

The Key to the Matter

Chapter 4

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Some time later, the two lovers' flaring passions finally being sufficiently sated to make room for other, less vital concerns, they lay on Susan's bed talking.

"Given that I've got so much more to learn and so much practicing to do," said Susan, "How long will be before I can start 'earning my keep', do you think?"

Kara smiled mischievously at her lover's choice of words. "I think you're doing a quite adequate job of that already, love," she murmured teasingly.

Susan accepted the tease in the spirit in which it was intended and poked her tongue out at her lover in reply. "This isn't work," she protested, then. "It's too much fun." She threw herself across the bed at Kara and proceeded to tickle her mercilessly, the ensuing windmill of flailing arms and legs and flying blonde and red hair fully occupying the lovers' attention for several giggling, strenuously aerobic minutes and severely testing the structure of the bed. Eventually tiring of the enjoyable activity, they fell apart. "Now," laughed Susan. "A serious answer, please, love. How soon do you think I'll be ready to start using my powers, to fight crime or whatever?"

Kara reached over and softly caressed the older woman's face. "Whenever you think you're ready, love," she replied quietly. "You're getting very good with your flying powers and tachyonic vision and you're better than I at fine muscular control. You're totally bullet-proof as well, now. We need to work on control of your heat vision a bit more," she commented, smiling gently.

Suddenly becoming aware of something which, until that very moment she had, unaccountably, failed to notice, Kara began to chuckle. "I love your hair long, too, love. It really suits you." She reached toward Susan, picked up a handful of her now long red hair and gently drew it toward her, into Susan's own field of view.

Susan's eyes bugged out and her jaw dropped in amazement. "Whaaa ...," she began. Wonderingly, she reached up and fanned out her hair. "I've never had hair this long," she said dumbfoundedly. "When did this happen?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing, love." Kara burst out laughing. "Oh, the expression on your face right now is absolutely priceless."

Susan shook her head in bewilderment. "Hair doesn't just grow like this, overnight," she sputtered. "Is this something else that comes with enhancement?"

"I really don't know, Susan," admitted Kara, still chuckling softly. "It must be, though. I can't think of anything else which could account for it."

"How do you manage to cut your hair, love?," asked Susan. "It'd be a bit difficult, wouldn't it, what with invulnerable hair and all that?"

"I've never had to," admitted Kara. "I like my hair at this length and it's never grown any longer since I've been here on Earth. I don't think it's possible to cut my hair, with anything."

"Oh, great!," muttered Susan. "I guess I'd better get used to having it at this length, then," she continued more loudly. "I was thinking just the other day that I should maybe let my hair grow out a bit more, but I really wasn't expecting this. I just hope it doesn't get in my way too much."

"Well, as I said before, long hair really suits you. You look great like this, love," Kara reassured her. "If it gets to be too much of a problem, maybe Kal can work out some way of cutting it when he gets back."

"Oh well," said Susan, shrugging her shapely shoulders and finger combing her hair back over her shoulders. "I guess I'll survive." She grinned wryly. Kara grinned back at her. "Now, where were we before my new hair distracted us?"

Kara thought for a moment, then continued. "You've had extensive training in martial arts, haven't you," she asked.

"Yes," replied Susan.

"I think it'd be good for both of us if you started teaching me at least the rudiments of hand to hand combat," said Kara.

Susan's eyes widened in surprise. "What on earth for?," she asked, puzzled.

"Raw power isn't everything, love," replied the blonde. "It's conceivable that some day we're going to come up against someone from another planet who is comparable in strength to ourselves, maybe even stronger. The more skill we have at hand to hand combat in a situation like that, the better off we'll all be," she finished, thoughtfully.

"Mmmm, yes, I can see that," mused Susan. "One thing martial arts does teach you is very good discipline, as well as fine control of your body and that has already helped me enormously since I've been enhanced. But *I have* noticed that my normal morning exercises don't do a damned thing for my enhanced muscles." She paused for a moment. "Although I certainly haven't tried to do any martial arts katas since I've been enhanced. I guess learning to adapt the katas to enormously greater strength and speed and figuring out how to incorporate flying powers into the training would be good experience for me, as well." Susan stopped and thought for a moment. "Love, what do you and Kal do to get a good workout, anyway. And how much exercise does a super body actually need?"

"Well, once we reach full muscular development it really doesn't take that much work to keep in shape," replied Kara. "In fact, we'd really have to work hard at it to manage to get out of condition. Generally I do isometric exercises, after all loose five or ten thousand ton boulders aren't really that common and they're hell to keep balanced," she continued with a sly grin.

Susan's eyes grew as large as saucers. "Can you really lift that much?," she whispered, awed.

"Dunno," Kara tossed back, shrugging. "I've never tried, myself. You might ask Kal, though. He's probably tried it with a big iceberg or glacier at some time. Or a medium sized ship would probably weigh about that. It'd probably break apart under the stresses, though." She grinned cheekily. "One thing you will probably discover soon, if you haven't already, is that physical exertion can be a real turn-on. The more we exert ourselves, the hotter and hornier we get. At least I do. I assume it's the same for Kal, he just somehow manages to hide it well."

"Oooo!," exclaimed Susan, grinning broadly. "Well I've always loved exercising. Now I've got an even better excuse to do a lot of it." She winked. "I've always had trouble finding good sparring partners in my own weight and strength range though. I guess that's going to be even harder now," she continued ruefully, "Unless you and I are closely matched enough now, to give each other a good work out." She thought a moment and permitted an expression of pristine innocence to encompass her beautiful face. "Although, if we did work out together, how would we tell if it's actually the *exercise* that's turning us on," she remarked slyly.

Kara dissolved into a fit of giggles. "Oh, love, you are incorrigible," she eventually managed to get out.

Susan grinned at her, deciding then that it was time to change the subject to one slightly less distracting. She waited until Kara had managed to control her outburst of hilarity and took a deep breath. "What is it about lead and tachyonic vision?," she asked curiously. "On the basis of what you've already told me, lead shouldn't be able to block tachyons the way it does."

"I don't really understand it that well myself," admitted Kara. "It has something to do with frequencies, though. All tachyons possess a characteristic frequency, or 'colour' but our eyes only use a very narrow band of tachyonic 'colours'. It just so happens that that band is very powerfully affected by the atomic structure of lead. Other materials respond to and strongly affect different 'colours' of tachyons but, as we don't use those sorts, or 'colours', of tachyons, we don't notice the effects. The tachyons our eyes use can go through literally miles of anything other than lead and be only slightly affected. Our eyes, when they pick up those tachyons, can somehow 'read' the slight changes in those tachyons and our brains can then reconstruct an image of the objects they had passed through. Of course, the more material they pass through, the more changes occur in the tachyons and the foggier the resulting image becomes. I think Kal called it interferometry or something like that when he was trying to explain it all to me."

Kara paused there for a moment, a slight expression of bafflement passing across her beautiful face. "Kal's never been able to understand, or accept, that I've got no real interest in the 'why'," she commented. "As long as I can understand how to 'do', that's enough for me." She sighed, continuing. "Heat vision works a bit differently. There, our eyes somehow actually collect and focus tachyons and use them as a sort of carrier wave for the heat. At least, I think that's how it works," she confessed. "Kal did try to explain it all to me once but he got horribly technical and I may have gotten it all mixed up."

"Oh," exclaimed Susan. "Is that why everything seems to become tinged with violet when I use heat vision?"

"I guess so," said Kara. "We can melt lead easily enough, we just can't see through it worth a damn."

"What's the story with Kryptonite then?," asked Susan. "Am I going to be affected by it, too? After all, I'm not a Kryptonian."

"Well, that's different," explained Kara. "Krypton had a core of almost solid, although not pure, gold. It was that, together with the red sun of Krypton, that had a very strong dampening effect on super-powers. You see, our bodies' ability to absorb and use the inter-dimensional energy is multiplied enormously under the influence of a yellow sun like Earth's. What little energy we were able to absorb under a red sun, we were prevented from using by the gold. Between the two effects, we were no more powerful at home, relatively speaking, than an unenhanced Terran is here on Earth."

"Pure gold acts a bit like a mild poison to us, you know," she continued. "Being too close to gold has an effect almost like being drunk to a Terran and I think it will prove to be the same with you, now. It doesn't exactly prevent us from absorbing the inter-dimensional energy but it strongly affects our ability to use it. By the way, one of Earth's scientists once learned to detect and partly harness that energy. He called it 'Orgone' energy, according to Kal," she inserted parenthetically. "I think Kal said his name was William Reich, ... Hang on, that doesn't sound right. Um, Wilhelm? That's it, Wilhelm Reich, or something like that."

"Anyway," she continued, "gold doesn't stop us from absorbing and storing this Orgone energy but it does interfere with our normal use of it so we become much weaker and somewhat less invulnerable if we're too close to too much of it. I wouldn't suggest you wear any heavy gold jewelry, for instance, or go for a tour of the vaults under Fort Knox. Kryptonite is actually gold mixed with other, radioactive, elements. The presence of the gold makes us vulnerable to the radiation of those other elements and it can have some rather embarrassing and often dangerous effects on us."

"Oh, I see," said Susan. "So I'd be just as vulnerable then, to the different forms of Kryptonite, as you or Kal."

"I would expect so," nodded Kara. "The effects may not be quite the same on you because you are Terran, not Kryptonian, but there would certainly be an effect. It's just as well the stuff is very rare here."

"So it'd be possible for someone to make synthetic Kryptonite by mixing some radioactive elements with gold," commented Susan.

"Kao! I hope not!," exclaimed Kara. "I'll have to ask Kal about that but I don't think so. I think it was because of the dampening effect of Krypton's red sun, that other elements never before seen on Terra were able to be formed. Under the influence of the more energetic yellow sun here, those elements become very unstable. They would probably explode very violently if there were too much together in one place and if they weren't mixed in with the gold. But they start to emanate very powerful rays of energy that can have some very embarrassing, painful and dangerous effects on our bodies."

"Wouldn't that tend to suggest that this orgone energy is somehow involved, that it somehow helps to make those elements more unstable?" asked Susan curiously.

"I've got no idea," admitted Kara. "You'd best ask Kal about that. He's the scientific type and I'm sure he'd be able to give you chapter and verse on all the technical details. Surprisingly enough, the rays from Kryptonite don't seem to have any effect at all on a Terran. Fortunately, once we are able to get away from the stuff, our ability to use Orgone energy normally is no longer suppressed by the gold and our bodies can repair any damage caused by the radiation very quickly. The other effect I've noticed," she continued, grinning, "is if our use of Orgone energy is blocked for too long by being close to gold, the results can be rather dramatic when the gold is finally removed."

"Dramatic in exactly what way," asked Susan suspiciously, having noted Kara's grin.

"Oh, powerful energy discharges are pretty usual," said Kara offhandedly. "Usually from my breasts and, particularly, my nipples. It tends to be very arousing, too," she added, smiling.

"Hmmm," said Susan, returning her lover's smile. "Hey, I just remembered. I read something years ago about this Orgone stuff. Something about it having a lot to do with sexual responses in the body, and particularly with orgasms. I wonder if that's got anything to do with exercise and exertion making us horny? Like if we're using up a lot of Orgone energy very quickly and fresh energy is flowing into our bodies."

"That sounds about right. I'd say that's exactly what does happen. Well spotted," congratulated Kara. "Well, my love," she continued. "Let's grab a shower and get dressed and go do some more work," she suggested.

"Okay, you're 'on'," replied Susan enthusiastically.

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A short time later the two women were flying over the Metropolis skyline, enjoying an impromptu game of tag. After a brief detour while Kara rounded up some desperate criminals engaged in a shoot-out with some of the Police Department's finest in downtown Metropolis, they quickly arrived back at their deserted valley. Susan was laughing in her exuberance. As they landed, she quickly grabbed Kara's hands and swung her around in joyous circles for a few moments before embracing her. "Oh, Kara. How wonderful it is to be able to fly!," she carolled in high spirits. "Thank you, thank you, thank you, my love." Kara laughed unrestrainedly at her lover's infectious enthusiasm, hugging her back. Eventually they drew apart, still chuckling with joy.

"Right," said Susan, returning eventually to relative sobriety. "Let's get down to business. First off, I want to try that welding trick again. Let's see if I've got it right ... I hold the pieces together, right? Then I concentrate on the join with my tachyonic vision and imagine the metal getting hot and melting and flowing together at the join?," she asked.

"That's exactly right, love," replied Kara. "The most important thing to remember is not to strain or push at it. Just take it slow and easy. Then when you've finished, let yourself see the metal as it really is instead of imagining how you want it to be and your heat vision will turn off by itself," she instructed.

Susan picked up two of the surrealistically twisted steel rods from her previous day's activities and held them together. She focussed her tachyonic vision on the join and concentrated on imagining the metal of the join to be heating up and starting to melt. She started to breathe more quickly as her vision became tinged with violet again, but carefully maintained her mental visualisation of what she wanted to have happen, imagining the metal melting and flowing together at the point she was concentrating on and gradually moving that focus point along the join and around the steel. Moments later she allowed her imagined image to lapse and her vision flashed back to normal. She closely examined her handiwork and exclaimed with pleasure to see a perfect weld all around the join. "Kara, love! Look! I did it!," she sang out joyfully. "It wasn't hard at all," she exclaimed.

Kara hugged the enthusiastic redhead. "Beautifully done, love," she proclaimed. "Now let's try some more."

Susan quickly gathered up more of the steel pretzels, welding them together with her heat vision as she went, finding that the work became easier, her use of heat vision becoming almost second nature and that she hardly needing to think about what she was doing any more. Kara looked on with interest as a weirdly shaped piece of metal sculpture rapidly took shape under the hands, and eyes, of her red haired lover. Scant minutes later, Susan had finished. She turned it around slightly and stepped aside, a mischievous expression on her face. Kara looked closely at the result, then took a few steps around it and looked again, bursting into paeans of laughter as she realised what her lover had just wrought. "Oh," she burred in delight. "That is just so obscene! So cleverly done and so appropriate."

For Susan had managed to create from the pile of warped and twisted scrap steel an amazingly recognisable caricature of a nationally known and very vocally anti-lesbian female legislator eagerly caressing a monstrous vagina.

Kara clapped her hands in sheer delight. "Let's dump it on top of the White House tonight," she exclaimed, grinning maliciously.

Susan laughed gleefully. "Oh, wouldn't that be fun," she bubbled, delighted. Then she shook her head regretfully. "No, we'd better not, love. That would be just too obvious. Everyone would realise that super powers had been used and they'd immediately conclude that you'd done it."

"Not that it'd worry me too much," Kara contended, "But you're right," she reluctantly concurred.

"Yeah. So let's just keep it to ourselves," proposed Susan. "I can use it to practice on some more." With that, she focussed her attention on her parody and exercised her heat vision one more time, causing the steel to glow incandescently and slowly slump into a puddle upon the ground.

"You know, I never would have guessed you to be an artist, love," smiled Kara. "That was so well done."

"Oh, caricature isn't really art," denied Susan. "I used to play around with it a bit at school. I'd regularly get into trouble for caricaturing the teachers. The other kids loved them. The teachers were usually quite unimpressed by my efforts," she grinned maliciously. "And then I'd have to take a note home. Mom and Dad found it all very amusing but they usually asked me to try and restrain myself. I haven't done it for years, though. I was often sorely tempted while I was in the army but I somehow managed to convince myself that discretion was the better part of valour," she concluded.

"Well, whether or not it's art is a matter of opinion," said Kara, "And my opinion is that it is. Be that as it may, you've certainly caught onto using your heat vision. I couldn't have done better myself."

Susan coloured slightly. "Thanks, love. I don't know how I'd go on larger stuff, or smaller stuff though. There's plenty of practicing to do yet, I think."

"Even so, the basics are the same," retorted Kara. "I don't think you'll find it as hard as you think, love."

"That reminds me," said Susan, changing the subject off of herself and onto something else that had been puzzling her for a while. "I've been noticing that people's voices sound somewhat different to me now. There seems to be a whole bunch of overtones that I've never been able to hear before. Except for your voice, love. It hasn't changed at all. Why would that be?"

"I think you're probably hearing ultrasonic overtones since you've been enhanced. Everyone's voice has them. In my case though, and Kal's, our vocal cords are far, far stronger and we can exert a far closer control on them. That tends to block off the high overtones. But our control allows us to easily change the pitch of our voices, over a very wide range. For example," and Kara effortlessly shifted her voice up several octaves so she was speaking entirely ultrasonically.

Susan was dumbfounded, her mouth opening in amazement. "Hey, love. That is amazing. Would I be able to do that?," she eventually managed to ask.

"I don't see why not." replied Kara. Your vocal cords should be almost as strong as mine. Hmm. I'm not really sure that I can explain how to do it. It's an automatic, unconscious action with me. I decide I'm going to speak ultrasonically and I just do it. I guess you could try concentrating on your vocal cords and try to consciously tighten them as you speak.

"But," began Susan. "If my vocal cords have gotten as much stronger as the rest of me, how come *my* voice hasn't changed?"

Kara considered for a moment. "I think it's probably because you've been unconsciously compensating for the changes, love. Although, now that I think on it, I believe your voice has changed slightly. Not so it'd be audible to a normal person though, but I do believe your own supersonic overtones have pretty much vanished." Susan's eyes widened again. "You just haven't noticed it yourself, probably because you didn't start to be able to hear them until you'd already started to lose them. If you concentrate on it and learn how to do consciously what you've already started doing unconsciously, you should be able to develop the same level of control as I have."

"Oh well," said Susan. "Let's give it a try then." She took a deep breath, from her diaphragm, and launched off into a scale with a pure, clear contralto voice. Kara's eyes widened in appreciation at the purity of her lover's singing voice, then widened again as Susan continued the scale on up through the soprano registers. Neither did she stop there, continuing for several more, humanly impossible, octaves into the ultrasonic before she ran out of breath. "Wow," she panted. "I've never sung that high before."

Kara shook her head in astoundment. "Double wow," she breathed in awe. "You are one very talented lady, my love. Perfect pitch, too, if I'm not mistaken."

Susan coloured slightly at the complement then shrugged depreciatingly. "I was too much of a tomboy as a child to take music and singing seriously," she admitted. "My mother and several of my teachers tried to encourage me to take it further but I just wasn't interested. I got quite aggressive about it at times. When I was in the army, Carmen used to enjoy listening to me sing." Kara raised an eyebrow. "Captain Carmen Anna Gutteriez. She was the CO of Charlie Company and I was one of her Lieutenants." She smiled reminiscently. "And her lover. I *do* enjoy singing for a small, appreciative audience."

"Love, with a voice as beautiful as yours, I'm not surprised she enjoyed listening to you," said Kara. "In fact, you can sing to me whenever you feel like it," she smiled.

"Alright, you asked for it," grinned Susan. Taking another very deep breath, from the diaphragm as all singers should, she closed her eyes and launched into a rendition of Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sounds of Silence', with one slight variation. She impishly pitched her voice half a dozen octaves higher than the original score. She segued then into an equally ultrasonic rendition of 'Scarborough Fair', followed by ultrasonically rearranged versions of several other equally popular favourites, classical, folk and modern. Kara closed her eyes also, smiling slightly at the appropriateness of the first song's title, at least for any non-superpowered listener and listened, enraptured, to the sweet sound of her lover's voice.

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Just then, Susan became aware of a faint, wierdly ululating and very highly pitched sound and trailed to a halt. She opened her eyes to see Kara cocking her head and listening intently. She turned, squinting her eyes slightly, and gasped. "Love, I have got to go, *NOW*," she exclaimed hurriedly.

"Do you want me to come too?," asked Susan.

"No," replied Kara shortly, taking immediately to the air. Moments later Susan was astonished to hear a triple sonic boom as Kara rapidly disappeared into the distance.

Susan shrugged her shoulders. "Must be an emergency of some sort," she mused. "Just as well she didn't want me to go with her. At that sort of speed, I'd be starkers when I got there." She grinned to herself as she realised that the possibility of appearing naked in public didn't bother her in the slightest, now. Yet a week before, she was certain, she would have experienced terminal embarrassment at the mere suggestion that she might be placed in such a situation. "My, how the gal's changed," she murmured to herself, giggling. "Oh well, I'll do some more practicing while I'm waiting. I might as well start trying out some katas."

She launched into one of her simpler katas, concentrating hard on controlling her body as she did so. She ran through several more before stopping and shaking her head, an exasperated expression on her face. "This doesn't feel right," she muttered to herself. She thought deeply for a moment and attempted another, more complex kata that required her to tap into ki. As soon as she did so she felt an enormous surge of energy course through her body and found herself tumbling wildly, totally out of control, down the length of the valley. Coming to a slithering halt after smashing her way through several large boulders, she picked herself up out of the rubble, ruefully noting that her clothes had come off a distinct second best, again.

She sat down, closed her eyes and cleared her mind, initiating a meditative trance. Having entered the state, she very, very cautiously and tentatively reached again for her ki and instantly experienced another massive, uncontrolled surge of energy. Snapping her eyes open, she was astonished to see that the rubble around her had melted in a perfect five foot circle. She looked down at her body then and was astounded to see her skin glowing an incandescent silvery colour. She felt intense tingling sensations throughout her body, not the sensations of sexual arousal but rather as if she were filled to overflowing with energy and life. As she watched, amazed, her skin gradually returned to a more normal colouration, although the sensation of enormous energy remained with her. She then glanced down at her breasts, stupefied to discover that they had grown noticeably larger.

Susan considered long and hard, finally deciding to pay a quick visit to her old sensei from years before, to seek his advice. The white haired old Asian was one of the very few men she had ever truly respected in her adult life. She quickly flew back to her apartment and changed into fresh clothing, bundling her gi into a bag before taking to the skies again.

Arriving at the dojo, she entered the changerooms and quickly changed into her gi. She rapidly scanned the building with her tachyonic vision to locate the master and then went out into the hall to make the customary obeisance to the tatami. Oblivious to the eyes following her, she quickly strode then to the small, bare room of the master. Quietly entering, she bowed and knelt on the floor, remaining silent, awaiting the sensei's pleasure, unwilling to gratuitously interrupt him, the habit of respect too deeply engraved to ignore. The master looked up as she entered, eyes widening as he observed her fluid, gracefully powerful motions. "Susan," he greeted her, rising smoothly to his feet and returning her respectful bow. "How can I be of assistance to you."

"Master," she replied. "I need your advice." The ancient Asian nodded at her to continue. "I need to learn how to adapt the katas," she began hesitantly, "to work with greater strength and speed. I have recently experienced what can only be described as a miracle." She flushed intensely and continued. "I mean no offence to you, master," she began. "B-b-but I need you to keep my request in total confidence for the moment." She hung her head in shame at having made such a disrespectful request of the sage, blushing incandescently.

The sensei quickly rose to his feet, approaching the embarrassed woman and touched her gently on her long, red tresses. "Stand tall, child. There is no need to be ashamed of a necessary request. All that passes between us here will be kept in total confidence. I have already noticed your new fluidity and power of movement and sensed your greatly augmented life force. I have concluded that you have changed greatly in the years since I last had the opportunity to train you and I suspect that it is this in which you require advice. Your sense of presence and your movements now remind me strongly of the one known as Supergirl."

Susan looked up at the sensei gratefully and nodded her thanks, rising smoothly to her feet. "Her name is Kara, master. She and I have recently become lovers."

The sensei nodded. "This much is obvious, even to one with only small ability to perceive," he chided her gently.

"Somehow," the redhead continued, "Unworthy though I am, my strength and speed have been miraculously enhanced by this relationship."

"Unworthy, child? I hardly think so. Opportunity of such magnitude seldom crosses the path of the truly unworthy," replied the master. "False modesty, on the other hand, can only work to hold you back from attainment of your full potential."

Susan blushed again at the master's subtle reprimand. "My past training in the Art is helping me enormously in adapting to the use of these new powers," she continued. "But the katas do not seem to adapt well to my new strength of body or my ability to fly."

"Flight too," murmured the sensei. "That is awesome. I could almost feel envy for such an experience."

Susan bowed deeply to the master. "Oh master," she exclaimed exultantly but quietly. "You have no idea what a wonderful experience it is." The master bowed his head for a moment in acknowledgement of Susan's exuberant statement.

She continued, "Kara has asked me to start training her in the Art but I am unsure of where to begin. I have also experienced disconcerting results when I attempt to touch ki."

The master nodded. "Tell me what you have experienced," he said quietly.

"The first time, I attempted to tap ki in the course of a kata. I felt an unbelievable surge of energy and found myself tumbling out of control for several hundred feet. The second time, I entered a meditative trance, reached out to touch ki and experienced an even more powerful surge. When I opened my eyes I found that rock had melted for five feet around me and my skin had turned silvery. At the same time I was filled with life and energy." Susan blushed, continuing, "Kara has explained to me that her, and now my, breasts store energy which comes from another dimension. My breasts had already increased noticeably in size since my enhancement but since my attempts to touch ki this morning, they have become even larger."

She paused, thinking for a moment. "The conclusion I have reached is that this dimensional energy, which Kara also calls Orgone energy, is either the same as or very similar to ki. I seem to have this energy flowing continuously into my body now, making it invulnerable and powering my other new abilities, but when I deliberately try to open myself up to, and touch, ki, the flow seems to become an uncontrollable torrent, leading to the effects I described to you."

The master considered for a time in silence. "You have studied the history of the Art, child," he began. "And you know that the true origins of the Art are shrouded in antiquity." Susan nodded.

"Know now that there are exceedingly ancient legends, passed down in the Art for uncounted centuries from master to advanced student, that describe how powerful beings, Gods almost, once came here and chose many people, amongst them many students of the Art, taking them forever beyond mortal ken."

"There are later legends about fabulous beings with the ability to fly and with far beyond normal strength, who resided for a time in the northern lands, in what is now Europe," he continued. "But that is largely beside the point. My child, you were an unusually talented student of the Art, absorbing that for which you were ready far more rapidly than most. But you would never allow yourself to be pushed past that point." The old master smiled reflectively. "There were times when you became almost aggressive in your disinterest, as I recall," he continued, smiling slightly. "There have been rare cases in the past where a student of the Art has been wrongly pushed too far and too fast in their training and they have unexplainedly perished, usually amidst intense flames."

Susan's eyes opened wide. "Spontaneous Human Combustion," she gasped in horror.

The sage nodded. "The Western countries have indeed called it that," he said quietly.

"Could that have happened to me if I had grasped too hard at ki when I was younger?" She shuddered violently. "Now though, with my newly acquired invulnerability I can handle far more ki without harm," she mused, relaxing. "But how can I learn to control it?," she finished pleadingly, hanging her head.

"As for one's use and control of ki, there are two stages a student of the Art must go through on his way to attainment of mastery. You have arrived at the first stage, where you reach for ki only as you need it and only in small amounts for brief periods. The next stage, which must be attained before a student can continue on to full mastery of the Art, is where he or she must learn to become aware of and be in contact with ki during every moment, waking and sleeping, thus becoming able to use ki instantly, without any preparation."

Susan's eyes widened once more, this time in amazement. "But how could this be possible," she breathed. "I have always had to concentrate hard to touch ki."

The master nodded. "That is correct for the level you have attained in the Art. Had you had the interest to continue at the time, you would have been gradually trained in and guided into new katas, new exercises which would encourage you to contact ki more closely and for longer periods. Ultimately you would have attained full contact with and control over your use of ki. Note well that you do not control ki. Neither does ki control you. Ki is part of you. You more than most since your enhancement, child. I am going to teach you some exercises that will teach you to become consciously aware of the flow of ki into your body and able to sense yourself using ki."

Susan nodded gratefully. "Thank you master," she said. "I place myself in your hands in this matter. When may I begin?"

"Now, child. Seat yourself." The redhead and the ancient master folded themselves into a lotus position on the floor, facing each other and the lesson began.

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Dusk was beginning to fall when Susan finally left the dojo, promising the master that she would assiduously practice the new exercises he had taught her and that she would return when she had mastered them or if she had trouble. She took to the early evening skies and flew slowly towards Metropolis, mulling over her long conversation with the master and rehearsing in her mind the exercises the master had taught her. "I'm going to have to be really careful with this," she said to herself. "Mmmm. I wonder where Kara had to go in such a hurry this morning. I hope she's not worried about where I vanished to." She smiled to herself then and, eager to start practicing the new exercises she had been taught, swiftly accelerated towards the deserted valley.

Duly arriving, she scanned around her, looking for any sign of Kara. Seeing nothing, she settled gently to the ground. Ruefully recalling the fate of her clothing earlier that day, she quickly stripped and threw her bag and clothes a dozen feet away, behind some rocks. Naked, she seated herself in lotus fashion, quickly ran through the first exercise again in her mind and then settled to her task. She quickly relaxed the muscles of her body, closed her eyes and set her breathing to a calm, even rate. She then cleared her mind, seeking her centre, that point of balance within herself where all was calm and the distractions of corporeal existence ceased to have meaning. Once she achieved this transcendental state, she tentatively began to open herself up, as the master had instructed her, allowing herself to become aware of ki without actually touching it.

A short time later, she became aware of a source of what she perceived as light, that was separate from her but at the same time very much a part of her. Entranced, she allowed her newly discovered inner perception to roam around. She quickly found herself able to distinguish a multitude of faint sparkles of the same "light" all around her and, as she allowed her perception to roam still further, became aware of more intense sources off in the distance. "Why, I'm seeing life itself," she exclaimed to herself in quiet wonder. Marvelling at this magical new perception and mindful of the master's lessons, she allowed her awareness to expand still further, discovering that she was somehow pervading an ever increasing volume and perceiving, not physical bodies so much as, in some strange and wonderful way, the life force which motivated those bodies.

All of a sudden she became aware of a blazing beacon of this strange life-energy, beside which all the other sources she had already sensed paled into insignificance. Entranced, she focussed onto this new source and tentatively reached out to touch it. As she did so she first became aware of another physical body and then another mind and the thoughts of that mind. Feelings of great tiredness, intertwined with satisfaction with a difficult job well done, of a vague unease coupled with a curiosity. Then the penny dropped for her. This was Kara's body and mind and thoughts she was perceiving. "Why, she's wondering where I am and just starting to get a bit worried," Susan thought wonderingly. Cautiously and with infinite care, she attempted to insert a thought into the mind before her. "*Kara*," she sent.

The mind she was watching suddenly roiled in confusion. "*Whaa, What? What was that? Who said my name?*," she heard as clearly as if she had been talking face to face with her lover.

She tried again. "*Kara, it's Susan.*"

At this, Kara's mind calmed down. "*Where are you, love. I can't see you,*" she heard then.

"*Don't worry. I'll be home soon and I'll try to explain,*" she sent then.

"*Okay. Hurry home. I love you.*" came the response in the same unexplainable way.

Susan carefully encouraged her strange new perception to shrink back inward again. She realised then that she, herself was just as blazing a beacon of life as Kara had been, as her perception narrowed down still further until it sank once more within herself. Remembering the master's careful instructions, realising embarrassedly that she had gone considerably beyond those instructions in her attempt to communicate with Kara and extremely relieved that nothing had gone awry, she gradually and carefully shut herself away from her awareness of ki. She opened her eyes then and, flexing her muscles slightly, gracefully floated into the air, to where she had thrown her clothes earlier. Retrieving them and getting quickly dressed, she grabbed her bag and took to the dark skies, heading for home.

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