

Contest

WINNER

"1000 words or less"

The Film-thin Bound

by Kalin M. Nenov

At last, my fist screams out. My mouth is open, but no sound escapes.

I stare at my purplish, bloody knuckles. I stare past them at--

--I retch and avert my eyes--

...hideous...

want to hide--disappear--die ... I can't go on

I stumble forward

there's nowhere to go

and kneel to pick the shards of my broken companion.

Farewell, Vivianne... I couldn't keep you; you couldn't stay. That is the way it is--no matter what I've wished for. At least you found your love ... soar together, Companion mine ... soar together. And I...

I lift the tiniest shard: the tip that used to slice the clouds and send a handful of warm beams upon my cheek on so many gloomy evenings. I cradle it gently. Then I remove my belt and cover all--shards, belt and scabbard--beneath soft, serene grasses.

...I have to go on.

And so it's time to notice her.

The spells are broken, every slave in the realm is free. During those last moments of my wrath, they have all gone away

gone back to their families--their friends--the people who care for them

--but she has not.

Why haven't you left? my eyes ask, even as I turn my back to her and look for my path.

"I'm ... cold..."

The faltering voice cuts me, deeper, worse than I thought possible at this point.

"Cannot ... go..."

I stagger on.

"Please..." *Click.* "Stay..." *Click.* "With me..." *Click. Click.* "For this night ... only..."

I stagger round.

She has unclasped her cloak: a bare sliver shivering in the dusk. My eyes fleet over her slender curves and rush to catch hers, hunting for the feeling, the warmth, the aching...

What they find is emptiness, cold, all-engulfing--I force out, "I cannot."

"Why..."

Her voice has almost died; her eyes don't blink.

"I..."

Vivianne ... Jonathan ... Aes ... All broken--lost--gone...

And my body: a single ache to touch and be touched, a frozen string that will snap in two at the tenderest stroke, a star that will blaze into a conflagration the moment skin brushes against skin; my fingers, dripping with blood; my hands, yearning to unclutch and reach out and be cleansed...

I don't know.

"...don't know."

And then, before she can make another plea, I suicide, as I must. "If I stay with you tonight ... the memory will hurt more than I could bear."

"I ... am sorry..."

Suddenly her eyes start gleaming, with a wet aliveness, which tears through the shroud of my misery and finally reveals her to me just as she is.

"I ... wish you well..."

She *is* sorry--for *me*--for what she's seen inside me; she *does* wish me well

"...savior mine..."

--and she's delirious, she is cold--lethally cold--and her eyes have been filming over, and she's been on the verge of life all along, and each squeezed-out breath has taken her farther down, and now she is falling through...

...and it's a film-thin bound that keeps apart a savior and a failure.

I lurch forward, cradle her, squeeze her. I share with her all the heat I have left.

(The heat of a conflagration can keep a life from the cold.)

My fingers, much death as they've seen, are warm and gentle; my capacity for love is as vast as my need to be loved; and there's more to me besides these--so in the end she opts to stay a while.

Perhaps ... long enough to make the two of us four.

~ END ~