

# Silver Eyes

*Mint Kang, 2004*

*This story was originally and lamely titled "Silvery-Not", and it was born from the scene with the bucket in the taxi, while I was attending a lecture on business law. Don't ask. Just don't ask.*

In the dream he was walking along an aerial promenade on Dendraishe, the secondary seedworld of Silver Sector. Something hit the back of his head and bounced off; a large black plum.

He turned and Myvari was standing there, giggling. She threw another plum at him and he caught it this time. "Where did you get these?" he said, biting into it. It was sweet, and very juicy.

"At my wedding reception," Myvari said. "Meet Desnodyne! I just married him!"

A man, silver-haired and silver-eyed with a long pointed chin, stepped up behind her and put his hand possessively on her shoulder. "Nice to meet you, Chrish," he said. "You really look a lot like Myvari."

"Of course I do, you stupid idiot!" he shouted. "I'm her brother!"

And as if his shout had triggered it, the promenade exploded in orange-yellow flames. Myvari screamed and screamed. Her hair was burning. Her clothes were on fire. And Desnodyne stood there in the midst of the flames, looking helpless.

The scene peeled upwards with Chrish's eyelids and revealed the reality of a cracked gray ceiling. He blinked stupidly at it for a moment before his brain caught up with his body and reminded him where he was.

"Stupid dream," Chrish said out loud. In the back of his mind, Myvari's voice whispered, *Yes, wasn't it? You and your imagination, Chrish.*

He sat up, swung his legs off the bed and experienced a sensation exactly like two large nails being driven into the sides of his head. Hung over. That was it. Hung over from too much to drink last night. That explained the dream too. Myvari hadn't died on Dendraishe, and she hadn't burned either. It had happened in one of the starfill sectors, in some crazy accident involving an aircar, a bottle of lubricant and six lamp posts.

Nothing exploded, but she hit her head on the dashboard and had a brain

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haemorrhage which no one noticed until she collapsed two days later.

Desnodyne had been thrown out of the car and survived with a variety of broken bones. When Chrish heard he had wanted to break the rest of them. How could a pointy-chinned jerk like Desnodyne go on living, when beautiful Myvari was dead?

He'd left Silver Sector, but not to break any more of Desnodyne's bones. He'd started travelling and hadn't stopped. Sometimes messages from home caught up with him, telling him to come back, everyone was worried about him. Chrish read them and chucked them in the nearest garbage bin.

The dingy little toilet attached to the room had a cracked sink with two large taps. Both gave out yellowish water that smelled faintly chemical. Chrish stuck his head under the nearest one and held it there until he ran out of breath. He could still taste black plums in the back of his throat.

"God, Myvari," he said out loud, staggering back into the room with water streaming out of his hair. Metallic silver hair just like hers, like Desnodyne's. Eyes like silver metal disks. They were all Tsharin, ruling caste of Silver Sector. Distinguished by the hair and the eyes and a sheen of metallic silver underlying the skin so the whole lot of them looked like godven androids. Even the blood was silvery-red.

Chrish fell into the room's one splintery chair and stared blankly at his left arm. Gleaming silvery scars crisscrossed the underside of it. He was starting to feel an irresistible urge to look at his own blood.

*Chrish, Myvari's voice reproached.*

"Go away," he mumbled. "You're a figment of my imagination."

They'd brought her body back to Silver Sector for burial on Arcto, the primary seedworld. Chrish had slipped into the vigil room when no one else was around and kissed her for the last time. Then he'd gone off and cried until he nearly vomited. And when he'd finished crying, he started hearing her voice in the back of his mind.

The Tsharin of Silver Sector were telempathic. Everyone took that for granted. Tshar children were taught to speak and listen and act with their minds the way ordinary human children were taught to do the same things with their mouths and ears and bodies. But no one'd ever mentioned being able to talk to dead people.

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He stared at his arm. After a moment a thin line drew itself across the inside of his wrist. The skin pulled gently away from the line. So did the flesh. Thick silvery-red blood welled up.

*Chrish, stop that, Myvari said. You don't need to hurt yourself for what happened to me.*

"Myvari. *Godven*, Myvari. Why'd you have to marry him? Why?"

No answer. After a moment Chrish laughed out loud, rather unsteadily. No wonder the whole family was worried about him. Talking to inexistent voices! And doing so in a filthy, vermin-riddled motel room on Amegan, of all places—Amegan, sinkhole of the Galactic Federation, where crime and squalor wasn't just a way of life but life itself—

He lurched out of the chair and scabbled under the bed. Dust and splinters and insect crap got into his hair, stuck on his still-wet skin. After a while he found his backpack. Cheap little bright blue bag with fraying straps. He couldn't even remember where he'd gotten it from. Not out of Silver Sector, certainly. He'd thrown away everything from that life.

There were five small white pills in the bottle in the bottom of the bag. Chrish backed out from under the bed. He shook the pills out into his palm. "One to make me happy," he muttered. "One to make me sad. One to make me insane and one to make me all right again. And one for you, Myvari."

He swallowed all five and lay back on the floor, staring at the cracked ceiling. Something multi-legged skittered out from under the bed, ran over his bare chest and disappeared into the bathroom.

After a while the depression quietly receded. It was replaced by an euphoric clarity of thought. Chrish smiled to himself and got up. He was humming a tune as he went into the yellowish, chemical-smelling shower, and still humming when he got dressed and sauntered out of the room.

Lel Johm, the supplier Chrish dealt with on Amegan, conducted his business in an alley just outside the port sector. He had three large bullyboys with him, one human and two furry, scaly qom-do.

"Good morning, my friend," Chrish called airily from the mouth of the alley. "You're looking very healthy today."

The bullyboys glowered. Chrish smiled at them. He could sense

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their fear, lurking down inside where no one but a powerful telepath could have found it. Out of nowhere, the desire to kill someone—lovingly, with great attention to detail—rose up and filled him with a bubbly silver happiness.

"The usual," Johm said, quite unmoved. Lel Johm impressed Chrish very much. The man never felt any emotion at all. "How many?"

"I'm leaving Amegan today," Chrish said. He hadn't realized he was going to until the words came out. Then it occurred to him that he wanted to sit on a whitewashed wall in the sun, and eat black plums. None of which, of course, was available on Amegan.

Johm waited.

"Give me a big supply to go with," Chrish said, "five hundred should do it."

"Fifty thousand," Johm said. "You'll have to wait a few hours. Big orders take a while to process."

"Fifty thousand, no problem." Chrish regarded Johm with a faint sense of possessiveness. Inside his cavernous overcoat, the supplier's body was rake-thin. Chrish thought dreamily of closing one hand over Johm's skinny neck and twisting. Or better still, reaching into Johm's chest with his mind and making the man's heart explode.

The bullyboys, original Amegans, knew when someone was thinking about killing. They also knew when someone was capable of carrying out the thought. Their fear became stronger, and they moved away imperceptibly. But Johm, although he must have known as well as them, stood his ground. There was no fear in him.

"Come back this evening," Johm said.

"Oh, I will," Chrish said, and walked away, smiling gently. His own overcoat, pale gray and worn to tatters so thin they were nearly transparent, billowed out behind him in a breeze nothing else felt. He started to whistle as he walked, and sensed, dreamily, the fear in the people who passed by him.

He stopped for food at one of Amegan's nameless canteens. The smell coming from the kitchen area was anything but appetizing. Chrish ordered the special. It looked rather as if something had had indigestion on the plate. "Oh, this stuff," he said. "If I have to look at it another moment I'll puke."

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The *dokendo* doing the cooking gave him a quick frightened look and took the plate away, replacing it with something no more identifiable but more aesthetic-looking.

"Thank you," Chrish said, and wandered off to find a seat. The tables in his path emptied with a miraculous speed. All around him he could sense the fear, guarded by expressionless faces and voices that did not change. He smiled around at the other diners. It would, he thought, be rather nice to carefully kill someone around now. But he was hungry.

He settled into one of the recently-vacated seats at random. Two tables across from him the fear was mixed with aggression. Somebody disliked him. Chrish smiled. He took a bite of lunch and waited.

A few minutes later four presences crowded up behind him. A hand grabbed his chair and yanked it out from under him. Chrish stood up an instant before he would have been dumped on the floor, and turned.

A large, very hairy human confronted him. Behind were three indeterminate hybrids of the type common in the Cravern sector.

"Tsharin, eh?" the hairy human growled. "Whatcha doing in our turf, pretty boy? Thinkin ya so great on account of all that silver, eh? Everone givin way to ya an all, eh?"

Chrish smiled gloriously, but said nothing.

"Hear talk ya some big shot assassin," the hairy human went on, working himself—*itself?*—up. "Well, ya try ass-assinating *this!*"

The gun came up fast. Chrish grabbed the gun hand faster, his fingers locking around the hairy wrist and twisting so that the gun fell to the floor and the arm stiffened and locked all the way to the shoulder. He turned and lifted, sliding the power of his mind into the strength of his body, and slammed the hairy human's head up into the ceiling of the canteen with a tremendous crack. Instant brain jelly.

"Oh dear," Chrish said, smiling. "Didn't mean to hurt him."

The three hybrids started to back away. Chrish watched them. His hands worked absently over the hairy human's body, flexed, jerked, twisted. Rib bones came loose under the skin, vertebrae splintered and disconnected.

"Don't go," he told the three hybrids, and tossed the mangled body at them, gently. It struck with enough force to knock them flat.

Chrish held out his hand. The dropped gun floated off the floor and

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nestled itself into his fingers. He took aim carefully. Shot each hybrid in the head, then dropped the gun again. He looked around for his chair; it was upended on the floor beyond the pile of bodies. He walked over them, one foot sliding a little on the hairy human's belt buckle, and retrieved the chair. Then walked back over the bodies with it, and seating himself, finished his lunch.

Later he went to see the KoRow Kid. The Kid headed the Amegan chapter of a very large protection ring, and her biggest rival was Thesrus *medhli* the Parthran.

A group of security types stopped him outside the Kid's headquarters in the nightlife sector. They knew who he was, of course—hard not to know the only Tsharin you'd ever see outside Silver Sector these days—and they knew they hadn't a chance of really stopping him if he didn't want to be stopped, but they did it anyway.

Chrish liked that, rather. He admired people who were terrified of him but stood up to him anyway. He always found it harder to kill them.

"State your business," the head type demanded.

"I've got an offer for the Kid," Chrish replied, "about the Parthran."

They let him in.

The Kid's office was on the second floor, a lush, plush black-velvet crypt in which she sat like an ice sculpture.

"Fifty thousand," Chrish said, bowing, "and I'll bring you the *medhli's* head before evening."

"You go cheap for a Tsharin," the Kid said. "Especially one who pulls jobs the way you do. What's your catch, Chrish-shar-Arctoran?"

She used the proper address. He was impressed. "No catch," he said. "What would I do with more money, anyway? It's always too much for the small things and too little for the big things."

"Yes," the Kid said, "the Tsharin of Silver Sector can have anything they want for no price at all, if they put their minds to it."

Chrish laughed, appreciating the joke. Then he left.

He caught a taxi just outside the Kid's headquarters and took it straight to the Bluelish nightclub at the opposite end of the nightlife sector. This was where Thesrus *medhli* spent most of his time.

When he went in the nightclub was empty of patrons. It was mid-afternoon, after all. But the walls were lined with security types wearing

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blue neckties, and sitting at one table with two doxies and a crowd of types around him was the *medhli* himself.

Every single security type went on edge when Chrish walked in. He ignored them, heading straight down the centre aisle to the stage where a band of musicians was performing. The music faltered as they saw him coming, then picked up again as he went around the stage and disappeared into the wings.

The speculation and suspicion behind was deafening to Chrish's mind. Smiling to himself, he found the janitor's closet and selected an orange plastic bucket with a cover. Then he walked out again, bucket swinging nonchalantly from one hand.

This time he went right up to the *medhli's* table. Two blue-necktied types instantly stepped forward to intercept him, hands by weapons and ready to kill.

Chrish put the bucket down, hands disarmingly open, and bowed. "Chrish-shar-Arctoran, at your service," he said, and as the words left his mouth he formed the power of his mind into a long keen blade that flashed out and cut the two types in half, then flashed further out at the neck level of the shortest type standing.

They dropped where they stood without a sound, and the blood did not start to flow for several seconds. By then a slow dull throb was forming between Chrish's temples. The powers of the Tsharin were non-material, and to abuse them in such a fashion—affecting material substances so strongly—was, well, just asking for trouble.

The doxies started to jump up and scream. Chrish was ready. The psychic blade struck again, dropped them back into their chairs. Then he turned to the *medhli*, who still sat there with an astounded expression. "This is nothing personal, you understand," he said gravely.

And he flashed the blade out one last time, at the *medhli's* neck level this time. The throb between his temples shot skyward and then settled into a lingering, vision-blurring agony. Chrish swayed where he stood, trying to blink his vision back into focus.

There was a rustling around the nightclub then, and a rising roar of emotional outrage as the security types lining the walls finally realized what had happened right under their noses. Weapons started to come to hand—and stopped, frozen in place, as Chrish reached out and seized

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control of their minds and bodies. Tears of pain trickled down his face—the sensation was very like that produced by a muscle which, having been overworked in the wrong position for too long, is suddenly snapped back into its usual place and function.

After several minutes, he regained his composure and turned to face the paralyzed types. "Like I said," he carefully articulated, "this is not personal. I'm not even in the mood to kill anyone now. But you people seem so determined to make things messy. I really hate it when things get messy."

And, since the pain was coming back and he'd run out of words, he extracted the gun from the holster of the nearest dead type and, taking his time to aim with great precision, shot all the blue neckties in the nightclub.

When the last one slumped to the floor, Chrish retrieved the bucket and returned to the table. He picked up the *medhli's* head by the hair and lowered it carefully into the bucket, noticing with interest that the blood did not start to flow until the head was actually clear of the neck. Then he fitted the cover on over it and turned to leave.

A scraping sound and a spurt of terror from the stage stopped him. He'd left the musicians alive.

"Oh," he said, turning to regard them. "What shall I do with you?"

*Chrish, leave them alone!* Myvari's voice rose up in the back of his mind, scolding.

"God, Myvari. Go away. Just go away."

*No, Chrish, her voice said. This isn't like you, not the you I knew back home. Why are you doing this? Why are you wandering around the galaxy like a vagrant? Why are you killing people like a common assassin?*

"I am a common assassin," he said out loud, stumbling towards the exit with the bucket in one hand. Behind him, more thumps and scrapes sounded from the stage as the musicians, fleeing, became entangled in their instruments.

*What's happened to you?* Myvari's voice persisted. *Don't shut me out, Chrish. You never used to.*

"Go away!" Chrish shouted. He lurched out into the street and waved furiously at the nearest taxi. It pulled over at once and he fell into the back seat, head almost splitting with the pain behind his eyes. He desperately needed Johm's happy pills.

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*Chrish, I'm your sister, your own beloved sister.*

"My dead sister!"

The bucket bumped his legs. Inside it, Thesrus medhli's head bumped the orange plastic. In front, the driver was assiduously ignoring him.

Chrish pressed his head into his hands. He envied the medhli, peacefully disembodied and coffined in orange plastic. No headaches, no dead sister talking in the back of the mind. No need to worry about anything any more. Just let the fool Tsharin with the happy pill habit and the unkickable depression carry you around anywhere you were needed. In a bucket, no less. Most illustrious transportation on Amegan.

"It's my *godven* punishment," he muttered.

*Don't swear, Chrish.*

"Just shut up!"

Perhaps because the driver wanted to get rid of him as fast as possible, they reached the Kid's headquarters in less than fifteen minutes. The taxi's wheels left skidmarks at every corner.

Chrish threw a random handful of change at the driver and lurched out. His head felt as if it were breaking in two from the inside. "Back to see the Kid," he croaked at the security types outside, waving the bucket vaguely at them.

The Kid was less of an ice sculpture this time. She looked into the bucket while Chrish collapsed in a black velvet chair, and burst out laughing. "You have a lovely sense of humour, Chrish-shar."

"Lovely headache, too," Chrish croaked, not really caring.

The Kid came around to stand behind his chair and stroked his temples with both black-gloved hands. "Work for me, Chrish-shar-Arctoran, and I'll see to it you have a lifelong supply of happy pills," she said. "As many as you'll ever want."

The offer was tempting. Beautifully tempting. Happy pills forever. Never have to hear Myvari's voice again. Chrish leaned back into the stroking hands, purred a little at the thought. But then there were the plums.

He retraced his train of thought with some difficulty, and remembered why he was here in the first place. He wanted money to buy five hundred happy pills from Lel Johm, because he was leaving Amegan and wanted to lay in a quick stock in case he couldn't get more later. And

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he was leaving Amegan because he wanted to sit on a whitewashed wall in the sun and eat sweet black plums, the sort Myvari had thrown at him in the dream just this morning.

Back to Myvari. Chrish groaned.

"What's the matter, Chrish-shar?" the Kid said. "Do you want to negotiate my offer? I'm amenable. Read my mind and see for yourself. I have a great many resources, and the people who work for me benefit very well from them."

He blinked at her. After a moment he caught the trend of the Kid's thought. She was very pleased at receiving Thesrus *medhli's* head in an orange plastic bucket. So pleased she wanted to reward him by sleeping with him for a few nights. She considered that the best reward she could give any of her underlings, male or female.

"I'm going offplanet," he said.

The Kid raised an eyebrow, offended. "And what are you going to do offplanet?"

"Find a sunny place with whitewashed walls," he said. "And sit on one of them and eat black plums."

The Kid burst out laughing again. "You're the first man who's preferred fruit to me. Come now, Chrish-shar. At least oblige me. I'll pay you, if that's what you want. I've never had a Tsharin before, and certainly I've never had anyone quite as pretty as you. You are a very pretty man, you know. Haven't you looked in a mirror before?"

That made sense, Chrish thought. Myvari had been beautiful, and he was her brother. Of course he would be beautiful too, if you looked at it that way.

Myvari.

"I've only slept with one woman before," he said, rising and drawing the tatters of his overcoat around him with the remnants of his dignity. "And she was my sister."

He left. He didn't bother to pick up his payment or stop for Lel Johm's happy pills. He headed straight for the spaceport and mesmerized a freighter captain headed for Felis Major into taking him on.

The voyage was wretched. He started having withdrawal symptoms. Happy pill withdrawal wasn't messy—no vomiting or drooling or loss of bowel control—but it turned his senses inside out, made him hear colours

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and taste people's thoughts and feel the sensation of sounds like acid on his skin until he collapsed in a shivering, flopping heap on the floor of his berth. And Myvari's voice constantly whispered in the back of his head, soothing him, reproaching him, sometimes crying over him.

When the freighter touched down on Felis Major Chrish staggered off it thinking he was going insane. And no happy pills to make him all right again.

It occurred to him that the Felis Major spaceport was elevated, nearly five hundred stan-klicks off the ground. Jumping off the edge of a landing platform seemed a pretty good idea. He swung around in the direction of the nearest one, and almost fell over.

Someone caught him and balanced him upright, silver-metal hair falling into his eyes as he wobbled. A blocky pouch was thrust into his left hand, a string bag into his right. "Compliments of the KoRow Kid," a voice said into his ear. "She says to tell you, there's a town called Tetris which might be the place you're looking for."

The person withdrew. Chrish staggered around in a small circle before regaining his balance and looking at the objects in his hands. The pouch contained a fifty thousand credit draft and what looked like enough happy pills to last him a year.

The string bag—contained large black plums.

Chrish shook himself violently, attracting the attention of a port attendant who saw the silver-metal hair and the metalsheen skin and came rushing over. "Can I be of service, lord Tsharin?"

"Do you know a town called Tetris?" Chrish said.

"Right on the equator, lord Tsharin. It's quite a pleasant place if you can stand the heat—and the glare, of course. They paint all the buildings white in that region, to keep out the midday heat."

Chrish smiled dreamily. In the back of his mind, Myvari whispered, *I'm glad you're happy, brother my love.*

"I'll just start for there, then," he said.