

Alien Bloom

A NINA Side Story



Written by Brazzel / Art by SeekGr

“The Corpse Bloom stands over eight feet tall, half-buried under a mound of soil. Clusters of berries grow around it. When concealed, the petals take on a bluish hue indistinguishable from the mist that permeates the atmosphere. Its rigid texture makes it appear to be some kind of rocky formation from a distance. Upon closer inspection, you can make out the outline of the petals. I have to be careful not to get too close, however, due to the plant’s interesting method of catching prey. It is, as far as I can tell, carnivorous.”

Tess clicked off the voice recorder and placed it in her bag. She lay on her stomach, keeping a healthy distance between herself and the plant. Rocky soil bit into her knees as she inched closer, wary of the tendrils’ range. She had already witnessed the demise of two rabbit-like creatures earlier that day. Caught eating the berries that grew around the plant, the venelopes had been dragged squealing into the Corpse Bloom’s unfurled maw. Four hours later, their bones were deposited in the pit the plant occupied, along with a foul brown paste. The plant made its own fertilizer.

Flora or fauna? The research team couldn’t decide. However, Kat and Mick, normally assigned to flora, were off on the south end of the planet establishing a greenhouse. In lieu of their expertise, Tess had been sent to observe the morbid flower.

“Animal expert,” she muttered. “Hardly anything on this planet can be classified as an animal.”

The self-assurance did little to quell the guilt. She had visited Nina before making the trek to the Corpse Bloom and the amorous alien had done a number on her. Nina’s immense, slimy member had found its way into every orifice as Tess lay prone and moaning. She had told herself that banging the alien was necessary to breathe the CO₂-rich air that made the planet inhospitable to humans. Nina’s cum was the only known substance capable of allowing her to breathe without the aid of a helmet. Of course, that would be difficult to explain to the other researchers.

The Corpse Bloom twitched. Tess waited with bated breath as something small and agile leaped into the flower’s range. Its form was obscured by the mist, barely a black dot on the landscape. Tess pulled out her voice recorder.

“An animal has approached the bloom,” she said. “I can’t see what it is, but besides a small shake of its upper extremities, the Corpse Bloom has yet to respond to its presence. Perhaps it is because it is no longer in need of nutrition. However, the remains of the two previous creatures have been digested, so its stomach-like apparatus should be empty right now. Why it does not attack is a mystery to me. I shall get closer.”

Tess scooted closer. She still couldn’t see what kind of creature was lying in the mist. It moved back and forth, keeping low to the ground. Closer and closer, Tess crept, sweat beading her brow.

The Corpse Bloom seemed dormant. An ominous breeze swept across the valley, rippling the closed petals. Tess could smell the heap of remains that lay at the bottom of the pit. The odor rose from the roots, saturating the valley in the scent of death and decay. Besides the scat, Tess could also smell the sweet aroma of the red berries that grew in clumps around the plant.

“I think that the Corpse Bloom uses the berries that grow around it to lure prey. When the wind is still, only the smell of the berries remains. Small animals come to feed and are bound in the tendrils that hide beneath the dirt. The range of these tendrils seems to extend up to fifteen feet. I must be careful not to nudge one. The animal still has not moved. Maybe the plant is full—”

In an instant, Tess felt the ground beneath her feet tremble. She lay still, hoping that her movement hadn't disturbed the huge plant. Still, she was more than 30 feet away. Once the rumbling quieted, she continued to crawl.

"A small earthquake just shook the landscape. The plant has not reacted, and neither has the animal. It still sits within spitting distance of the petals, and yet the Corpse Bloom has made no move to capture it. I can see three of its tendrils spread across the valley. Each is smooth, with the tips being around 3 inches in diameter. They are capable of pulling even a nina off balance."

Speaking of Nina...

Tess quested toward the alien with her mind. The valley where Nina lived was almost two miles to the south, but their connection had grown stronger over the past few days. Tess wasn't sure she liked the implication. It still made her uncomfortable to have the alien in her head. When she reached Nina, all she found was a smooth wall of peace. Nina was asleep.

The Corpse Bloom was moving again. Tess held her breath as the petals unfurled, each coming free with a small pop as the flesh-colored underside tore away from the center. Open, the middle of the plant's bulb resembled a gaping maw. Eerie globules of clear liquid were laced between the petals. The inside looked soft.

"The Corpse Bloom is open," Tess whispered. "It must have sensed the animal, although it has made no move to capture it. The earth is shaking again, perhaps due to the movement of its roots. The network must be wider than I thought."

Something tugged at Tess's leg. She looked down. Her face went white.

A blue tendril had snaked its way around her ankle. As she watched, it shook free from the earth, coiling further and further up her leg. Tess grasped at the pressure. It felt like a metal vice had closed around her thigh. The tendril began to pull.

"Update," Tess said into the recorder as the plant dragged her toward its slaver petals. "The Corpse Bloom has wound its way around my foot. As hard as I try, I cannot break free. There is a knife in my pack, but I have unwisely left it up on the ridge. I did not think its range extended this far."

Tess rolled onto her back. The tight spacesuit did little to cushion the rough bludgeoning as the plant dragged her across the ground. It rose up to meet her, turning its maw so that for the first time, she could observe the space where the head met the stem. To its left, Tess caught a glimpse of the 'animal' she had seen hopping across the valley floor.

"The plant has exhibited signs of intelligence," she said, grabbing a chip of stone. She hacked at the tendril to no avail. The skin was as hard as granite. "The animal I was observing was actually just one of its roots, modified to look like a vennelope. It must be how it lures larger prey. Although I have been caught, I shall continue my log. The Corpse Bloom cannot digest humans, or any other creature that breathes oxygen instead of CO2."

Passing one of the berry bushes, Tess grabbed a handful and popped one into her mouth. The sweet taste exploded over her taste buds. It tasted like honey mixed with raspberries. No wonder the animals risked their lives for it. She turned to grab another handful, but the plant had dragged her out of reach.

An overpowering scent assaulted Tess's nostrils. She was close enough to smell the fragrant lubricant that coated the inside of the flower's mouth. Each petal was padded with an inch of soft, undulating flesh that glistened with the stuff. Tess wondered if its purpose was for pre-digestion, or if it was merely to aid in 'swallowing.' The Corpse Bloom had dragged her almost as far as the pit. At the edge, it stopped and started to lift her.

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Hanging over its humid maw, Tess struggled to hold onto her recorder.

"I am right over the Corpse Bloom's mouth," she said. "I can see down its. A narrow, rubbery tube leads down into the digestion chamber. It seems to take many twists and turns on the way down. It's lowering me now. I can smell the insides. It reeks of meat. The petals are twisting around me. The light is starting to fade. Yes, the tendril is pulling away from my ankle, twisting out of the only space left between the petals. It's dropping me."

Tess landed with a plop against the pink surface of the plant's mouth. There was no light but for the red eye of the voice recorder. The noises of the alien planet had muted, replaced with the swish of plant saliva and the creak of roots. Somewhere beneath her feet, she could hear the deep growl of the stomach.

A lesser researcher would have panicked. Tess, however, was elated. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to explore the anatomy of a living Corpse Bloom! Once it found out that she was indigestible, it would spit her out, so she might not be able to go through the intestines, but holy snacks did this sure beat dissection!

Tess settled into her moist dungeon and waited. The petals continued to twist around her, squeezing from her legs up. Soft walls slurped at her arms and sides, coating her suit in lubricant and holding her steady above the throat. Tess's feet hung over a void. The plant was taking its time with her consumption. Tess kept one arm above her head and the other close to her face, her voice recorder clasped in her palm.

"I always wondered how the Corpse Bloom swallowed," she said. "From the outside, it just looked like the petals closed and I assumed that gravity did the rest of the work, but it seems to have suspended me over its throat while lubricating me in a warm slime. I can feel it trickling down my back and against the inside of my legs. The sensation is akin to a warming gel. It, ah, tingles when it touches sensitive areas."

The gel more than tingled. Tess had to clench her legs to keep from moaning as it coated the inside of her thighs. She bit her lip and tried to think of two large numbers to divide in her head. It was her way of calming down. The Corpse Bloom pulsed around her and its slobbery walls squished around her ears. Some of the slime dribbled onto her lips.

"It, ah, tastes like honey," she gasped. "Something is happening below me. I can feel the throat widening, but the plant has yet to lower me into its embrace. Instead, some kind of bindings are coming up through it, winding around me ankles. They feel like the tendrils from before. As the petals squeeze, *oooh*, the tendrils drag."

Tess slurped lower. The tendrils wound up to her waist, holding her firm. From the top of her hand, the petals tightened, squeezing her like a tube of toothpaste down into the humid caress of the throat.

"I had just gotten used to Nina," Tess hissed. "But this is something else."

The arm holding her voice recorder was pulled over her head. It was hard to tell where the mouth ended and the throat began. Hot air rose from below, giving Tess her first hint of the sweltering environment she was being dragged toward. The tendrils did not let up. They pulled her feet around the first turn, and the throat clamped around her.

GULP!

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The petals tightened,
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a tube of toothpaste
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of the throat.

The accumulated saliva from the petals washed over Tess, turning the rubber walls of the throat into a veritable waterslide. Her body was forced through a series of narrow turns, guided by the tendrils and the frictionless walls. The motion ended as the tube suddenly gave way, and Tess splashed into the stomach chamber.

As with the mouth, no light permeated the inside of the plant's stomach. Tess lay half-submerged in the grime. She hoped that it was more of the honied saliva, but by the smell of it, she was bathing in bile. The space was large enough that she could stretch out. The tips of her fingers and toes brushed the pliant walls, causing the plant to ripple around her.

Legs still bound, Tess dragged the voice recorder from the bubbling liquid. She had to speak louder than normal to be heard over the sounds of digestion.

"I have entered the belly of the plant," she said, struggling to stand. "It is roughly 6 feet in diameter. The walls are made of a thin material that jiggles when I touch it. They are secreting a foul-smelling liquid with properties similar to stomach acids. Whether it is the same biologically will require more tests. My heart rate and breathing are normal. It seems that I should have no problem surviving this encounter. The Corpse flower has swallowed inedible substances along with animals before and it always spits them out. The stomach is filled with enough CO₂ that I will not suffocate before then."

Something about her own words disturbed her. Whether the plant was going to spit her out or not, she was still 10 feet underground in the stomach of a creature that could turn animals into withered husks. A chunk of something brushed her leg. Tess was glad she couldn't see. She sat with her back against the smooth wall in case it was cooler. The temperature in the stomach was rising.

Tess found herself thinking of Nina. The alien had swallowed her in a similar fashion, but her stomach had never made Tess feel paranoid. Inside of it, she shared an intimate connection with Nina, as though the alien's body was a protective shell that kept her safe from the hostile world. She loved the way it jiggled around her, bouncing her up and down along with Nina's lumbering steps.

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A foreign feeling pierced through Tess's thoughts. Nina was awake, and panicked. Despite the distance between them, Tess could sense Nina questing for her, searching for her mind. Tess reached out and they connected.

Danger.

No. No danger. I have been swallowed by a plant.

Tess projected an image of the Corpse Bloom and of herself, safe inside of its gurgling stomach. She tried to also project a sense of calm.

Danger!

No, no danger. Can't digest. No... poop?

Her skin itched. She scratched at her suit, unsurprised to find that the fabric was coming apart in the acidic soup. No matter. She had another suit in her pack. It was a lesson that she had been quick to learn on that alien planet.

The stomach walls were clenching around her. The plant would soon realize she couldn't be digested. Nina's responses were coming in short bursts.

Danger! Coming! Wait!

Tess sighed. Oh well.

"The stomach is packing in around me," she said. "Like I thought, it squeezes its prey, reducing the open space as the digestive juices rise. It has already eaten through most of my suit

and despite my immunity, is irritating my skin. Two tendrils still bind both of my legs. Soon, it will spit me out. As you can hear, it is getting quite loud, and very hot. I am sweating. Part of me does not miss the suit. The juices are up to my waist now, and as the stomach clenches, I find it easier to stand than to sit. Something is prickling against my legs. Perhaps the tendrils—”

The breath leaked out of Tess’s lungs.

Danger! Danger!

She had seen Nina that morning.

Danger! Run! Danger!

Nina’s cum had interesting properties. The first was that it allowed her to breathe CO₂.

Coming! Coming!

The second was that it stripped away her immunity to digestion.

Tess kicked at the bindings, but they held tight. The digestive juices were rising around her. The grinding of the stomach, once as gentle as a massage, had turned into a death trap closing in on her. Tess plunged her hands into the encroaching walls, but they absorbed the blow. She could feel them pumping more acid between her fingers.

How long did she have? Minutes? Seconds? Tess cursed herself for waiting. She turned her attention toward the throat, but in the dark, she couldn’t tell whether it was open or closed. Besides, the bindings wouldn’t allow her to climb. She was trapped.

Nina! Hurry!

Danger! Hurry! Coming!

Her legs stung. Bare needles of pain crept along her skin as the digestive juices rose along with the temperature. Tess’s breath was coming in ragged gasps. She clenched her fingers together and punched her nails into the flesh surrounding her. Nothing. Not so much as a dent. The grasping walls sucked in her arm, trapping it into the heaving mass of tissue. With one arm out of commission and the other pressed uselessly at her side, Tess placed her focus on her legs.

The bindings strained as she struggled to raise her leg. They gripped both of her calves, locking around the back of her knee. There was no way to free herself.

Tess fingered the voice recorder at her side. She yanked her arm up along her stomach and between her bare breasts. Hoping that the recorder was the right side up and that it could even hear her above the turmoil, she gasped her final message.

“I,” she said, gasping as the juices sloshed over her chest. “Have made a mistake. A great many, in fact. You will find details in a journal I have left behind the panel in my room. If this voice recorder survives and is picked up, please return it to Bryce at the Research Base 3.”

“The stomach is now completing its rotation. I will be asphyxiated before being dissolved. I cannot see the state of my skin, but it feels like no more than a painful abrasion. The heat is unbearable. I have been, *ah*, inside for almost fifteen minutes. Corpse Flower digestion seems to be consistent with the process of most other carnivorous plants. Must confirm with flora team. If my remains cannot be recovered, plant a flower in that new greenhouse for me. This has been Tess.”

The recorder dropped from her nerveless fingers.

If anything could be said about Tess, she didn’t panic in the face of impending death. She held her breath and wondered how long it had been since the days when she had practiced expanding her lungs as part of the colonization program. Her record was four minutes. The juices overtook her head and she closed her eyes.



Sadako

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The first minute passed without incident. Tess counted the seconds, feeling around for a way out. The bindings around her ankles had receded into the plant's lower core. Evidently, they weren't needed to suck her pulped body into the intestines. Tess drew her knees up to her chest, the stomach filling in empty space beneath her, cradling her in its molten embrace.

The second minute passed like a dream. If her life was supposed to flash before her eyes, Tess had always figured it would happen then, but instead, all she could do was concentrate on holding her breath. Her lungs were burning and the pressure of the stomach made her ears pop.

She could hear nothing besides the gurgles and the scuffling sound of the plant moving above her.

She had known coming here was a risk. Nobody had lied to her. Every researcher kept their will updated. Hers was tucked beneath her bed, just five words: Everything goes to my sister.

Then, there was Nina. Perched above the bowels of the carnivorous plant, Tess wondered if the alien would miss her, or whether she was capable of that emotion. Tess could feel her scratching at the edge of her mind, but the message wasn't getting through. With the last of her concentration, Tess touched on their psychic link.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Be good."

HERE!

The stomach exploded with a wet ripping sound. Tess blinked in the harsh alien sun, her skin pink and fragile. Nothing of her suit remained. She lay naked among the viscera, surrounded by the twitching remains of the Corpse Bloom and its many victims. Nina stood over her.

The alien's face and legs were bruised. There was a dark purple line stretching around her neck where the plant had tried to strangle her, but Nina's skin was thick and her strength was second to none. One of the petals oozed down her chest. It flopped to the ground with a thwack.

Tess reached for her and Nina was there. The alien drew her into her arms and held her against her chest. Familiar breath ruffled Tess's hair.

Safe.

Tess wrapped her arms around Nina's back and let the emotions that she had been stemming come out in a torrent. Sobs wracked her shoulders as hot tears spread along the inside of Nina's neck. Tess curled up tighter, overwrought. Her fingers clutched at Nina's porous skin, trying to take as much of it in as possible.

The alien seemed to understand.

