

T-Fury

By R. A. Conti

1.

The woman stood alone at the high table. Stephan stopped when he noticed her. "Excuse me, is that a T-Fury skirt?" he asked.

"Yes it is," she replied, smiling. "My daughter has several, but this one's my favorite." The skirt was dark blue with stylized stars, planets, and little rocket ships. Although the print pattern looked busy and playful, the sheer fabric draped softly over her abdomen, thighs, and legs in a sexy but nerdy way. It immediately became Stephan's favorite as well.

"You don't see those a lot," he commented as he eyed her.

"You mean on a woman my age in a place like this?" All the other women wore tight skirts and tops that exaggerated their physical features.

"Are you waiting for someone?" Stephan asked.

"Yes," the woman replied. She noted the disappointment on his face. "I was waiting for someone to notice my skirt."

"That would be me."

She offered her hand for him to shake. "My name's Andromeda." Her name surprised him. She noticed his reaction. "I could show you my birth certificate," she suggested with a wry smile on her face.

"It's a beautiful name. Are you a heavenly being?" He tried to look into her eyes but glanced down at the skirt again.

"What do you mean? Oh." She realized what he meant and smiled.

"A galaxy?" he clarified his question.

"Yes, I am. And what are you?" she teased.

He had to think fast. "I'm an astronomer, looking at the most beautiful galaxy I've ever seen." What the hell, he thought, flirting was fun. He might as well go all in.

"Well, mister astronomer."

"Stephan."

"Would you like to go from astronomer to astronaut, and explore this galaxy?" He hoped she meant what he wanted her to mean.

"Well, my rocket ship is in the shop right now, so I'm not able to do much exploring," Stephan joked.

"You're in luck, I have mine. Shall we take off?" Andromeda grabbed his hand and started toward the door. The cool night air freshened them up when they got outside.

"Okay, here's the deal. Everybody calls me Andy. I'm divorced. I have two daughters, Jessica and Emma. One is in college the other is a junior in high school. I've been looking to meet somebody different and interesting."

"Just different and interesting?" he asked. She looked puzzled. "Most women would say tall, dark, and handsome."

"Oh, right. I met him. Married him. Divorced him. He was tall dark and handsome but not much else," she explained.

"I'm sorry."

She waited for him to say more. When he didn't, she went on. "Here's where you're supposed to say something like 'He must have been crazy,' or 'He was a lucky man,' or something like that."

Stephan smiled and looked down at her skirt again. "I'm the lucky man." She blushed and squeezed his arm. It seemed he got beneath her flirting repartee and touched something inside her. "Is there someplace quiet nearby where we can sit and talk?" he asked.

"Indeed, there is." Andy took his arm and started walking down the street.

"Who says indeed anymore?" Stephan teased. She smiled again. He liked her smile. "So, what does Andy do when she's not dazzling astronomers?"

"I run a small software firm. We write the software that runs the software."

"You mean like machine language?"

"Kind of. Are you an IT person?"

He nodded. "I was on track to become a highly-paid IT person. But I watched my colleagues burn out one by one. I didn't want that to happen to me."

"What did you do?"

"I quit. And then I bought a small pet store."

"You're joking."

"No. It's not like those huge pet warehouses. It's an old-fashioned place. I have a few birds, some tropical fish, and an occasional hamster."

"No dogs or cats?"

"No. I don't handle them. I just refer people to rescue shelters."

"It sounds wonderful."

"It is. I've been happy there. And I'm making a profit. Of course, every once in a while I refuse to sell one of my fish because I've named him or her and we've bonded, but mostly I let them go when I have to."

"I like what you just said."

"You like tropical fish?" he teased.

"About being happy. No one says that anymore."

"Would you say it about yourself?" he asked. She was quiet.

"I haven't asked myself that."

"Do you have an answer?"

"Um..., honestly, I'd have to say no." Her smile was gone.

"What's wrong?"

"I thought I was successful. I was proud of what I'd done. My company sells a good product, but I've come to realize something."

"Which is...?"

"The only way to have a career is to give up your soul." She frowned and looked at him; he gazed into her eyes and saw hurt there.

"And you'd like to get it back?" he asked. She nodded. "Is this how you were planning to do it?" He was referring to her T-Fury skirt. She smiled and nodded again.

"Yes, but I wasn't sure it was gonna work." Andromeda seemed like a strong, self-assured businesswoman who would know something was going to work before she even tried it. They sat quietly.

"This is happening very fast," he said.

"What's happening?" she asked.

"We're connecting."

“Does that bother you?”

“No. But this can’t be real. You can’t be real. I’m just having a wonderful dream.”

“I’m very real,” Andy replied. She looked at him. He did not reply. “I could show you how real.” He gave her a puzzled but interested look. She felt delighted she surprised him.

“Would you like to see my daughter’s collection of T-Fury skirts? She has some leggings, too.” Stephan sat there, unable to answer. There was a long pause. “If you don’t want to...,” she added, shyly.

“Are you absolutely certain this isn’t a dream?” he asked, feigning seriousness.

“Yes. Do you want me to put it in writing?” She mimed reaching into her purse for a pen and paper.

“That’s okay..., about those skirts.”

“I might have one that fits you since you like them so much,” she teased.

“Do you have a dressing room where I could try one on?”

“Matter of fact, I do.”