica’s arms against the mattress. “This is going to blow both our minds.”

Before Jessica could utter another word, he embraced her—attached himself to her, actually—legs-to-legs, chest-to-chest, arms-to-arms. Horror flashed in her eyes, but only for a few seconds; then her facial muscles slackened. “Oh-h-h my . . . God,” she whispered.

“They’re insisting that we be fruitful and multiply.” And Brandt opened himself wide, pore by pore, for the first metamorphosis to begin, to allow their destiny to be fulfilled.