

Andorra Pett
and the
Oort Cloud Café

A short story

By

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Andorra Pett and the Oort Cloud Café

“Is that it?”

The entrance was in partial darkness, the walkway behind me dimly lit with flickering tubes. My heels had clicked on the floor as I passed small piles of rubbish and stained brick effect cladding. The heels didn't really work here but I was out of my depth and struggling to catch up. Same as the clothes, my designer suit was a little out of place in this riot of grey. A splash of colour in a drab working world.

“People don't come down here much,” explained my guide, the rental agent for the mall. I'd forgotten his name and instead thought of him as Mr. Greasy. It suited him, his hair was greasy, as were his clothes; even his smile was up there on the grease-o-meter. He probably thought of himself as a ladies' man, I know we were out on the fringes but surely not? Maybe a desperate ladies' man but I wasn't desperate. At least not that desperate. Not yet.

Mr. Greasy was still talking. “It's been dead down this branch since the new diner opened in the extension.”

I knew where he meant; we had passed it on the way here, all gleaming chrome and fresh baked aroma. The barista was archetypal, white teeth and blond, a role model for Mr. G. Maybe someone should tell him.

He turned a key and pressed a button. The steel security curtain rolled up, to reveal a wide window and a narrow door at the side. Faded lettering proclaimed that this was the 'ucky Strike Bar and Grill.' The 'L' had fallen off. As the mesh rose, dust fell from the links; the place had been shut for a while then.

“What happened to the last owner?”

“There was a change in the law, no booze allowed anymore. It kind of stopped him in his tracks. He gave up and walked away, owes me a month's rent too,” said Mr. G as he opened the door. He flicked the light switch; dim red lighting came on, just enough to see tables, chairs, and a bar. Everything was covered in dust, there were dirty glasses on the tables and the overhead video screens were blank and cobwebbed. I shuddered, I don't like spiders.

“The kitchen is out back, together with stores and living space,” continued the sales patter, “a nice bedroom, en suite.” He leered. “Plenty of room for a little lady like yourself. I’ll show you.”

“Take your word for it,” I answered, not wanting to be in a confined space with him, his breath was probably greasy as well. I didn’t want to know about his hands. “Are the fittings and stock all included?”

“All the alcohol’s been impounded but everything that’s here is yours for 200 a month, one month up front.”

“I’ll take it.” It wasn’t ideal but I was fed up with running, and who knows I might even grow to like the place. And there wasn’t anywhere further to run.

“What you gonna do with it then?” he asked. It was a fair question, I didn’t really know but I wasn’t going to tell him that.

He moved closer. “Let’s seal the deal then,” he suggested, with a wink.

One of the advantages of being a short shrimp, as my mother used to say, was that you didn’t have to reach down too far to do a man serious damage. I was just contemplating that when he was saved by the arrival of Cy, my friend, and business partner, dragging a trolley full of luggage.

“You lost me, Andi,” he puffed. “It’s bloody dark down here, is this it?”

Greasy backed off; Cy was larger and less greasy than him. Not only that but Cy had no interest in me in that sort of way. Dave was the love of his life, he had left him to look after me and that made me feel alternately good and bad.

“He’ll wait,” Cy had explained on the trip out, “and if he doesn’t then I can cry into my cappuccino for a while and move on.”

“Pay the man, Cy.” I had decided. “400 and let’s get the Gingham bunting out.”

Greasy shook his head. “Gingham! What the hell are you going to do to the place?”

“Maybe the diner needs a little competition,” I ventured; this brought a smirk and a shake of the head.

“Mr. Munro won’t like it.”

“Mr. Munro can lump it. Shall I tell him or will you?”

He took the notes from Cy and walked away, chuckling in a greasy sort of way. “I’ll give you a month,” he shouted over his shoulder.

“You’re not serious are you?” said Cy as I walked around the tables to the far wall. “We can’t run a café.” I stopped and turned back to him.

“Why not, Cy? It’s perfect, there’s only one other place selling leisure here, all we have to do is pretend it’s the shop in London, just coffee instead of clothes.”

“Can you bake cakes, Andi?”

“No, but how hard can it be?” I turned back and continued to the end wall. I had thought the place was dark, I was about to find out if I could make it lighter.

I had spotted the control for the picture windows and turned it. It was sticky and resisted but in the end, it rotated and with a whir the view was revealed.

Saturn’s rings in all their glory filled the room with reflected light, the space opened out and became more than just a derelict and unloved bar. Even an ‘ucky’ one. This was now my café, and I was going to make it work. And Cy was going to help me.

“Welcome to the Oort Cloud Café, Cy.”

He shook his head. “I just hope you know what you’re doing.”

It’s about time I introduced myself, I’m Andorra Pett, known as Andi to my friends. I’m short but feisty with a few curves and a mess of black hair. I used to run a vintage clothes shop back on Earth when I was young and still believed in happy ever after. Back then there was Trevor, he said I was the love of his life, I believed him too, right up to the moment that I caught him with my ex-best friend Masie. Then I knew it was time to change everything. I cleaned out all the accounts, just took the money and ran.

That was a bit out of character for me, I wasn’t a space hound or even the flying to Spain type. But I thought it’s time to get over it and DO something. Cy (it’s short for Cyril but don’t ever call him that), caught up with me and tried to stop me at the port but he ended up coming with me. He said he was looking out for me but I reckoned he wanted a break, the same as I did. Cy was

my assistant from the shop, a genius with a sewing machine and my confidant. Plus he tended to bail me out when my mouth got me into trouble.

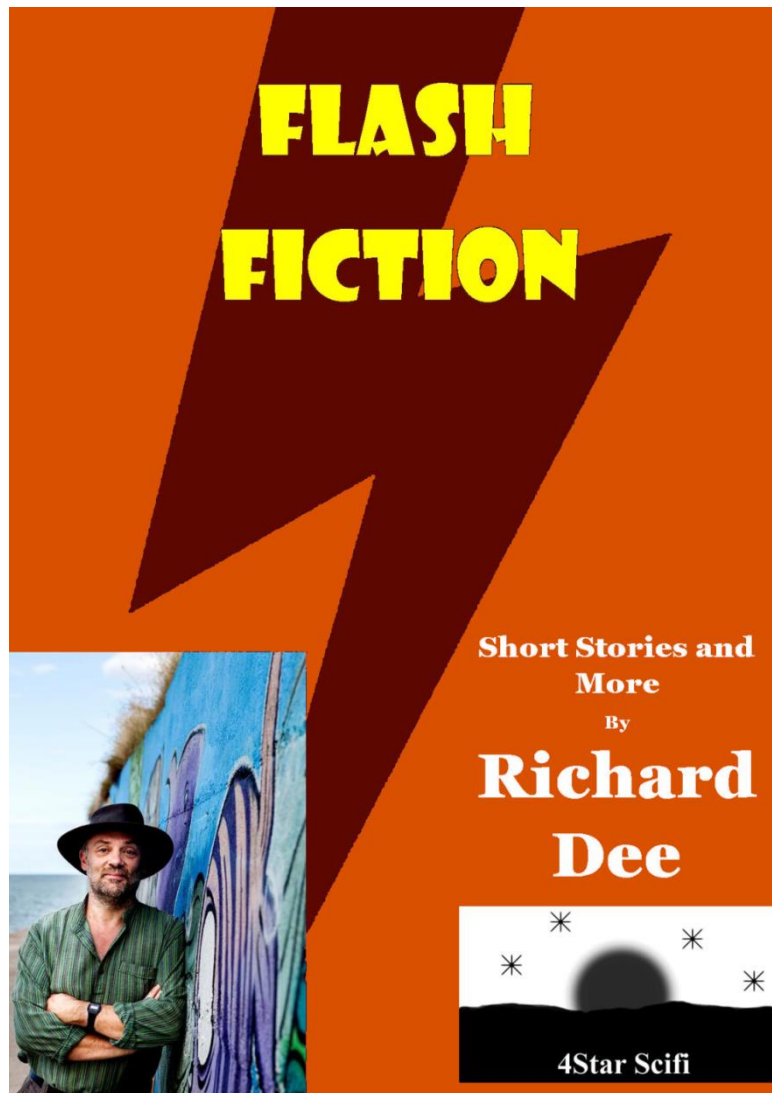
“Won’t you miss Dave?” I asked as we boarded the shuttle.

“Maybe,” Cy answered, “but then I’ve always wanted adventure. Keeping you safe should guarantee me that.”

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Andorra Pett will be appearing in her own full-length novel, to be released soon.

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