

# Morgana's Gift

*(a musical journey)*

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(accompanying playlist for chapter titles can be found here:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3damrM3UDhmqxM1tczDuUo?si=b080e94a1bef4e2c> )

## Prologue – Darkness On The Edge Of Town

The hour after bars close for the night was always the most dangerous time to be out on the road. Driver attentiveness was at its lowest, and the percentage of drunks on the road was at its highest. But Kevin didn't have any choice. The gig had gotten out, and the rest of the band had demanded he take them out drinking, and then ferry them home. The back of his car was still loaded up with most of the gear, because the band would've probably pawned the gear off for drugs given half a chance.

It wasn't like they were friends of his – but they were his bread and butter, at least until his big break came along, which he'd always assumed it never would. He needed them, to keep himself afloat. Most of his life had been spent just adjacent to the luck needed to see prosperity.

But the world was a funny place.

The freeway was mostly empty, but there was a single car on the road ahead of him, a black Escalade, one of those titanic tanks that clogged many of the streets of California, consuming gasoline like nobody's business.

Kev was accustomed to seeing them wobble a little at this time of night, but this one was doing more than a little wobbling, so he slowed down some, backing off enough to give the SUV more than a bit of space.

The extra twenty feet or so likely saved his life.

When the right rear tire of the SUV burst, the vehicle swerved wildly, the driver trying to compensate, attempted to turn into it, and instead, the vehicle rolled over and started cycling into the ditch off to the side of the road. The damage was catastrophic, the vehicle in tatters.

Kev pulled his car over quickly. He didn't have time to think – he simply wanted to see if the driver had survived. He hadn't even called 911 before he had put his car into park and started sprinting towards the wreck. The Escalade was upside down, the frame of it holding together, although he could see bowing on parts of it. Glass was strewn across the concrete, and gasoline had smeared atop of it.

Only one person was in the car, a woman, hanging upside down, suspended by her seatbelt, the airbags deployed but already deflated, their job done. She hung there, deathly limp, unconscious. Normally, he would've just checked on an accident and let the emergency services handle it, but the gas tank was ruptured, and while he knew enough to know the vehicle wouldn't explode, it could very easily catch fire, which wouldn't be conducive to the health of the woman.

Kev couldn't afford to wait, or, rather, the woman couldn't afford for him to wait.

He reached in and popped the latch on her seatbelt, doing his best to catch her, pulling her from the vehicle. It took some effort, but he pulled her from the vehicle and dragged her away from the wreckage, which had started to burn.

When he had the woman back to the relative safety of next to his own car, he looked back and saw the vehicle erupting into flames. It burned brightly, quickly, and he wondered for a moment if the SUV had been sporting NO<sub>2</sub> or some other borderline legal accelerant. The fact that the flames were green entirely slipped his notice.

Behind him, the woman on the ground started to cough. “The fuck just happened?” he heard her say.

“Don't move,” Kev said. “I'm going to call 911.”

The woman raised a hand and waved it in his direction, and he stopped reaching for his

cellphone, not of his own volition. She was in her early fifties, fit but certainly not immune to the rigors of age. She was dressed in a rather atrocious looking track suit, something akin to one of those insipid housewives shows set in New Jersey. Her fingers were covered in rings, gold and jewels, gaudy and borderline ridiculous. Her hair was dyed a deep unnatural shade of red, that of faded blood. She cranked her head up to peer over at the vehicle. "Well, that looks like it would've been fatal. And you pulled me out? Saved my life, you did." There was a spice of accent in her voice, European, British maybe.

Her fingers twitched again and the world shifted.

Kev found that he couldn't move, and while he wasn't sure why he couldn't move, he also didn't feel particularly bothered by it, which he felt in and of itself should bother him more than it currently did. "What's happening to me?"

"Oh, I can't have the police coming and investigating," the woman said, curling her fingers as her wounds disappeared before his eyes. "That's the last fucking thing I need, is attention." She stood up and dusted herself off, looking over at him with a smile. "Be with you in a minute, darling."

She turned to look over at the flaming wreckage of the SUV and waved her hand, coiling her fingers, as the wreckage shrunk down, both the car and the fire growing tiny, the light cast from it fading remarkably quickly. She walked over to it, a small flickering spot of flames in the grass, and she stepped on it. "There. Wouldn't want a wildfire spreading on my account. Now, to deal with you."

Kev shook his head a little bit. "I, uh, I won't say anything to anyone."

The woman smiled, almost a touch wolflike. "Oh I know you won't, darling. I'm going to make sure you don't ever want to say anything to anyone about all of this. I'm going to do you a favor, something that any number of men on this world would sacrifice a small village for."

"A... a favor?"

"Absolutely. You've saved my life. I couldn't have it on my conscience, something like that going unrewarded. A being of infinite power like myself, dying on a fluke because of a blow out? I'd be the laughing stock of the magician community if it ever got out. And those sorts of things always get out. If there's one thing I've learned over thousands of years, secrets never stay buried unless you bury them yourself. So, if you could have anything you ever wanted, and I do mean anything, what would it be?"

"Well, I..."

"Hush, darling. If you use your words, you'll only undersell your true desires, and the price of saving my life shouldn't be cheapened and sullied so. And I don't want you getting some insane idea that I'm a genie, or a witch out to curse you by adhering to the letter and not the spirit. Anything at all is within my power, and I intend to give you a gift in equal of saving my life. Just think of it and..."

The woman closed her eyes, cocking her head to one side, placing one hand on his face as a smile started to creep across her on, and then she started to laugh, softly.

"That is simultaneously both one of the most perverse and most ethical things I think I've ever seen inside of someone's mind. I utterly adore it. It will take some time, something of that scale, but your wish is granted, and what a doozy it will be. It's a shame I won't be around to watch it all unfold. We will never see each other again, Kevin Bishop, but never let it be said that Morgana Le Fay doesn't repay her debts. Your life is going to change a great deal over the next few months. Enjoy the ride, my boy."

A few seconds later, Kevin found himself staring off into the empty night, pulled over at the side of the road, no sign of the SUV, or the woman, but he knew that it was real, it had been real, he'd been certain of it.

He could still smell the lingering scent of smoke in the air.

## **Chapter One – Manic Monday**

Six months to the day after the accident, Kevin had almost convinced himself the whole thing had been one mixed-up, sleep-deprived hallucination, something his brain had made up to fill in him falling asleep at the side of the road after trying to drive his drunken bandmates home after another disaster gig.

The band had broken up a few months after, and since then, he'd been working on commission, doing contract work, mostly for film students and the occasional cheap television producer. It was barely enough to keep his head above water. Hell, he'd been thinking of going down and applying at a McDonald's, if it came to it.

It was all going to shit.

He'd gotten an email offering him a gig, but he needed to come up into the Hollywood Hills to meet the client and discuss the work. Kev generally hated coming up into the hills. It reeked of too much money and not enough common sense. The people up there were always worried about the wrong things, lost in tunnel vision about the most minute detail that truly didn't fucking matter at the end of the day.

The address he'd been given wasn't too far up into the hills. High enough to have a nice view, but not so far as to be wildly inconvenient. Insanely big, however, he thought to himself, as he pulled up to the gate of the estate, rolling down his window so he could push the buzzer.

“Yes?” a female voice said on the other side of the intercom.

“Kevin Bishop. I have an appointment.”

“Of course. One second, I'll buzz open the gate.”

A few seconds later, the automated gate started to open, and Kevin drove his shitty Corrola up the driveway. And as much as he wanted to be annoyed by the opulence of it, he had to admit that it was actually lovely for what it was. The house was more like a manor, but he had to wonder exactly how many people lived here. The place looked large enough to house a small army. But he saw only one car out in front of the building, a nice shiny new Scarlet Tesla S.

Overwhelmingly, he wasn't angry so much as envious. It seemed a pretty good life.

He hopped out of his car, and grabbed his guitar. He wasn't sure what the gig actually required, but he found it was always good to have an instrument with him in case he needed to put together a melody on the fly. It didn't even seem worth it to lock his car door behind him.

Before he'd even gotten to the door, it opened and a good looking woman in her early 30s walked out and toward him. “Mr. Bishop. So exciting to finally meet you. My name is Elizabeth. Why don't you come in?” She was dressed in a business suit, but the skirt was daringly short, and offered a tantalizing look at her toned legs beneath dark stockings. The top of it also pressed her plump cleavage into a confident neckline that almost seemed to invite him to have a looksee, although he did his level best to keep his eyes matching hers. Her blue eyes seemed genuinely excited to see him, and she offered a hand for him to shake, holding onto it a moment longer than he'd expected her to. She held the door open for him, as he moved into the building. “What do you think of the place?”

“I want to object to it, but I have to admit, the place looks great.” He glanced at the painting hanging in the entryway, next to a pair of staircases, one leading upstairs and one leading down. “Is that an actual Picasso?”

“It is. Don't you like it?”

“I do, but it seems a little pretentious to hang it right in the entryway.”

She nodded, almost as if she was making a note in her mind. “That's a fair point.”

“How many bedrooms is this place?”

“Twelve, with I think nineteen bathrooms?”

“You're not sure?”

“It's a new house.”

“How many people actually live here?”

“Right now? Almost no one.”

“That seems rather silly.”

“Oh,” she said with a sly smile, one that almost seemed a touch suggestive. “I imagine it will fill up quickly enough. Follow me, please?” She tossed her chocolate colored hair over her shoulder and walked him down a hallway and into a meeting room. There was a long table, with one wall used as a projector screen. She took a seat next to a large wooden box, popping it open just enough to reach her hand in before pulling it out, closing the box before he could see what was inside. “Before we get started, could you try this on?” She held out her hand, a simple ring resting atop of it. It looked like platinum or white gold, with a single stone in the center of it, something like onyx but with smoke blended within the black gem.

“Excuse me?” Kevin frowned a little bit. “Why?”

“It's a gift for you. From the client. But they'd like to be sure it fits before we get started.”

It was an odd request, but Kevin needed the money, and it seemed harmless enough. So he took the ring from her and looked it over, just making sure it didn't have any barbs or gimmicks on it. There was an inscription on the inside of it, but it wasn't in any language or even alphabet that he recognized. “On any particular finger?”

“Your ring finger on your right hand, if you please.”

He gave the ring one more quick examination, then shrugged. “Alright, I suppose, I can do that.” Kevin put the ring onto his ring finger and then promptly blacked out.

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When he woke up, he felt like not much time had passed, but a quick glance at his watch revealed how long he'd been out – about fifteen minutes. He lifted his head up and the wall now had a familiar face projected onto it, that of the woman he'd pulled out of the car six months ago, a wry smile on her face. “Now I know I said we weren't going to see each other again, Kevin, but I'm not there in person, and I'm going to consider that sticking to my word. It's taken longer than expected to get all the mechanisms in place, and I'll be honest, I haven't been working on it with as much fervor as perhaps I should have, but truly life changing magic is like any other form of artistry – it simply cannot be rushed if you want quality work done.”

Kevin glanced around the room and saw that nothing else had much changed. The box had been moved a little closer to him, and the woman, Elizabeth, had scooted her chair in his direction, but other than that, it felt as though everything was the same. He reflexively checked to make sure his wallet was still there, and it was.

“Let's start with the simple things. The house you're in right now is yours. You're now also independently wealthy, although I saw your mind clear enough to know that you won't be content not doing any work, so put a pin in that. The woman to your right, Elizabeth, is likely going to be your majordomo, your right hand woman. I won't make that decision for you, but I think she's the most likely candidate, as I handpicked her myself based on what I gleaned from your mind. If you decide you don't want her, that is of course your right, and she will leave after finding another potential. But give her a try. I think you'll get along like a house on fire.”

Kevin's eyes turned to look at Elizabeth, who was watching the screen with him, and couldn't deny that she looked like a capable woman, but he wasn't sure exactly what Morgana meant when she called her his 'majordomo.' Morgana started to talk again, so he turned his gaze back to the screen.

“When I looked inside your mind, what you wanted, more than anything, even if you weren't aware of it, was what I can only describe as an ethical harem, a household full of several women with whom you had sexual relationships with, all of whom knew about each other, and liked each other even. You didn't want anyone to be committed to you for life unless they wanted to. You didn't insist

they be exclusive to you, only that they be safe with any other partners they might have, and that if they decided they wanted a more permanent relationship with someone else, they tell you, and you part ways amicably.

“You didn't require they be bisexual, something I found startling, but I think you'll find most of them will be. Consider it a sweetener I decided to add for my own edification. I rather like the idea of three or four of them teaming up on you and overwhelming you without warning, although I'll have to simply guess as to what they look like. In fact, you were remarkably unspecific about physical attributes with the women you'd like in your harem, other than an overarching philosophy that I myself agree with – variety is the spice of life.

“You weren't specific about how many you wanted in your little ethical harem, so I had to use a bit of my own judgment on that front. I decided seven or so sounded about right, at least as an opening guess. One for each day of the week. It had a nice sort of symmetry to it. I've always been a fan of symmetry. As long as you have an open slot in your harem, the girls will keep on coming. My magic will ensure that. Maybe your majordomo will bring them to you, maybe one of the other girls, or maybe they'll just stumble into your life. Magic's tricky that way. It makes decisions all on its own. That's why I like it. I don't always have complete control – I just point it and let it loose.

“I also made a few physical changes to you, just to throw in a bit more to round the package out. You've had about ten years of aging shaved off, and you're going to age about thirty percent slower than anyone else. I thought about granting you immortality like myself, but I saw in your mind that you wouldn't consider that a benefit, and I have to respect someone who respects their own mortality, even if I don't agree with that stance. Your refractory period has been shortened, to keep your partners satisfied. You won't get that male pattern baldness that runs through your family, nor their proclivity for heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's, dementia and the like. And your orgasm will incite the hardest orgasms your partners have ever or will ever feel in their lives.

“There's a handful of additional surprises that you'll get along the way, but I wouldn't want to spoil them, otherwise they wouldn't be surprises, now would they? Now, back to the thing I told you to put a pin in – work. You've been doing nickel and dime composing work for the last few months, and it turns out you're very good at it if I do say so myself. Certainly much better than you've been being treated. So your new majordomo will be handling the business end of your career from now on, and she's already got better work for you lined up. The pretense that brought you here has real work attached to it. Work you'll enjoy.

“Inside the box are pendants that match the ring you're now wearing, one for each member of your harem. They will link you all together. The pendants can be modified, into chokers or necklaces or whatever the girls decide they want. I know how girls are with fashion, so the gemstone mounting is flexible, and can put onto just about anything. Maybe even a ring, if a girl's got a particular issue with things around her neck.

“Anyway, that should be enough to get you started. But above all else, remember – this is a gift. So enjoy it. Don't worry about the minor details, the things that don't seem to make sense. Roll with it, and you'll do fine. You've been a man waiting to wake up your entire life.

“So wake up.”

And the video froze on Morgana La Fey's smiling face.

Elizabeth turned off the projector. “So, I'm sure you've got lots of questions.”

“You want to fuck me? You barely even know me!”

She laughed, placing her hand on his wrist. “I know you better than you know yourself, Kevin. I talked for a long while with Ms. La Fey, and then I spent even longer studying you myself, getting everything I would need to keep you happy. I picked the house, the car, got you set up with your gig for this upcoming Rouchard movie...”

“Wait, I'm scoring Emily Rouchard's next movie?”

“You most certainly are. That's what your next gig is.”

“And... I hate to keep going back to this but...”

“Yes, Kev, I absolutely want to fuck you. More than you can possibly know.” The squeeze on his arm grew a bit more firm, excitement racing through her. “But I'm not going to be first. I believe I'll be taking the third slot, if that's alright with you. If you absolutely insist you want me to be first, that's fine, but I would prefer to prove myself and my skills before we formalize our arrangement. And the first candidate is here and waiting for you.”

Kevin's eyes widened. “Really?”

Elizabeth nodded. “She's down the hall. You've been single for a long time, so I thought your first member of the harem should be someone who wanted you at your most... vigorous.”

“Vigorous?”

She stood up, still holding onto his wrist, pulling him to his feet. “Let's go and introduce you. You can see for yourself.” She picked up the box and they both exited the room.

The two walked down the hallway and opened a door leading into a study, a room lined with bookshelves, and in the center, facing away from the them, a girl on her knees atop a pillow, her blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail, dressed in a white oxford shirt and a green plaid skirt with long white stockings. Even though it was clear she'd heard the door open, she didn't turn around or even look over her shoulder, waiting patiently.

Kevin looked at Elizabeth, who gestured for him to enter the room, so he did, and she moved in right behind him, closing the door after them. They walked into the room and around the girl so Kev could get a look at her. She was lovely, fit, tanned, in her early twenties he would've guessed, and was smiling up at him like he was the greatest thing she'd ever seen. She clearly didn't have a bra on beneath the shirt, and her nipples were stiff as rocks. Her hands were folded behind her back, to make her whole body thrust his way.

“Kev, I'd like you to meet Ashley. She would like to be the first to join your harem.”

“It's a pleasure to meet you, sir,” Ashley purred up at him, not getting off her knees. “I hope I'm to your satisfaction.”

“I, uh...” Kevin was a little lost for words.

“Ashley,” Elizabeth said, “tell Kev what you told me you're looking for.”

“Mmmm. I want to be your fucktoy, sir. I specifically want to be your first so that when you just need to use someone, to fuck them within an inch of their life, I'll be the first name on your lips. I've been spending too much of my time with fumbling college boys who want to be gentle and tender, or worse, just violent and abusive. Trying to find someone to pin me down and fuck the shit out of me who doesn't also want to beat me until I'm black and blue has been an utter fucking drag. But that's just what you want, and I want that too.”

Elizabeth set the box down on a desk off to one side, turning back to look at him. “Would you like that, sir?”

Kev stepped in a little closer to Ashley and had to stop himself from reaching out to touch her face. He'd started to reach forward towards her, and she'd started leaning towards him in response.

“This is all some kind of joke, isn't it?”

“Put a collar on her and find out.”

“Fine, I'll bite.” Kev was absolutely prepared for them to start laughing at any moment, but until they did, he really didn't see himself with much to lose. “Give her one of the pendants, and then I want you to sit and watch as she gives me the best damn blowjob she's capable of. Hell, more than watch. I want you to counsel her. Encourage her. As dirty as you can.”

Elizabeth's smile widened, as she opened the box, her tongue wetting those lips of hers that were dark scarlet with sultry lipstick. “Oh good. I was afraid I was going to have to convince you to let me stay for the fun. And as for the pendant, Ashley wanted something a bit more... skintight.” She opened the box and reached into it, drawing a velvet choker out from it, a small broach in the center of it with a smoky gemstone that matched the one in his ring. She held the choker out to him, and he

slowly took it from her. "You need to be the one to do it, though."

Kevin looked down at Ashley, who was trying her best to sit still, but she was wriggling and squirming like a child eager to open her Christmas present. "You sure you want this?"

"Absolutely. More than anything." Those deep blue eyes of hers held his gaze like salvation lay within. "I'll do anything you want. Call you Sir. Daddy. Master. Whatever you want. And I've even got a cherry to put on top." His eyes stayed fixed on her, as she offered up a shy smile, almost the barest hint of nervousness beneath it. "I've only got one virginal hole left, but it's all yours, my final cherry. If you want it." She bit her bottom lip, the smile turning primal. "I hope you want it. I'd say I want to give it to you, but that's not entirely true. I really want you to take it. To fuck me in my tight little virginal ass. Because it'll be yours. So do it. Collar me. Take me. Make me your bitch. Your tight young whore. Your giggly, eager, willing little fucktoy. Please. Sir." She pulled her shoulders back further, her arms with her wrists crossed, her head tilted up to offer her neck to him as much as she could.

He reached forward and slowly brought the choker across her skin, moving to close the clasp as he saw Ashley shiver, her smile widening. He almost thought he heard a hint of a moan pouring from her throat. "Okay, you've been collared, so—"

As soon as he pulled his hands back, hers were moving forward in a rush straight for his belt. There was no mistaking the primal moan erupting from her lips now as she nearly ripped his jeans open, her fingernails painted a bright red. "God, I've never wanted to suck a dick so much in my entire fucking life," Ashley cooed at him as she tugged his jeans and boxers down, his cock springing forth to slap her in the face. She immediately pushed her lips down on it, no hint of patience as her eyes kept focused on his while she slid the entire length of his thick dick into her throat. He could feel her throat clenching a little, struggling to accommodate him, but she was determined to push until her lips were wrapped around the base. He could see those lovely blue eyes of hers watering up, but refused to let him pull back until her nose was against the base of his cock, holding there for a moment before drawing back, coughing just a little bit as she gasped for air.

Elizabeth purred a little bit, sliding up behind Kevin, smoothing one of her hands across his chest as she rested her chin on his shoulder, looking down as Ashley pushed her mouth back down to his balls again. "Voracious little slut you've got there, sir," she whispered into his ear. "I'm impressed she can get the whole fucking thing in her throat."

"It's unfair me being fully dressed like this and —"

Ashley's hands leaped from his hips to immediately fold her fingertips into the edges of her Oxford shirt and ripped it open, causing all the buttons to pop off and fly across the room, exposing her perky tits. She wasn't anywhere near as curvy as Elizabeth was, but they were still a decent handful. Her pink nipples looked stiff enough to cut glass. She pulled her head back to gasp for air and look up at Elizabeth, a string of spit connecting her mouth to his dick as she grinned, frantic and a little crazed. "You weren't kidding about the taste."

"The taste?" Kevin asked Elizabeth. "What's she talking about?"

Elizabeth giggled, nuzzling up against him. "One of those little surprises mentioned earlier. Your cum, precum included, will taste sweet, custom tailored to each woman's desires." He could feel Elizabeth's heavy tits pressed against his back firmly as her hand reached down to stroke a bit of Ashley's hair from her face. "What's it taste like to you, slut?"

Ashley giggled, her tongue slathering over the head of his cock. "Super sweet, like cotton candy. It makes me shiver each time I taste it." She pushed her mouth back down and then pulled up quickly only to slide her lips back down again, almost fucking her face onto his dick.

Elizabeth nibbled on his earlobe, letting her tongue tease the shell of it. "She doesn't really need my encouragement, Sir," she whispered at him. "And I'm actually getting a little jealous. When you're fucking my face for the first time, I'm going to make sure I've got thick mascara on so I'll have it running down my cheeks before you're done. But you're going too gentle on her, I think."

"Oh?" Kevin laughed a little bit. "What should I be doing instead?"

“Something like this,” Elizabeth said as her hand grabbed the girl's blonde ponytail and pushed, holding her face down for a long moment, until one of Ashley's hands reached to grab one of Elizabeth's calves, at which point she pulled the girl's head back. Elizabeth giggled into Kevin's ear, as Ashley panted for air, but refused to pull away, her tongue still lapping at his shaft. “See? Nothing wrong with skullfucking a slut every now and again. Besides, you love it, don't you, you little whore?”

“Mmmm... Yes ma'am,” Ashley said just before her mouth pushed back down onto his cock. “But if it's okay, I'd very much like to be fucked now.”

“That's really up to him, isn't it? But you could ask him.”

“Sir?” Ashley turned her eyes back up to him. “Can you please fuck me now?”

“Are you sure that's what you want, Ashley?”

“More than fucking anything.”

“Give Elizabeth a kiss then get on your hands and knees on the pillow,” Kevin said.

Elizabeth moaned softly as she crouched down, taking Ashley's chin in her fingers, tilting her head up. “What a lucky little fuckpet you are,” she said, before kissing the younger girl. Elizabeth couldn't help herself and pushed her tongue into Ashley's mouth, shivering hard as an orgasm rushed through her body, the taste of Kevin's cum on Ashley's tongue setting it off inside of her. Eventually she drew in the strength to pull back from Ashley's lips. “God how I envy you, you little whore. Now get down on your hands and knees, and pull up that skirt for your Master.”

The blonde girl nodded and turned around, keeping her knees on the pillow as much as possible, before she bent forward, falling onto her hands. Slowly, she drew up one hand and snaked it behind her, reaching to draw her skirt up slowly until it rest at her waist, hiked over her pert apple shaped ass. “All yours, sir.”

Kevin moved down to his knees behind her, reaching one hand between the girl's legs to smooth his hand against her snatch. He'd never felt someone so drenched in his entire life. “God, she's fucking soaked.”

Elizabeth laughed again, moving to sit in a plush chair he hadn't noticed until she took it. “You made her that way. You'll make them all that way. It's hard to resist, isn't it?”

The whole dreamlike state felt particularly heightened as he rubbed the tip of his cock across her twat, feeling her shiver, trying to get him lined up so she could push onto it, but Kevin kept moving, not yet letting himself impale her. “Very much so.”

“Go on then. Enjoy yourself.”

He set his hands on her hips and let her wiggle until the mushroom head of his dick was properly aligned, and then let her push herself back onto it, his hands more holding onto her hips than pulling her on, as a groan escaped his lips. “Fuck, she's fucking tight.”

“Teenage pussy usually is, you'll find,” Elizabeth said.

“Teenage?”

“Ashley's only eighteen, Kevin. She'll be a freshman at UCLA in the fall, won't you, dear?”

“Nnnnnhhhhh... yes, ma'am.”

“When was the last time you fucked a teenager, Kevin?”

“I've,” he muttered, “I've never fucked a teenager. I didn't lose my virginity until my twenties.”

“Ah, well then,” Elizabeth said as she reached over and poured herself a glass of bourbon before raising it up in a toast. “Mazel tov. To your first, since she certainly won't be your last.”

He drew back and then thrust forward again, far less hesitant than before.

“That's it,” Elizabeth said to him. “Really give it to the little bitch. She told you she likes it rough.”

He surprised even himself when he lifted a hand and slapped Ashley's ass with a loud spank, the girl squealing delightedly in response. “Fuck yeah, daddy,” the girl shouted at him. “Spank me like the slut I am.”

Elizabeth took a draw from the liquor then rose to her feet, setting the glass back down on a

table, as she walked over and knelt down in front of Ashley, her stockings skidding a little on the wood floor. She reached up a hand and slapped Ashley in the face, not brutally hard, but enough to smart, certainly. "Whose slut are you?"

"His slut, ma'am!"

"Don't tell me, you silly slut. Tell him."

Ashley looked back over her shoulder at him and those bright blue eyes flared with an intensity that almost frightened him. "I'm your slut, sir. Fuck me. Fuck your little teenage fucktoy. Fuck me like the whore I am for you. Fuck your whore, daddy. Pound me. Your dick feels so fucking good. Pound me. Fuck my hole. I wanna feel you cumming in my cunt. So fucking good. Fill me full. Pour it in me. Cum in my cunt, Master. Cum inside me. Gimme that cum."

"Tug her hair before you do, will you?" Elizabeth said to him, her voice perfectly calm.

Kevin grabbed Ashley's ponytail and yanked it, feeling his nuts drawing up and just as he started to unload inside of the teenager's silky snatch, she started spasming and clenching on his cock, trying her best to milk as much cum out of him as she could.

Just as Ashley began clamping down on Kevin's dick in the throes of orgasm, Elizabeth fished out a phone from the pocket of her suit jacket and took a photo of the young girl's face. The flash from the cell phone was a dead giveaway.

He slumped a little forward, his hand pressed against the small of her back, and Ashley's hands slipped out from under her, as her shoulders braced against the edge of the pillow, a satisfied moan burbling from her throat.

Elizabeth crawled forward and leaned her head down to push her mouth onto his cock, suckling it clean before pulling her head back. "So, did I do well, sir?"

"Fuck, she's delightful. I should give you the job right now."

She smirked up at him, putting the phone in the back pocket of his jeans. "I'm gonna get a picture like that for every girl you take in, so you see their O face whenever they call you. It's her contact photo. You'll have to get used to carrying two cellphones, but it'll be second nature before you know it."

"Fuck, I need to take a break."

"Let me take you to the master bedroom," Elizabeth said, moving to her feet before helping him up. "You can have a nap, and later tonight, we can talk the actual business and next steps." She tugged his jeans back up, buttoning them up for him.

"What about her?" Kevin said, gesturing to Ashley.

"I'll send her along to crawl in bed with you." The teenage girl was slumped in a puddle on the pillow, still trembling in the aftershocks of the orgasm. "Once the slut can stand, anyway..."

## **Intermission One – Born To Run**

A short nap, as it turned out, had morphed into a long sleep. Kevin didn't normally go to bed at five in the evening, but as soon as he'd crawled into that massive king-sized bed, he'd put his head down onto the pillow and passed right out and slept until morning. He had been sure he'd gotten into bed wearing most of his clothes, so he was sure surprised when he awoke completely naked, except for the ring, naturally. By the look of the sky outside of the giant window overlooking Los Angeles, it had to be early morning, with the sun just breaking on the horizon. That was the second thing he'd noted when he woke up.

The first had been that Ashley was slowly bobbing her head up and down on his cock, her tongue taking its time in slathering every inch of his shaft. It was a leisurely pace, as if she was simply enjoying his morning wood without trying to intentionally awaken him. She was on her knees, completely naked except for the collar around her throat. Sitting next to her on the bed was Elizabeth, who stroked the girl's hair from time to time. "She insisted she be allowed to wake you, sir," Elizabeth said to him. "I assured her you wouldn't mind too much." She had changed from a business suit into something significantly more casual, a large t-shirt hanging over what Kev assumed had to be shorts.

"It shouldn't be an every morning kind of thing," Kevin said, "but I wouldn't mind it once or twice a week." Now that he was awake, Ashley had dialed back on the hesitation to her pace, and was thrusting her face onto his cock faster now, glucking each time the tip of his shaft hit the back of her throat. The girl clearly knew what she wanted, and didn't want to wait for it, not that Kevin could put up all that much in the way of resistance.

"You hear that, Ashley?"

She pulled her head off, hovering just over his cock so she could speak. "Yes ma'am."

Elizabeth swatted the girl hard on the ass. "Don't tell me. Tell him."

"Yes sir, I won't do it every morning. Twice a week." And then she immediately dove back to her task, wrapping her lips around his dick as if it pained her to take her mouth off of it.

"She'll probably just end up fucking you awake at least once or twice a week as well, if you don't tell her not to, although once there are more women in this bed, we'll be able to keep her in check a bit better. Such a thirsty little slut, but then I knew she would be."

"How did you even find her?"

"Her mother is my old college roommate," Elizabeth said with a smile. Kevin was surprised. He'd guessed that Elizabeth was in her early 30s, but if she had a college roommate with a daughter going off to college herself, she had to be in early 40s instead, not that he minded. As if reading his mind, she continued. "Hopefully that doesn't make you think I'm too old for you, but I've watched Ashley grow up over the years. I'm even her godmother. She needed someone older to talk to who wasn't her mother, so I know all of her dirty little secrets. And when she wanted to dabble in more sapphic delights, I was a safe outlet for her. She had been complaining to me the day after my first meeting with Ms. La Fey that she'd been having such rotten luck with boys lately, and hoped that LA would be better in the fall. She's from Ohio, and moved in with me so I could present her to you. If you'd decided to pass on her, she would've just moved into the dorm from my place in August when classes start."

Having a conversation while being blown had never been a challenge Kev had been presented with before now, and he was thankful Elizabeth was doing most of the talking, as he could feel Ashley's tongue slathering over his cock, her cheeks denting in when she inhaled hard on his shaft. "Her mother isn't going to mind... all of this?"

"Oh, you won't keep her forever, sir," Elizabeth said with a sultry laugh. "Ashley will stay with you throughout college, but once she graduates, she'll head back into the boring real world and try to find someone to settle down with. Sooner, I suppose, if the opportunity presents itself while she's in school and you decide to allow her."

"If I decide? I have that kind of power?"

"Sir," Elizabeth sighed, a wry smile implying the slightly disappointed tone was more in amusement than actual dismay. "For the time being, you own her. She's yours. Dye her hair if you want, or pierce her nipples. Make her answer the door completely naked when you have pizza delivered. I mean, if you decide you actually want her to stick around her entire life, I suspect she would entertain the idea, but I somehow anticipated you would eternally rotate in new fucktoys into your stable, so you always have a coed plaything in the first position."

"You make me sound so cruel, Elizabeth, as if I'd kick her to the curb."

"She's getting something out of it, Kevin. You're giving her the sexual experience she wants for now. Beyond that, you're also giving her a place to stay, food to eat and paying for her college, out of your sizable resources."

"I am?"

"It's part of the setup that Ms. La Fey suggested," Elizabeth said. "She made a point to help me out with a few key details."

Almost as if their conversation was challenging her moment, Ashley started to thrust her face into Kevin's crotch as quickly as she could, bobbing her head fiercely, her tongue wildly slashing across his skin. He couldn't resist long, and in moments, he found himself blasting a load of hot cum into the girl's mouth.

Ashley pulled her head back, her lips pursed tightly together, and looked up at Elizabeth before getting up onto just her knees next to the older woman. Elizabeth leaned in and pressed her lips against the girl's, a searingly erotic kiss between the two, as Ashley passed some of his cum into Elizabeth's mouth, making her tremble for a long moment before the two broke the kiss.

"What's he taste like to you, ma'am?" Ashley asked her.

"Like Macallan 25, smokey and yet vital and domineering," Elizabeth answered. "I can't wait to have an entire dose all to myself, but good things come to those who wait." She rubbed a circle onto the young girl's bare back. "Go and get dressed now, Ashley. We have a guest planned for later today, and it simply will not do for you to walk around wearing only that."

"I'll go hop through a shower," she said, crawling off the bed.

Kevin and Elizabeth both watched the girl's ass sway as she walked away from them and headed into the bathroom. "Every day you let her keep that cherry, sir, is a goddamn shame, but she is yours to do with as you see fit," Elizabeth sighed. "Know that she's very eager for it, though."

"I'll get there soon enough, I'm sure." Kev slipped out of the bed and moved over to the walk in closet that was bigger than his old living room. "Some of these clothes aren't mine, but I know at least some of them absolutely are. I don't know where you'd even find a Tangerine Dream t-shirt these days," he said, his fingers brushing against the aforementioned shirt which hung from a clothes hanger. "I've certainly never hung them up before."

"After you passed out, Ashley and I took your keys over to your place and packed up some of your essential things to bring here. Clothes, your instruments and your cat. He's resting quietly in the living room. He seemed quite nervous when we brought him here, but we brought him immediately into the bedroom and let him sit on the bed with you and that seemed to calm him right now. He's been exploring since then, I think. Later today, we can go over what else you want to bring and what you want to donate."

"Yeah, Stu's pretty unflappable. Once you showed him that I'm here, as long as he can find food and a litter box, he'll be fine." Kevin opened a series of drawers, finding pajamas, sheets, and eventually underwear and socks, grabbing a pair of boxers to tug on, followed by some white gym socks. The next drawer down was full of jeans and slacks, so he grabbed a pair of loose fitting Levis and pulled them on before he went back to the Tangerine Dream t-shirt, sliding it off the hanger and over his head. "What did you mean by 'donate'?"

"Most of the furniture is, if you don't mind me saying so, sir, a little beneath you at this point,

but I wasn't sure if any of it had sentimental value. Couches, chairs, beds, we have the house nice and stocked with much better than what you had at home. Books, CDs, vinyl and such, we can someone bring all that over, but I think your days of needing that wobbly kitchen table are over, don't you?"

Kev tugged on a pair of his favorite leather boots as he nodded. "I suppose that's true. Bring all the posters from the walls, the vinyl, the CDs, the books, oh, and I've got a handful of coffee mugs that I want. My computer as well. I'm sure you've bought me the newest high tech monstrosity, and that's fine, but I still need to get all my data off the old one." He glanced at Elizabeth, as a thought occurred to him. "Are you living here as well?"

"I'm staying in the guest house out back until you decide whether to bring me on board or not, sir, although I do keep an apartment downtown."

"Elizabeth," Kevin sighed. "Can you please drop the pretense that I'm not going to bring you on as my majordomo? You've set up this house incredibly well, and you know enough about me to know that if I woke up in a strange house, the first thing I was going to be worried about was if someone had fed my cat. You're on my staff. You're the head of my staff. Get used to the idea."

Elizabeth both smirked and blushed a little. "Yes. Well." She seemed almost uncertain what to say next. "I'll still wait until after you've brought one more member into your household before I officially get my locket, just to be certain. But I'll bring my things from the guest house into the main house when you're having your meeting this afternoon."

The two of them had walked from the bedroom out into the hallway outside, as Elizabeth was starting to take him on a tour of his new home. He was certain the layout was going to challenge him for a while, but soon enough, he would be able to think of it as home without it feeling like a lie. As they made their way down the stairs and past the entryway, Kevin noted with approval that the Picasso that had been hanging there had been moved. "Who am I meeting with?" he asked her, as they headed into the living room, or, he supposed, one of the living rooms.

"Director Emily Rouchard and actress Alice Karteaux as I mentioned to you yesterday. They'll be here to talk to you about the film and go over what they're looking for in terms of score. They have a four o'clock meeting, with dinner being catered in, depending on how long the meeting goes. Ms. Rouchard is quite particular about what she wants from a sonic perspective, so the meeting may well run into the evening. She took a bit of convincing, but after I played some of your work from "The Devil's Confession," it wasn't too hard to..."

"You heard that?" His Burmese cat, Stu, hopped up on the couch as Kevin walked by, leaning his head to butt against Kev's hip, a none-too-subtle signal for him to pet his companion, which Kevin did. "I'm pretty sure that film had negative ticket sales."

"I sent her a copy of it for her to watch, just so she could hear the score. She told me she thought the movie was trash, but was especially impressed with your use of a Hammond organ to make it feel so timeless."

"I did it all digitally, but I'm pleased she recognized the sound," he said as he moved to sit down on a couch, Stu climbing into his lap as Kev continued to pet the cat, who had worked himself up into a steady purr.

"Did you want me to track down an original Hammond organ for you?" she said as she moved to sit down on the other end of the couch. "It wouldn't be too difficult."

"I appreciate that, but they are a beast to maintain, and I can get the sound I want digitally with far less muss and fuss."

"You do have quite the love of vintage gear, Ashley and I noticed, when we were packing up your things. Five full boards worth of guitar effects pedals seemed, to my eyes, a little excessive." She reached over to the coffee table and picked up a tablet she had left there earlier, flipping open the top of it and bringing the computer to life.

"Each one is a different tool for the toolbox, Elizabeth." Stu seemed pleased that his master was awake, and settled comfortably, gingerly kneading at his leg with his paws while he continued to purr.

"You said yesterday that you imagined this house will fill up rather quickly. What did you have in mind?"

"You're going to need a staff, sir, who should also be part of your harem. You're going to need a housekeeper, a gardener and cook, to start with. Perhaps one woman could take on two of those jobs, but not all three."

"I trust your judgment, Elizabeth."

"Thank you, sir, but you're going to need to make decisions yourself. I also personally think you're going to be in need of a personal trainer, just to make sure you're staying fit and healthy. You may also wish to consider bringing on a bodyguard, a lawyer and a physician. I would've said you would need an assistant and an accountant as well, but I will be able to fulfill both of those duties for you myself."

"Why not a chauffeur as well?" he joked.

"I considered that, sir, but I decided that if you were to bring on a bodyguard, she would also be able to double as your driver."

"Fuck, Elizabeth," Kevin said, "I was kidding."

"Sir, you're basically going to be Hollywood royalty overnight. Once you start working on Ms. Rouchard's next movie, you're going to be one of the most sought after composers in the industry. You will be able to pick and choose your projects. Expect to be invited to all of the kinds of parties you never were before, and that means you're going to need at least a bit of protection. I wouldn't worry too much about things like TMZ, though. They've never seemed to care much about composers."

"So how many members of my harem have you lined up candidates for?" Kevin said. He had decided mentally just to go along with whatever fever dream he was having and enjoy the ride.

"Tomorrow you'll meet my primary candidate to serve as your personal trainer and cook. And next week, I've got a couple of meetings scheduled for you with candidates I think you'd quite like as a bodyguard/driver. Those seemed like the most immediate needs. Other than that, I've done my best not to work too far ahead." Ashley tapped on the tablet a little bit, as if making notes for herself. "I've learned a lot about you, Kevin, but there's a limit to what I can learn from afar."

"How did you learn so much about me anyway?"

"Research. I interviewed your former bandmates, your old classmates and roommates from college, reached out to what little surviving family you have, as well as talking with the people you've done work with for the last year as you tried to transition from being a rock musician to a composer. Oh, and naturally, I reached out to your former partners."

Kevin shook his head a little. "I'm sure that was a nightmare all by itself."

"Oh, I don't know," Elizabeth said, a mysterious smile flitting across her face before quickly vanishing. "I don't think you knew them all quite as well as you think you did. But we'll put a pin in that for another day. Beyond all that, though, there is only so much you can learn about a person from resources outside of that person. So as we spend more time together, I'll have a better understanding of what you are and aren't looking for as I work towards my ultimate goal."

"Ultimate goal? That sounds a little ominous."

Elizabeth shook her head with a smile. "Not at all, sir. Despite the fact that you wanted your own ethical harem, you also wanted that thing that so many men want - a wife. Finding a woman worthy of being your wife will take some doing, especially one who will be accepting of, well, all of the rest of your life. It's a difficult task, but one I feel certain I'll be able to overcome, in time."

"You aren't considering yourself for the job? Or Ashley?"

"Sir," she said, a rather formal tone dropping into her voice. "You've already offered me exactly what I want, the position of power behind the man of power. I will organize your life, manage your business and tend to your finances, and not only will you compensate me well for it, you'll also be so kind as to fuck me stupid on the regular. That's what I want, sir, to be your professional support."

"So what do I need a wife for?"

"Emotional support, sir, and someone to be your equal. I will always be one step behind you. Because that's what I want, that's where I want to be. I'll be logistics for you, but I won't ever be your decision maker. You will make your own decisions. You will be in control of your life, and the good and the bad will arrive at your hand. A wife will help you make decisions, but that isn't a job that I want. Sir."

Kevin nodded. "Honest and upfront. I can appreciate that, Elizabeth." Stu finally seemed like he'd gotten bored on Kevin's lap and hopped off, his tail swishing as he started wandering down a hallway. "All right, why don't you give me a formal tour of, uh, well, our house, I guess?"

"No need to be afraid, sir," she said as she moved to her feet, tucking the tablet under one arm. "It is, in fact, a very, very fine house."

"I might've said it's in the middle of our street, but I appreciate the reference."

"We aren't in the middle of our street, though, sir. We're at the end, and our driveway leads up to a cul-de-sac, along with two others."

"Touché."

Over the next hour, he found it surprising how accurately Elizabeth had been able to predict his tastes and preferences. The house was well laid out, and while some furniture had been bought, many of the bedrooms were currently unfurnished. Elizabeth told him that she suspected each of his partners might like their own room in the house to do with as they saw fit, and so none of them had been decorated as of yet, although Ashley did have some furniture being delivered tomorrow.

The house had a five-car garage attached to it, although only the Tesla he'd seen out front and his shitty Corrola were in it for the time being. "You kept the Corrola?" he laughed, seeing it in the garage as he shook his head, almost in shame that he'd ever driven the damn thing.

"I didn't want to get rid of anything without your say so, sir."

"It barely runs on a good day, smells off spilled beer and machine oil and the front bumper might fall off if you look at it the wrong way. I don't even know how you got her to start up to drive her into the garage."

"We, ah, actually had to push it in neutral. Neither Ashley or I could manage to get the engine to start."

"There's a trick to it. Doesn't matter." He waved a hand at it. "Get it out of here. Have someone come haul it away for junk and spare parts, if it's even worth that."

"Very good, sir."

The doorbell rang, as Kev glanced at his watch. "I thought you said the meeting was at 4."

"That'll be lunch being delivered, sir. I had Tacos El Tamix ordered, as your old bassist, Kelly, said it was one of your favorites."

"Oh hell, then let's eat. I'm not gonna let that go cold."

Kev, Elizabeth and Ashley enjoyed their lunch in the dining room, although he had to admit, they did feel a little outdone by the empty space. The dining room table was big enough to fit five on each long side and two on each narrow side, so with just the three of them, it felt like they were barely using the table.

Over the course of the meal, Kev spent a bit of time doing his best to get to know Ashley and Elizabeth, although Ashley was far more forthcoming about herself than Elizabeth was.

Ashley had grown up in Cleveland, daughter of a single mother who had been increasingly strict throughout her senior year. She'd had a few boyfriends, one of whom had been rough with her, which she liked at first, but he had taken too far one night. Elizabeth had put an end to that boy the next day, making sure he was terrified of even going near Ashley again, much less laying a hand on her. Ashley had also needed to have an abortion a few weeks later, which she naturally hadn't told her mother about, and Elizabeth had helped her through. That immediately made Kev grow nervous before Ashley assured him she was on the pill now, so it wouldn't be a problem for them, which put him back at ease.

She hadn't come to LA with hopes of being in movies or any such nonsense, but because UCLA was a great school. In fact, the girl told Kev she hoped to be a veterinarian after school, but that she was also open to finding herself while she was in college, if another life path beckoned to her. She'd never left Ohio before she'd moved in with Elizabeth, and the first day she'd arrived in California, she'd made her godmother take her down to the ocean, so she could swim in the Pacific for hours.

Every time Kev tried to circle the conversation around to get a bit of history about Elizabeth, the older woman had simply redirected back to Ashley, but not in any way that Kevin could get upset with. In fact, he had to begrudgingly admire the skill with which she could control a conversation and not make it feel forced.

Ashley was also insatiably curious to learn as much as she could about Kevin, so every moment the conversation seemed to lull even the slightest, she pounced on him to pry more of his history out of him. It seemed Elizabeth hadn't told her much.

It surprised him how much she genuinely seemed interested in his rather dull backstory. He'd grown up in Colorado and moved out to California after high school with a couple of friends in his first band, Broken Souls, trying to get noticed by a record company.

Broken Souls had only lasted about a year, and Kev had been attending the Los Angeles College of Music while also working as a busboy at one restaurant and a bartender at another. After Broken Souls had come Sailor Lemmy, his next band, which had lasted about two years, followed by nearly a dozen other unsuccessful bands until his last one, Truth Knife.

They'd actually landed a record deal and recorded an album, although half of the band had been so drunk or stoned that Kevin had played their parts for them for much of the album, except for Kerry, who'd never let her partying get in the way of her ability to drum, which was for the best, as Kevin was a terrible drummer.

The label had been optimistic about the album, "Wayward Dreamers," before its release, but the same week the album came out, the label had folded, the founder having fled the country with most of the company's funds, leaving everyone else to hold the bag.

While Truth Knife had played a handful of gigs opening for bigger acts, without the weight of a label behind them, the album had been dead on arrival, and they'd been on their last legs the night Kevin had saved Morgana La Fey's life. A week after that, they'd played their final gig, and had a blowout argument about the usual - how half the band wanted to be in a band to make music, and how the other half wanted to be in a band just to score drugs. When the band had officially called it quits three weeks later, it had basically been a formality. Nobody even wanted to see each other after that.

Ashley had virtually demanded that he give her a signed copy of the album, despite her never having heard a thing he'd played. He wasn't sure Truth Knife was going to be Ashley's speed, but he'd learned not to judge anyone's musical tastes for them. The band had been a sort of psychedelic prog metal band, and Kevin had often said the closest similar band he could think of to their style was Tool, although Kevin's style leaned a lot more heavily into electronica than Tool ever had.

The more he talked about the band, the happier he was to be apart from them. The interpersonal drama of the other members had consumed all of the talent they'd had, sucking all of the oxygen out of the room, until they were all suffocating each other.

Pivoting slightly from that, Elizabeth had pointed out that she could also likely get him work as a session musician, if he wanted, or he could take a try at being a record producer. Kev said he might not mind the occasional session gig, but had no desire to be a record producer. "I didn't even like our producer, Elizabeth, so I don't think I'd be a very good one."

She nodded and typed onto her tablet, clearly making a note of it. "You're the boss, sir."

"You know, I'm not going to let you dodge talking about yourself forever, Elizabeth," he said with a smile.

The doorbell rang and Kev glanced at his watch in surprise. They'd been talking for hours now, and his watch read 3:48 pm. The time had just flown by. "It looks like your four o'clock is here a little

early, sir," she said with a smile, as she stood up. "So I've won this round. Ashley, clean up the table. Kev, I'll bring them to you in the meeting room we were in yesterday. Why don't you go and make yourself comfortable there?"

"I can meet them at the door," he said, shaking his head.

"You truly don't have to, sir."

"Elizabeth. I am not going to be one of those fucking snobs who doesn't answer his own door at least some of the time. Let's go."

The two walked down the hallway from the dining room to the front door of the house. "Why didn't they have to buzz at the gate like I did yesterday?" he asked her as they made their way to the door.

"I knew they were coming, so I opened it remotely about half an hour ago on my tablet."

"That thing controls the whole house, doesn't it?" he said, nodding towards the tablet she kept under her arm.

"You have no idea, sir," she said, as they reached the door.

Once the door opened, Kevin took a good look at the two standing on his doorstep. They served as quite the contrast to each other.

On the left stood Emily Rouchard, an indie director of no small renown. She was the daughter of legendary multiple Oscar winning director Otto Rouchard and had tried her hand at acting as a teenager, only to get such horrible reviews that she had withdrawn from acting before emerging as a talented director a decade later.

She was slender, with a pronounced nose, jet black hair framing her face in a sharp bob. Her husband played drums in an indie band called Ring of Osiris that Kevin quite liked. She was dressed in a loose blue button up shirt and black slacks, which made Kevin feel a bit more at ease that he wasn't supposed to be dressed up for the meeting.

On the right stood Alice Karteaux, one of the hottest actors working right now, in every possible way. She'd briefly had a career as a model when she was a teenager, and had moved from New Zealand to Hollywood to strike it big some twenty five years ago. Her first few films had been minor successes, although she'd mostly been a supporting player. The accent had faded quickly, although there were still hints of it when she would be interviewed. A supporting role up against actor Albert Lomax in a film called "Winding Bullets" had been her big break, and she'd said in numerous interviews from that moment onward she'd decided to trust directors over scripts and studios any day, and twice on Sunday. Since then, she'd done an overwhelming number of action movies, most of which Kev had seen dozens of times. Her most recent one, an action film that also happened to be a period piece in the 1960s, was one his top ten films of all time.

Alice was statuesque to say the least, well over six feet tall, and yet, still incredibly feminine for being muscular and toned. She had on a fashionable top that still screamed activewear and a dress that flowed past her knees. She was gorgeous in a way that was almost too much to look at, confident and strident, as if daring anyone to look too long, or look away, it was hard to tell. The last gossip he'd seen of her was that she'd broken off a three year relationship with Max Morris, a triple-Oscar winning actor about ten years her elder, although he did remember his bassist commenting that some article had said she was still single some two years after that breakup, waiting for some guy to "man up and grow a pair."

"Good evening, ladies," Elizabeth said to them. "I hope you didn't have any trouble finding the place?"

Alice shot her a warm smile. "I mean, you could have just told us you had moved into Roland Felton's old house. Is this the composer in question?" she said, waving a hand in Kev's direction. "Hi, I'm Alice."

Kev glanced over at Elizabeth. "You didn't tell me Roland Felton owned this place before I did, Elizabeth." He took Alice's hand and shook it, almost laughing a little. "I think you're one of the most

recognizable faces on the planet, but I appreciate the introduction. I'm Kev."

"Don't dismiss yourself so lightly," Emily said. "After hearing your work on 'The Devil's Confession'..."

"You know that's just a film school student's first project, made with a budget of about ten grand, right? It was a crap movie, but I did the best I could."

"I wasn't interested in the film itself, Mr. Bishop, merely how the music complimented the visuals."

"Please, call me Kev."

"Well, Kev," Emily continued as Elizabeth brought both women inside the house, starting to lead them down the hall to the conference room, "after that I did a little homework of my own, and managed to track down a copy of Truth Knife's album, and that sound is a lot of what we're looking for. Sort of metal but with flirtations of electronica and synthwave."

As they entered the conference room, Kev was surprised to see that his laptop was already resting next to one of the chairs, a little MIDI keyboard attached to it, his usual setup when he was demoing things for potential clients. "The band broke up months ago, but I suppose it wouldn't be too hard to lean back into that sound again."

"Excellent, but with more electronica, more synthwave, more sort of retro sci-fi," Alice said. "This is going to be a big science-fiction action movie, but with a lot of throwback in it. Less actual sci-fi and more like what 1982 thought sci-fi was going to be."

"Oh, the Blade Runner/Alien aesthetic."

"Yes!" Emily said, sliding into her seat. "Finally, someone who speaks my language! It's John Woo meets John Carpenter meets Ridley Scott, but with a kick ass heroine right in the center of it."

Kev moved to sit at his computer as Alice moved to sit on the other side of him. "While it doesn't surprise me you're making another action film, Ms. Karteaux, I have to admit, it comes as a bit of a surprise to me that you're the one directing it, Ms. Rouchard. You've mostly done two and three handers, small casts and low budgets. What you're talking about must have quite the effects budget."

Emily casually waved her hand. "ILM is handling all of that this time around. The movie's an adaptation of a novel called 'The Desperate Disintegration' and there was a giant bidding war for it last year."

"I'm afraid I've never even heard of it."

"It's not out yet, but the prepublication copies were floating around the desk of every major studio in this town, and when I saw it, I knew I wanted to do it. It's weird and warped and freaky," she cackled with mad delight. "If anyone else got their hands on it, they'd sand off all the rough edges..."

"Which are the best parts," Alice interjected.

"Which are absolutely the best fucking parts! So I knew I couldn't win a bidding war on my own, so I brought the novel to my good friend Alice here..."

"And I said I'd sign on as the lead, but only if Em could direct it..."

"And here we are, talking to you, seeing if you're going to give me that Truth Knife meets Vangelis sound."

Kev had been tampering with his laptop and keyboard while they'd been talking. "So, here's an initial thought..." He hit the play button and a whipping melody, steeped in Moog keyboard effects, danced through the room, while a subtle electric guitar lead line flickered in and out around the background. "Something like this?"

Alice slammed her fist on the table. "Goddamn, I knew we found our guy. We were listening to the Truth Knife CD in Em's car on the ride up here, and I kept saying, if he can lean into the synth stuff more, we'll be on our way."

"How far out are you?"

"We finished principal photography a month back, so we're editing it together now while ILM builds all our effects. I could show you a rough cut as early as next week. It'll be like four hours long

and full of placeholder pre-vis, but you can still get a general idea of where we're going and start putting together some themes and a general blueprint for scoring it," Emily said. "You have a screening room here?"

"We have a very nice home theater room, although if you needed to preserve security, Kev could come down to the studio lot and watch it there," Elizabeth answered.

"That'd probably be best," Alice said, "just because the studio is very paranoid about security. We're planning on a release next April, at the start of the summer blockbuster season."

"I'll be constantly editing and reworking until then," Emily said, "but Alice has been very protective of this project, so she'll happily watch it with you and give notes. We may have to do some reshoots in a few months, but other than that, Alice is keeping her schedule pretty clean so she can keep tabs on the movie as much as possible."

"You seem pretty invested in this movie, Ms. Karteaux," Kevin said.

"I'd better be. I'm an executive producer, in addition to being its star. So it's my money that's paying you."

"I hope I'm worth every penny."

"If you aren't," Alice said with a wolfish grin, "you will be once I squeeze it out of you."

## **Chapter 2 – Tuesday's Gone**

Before midnight, Emily Rouchard had sent over the contract, officially signing Kev to be the composer for her upcoming movie, offering him more money than he'd been offered to do anything. He was a little surprised by the number, but Elizabeth assured him that while the amount was high, it wasn't unreasonably high. He'd naturally signed it and set it back. His first appointment was to meet with Alice at the beginning of next week, where he'd see a rough cut of the movie, and could take notes while he did.

He'd been tempted to stay up late and explore the house more, but Elizabeth had made sure he didn't, assuring him that his morning tomorrow would start relatively early for his interview with Elizabeth's next candidate. So he'd crawled into bed and Ashley had snuggled up against him on one side, while Elizabeth had agreed to slide in against his other.

True to her word, Ashley had woken him up in the morning without blowing him, instead putting on coffee, even going so far as to run out for bagels before she'd gotten him up. Elizabeth had also awoken before he did, and she'd helped make sure the house was in order. So he'd woken up to the smell of coffee and his cat, Stu, was nuzzled up against his side.

“You finding the new house okay, Stu?”

The cat stretched in response, but offered no other answer.

“Fair enough,” Kev said, climbing out of bed. He hopped through a shower and threw on some clothes, before finding his way into the dining room, or at least what he thought was the dining area. “Bagels, huh? Good choice.”

“Might be one of the last time we order things in, if you like your next candidate,” Elizabeth said, as Kev moved to sit down at the table. “She's reportedly quite the cook.”

“But she's not just going to be a cook, you said?”

“No, she'll also be your personal trainer. If you like, that is. She's been a personal trainer here in LA for about a decade, but she insists that training isn't enough, and that she needs to help keep her client's diet in check. She's supposedly a hell of a cook as well.”

Kev laughed a little bit. “That's about what she does, not who she is,” he said, as he started to snack on one of the bagels. “Aren't you going to tell me anything more about her?”

Elizabeth shook her head, smiling at him, as Ashley poured him a cup of coffee. “I'm not going to tell you much of anything about anyone in advance of you meeting them, sir.” Ashley poured her one as well. “It's unfair of me to set expectations for you, so I want to let each girl speak for herself.”

Kev smirked. “Is that always going to be the case? Because I'm certainly going to want you to do a bit of recon and make sure I'm not heading into utter chaos.”

“Oh, I can't promise they won't be chaotic, Kev,” Elizabeth said. “But they won't hurt you, and I think they'll be generally a good match, based on what I've learned about you.”

“I truly wonder how much you've learned about me. I mean, I try not to spend too much time talking about myself.”

“No kidding,” Ashley interjected. “We practically had to pry it out of you yesterday.”

“Well, I've been taught it's not polite to talk too much about yourself, so I try not to do that.”

“When you're picking partners, Kev, that's not generally true,” Elizabeth said.

After they finished breakfast, Kevin decided to take a tour of the house on his own. The place was huge, and overlooked Los Angeles with a hell of a view, the kind of view he'd dreamed of since he'd moved out to California. He'd never really thought it was going to be possible, but in the span of just a few days, his entire life had been upended. He loved the way it overlooked the city during the day, and couldn't wait to see it at night. He'd been tempted to sneak out of bed and look at it the night before, but decided that he wasn't likely to be able to get clear without waking either one of the girls.

“You'll love it at night,” Ashley said, as she moved out onto the porch to stand next to him. “It reminded me of this old movie I must've watched a dozen times. It's called 'Heat,' with DeNiro and

Pacino. You ever seen that movie?"

He chuckled, shaking his head a little. "Are you kidding me? I love that flick. But 'old movie?' That film came out in '91."

"That's before I was born."

Kev mocked a wince. "Don't I feel like the old pervert now?"

"Oh, don't feel old." She leaned up and kissed him on the cheek.

"Feeling like a pervert's okay, though?"

"Definitely," she giggled. "I like perverts."

"You have any inside info on this meeting I've got in an hour or so?"

"Just a name, nothing more."

"Well, that's more than I have now," he said. "Spill."

"What's in it for me if I tell you?" she said, swaying her hips from side to side. She'd only put on sweatpants and one of his t-shirts, and the whole outfit was undeniably sexy. "I want something in return."

"What do you want? I know a guy who can probably bankroll your college education for you," he said, after leaning in to pretend like he was whispering a secret.

"You're already doing that, so I suppose I can tell you. Her name is Natalie. She's going to be here pretty soon, though."

Kev glanced at his watch. "How so? I've got like an hour."

"Oh you haven't figured it out yet, huh?" Ashley clicked her tongue with a smirk. "Then I suppose I can spoil that one for you, as well. Elizabeth's always got things booked like fifteen to thirty minutes earlier than she says she does, so you're never getting too anxious waiting. Sometimes it's just like five minutes earlier than she said, but sometimes it can even be like an hour earlier."

"That sounds horrible for a personal scheduler," Kevin groaned.

"She knows how to keep you on task, though. So you'll work it out."

"What are you going to do to keep yourself busy for the next month until classes start?"

Ashley flicked her hair back over her shoulder. "You, mostly." She giggled, then rolled her eyes in his direction. "Don't worry, I'll make sure I get familiar with the campus, and figure out how long it takes me to get to and from school so that I'm not late."

"We're in the hills, so it won't be too bad, but never underestimate the living hell that is LA traffic." The two stood in silence for a minute or so, looking over LA while the sun continued to rise higher in the sky. "What can you tell me about Elizabeth?"

"She'll be good for you, sir," she said. "I think it's smart that you decided to just move her in already, rather than make her wait. I know she wanted to prove herself to you, but by now, you have to know she's very capable."

"Yeah, I got that. I was worried that Emily Rouchard was going to show up here with some lofty expectations about what I was capable in terms of scoring, but apparently Elizabeth had gotten her a copy of the Truth Souls CD."

"What did you think, Elizabeth was going to over promise just to score you a gig? That wouldn't make any sense. Otherwise your first gig would be your last."

"Sure, but does that matter?"

"To you it does," Ashley said, her hand smoothing over his back. "So it does to her too. I know it's weird having someone looking out for you this much, but you're just going to have to get used to it, daddy."

"Don't call me that."

"Oh, you can't lie to me, but I won't do it front of other people, if it makes you feel any better. Anyway, I'm going to take the Tesla down to campus and pick up my books today, so I'll be back in time for dinner."

"You don't want to be here to meet Natalie?"

Ashley shrugged. "Either she'll be here when I get back and I'll be sharing a bed with her, or she won't, and I won't have to learn her face at all." She headed back to the doorway. "Besides, if she's gonna be your personal trainer, she might be all crazy ripped."

"Somehow I think you and I envision personal trainers very different," he laughed. "Besides, if that was true, she'd probably be named Natalia or something."

"Yeah, I guess. Have fun!" Ashley skipped off the balcony and headed inside, just at the same time that Elizabeth walked out.

"She's going to be a handful, that one," she said, moving to stand next to him on the balcony. "But somehow I think you're going to like her that way." She nudged his hip with her own. "You doing okay?"

"The thought of someone telling me what I can and can't eat is a little worrying, I have to admit."

"Don't think of it like that," she told him. "Think of it as someone who's going to help shape what you already like eating into a slightly more healthy form."

"I've practically been living off Arby's for the better part of two years, Elizabeth. It's not exactly easy to just walk away from that life of glamour."

She laughed, recognizing that he was kidding. "All I can tell is what I've already told you, Kevin. Be yourself, be honest about what you like and what you don't, and all of this should be relatively painless."

"But she already knows about..." he said, gesturing around him, as if trying to find the words to say it.

"Yes, she's absolutely on board with fucking your brains out every chance she gets. Hell, she's practically been trying to get into my panties for a year, so I'm sure that'll help, too."

"Oh has she now?"

The doorbell rang, and Elizabeth smirked, giving him a wink. "That should be her. Why don't you meet her in the front living room?"

"How many living rooms do I have?" he called after her, but she didn't answer. He almost considered waiting to see how long it would be before Elizabeth would come and get him, but he decided he didn't want to be rude, so he wandered back inside of his own house that he barely knew the inside of.

The front living room turned out to be basically right next to his front door, and he'd walked past a couple of times in the last two days, but hadn't taken the time to familiarize himself with it all that much as of yet. It was nicely decorated, with a couple of couches in a V formation, with a wedge shaped table between them. If there was a television in the room, it wasn't readily apparent.

What was readily apparent was that he wasn't alone in the room. Sitting on one couch, facing towards him, was Elizabeth, who had a sheet of paper in her lap that she was reading from. With her back to him was another woman, whom he assumed had to be Natalie. "Ah, there's the lord of the manor now. Mr. Bishop, I'd like you to meet Natalie Yu."

As the young woman stood up and turned around, Kev was able to quickly give her a once over. She looked to be in her early thirties, clearly of Asian descent, but not rail thin, to his delight. She had a gorgeous mane of hair, dark but in waves that lightened up the further down it got. He immediately noticed her face was dusted with a generous helping of freckles, and she had a warm, almost mischievous smile upon her face. She was dressed in black yoga pants and a black stretch top that clung to her generous curves well. All said and done, she reminded him of the type of girl he'd occasionally seen when scrolling through the hot section on Instagram.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Bishop," she said, extending a hand to him.

"God. Please. Call me Kevin or Kev," he said, taking her hand in his to shake. "Call me Mister Bishop again and this interview is absolutely over. Got it?"

She laughed, nodding. "Got it, Kev. So how do you want to start?"

“Well, tell me a little bit about yourself and why you want this gig.”

“Sure,” she said, letting go of his hand. “So I moved out from Kansas City about a dozen years ago, and originally wanted to be an acrobat. After about a year, I relocated to Las Vegas and joined Cirque Du Soleil, where I was part of Zumanity for a couple of years.”

“That’s their erotic show, Kev,” Elizabeth said.

“I know what it is,” he said with a smile. “Never saw it, although I saw Ka a couple of times.”

“My tits are too big to make it in Ka, and they’re natural, thank you for not asking. After a few years, I decided I wanted to move back to Los Angeles. Las Vegas is a great place to visit, but I didn’t like living out in the middle of the goddamned desert.”

“Can’t say I blame you.”

“Anyway, when I got back here, I split my time between being a personal trainer for a few local gyms and indulging my love of cooking.”

“You cook anywhere I would’ve heard of?”

“All over the place, really. I was at Musso & Frank’s for a year, I did six months at Trejo’s Tacos, but most of the time, I was part of catering teams or working at hotels.”

“And how’d you come to hear about this job?”

“Well, I’ve been Elizabeth’s personal trainer for a couple of years now, and when I saw her last month, she told me that she had a new gig she was getting lined up that she thought I might be a good fit for.”

“She told you about the gig?”

“Not all the details, but she gave me the big picture.”

“How big of a picture?”

Natalie’s smile widened a bit as she flashed him a wink. “Big enough. Here, let me stretch a bit while we’re talking.” She lifted one of her legs up until it was perpendicular to her other, her foot resting in Kevin’s hands. “Lift that up to your shoulder, would you?”

“Are you sure?”

“Trust me.” Kevin slowly closed his fingertips on her ankle and lifted the woman’s leg higher and higher up until it was shoulder height and then moved to slide her ankle to rest on her shoulder as she leaned forward onto that leg, pressing a little of her weight into him. “She told me you need someone who can be a personal trainer, and you also need a cook, so I told her I could do both jobs and save you a bit of money in the long run. Instead of paying two people high rates, you’re just paying one a *very* high rate, like 75% of what you’d have been spending for two.”

“Am I going to be happy with your cooking?” She was about to answer when Kevin raised a hand. “I’m sure your food is excellent, but I want to make sure you’re willing to make things that I want to eat, not just things that are high end cuisine.”

“Oh, I know how to get down and dirty with the best of them,” she said, as she hopped in a little, her leg moving even further upwards. “I’ll mostly be giving you healthier food, but it will be food you like, and I’m not going to deny you some sweets now and then. I hear you’re going to be working up quite the sweat, and if you weren’t before, well, I’m going to make sure you do with me.”

“She’s an out of this world cook, Kevin,” Elizabeth said. “Hell, she won an episode of ‘Chopped.’”

“Yeah?” he said to Elizabeth before turning back. “What was the hardest ingredient you had to work with?”

“A Cuban sandwich in the dessert round, but I made it work for me. I can pull up the episode for you if you want.”

“Oh, I’ll definitely want to watch it later. Sorry if I’m dancing around here. I’m trying to find a way to put this delicately, Natalie.” The underside of her calf was resting against his collarbone now, and she was continuing to get even closer. “I’m still very much getting used to all of this myself, so I don’t even know how to approach any of this. But I want to make sure that Elizabeth was perfectly

clear in what the entirety of the job was.”

“You mean did she mention that I'd be fucking your balls dry on the reg?” she giggled. “Yes, Kev, I do believe she might have mentioned that.”

“And you're okay with that?”

“Okay?” She beamed a megawatt smile at him as the leg rose even higher, the underside of her thigh pressed against his chest now. “You think I haven't been looking forward to it for days? Hell, I'm practically shoving myself up against you right now. Can't you smell my pussy dripping?”

“But you understand you won't be the only one, yeah?” Kevin could feel his heart starting to race a little bit. She was close enough now that he could smell her perfume. “That it's going to be, well, a harem of sorts.”

She tipped her head to the side, as if the statement amused her. “I can play with the other girls though, right?”

Kevin chuckled. “As long as they're okay with it.”

Natalie looked over as she leaned in enough to pin her thigh between one of her tits and Kevin's chest. “You gonna let me fuck you, Lizzie?”

“As long as Kev's okay with it,” Elizabeth answered.

She looked back to Kevin. “You gonna let me fuck her?”

“If she's okay with it, who am I to say no?”

“Then why would you think I'd be bothered by it?”

“It's not what I would normally think of as an employer-employee relationship.”

Natalie rolled her eyes in an overly dramatic fashion, a move that made her seem much younger than she was. “Don't be so square. I like sex, but having to find someone in the clubs these days is a fucking drag. So knowing that there's a good looking guy who's gonna plow me good and hard constantly just seems like a bonus, not a downside. Besides, I've been trying to get in Lizzie's bed for almost a year now, so I consider it a two-fer.” She leaned in a little bit, bringing her lips closer to his. “You wanna go for a tumble before you make an offer, or do I get the gig?”

“You still want the gig?”

She reached a hand down and smoothed the palm of her hand against Kevin's crotch, a sensual move that made his cock throb beneath her touch. “More than I can tell you, so maybe just give me the gig, and then I can show you.”

“Alright, then you're hired.” He could hear Elizabeth rising, and that was the point when he noticed the box had been sitting on a table behind her the entire time.

Elizabeth opened the box and reached in to pull out a pendant, a long golden chain with a smoky onyx teardrop shaped stone hanging from it. “I already talked to her about her style, and she wanted something loose, so she could tuck it under her sports bra whenever she wanted.” Elizabeth held the necklace out to him, as Kevin realized apparently he was always going to be the one putting them on the girls.

Kevin took the pendant from Elizabeth as Natalie slipped her ankle off his shoulder and lowered her leg back down to the ground. “Last chance to back out.”

Natalie shot him a look that sizzled with heat. “Ask me again and I'll knock you to the ground and not let you up for a bit.”

He shook his head a moment. “I need to hear you say it, otherwise I won't believe this is what you want.”

Natalie leaned forward and grabbed the back of his head with one hand, pulling his face down to hers as she kissed him, something wild and carnal, her tongue practically demanding entrance into his mouth before she pulled back, her hair a slight bit more disheveled than before. “Collar me, sir. Make me your bitch.”

“You don't have to call yourself that if you don't want to.” He unhooked the clasp on the gold rope chain, and then turned Natalie around, pulling her back a bit until her ass was grinding against his

cock as he slide the pendant along her neck.

“Oh, I want you to call me that and more. There's something nice about being protected, looked after... owned.” She reached behind her to place one of her palms against the back of his neck, as he moved to slide the hook into the loop and let the clasp close.

As soon as he did, he felt her press back against him firmly, a guttural moan pouring from her lips, her entire body quivering against him. He could feel her fingernails digging into his neck, her ass grinding into his cock hard. “You okay?”

“Okay?” she whimpered. “I just fucking came harder than I've ever cum in my fucking life. You bet your sweet ass I'm okay. But you know what I'm not?”

“What's that?”

“Done,” she said, her other hand grabbing one of his to pull it up to one of her plump tits. “I'm not fucking done.” She didn't let his hand stay there long, though, as she clenched onto his wrist and forced his hand downward, pushing his fingertips beneath the yoga pants to smooth against her snatch, feeling soft, fine hair before he touched those wet folds. “You don't mind a little grass on the field, do you?”

“As long as it's not like a 70s porno bush, I don't mind at all.”

“No, I keep it nice and tidy. Now you gonna smash me or what?”

“Right here? In the living room?”

She reached down with both hands and shoved her yoga pants down to the middle of her thighs. “You make me wait any longer and I'm just going to fucking take it.”

Kevin reached to unbutton his jeans. “You don't mind that Elizabeth's here?” He fished out his cock and started to rub it across her pussy. She was wriggling, trying to get him lined up and pushed in, but he was keeping her from impaling herself on it just a moment longer.

“Are you kidding?” She whimpered, then turned to look at Elizabeth, a crazed, eager grin on her face. “I want her to \*watch\*.” On that last word, she finally got enough leverage to force her cunt onto his cock, and she ground back onto him hard. “Fuck yes.” She pulled her hips forward a few inches then slammed her weight back. “Fuck.” Again. “Yes!” Again. “Fuck the shit out of me, you bastard!”

“Did I do well this time, sir?” Elizabeth asked as she moved to her feet and stepped towards them. “I'm sure she's going to do all sorts of perverted things with you, as flexible as she is.” She reached forward and tugged Natalie's top up to expose those plump tits, capped with stiff chocolate nipples.

“She's fucking tight,” he said.

That made Natalie giggle, as she continued to force him to keep thrusting in out of her snatch. “Tight.” Wham. “Asian.” Wham. “Pussy.” Wham. “Nothing tighter.”

Elizabeth reached down and pinched one of Natalie's nipples hard between her thumb and forefinger, twisting it sharply. “Oh, I'm sure I can think of something tighter.”

“Fuck, that hurts so fucking good, you bitch...” Natalie reached up and grabbed Elizabeth's head to pull her into a kiss as she kept thrusting back into Kevin's forward shoves, his balls slapping against her clit each time, railing deep and forceful each and every time.

Kevin could feel a hand smoothing along his hip before it darted down, as Elizabeth grabbed his phone from his jeans pocket, pulling back, as he could feel his balls starting to draw up. Natalie had widened her stance to let her get even more leverage, having backed Kevin up against a wall now, her cunt clamping and strangling his cock, trying to milk a load from him.

His body could only resist so long, and eventually, he knew he wasn't going to hold back, so he grabbed his hands onto her hips, as Elizabeth reached forward and pushed some of Natalie's hair out of her face for her, just in time for his orgasm to hit. As soon as his balls drew up and started dumping cum into Natalie's pussy, she went wild, her twat vibrating on his cock in a constant shiver, a primal moan pouring from her lips, just as that flash of the cellphone camera went off.

Kevin's shoulders slumped a little against the wall, as Natalie started to giggle, a mischievous

laugh that sounded a little drunk. “Oh fuck that was good,” she groaned. “And to think, I'm gonna get this any time I want...” She bent forward and then pulled her hips away from Kevin to slide her snatch off his dick with a wet pop.

“We should go take a shower or something,” Kevin mumbled.

“Oh no,” Natalie purred, as she turned around and moved to fold her legs beneath her, sitting on her ass below him. “Let me.” Her lips parted and she began to lick his softening cock clean, drinking whatever juices remained there from the two of them.

Elizabeth leaned in and pressed a kiss to his cheek, one of her hands reaching down to stroke Natalie's hair while the woman continued to clean him like a cat. “So, convinced yet?” she laughed.

“Tomorrow, Elizabeth,” Kevin said, “I am going to collar you and fuck you within an inch of your life.”

Elizabeth smirked, offering him a saucy little wink. “Promises, promises...”

## **Intermission Two – Hungry Heart**

When Kevin got up the next morning, he had been intent on immediately going after Elizabeth and fulfilling his promise to collar her and make her place in the house official, but as it turned out, Natalie cornered him and started him on a workout routine before he'd made it three steps from his bedroom. She'd warned him that the first few weeks of training would be the worst, but that she had rewards planned for him as he would begin to get whipped into shape.

For the next hour, Natalie put him through his paces, and by the end of it, he was drenched in sweat and he felt like every part of him was on fire. She warned him that tomorrow, he was going to be unbearably sore, so they would focus on cardio instead.

As his reward, she blew him in the living room, deepthroating his cock again and again until he fired cum down her throat. After that, she sent him to the showers while she made him breakfast. When he returned, clean and dressed for the day, there was a breakfast scramble waiting for him, and as promised, it might have been the best food he'd ever tasted.

“Where's Elizabeth this morning?” Kevin asked Natalie as he ate.

“Oh, she sent you an email, but she's doing some more prescreening for potential candidates today, so she won't be back until late this evening. Your schedule for the day is pretty light. You only have the two meetings,” Natalie told him. “They're both in your email.”

Kev checked his phone and found that he did indeed have an email from Elizabeth with his schedule. The first meeting was about reissuing the Truth Knife album, and was mostly just hammering out some specifics about what the rerelease would look like. The second was going to be a more complicated meeting, with a studio technician who was going to help him get the recording studio in the house up to whatever specifications he wanted.

Both meetings were scheduled for the afternoon, so it gave him time to explore the house a bit. There were, in fact, twelve bedrooms in the house, each with an attached bathroom, although the size of each room varied quite a bit. Obviously, he was in the house's main bedroom, as it was easily the largest, but he found that a few of the other bedrooms also already had things in them, one for Natalie, one for Elizabeth and for Ashley.

Ashley's room was the easiest to spot right away, as the teenage girl had wasted no time in decorating and customizing her space, with posters for various bands up on the wall, although he was surprised to see that she had somehow found a Truth Knife poster and had hung it up over her bed.

Thankfully, none of the members of Truth Knife had considered themselves particularly photogenic, so the poster was just psychedelic art in the vein of the CD cover, an anthromorphized tiger and fox, each in a suit of armor, crossing swords in some sort of duel, waves crashing down on them from either side of the tiny rocky island they stood on.

Kev had always loved the artwork they'd gotten for the Truth Knife stuff. It was all done by a local guy named Max Wraithbone. Kev liked the man's stuff so much that he'd actually kept the original artwork for the CD and had it framed. He was sure Elizabeth had brought it to the house, so it was hanging somewhere, and he was certain he'd find it soon enough. He was sure now that he was making music again, his and Max's path would cross once more.

Max was an eccentric local artist whose appearance tended to rattle people who didn't spend some time getting to know him. He looked a bit like Charles Manson, with a big bushy beard, long stringy hair and rail thin arms and legs that Kev suspected had done their time with heroin tracks in them before he'd gotten clean to survive the 1980s on. He had to be in his sixties or seventies, but the drugs and sex had kept him preserved, or maybe pickled was a better term. In addition to doing artwork for some local bands, Max tended to pay his bills by either doing artwork for surfboards or by tattooing his artwork onto people's skin. Every time Kev saw him, Max offered to give him some skin ink for free, and every time Kev had turned him down, but now he was actually considering it.

Kevin shook himself from his memories about his weirdo artist friend and backed out of the

girl's room to continue his exploration of his own house.

Natalie's room was right next to Ashley's, but it couldn't have been more contrasting. While Ashley's room had been full of clutter, Natalie's room looked barely lived in. The closets were closed, the bed neatly made and nothing at all on her floor. In fact, the only reason he could tell Natalie was staying in the room was that there was a purse draped over the chair in front of the vanity, and there were hair care and skin care products lined up below the mirror. Kev wondered if she just hadn't gotten moved in yet, but he did find it surprising how bare the room was. He decided he'd check in with her over the next few days and see how everything was working out.

The room next to that was clearly the room that Elizabeth had moved into. If Natalie's room looked barely moved into, Elizabeth's room looked extremely lived in, like she'd been in it longer than he'd been in the house. Of course, Kev knew that Elizabeth had been keeping all of her things in the pool house when he'd first showed up to the house, so it hadn't been so far to move it all.

The room was filled in wall to wall with art hung on the walls, clothes on hangers, make up on the dresser, even a clothes hamper off to the side of it. She also had a desk in her room, with a laptop dock, and a briefcase resting atop it. Kevin was tempted to open the briefcase and see what sort of surprises Elizabeth had lined up for him, but decided it would be bad form, beyond the fact that he suspected the briefcase was locked.

All of the other bedrooms were empty, and Kevin wondered how long it would be before the entire house was filled up. On his exploration, he also found that there was a room that was filled with exercise equipment, a sort of private gym. Other unusual rooms included a liquor cellar and a pantry that was barely stocked, although he suspected that Natalie would fill that up soon enough.

Just as he thought he was nearing the end of exploring the house, he found one last door on the ground floor that he hadn't explored, and when he opened it, he immediately understood why it was nestled so deep in the house – sound buffering.

It was a large room that was bisected by a thick glass wall, one half of it a soundproofed recording room, the other half partially consumed by a giant mixing board attached to a couple of computers, with his collection of guitars hanging on the wall, surrounding the framed original artwork for the Truth Knife CD cover, a pair of feathery angel wings cradling an orb that seemed to be the earth in some portions and an eyeball in others, each border of the piece being the image of a knife with the word “TRUTH” engraved on the blade. The title of the album, “Wayward Dreamers” had been lacquered on the bottom blade in red fingernail polish.

This was \*his\* studio.

Kevin had spent much of his young life dreaming about these kinds of spaces, and now he had one that was his, a studio of his very own. The recording area was large enough that if he wanted to, he could fit a whole five piece band in there, while he was working at the mixing desk with perhaps an engineer or two.

He'd given some thought to what he'd said to Elizabeth earlier, and decided that maybe he'd been too hasty to dismiss her suggestion. The idea of being a producer wasn't such an alien idea the more he thought about it, but he decided he would have to be very selective about the artists he would be willing to produce. He'd made his judgment too early because he had been thinking about it in terms of his old life, where he didn't ever have the option of saying no to anything that made him uncomfortable. If he decided to be a producer, Kev'd initially thought, he would have to take any artist that wanted to work with him, and that would mean being saddled with shitty people constantly infighting and not at all focused on the music. But now he could say no to anything or anyone, which meant he could be selective about it, and could work with artists that intrigued him and didn't seem like total dickwads.

Not only had all of Kevin's guitars been brought over, either Elizabeth or Ashley had set up all of his guitar pedals, although they'd all been chained together without enough attention paid into what order they were attached.

People who didn't play guitar heavily thought as long as the pedals were all connected, the results would be the same, but one of the things Kevin had learned early on was that the sequence in which the sound came through affected the output dramatically. Where you applied distortion and transformative effects in the chain was a vital part of cultivating a sound. You couldn't just link them together in any old order and expect to get what you wanted.

In his old apartment, the pedals had mostly been unplugged so that he could build a sequence as needed, kept in a box next to the amp, but here, there was so much room that the girls must've figured he wanted to have access to any of them at all of the time.

Kevin was waiting for people to show up anyway, so he unplugged all of the pedals and then began reorganizing and reconnecting them in the sequence he liked the best. He knew that he really needed to strap them all down into the pedalboards, but there was always that lingering fear that he would want to reorganize them again to get some particular sound for a track.

He got the pedals reconnected and then plugged in his old beat up electric blue Stratocaster, flicked on the Orange crate amp and jammed out for a little while, flooding the studio with waves of heavily distorted sound. He wasn't after any particular vibe – he just wanted to play.

It was nice to cut loose and simply jam. But like all things, he knew he couldn't spend too long, and sure enough, after about twenty minutes, he felt his pocket vibrate, letting him know his first meeting had arrived.

The meeting didn't take too long, but Kevin was delighted that Elizabeth had found a new label that was genuinely interested in reissuing the Truth Knife album. CDs were mostly a dead item at this point, but the new label would make sure the album was available on Spotify, iTunes, Amazon Music, Deezer, Tidal and whatever other platforms kids were getting their music on these days. Not only that, they were going to give him the masters and ownership of his publishing rights for the songs, something that didn't mean much to most people, but it was exactly what he wanted out of it.

What surprised him the most about his meeting, though, was that the label representative wasn't just familiar with his band, they were a big fan, and had already gone to the label and found the extra five songs that Kevin had recorded for the album, most of which had never been heard by even the band's most devoted fans. One of them had been included as a b-side on a version of the single that had only been sent to radio stations, but the other four had never seen the light of day. Hell, he'd barely even remembered those songs, so when the label rep played them for him, it was like a tour down memory lane, and he agreed that they could be included in the album's reissue.

After his meeting with the label rep, Kevin had a late lunch, then headed back into the studio space, this time with a more concrete plan of action. Now he intended to put it through its paces, and for the next hour or so, he tested all the microphones, checked the soundboard and tested the sound proofing on both sides.

There was an iPad in the room, thankfully, as he opened up a text window and started typing in notes of things the studio would need that it didn't currently have. They ranged from big things like some specific microphones to smaller things like an actual velcro pedalboard that he could put all of his guitar pedals into. After recounting the number of effects pedals he actually owned, he made a note that he probably needed two of the extra large versions to get all the pedals he used regularly, and two more for the pedals he used more sparingly. He also immediately noticed that he needed chairs and stools for the recording area, as well as a couch for the room with the mixing desk, and maybe a few more comfortable chairs as well.

Musicians always bitched about not having enough places to sit, and even a band with five people in it usually had a couple of friends or managers or groupies as part of the recording process, and a good studio needed space to accommodate them.

Along with that, the studio space needed to have a minifridge of some kind, some place to keep drinks and snacks in, especially if he was planning on putting long hours in down here. He knew Natalie was going to make sure he didn't load it up solely with sugary drinks, but would probably grant

him that some bands were going to need their soda fix.

Beyond that, the recording room was going to need some basic bracers and dampening spots to ensure that if they brought a drum kit in there, it wouldn't overwhelm the room. Bands took a variety of approaches to how they liked to record. Some insisted on all being in the same room at the same time, something that could be a pain in the ass to record and mix properly. Others preferred that each piece be recorded separately and then assembled afterwards.

Truth Knife had been somewhere in between, for a variety of reasons.

Daniel, the band's vocalist, insisted he always have the room to himself when doing vocal takes, which was fine, because he was a perfectionist who took a million times to get anything he liked on his best days.

Kelly, the band's bassist, showed up stoned or drunk at least half of the time, which meant he would take two or three tries at a song, and if none of them were good enough, Kevin would just go in afterwards and rerecord the bassline on his own. Kelly never knew the difference.

Charlie had mostly just been the band's rhythm guitarist for live performances, but he'd insisted on giving it a go in the studio as well. If he was honest with himself, though, Kevin wasn't sure there was a single note played by Charlie on the album. Everything had been either out of tune, out of time or just blatantly sloppy that he'd replaced everything the guy had done. They needed him for live shows, where he did fine enough, but when it came to studio time, Kevin wasn't going to let the guy's drunken ass drag him down.

But Kev had actually genuinely \*liked\* playing with Kerry. She'd been a hell of a drummer, capable of whatever style a particular song called for, and more often than not, adding flourishes that he hadn't even considered. At least a few times, Kerry had come up with a slinky groove beat out of thin air and he'd written whole songs around those.

As Kevin went about itemizing what the studio needed, he found himself coming to an interesting decision. He pulled out his phone and typed in a number he hadn't used in at least four months, praying she hadn't changed her number.

"Kevin, you old sumbitch," Kerry's jovial voice said to him. "How the hell have you been? \*Where\* the hell have you been? After the band broke up, you told me you were gonna call me when you felt like you got your shit together. Did you? Or are you calling me to ask for a favor like bail money?"

He laughed immediately, and wondered why he'd waited so long to call her. If there was any one person in the band he'd missed, it had absolutely been her. There had never been any sexual chemistry between them, mostly because Kerry was a lesbian, but their whole relationship had been more of a sibling feeling anyway. "When the band imploded, I guess I kinda did too, Ker. But the last week or so I've come out of it and lucked into a new life. It's a story you wouldn't believe if I told you, so I won't bore you with the details."

"Aw, I kinda like your boring details, Kev, but sure. So what's the buzz? Why you ringin' me up?"

"What's your schedule looking like for the next few months? You go back to teaching high school students how to bash the skins?"

"A bit, but I've been workin' as a session musician here'n'there too. And you askin' 'bout my schedule makes me think maybe you need a session drummer. That what this is about?"

Kevin smirked a little, glad that Kerry couldn't see him at the moment, as she might've used that smile against him. "Sort of. Consider it maybe a session audition for a more full-time gig."

"I'm not playing with those two fuckers ever again, Kevin, so if Kelly or Danny's in, I'm absolutely fucking \*out\*! I might be able to handle Charlie if I have to, but I don't see the fucking point considering how worthless he was most of the time."

"Kerry, I'm fucking done with the lot of them just as much as you are. The same goes for Charlie. And you're not the one who caught Kelly selling some of the band's gear to get a fix. I almost

couldn't afford rent getting two of my axes back, so why the \*fuck\* would I ever want to see any of their junkie asses again?"

"Yeah, well, Danny's a misogynistic prick, and I'm sick of hearing his fucking apologies for grabbing my tits while he's drunk. I don't give a shit how good a vocalist he is. My new girlfriend would beat the living shit out of him anyway."

"I'm absolutely with you there too, Ker," Kevin sighed. "I'm done making excuses for his shitty behavior because of his talent. There's gotta be other talented singers out there who aren't fucking assholes, so next time I need a singer, Danny will be a lesson I remember, not a name I call. But I don't need a vocalist. I need a drummer. Hell, I need the best drummer I know. You interested in giving it a go?"

"What's the gig?"

"I'm going to be scoring Emily Rouchard's next movie, starring Alice Karteraux."

"The fuck you say."

"If I'm lyin', I'm dyin'."

"How the holy fucknuts did you land \*that\* gig?"

"I've got a new manager now who's capable of moving mountains when she wants to, and it turns out that she sent Rouchard a copy of our album to convince her I could do it, and she dug the Truth Knife sound, so I'm going to be dipping back into that style for the score, and it wouldn't hurt to have a tight sticker behind the kit when I did."

The other end of the line was silent for a few seconds before Kerry spoke again. "Say that I ain't opposed to this. What's it an audition for beyond that gig?"

"A bunch of things. I'm going to be doing a lot more composing for movies now, since having an Emily Rouchard movie on my resume will draw all sorts of people in, but I'm also considering both taking a swing at being a producer and maybe starting a new band up as well, and frankly, you're one of the only people I've ever known in the music industry who I never wanted to punch. And you're stupid fucking talented, so maybe if the movie score works out, you'd consider coming along for part of the ride."

Kerry sighed a little bit. "Is this a pipedream or an actual paying gig you've got?"

"Paying gig, I promise. Upfront work, with a cut of the royalties from soundtrack sales and streams. Look, I don't blame you being skeptical, okay? I know I would be if I were in your shoes, but do me a favor and think about it. Hell, if you want to come by my new place and see the studio I'm setting up tonight, you can."

"Wait, you're setting up a studio in a home? In \*your\* home? What the hell did I miss over the last few months?"

"Tell you what, I'll text you my address and you can come up here for dinner and we can talk it over, okay? I'll show you the house and the studio, tell you what I can about the movie and we'll see where it stands."

The drummer seemed to consider it for a long moment before she agreed. "Yeah, fuck it, why not. I can't stand the little prick I'm supposed to be teaching tonight anyway. She's a brat who's only learning to drum to piss off her folks. But this time we're getting shit in contracts in advance, you hear me? No more fucking handshake deals, not with you, not with labels, not with fuckin' anyone."

"All above board in advance, Ker. Remember, I got just as fucked by the label as you did, maybe more."

"Yeah, okay then. I'll see you tonight."

After she hung up, Kevin texted her the address for the house, then sent text messages to Natalie, Ashley and Elizabeth, informing them he was going to be having a dinner meeting in the house tonight. Ashley shot back a message saying she would grab dinner on campus, so Natalie didn't need to make anything for her.

Almost immediately after that, his phone rang with Elizabeth on the phone. "Dinner meeting,

sir? You really should have me manage all your scheduling.”

“This was sort of a spur of the moment thing, Elizabeth,” Kevin said to her. “I realized I was going to need a drummer for Ms. Rouchard's movie so—”

“Oh! Did you reach out to Ms. Friedlander?”

Kevin was fleetingly caught off guard before he remembered that Elizabeth had talked to all of his band members when she was vetting him. “Kerry, yeah. She's coming over to talk it all through. You're welcome to join us for dinner, naturally.”

“Absolutely sir!” she said, an unconcealed enthusiasm in her voice. “She was the most pleasant member of your old band to talk to. Her appearance certainly threw me off at first, but once we started talking, I found her charming and delightful. I'll wrap up my screenings a little early and will be home in time for dinner.”

“Great, let Natalie know and I'll see you tonight. How's the screening going anyway?”

“Now sir,” she giggled, “it wouldn't be any fun if I told you anything in advance! Toodles!”

She hung up on him and Kevin caught himself smiling at the phone after she did.

Kevin also sent an email to the man from the label he'd met with earlier in the day. As part of the meeting, they had set up royalty payments. All of the band members had signed their royalty rights over to him long ago in exchange for cash payouts up front, but Kerry had always said she'd regretted that, so in the email he made sure that Kerry would get awarded her percentages from the reissue, even though she'd technically signed them over to him. He would just give them back to her for nothing, something the guy at the label didn't seem to understand, but agreed to. Kev didn't know how much money it was going to be worth, but he felt like it was the very least he could do for her.

Not long after that, Kevin's second meeting arrived and caught him completely by surprise. “DR?” Kevin said as he opened the door. “What the actual fuck are you doing making house calls to play studio prep monkey?”

The guy on the other side of the door was someone Kevin had spent a decent amount of time with. Randall McDonald, also known as Dandy Randy. DR, as he was often shortened to, was a mostly well kept guy in his early fifties who looked like he'd walked off the set of a seventies sitcom. He was called Dandy Randy because he was always wearing suits, but somehow the suits never looked modern, more like he'd walked out of a 70s cop show, like somehow the man had inherited an entire vintage wardrobe from his father or older brother. Hell, maybe the guy just spent his off days at second-hand shops. DR had a shoulder length mullet, and a handlebar mustache that sunk all the way to his chin line, giant circular rose-tinted glasses over his pale blue eyes.

Dandy Randy had been the keyboardist for a band called The Brand New Antiques in the late 1980s that had done relatively well for themselves until the tidal wave of grunge had killed their audience overnight. Since then, he'd rebranded himself as a studio engineer, but had spent most of the past decade always working for the same guy, a producer named Doomsday Davis.

The reason he'd known DR, and Doomsday as well, was because they had worked on “Wayward Dreamers,” Truth Knife's only album. Doomsday had lived up to his nickname, but had been able to wring out some great performances from himself, Danny and Kerry, although Kevin had wondered how much of that had actually been because of Dandy Randy, who had been the album's engineer. DR had a deft touch on the mixing desk, and knew just how everything should fit together.

“Oh, hey Mr. Bishop. I didn't know you'd be \*that\* Mr. Bishop,” the man said, taking a heavy drag off his vape pen.

“Please, DR, just call me Kev. And you didn't answer my question.”

Randy nodded, blowing the drag out into the air before taking another deep hit off of it, then blowing it again into the air outside of the door, stepping into the house only after he'd done so and tucked away his vape pen. “Me and Doomsday had a falling out, brother. It'd been coming for years, but, like, about five months ago or whatever, I was mixing the new Calcified record for him, and the dude lost his shit for no fucking reason at all. It finally just came to blows. My husband told me to just

be fucking done with him, that I shouldn't work with any motherfuckers who take a swing at me. So I finished that record and the last couple of times he's called me, I just haven't bothered fuckin' answerin' him, dude. But I still gotta pay the bills somehow, and since all my work was with the dickface and his studio, you can imagine the uptight bitch ain't recommending me to anyone who calls asking. So the last few months, I've just been helping people set up home studios to pay the bills. Fuckin' blows, man, but homeboy's gotta eat, yknowwhatI'msayin'?"

Randy could be eccentric, Kevin would be the first to admit, but he was also a wildly talented engineer and mixer who didn't deserve to be sidelined, after engineering some of the best rock albums of the last twenty-five years. He'd done some amazing work for Truth Knife, and now Kev found himself in need of a permanent engineer.

Kevin found himself wondering not for the first and certainly not for the last time exactly how Elizabeth could be this good at her job, connecting him to just the right people at just the right time. He didn't doubt for a moment that Elizabeth had found out that Dandy Randy had been out of work and that the two of them had gotten along well enough that Kevin would want to bring Randy on board.

"So, while you're going through this new studio with me, Randy, I want you to consider whether or not you'd like to come on board as my studio engineer full time."

"Whoa! You mean that, dude?"

"C'mon in, and we'll talk it over."

As the two walked downstairs, talking about the studio and what sort of things it was going to be used for, Kevin sent a text message to Elizabeth, saying "You are \*so\* going to feel something around your neck tonight after dinner."

"Promises promises," she shot back.

### **Interruption One – It's A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock'n'Roll)**

Dinner was scheduled late, planned for 8 pm so that both Ashley and Elizabeth could join Kevin and Natalie. Elizabeth had tried to insist that he didn't need to hold dinner time until she got home, but Kev had made it quite clear that he was going to, and if she didn't like it, she could take charge from him. She thanked him for not backing down, and assured him she would be home by 8.

It was around 6 pm that things got weird.

"I'm going to go for a walk, Natalie," Kev said. "This is my neighborhood now, so maybe it's time I had a bit of a stroll around it and see what's out here."

"Sir? Are you sure?"

Kevin smiled, using an easy going charm that had gotten him out of more trouble than he could keep track of over the years. He'd used it to get his gear back after his bandmate had hocked it for drugs, he'd used it after the label guy said he didn't hear a single in their first few sessions working on the album... shit, he'd used it to keep himself out of trouble as long as he'd been alive.

"Yeah, well, sometimes you gotta get the lay of the land by going out for a walkabout. I used to play with a drummer who said the only way to get to know the groove around you was to walk on it for a few miles in bare feet."

"Please keep your shoes on, sir."

"I'd planned on that much, Nat."

Once he walked out past the gate, he was surprised at how little he could see of his neighbors. Everyone in the neighborhood lived behind their own fences, so it was impossible to see who lived there, to learn who the people in the neighborhood were. He would have to go knocking on doors, or rather buzzing on gates, to find out who was in the neighborhood around him. Somehow he felt like he should save that for another day. It was almost like he was compelled to keep walking.

After he got a few blocks down the hill, he realized he was starting to reach the edge of a commercial district. On the other side of the cross street, he saw a little tiny strip mall with an Irish pub on the end of it that couldn't have looked more out of place.

That was where he was heading. He didn't know why, but that's where he was going.

The name of the pub, in decorative script that couldn't have looked more out of place among the taupe walls, was "Geoffrey's Gambit."

To the left of it was Liquor Outlet that looked like it probably got robbed at least once a month.

As Kev approached the door, he started to wonder exactly what was going on. The facade for the Liquor Outlet was rusted steel and one of the windows must've clearly been partially shattered because there was an unfolded cardboard box over it. The door was partially open, which sort of amazed him, because the Los Angeles heat had baked the area into a pretty good desert bake.

By contrast, Geoffrey's Gambit had a wooden facade on the storefront that looked impeccable, and the windows were stained glass that were pristine. The two building fronts couldn't have been more different.

Kevin opened the door and headed into the bar, and looked around the inside. The floors were wooden strips laid out, and the wooden bar itself looked like it might have been brought over from Ireland at some point. There were only a couple of people milling around the bar, and the bartender looked like he absolutely had to be named Seamus Maddigan.

He was this big, burly Irishman who looked like he didn't need a bouncer, because he seemed like the type of guy who would enjoy picking a fight with a drunk, like the idea of grabbing some drunk by the lapels and physically ejecting him from the bar would be the best part of his night. He had bright red curly hair cut short, and his arms were covered in tattoos, with his knuckles bearing the letters "H-O-L-D" and "F-A-S-T" across them. He had a waxed mustache that was curled on the ends, and a fiery red goatee with a skull ring binding the hairs together. It was a hell of a look, and Kev didn't want to be the guy who pissed him off.

“Ah, Kevin, about time you arrived,” a voice said from the end of the bar. “You certainly took your time in getting here, didn't you? No no, it's fine. Come, come, sit and join me for a drink.”

Kevin found his legs moving on their own. He felt like he should have been worried, but he also knew that he wasn't, and he felt like \*that\* should've also worried him. Since he couldn't be worried, he decided to look at the man whom he was approaching.

The guy at the end of the bar appeared to be in his thirties or forties, of Middle Eastern lineage, with skin the color of teak wood, jet black hair with tiny streaks of silver in it. His eyes were an icy blue that seemed wildly out of place on his face. He was in a pin stripe suit that looked insanely expensive, blues and purples, with a bright red handkerchief sticking out of the breast pocket, a silver pocketwatch chain leading from the one of the vest buttons to one of the suit coat pockets.

The man looked thin, but not excessively so, although the man's left hand had some ornate tattoo work on it that disappeared up the sleeve of the jacket, dark but faded, as if the work had been done long ago, and the man had spent much time in the sun since.

On the man's fingers, he wore multiple rings, gold and silver, littered with jewels. In front of his left hand was a Collins glass about half full with what Kevin would've guessed was expensive whiskey. Just off to the side of that was a well-read version of David Foster Wallace's “Infinite Jest” with a bookmark about two thirds of the way through it.

Kev looked at the man's face and found it long and gaunt, with a sharp, neatly trimmed black beard that almost made the man look like some sort of vaudeville villain, although the man had a sort of mischievous smile on it.

“I suppose you're wondering why you came here,” the man said to him before looking over at the bartender. “Seamus? Get Kev a mojito. He loves mojitos.” The bartender's name actually was Seamus. Kevin didn't even know how his day could get much weirder.

“I'm wondering a lot of things. Maybe you could start helping me all make sense of this.”

The man lifted his glass to his lips, taking a sip from it as he nodded, before putting the glass down. “You're being polite about all of this, even though I'm not compelling you to be. That's an excellent start to our relationship.”

Kevin moved to slide up onto the barstool next to the man as the bartender brought a mojito over to him. “Maybe you could start with your name?”

“My name,” the man mused. “Now that's a long tale in itself, but let's see. I have had many names. The aboriginal people of Australia called me He Who Walks With Darkness. The Chinese called me The Endless Water. There's a tribe of people in southern Africa who referred to me as the Caged Thunder. But those are never any of the names that anyone ever remembers. So perhaps we should stick to the one that everyone knows, hm?”

“Sure,” Kevin said, “let's go with that. So what is that?”

“Hm?” the man said, almost as if he was lost in his own thought for a moment. “Oh yes. About a thousand years ago, a writer took two of my better known names – Ambrosius and Myrddin – and combined them into one.”

“You need anything else, Merlin?” Seamus asked.

“We're good, Seamus. Thank you.”

Kevin looked at the man with a new level of respect, and suddenly the ring on his finger felt a thousand times heavier. But his other hand grabbed the mojito and brought it to his lips, hoping the liquor would cushion his system a little bit. “Not too long ago, I would've thought you were fucking with me, but these days, I've learned I no longer have that luxury,” Kevin said. “So I'm guessing you brought me here?”

“I did, lad, I did.” Merlin turned to look at Kevin more intently. “You may not realize it, but you have quite a gift there on your finger, the kind of magic that isn't lightly given out these days.”

“I'm fairly certain I couldn't give it to you, even if I wanted to.”

Merlin laughed quietly. “Nor would I ask you to, boy. I have plenty of my own magic, and so

have no need to go pilfering from others. But it's quite the artifact. It's been quite some time since that much magic has been baked into a single item. I know I certainly haven't focused that much into a single enchantment since, oh, Excalibur, if I'm honest." The man arched an eyebrow at him. "How did you get it?"

"What makes you think I didn't make it myself?"

The mage chuckled again. "The bravado on you, scrapling. I like it, though. Most people find my presence terrifying, and yet, here you are, almost challenging me to tip my hand without giving me anything. But you're playing checkers while I'm playing a dozen games of chess all around you. You aren't a mage. You don't know a thing about magic, and you've never cast a spell in your life. You don't have any of the markers. Hell, your soul has barely a scratch on it, none of the usual wear and tear us real sorcerers get along the way."

"Yeah, okay."

"So let me ask again, where did you get it?"

"I don't know that I'm allowed to say?"

"Why don't you try and see what happens..."

"I saved the life of Morgana LaFey after an accident, and she felt the need to repay me, so some six months later, she gave me this."

"Oh really? I can't see that being true. Let's just have a root around, shall we?"

The wizard brought a fingertip up to Andy's temple and tapped it, and suddenly the memory came flooding back in perfect detail – the car crash, his pulling the unconscious body from the car, Morgana's awakening in time to see the vehicle on fire. Then the memory jumped to just a few days ago, when Elizabeth and Ashley had entered his life, and the video from Morgana LaFey replayed in his mind.

Merlin withdrew his hand and nodded. "Well, I'll be dipped in Gaul's blood and called a Pig. What a truly wild and unusual story. Let me look at this gift of hers." The man took Kevin's hand in his own, bringing it up to his icy eyes, considering the ring for a long moment.

"Truly a remarkable piece of enchantment, full of all sorts of twists and turns, but almost too uncomplicated, if you ask me," he said with mirth. "You see, you've done me quite the favor in saving Morgana's life. I would've been heartbroken had she died in something as meaningless as a tire blowout, so her gift isn't enough purely on its own. Because you didn't just do her a solid, you did one for me as well. Which means I need to add to this. But, on the other hand, Morgana has also been a rival of mine from time to time, and I do so love meddling with her magics when given the chance. So let me introduce a bit of my own magic into her gift."

"You really don't have to—"

"Oh, but I assure you, Kevin, I do. And it won't be all bad." Merlin brought his hand to move over the ring, and Kevin could feel the metal heating up on his finger, not so hot that it burned, but enough that it was a little uncomfortable. "What day of the month were you born?"

"August 3rd."

"Alright, the 3rd of every month it is, then." There was a green light glowing beneath Merlin's hand before he started to lift it away, the light gone, the ring seemingly unchanged. "So every month, you will find the third day of it to be Midas Day. My first gift to you. I'll have to consider it, because it looks as though Morgana left you multiple gifts in your future, and I wouldn't want her to show me up. That's a few weeks away, though. And don't think about trying to reach out to Morgana to ask her about it. When she asks about it, and believe me, eventually she will ask about it, then you can tell her, but until then, it'll be our little secret."

"Should I be mad or say thank you?"

"Oh, why limit yourself? You'll have a lot more to say next time we see each other."

"When will *that* be?"

"I'll tell you what, Kevin," Merlin chortled. "Why don't you come back here on the 4th, and

we'll have ourselves a conversation then, alright? I do want to see how you're progressing with the little path that our mutual friend has laid before you. It's quite the majestic gift she has planned for you, so you should enjoy it. Her end barely has any chaos in it at all, so I'll have to be the chaos bringer for your little journey, and that's something I'm quite adept with. Go on, now. Scoot. I'll see you again next month. I'll cover your drink."

Kevin felt he had control of his own body again, and reached into his pocket and pulled out a fiver, leaving it on the counter. "You always leave a tip, even if someone else is buying," Kevin said before making his way to the door.

Just before he walked out of the bar, he looked back over his shoulder, and Merlin was gone.

### **Chapter 3 – Wednesday Lover**

The walk back from Geoffrey's Gambit to his house wasn't that long, but it felt like miles and miles and miles, as he considered all the things that Merlin had told him. He took his phone from his pocket and put a marker on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which was a few weeks off, marking it "Midas Day?" He wasn't at all sure what that meant, but the look that had been on Merlin's face convinced him it was going to definitely be a mixed bag. The name Midas Day wasn't doing it any favors, Kev thought, since that story was supposed to be a cautionary tale.

As he returned to his house, he saw that Kerry's beat up Honda Civic was parked in his driveway, looking one step away from death as it had for as long as he'd known her. There was something reassuring about that, some single detail that had refused to change despite all the sweeping edits his life had gone through in the past week.

Kerry called her car Lady Godiva, because the Civic was about as naked as it could possibly get. The paint had probably been green at some point, but now it was mostly rust colored, and pretty soon, the old girl would need to be laid to rest for good. Kev sort of hoped that he'd be able to pay her enough for her to get a new car and not have to worry about it.

He headed up to the front door and as soon as he stepped into the house, he could hear Kerry's boisterous laugh from down the hall. It was a comfortable and familiar sound, even if he hadn't heard it much as of late. She'd laughed a lot when the band had gotten started, and it brought a warm feeling to his heart to hear it again.

Kev walked down the hall and entered the dining room, where Elizabeth, Ashley and Kerry were all seated, enjoying cocktails. He suspected Natalie was in the kitchen finishing off dinner. "Three of my favorite ladies, all enjoying each others' company," he said, moving to sit at the head of the table, which they'd intentionally left unoccupied for him. "Glad to hear everyone's getting along."

"So you go from banging nobody to living the polyamorous dream, Kev?" Kerry said, leaning her chair back onto two legs, keeping it precariously balanced there. "I mean, I get it, if we'd have ever gotten groupies as hot as Ashley here, I'd have been all over that shit, but you never struck me as the kind of guy with that level of game. Props to you, my man!"

She'd modified her look a bit, but Kerry still looked like Kerry. Last time he'd seen her, she'd been rocking an undercut, but now she had what looked like a mohawk that hadn't been put up, a single stripe of long dyed purple hair down the center of her head, swept back and dangling down her back. She was short and ripped and butch, as she'd always been, and her face was covered in shrapnel – her septum had a large ring through it, each side of her nose bore a large stud, each of her eyebrows sported three silver rings, and her ears had enough piercings in them that he'd never bothered to count. Also on her neck, she bore a tattoo of a mermaid wielding a machine gun, Rosie the Riveter style.

Like she always did, she had on a pair of jeans that were more holes than denim, and tonight's t-shirt of choice was a Ozzy Osbourne t-shirt that said "No More Tours" on it, from his first farewell tour back in 1992, the image on it more than a little faded. Her heavily spiked leather jacket was draped over the back of the chair. Her bottle of Heineken looked like it was mostly empty already, so she'd likely arrived almost immediately after he'd gone out for a walk.

"Yeah, well, I sort of fell into it," Kev said, as Natalie poked her head in.

"Dinner'll be ready in ten, sir. Get you a drink?"

"I'll have what she's having," he said pointing at Kerry.

"Oh, and bring me a second, will ya doll?" Kerry said to Natalie, giving her a little wink.

Natalie smiled, nodding. "Sure thing. One sec."

"So you're really banging all of them, Kev?" Kerry said, finishing off her first beer. "I mean, I don't blame you. All three of these ladies are rockin' but don't you feel a little greedy, keeping 'em all to yourself?"

"They chose me, Ker," Kev laughed, "and it would be rude to turn any of them down."

Kerry looked over at Ashley. "I mean, c'mon, girl, he's gotta be too old for you, yeah?"

Ashley smirked at her, flipping some of her platinum blonde hair back over her shoulder. "The first time he fucked me, I came so hard my eyes rolled back into my skull. If he can always do that, I don't give a fuck how old he is, m'kay?"

Kerry let out a little whistle and looked back at Kev. "Shit, it's a shame I'm not into dudes at all, otherwise I'd take a hit off that," she said, laughing, as Natalie reentered the room, setting a beer down in front of Kev, then in front of Kerry, picking up her bottle.

"I'll be right back with dinner, sir," Natalie said, starting to head towards the kitchen.

"Make sure to dish yourself some out to join us, Natalie," Kev said to her.

The Asian woman stopped at the doorway, looking back, a bit of surprise on her face. "Are you sure, sir?"

Kev grinned a little bit at her. "Don't make me have to tell you twice."

Natalie blushed a little and returned the grin. "Yes sir, thank you sir. I'll be right back." Then she slipped back into the kitchen.

"Doesn't she normally eat dinner with you?" Kerry asked, arching a collection of eyebrow piercings at him.

"This is actually her first dinner here," Kev said, as Natalie brought the first round of plates in, setting one in front of Kevin before anyone else. "She just joined the family yesterday, didn't you, Nat?" he said, giving her butt a friendly squeeze.

Natalie set the second plate down in front of Kerry, then leaned down to give Kev a kiss, nothing too heated, but certainly affectionate. "Are you generally going to want me to eat with you, sir? It is, of course, your prerogative."

"Unless you have other plans, Nat, if I'm eating here, I'm going to want you to be eating with us every meal."

"If you don't want me to have other plans, just tell me not to, sir," she said, disappearing back into the kitchen. She was a lot more subdued now than she'd been earlier, but Kev suspected it was because they had a guest, and she was trying to put on a specific appearance, something Kev was eager to shut down quick.

"C'mon, Nat," he said as she emerged back out with two more plates, "I'm not going to dictate how you spend your days, okay? Eat with us when you're around, but if you need or want to have other plans on any given day, know that I'm not only okay with it, I encourage it, got it?"

"Got it, sir," she said, kissing his cheek again, setting down a plate in front of Elizabeth, then one in front of Ashley, before heading back one final time to get a plate for herself. When she returned, she smiled at Kerry. "You know how new things are. I'm sure you two had a bit of getting used to one another when you started the band."

"Not so much," Kerry said with a laugh. "I keep the time, Kev brings the tune. That's our roles. Although he's always been kind enough to let me toss in some wild fills, so I can jam in the breakdowns. But he's flexible enough to work within whatever polyrhythms I throw at him."

For the next hour, the five of them enjoyed a delicious chicken marsala and chatted about each other, all the girls willing to engage Kerry in conversation, all the while dodging questions about how Kevin had fallen into his new life, other than to say Kevin had done a very wealthy patron a good turn, which had been rewarded exceptionally.

After dinner, Ashley had helped Natalie clear the table, as Kevin gave Kerry a tour of the house, mostly just taking her past the rest of the house and down to the studio, which she immediately geeked out over. When he told her that Dandy Randy was now his house engineer, Kerry took his hand and shook it, agreeing to be his drummer whenever he needed it. When Kev told her that he'd also just given her back her percentages from all sales for the reissues of the Truth Knife releases, and she hugged him hard, telling him she'd always known he was a good guy, and was glad they'd gotten a chance to reconnect as friends.

As he walked her to the door, he told her that Elizabeth would be her point person for scheduling, but that she should expect to be up at the house and in the studio at least three days a week for the next few months, working on the score for the movie, in addition to any other projects he might pick up along the way. They hadn't even really discussed rates, because Kerry seemed confident that Kev would take good care of her, and she headed to her Civic and laughed, calling out to him that maybe she could finally replace the dying vehicle before driving off into the night.

That meant it was time to go and see Elizabeth. It was odd, he realized, but he felt a sense of expectation with Elizabeth that he hadn't with either Ashley or Natalie, in that Elizabeth had been around long enough for him to get a sense of the sorts of things she did and didn't want, and that meant he could let her down, something he feverishly didn't want to do.

He found her waiting in his bedroom, sitting on the bed, his cell phone resting to her left, the box with the collars in it resting to her right, a wide smile on her face. As she'd said she'd do, she'd applied particularly thick mascara during his little tour with Kelly, because she'd gone out of her way to tell him a couple of times that she wanted him to make it run down her face. Her cheeks were colored with more blush than she normally wore, although she hadn't put on much in the way of lipstick. She was only wearing a pair of black panties and a black bustier, which propped up her tits into a lush shelf of white flesh.

"Did you change your mind about making me your majordomo?" she said to him, a sly and inviting smile resting on her lips.

"Not at all," he said, walking into the room, closing the door behind him. He realized that he wouldn't normally mind the other girls wanting to be around, but for this time, for his first time with Elizabeth, he wanted it to be just the two of them. "But I can ask you the same thing. Have you changed your mind about all the things you told me you wanted me to do to you?"

"I've never wanted anything so badly in my entire fucking life, sir," she purred at him. "You're an even better match for me than Miss Le Fay thought you would be. Whatever you're going to ask of me, I will give it. Gladly. Willingly. Eagerly."

"I take it you've already picked out a pendant for yourself?" he said, moving over towards her and the bed.

She nodded, and opened the box, reaching into it and pulling out what she'd chosen. It was a pair of gold braided ropes, with a dip in the center where a small pendant hung from, a smoky gem in the center of it, matching that of his ring and the pendants the other girls wore. She held it out to him, looking up at him with excitement inside her azure orbs. "Will you do me the honor, sir?" she said, turning on the bed to show her back to him, sweeping her brown hair over one shoulder so her neck was unimpeded.

He took the necklace from her and slid it around her neck, seeing her shiver when he did, as he brought it together, having trouble with the clasp at first, which almost seemed to make her nervous and impatient, before his thumbnail finally hooked into it and pushed the clasp open, sliding the hook into the eye and letting it fall against her collarbone. When it did, she started to shake and shiver, goosebumps racing over her skin as she did her best to hold in a squeal that leaked out from her anyway, a high-pitched whimper that just couldn't help but fill the air as she orgasmed from the necklace bringing her into the family.

She turned back to look at him again, her eyes blinking several times quickly, as if trying to bring her gaze back into focus, and the smile on her face looked a little drunk. "I... I knew that would happen, but I *so* wasn't fucking ready for it," she moaned. "Thank you so much, sir. I know you said I've earned it, but I want you to know, I'm never going to want to go, and will always do my best to enhance your life as much as I can."

He brought a fingertip to her lips to silence her, then leaned in to kiss her, and she eagerly leaned into his kiss like she'd been waiting for that moment her entire life. After a minute or so, he pulled back from it, smiling down at her. "You're my girl Friday, for now and all eternity."

Elizabeth nodded, pushing the box further across the bed, so they would have more room on it, before picking up his cellphone. "I've got my makeup done all heavy so when you're skullfucking me, it'll run dark, like I told you I wanted earlier," she purred.

"Oh I saw that when I came in, but that'll be round two," he said.

"Oh?" she said, a little surprised. "May I ask why, sir?"

"Look, Elizabeth," he chuckled. "Your picture is going to be the one I likely see the most on my phone ringing, and a picture of you with your makeup streaked, looking entirely used, well, there's probably a little bit of risk of someone seeing that aside when you're calling and I'm in a restaurant or something, so that'll be round two, and you can still take a picture of it for my phone, but for your first orgasm, for the one that pops up whenever you call me, I want something a little more presentable."

"Alright sir, what did you—"

Kevin pushed her back onto the bed with a sudden shove as he moved down onto his knees at the edge of the bed, reaching down to draw her panties down her legs, pulling them off.

"Sir! You really don't—"

"Elizabeth, just enjoy this, will you?" he said, moving to press a kiss against the inside of her thigh, feeling her shiver in anticipation, as he dragged his tongue slowly up her flesh. He pushed his index and middle finger inside of her pussy as he moved to drag the flat of his tongue against her clit, feeling her lift her legs to hook them over his shoulders as her hips reflexively pushed up and towards his face.

"Oh god, sir! I didn't expect—"

He chuckled a little bit, lifting his head up to look at her, her head lifted enough so that she could look down at him. "*Nobody* expects the Spanish Inquisition!" he said, before pressing his lips against her clit and giving a few blasting buzzes, like he was blowing into a trumpet, which gave her body mixed signals, between the shocks of pleasure and the twinges of laughter.

He slowly worked his two fingers in and out at a languid rate, not wanting to build up too much too fast, as he dragged the tip of his tongue against her clit, drawing random shapes against it, occasionally making a letter from the alphabet, something he'd been told always kept good sensations running through a woman's body.

Beneath him, Elizabeth writhed, grinding her hips upwards towards his face and hand, whimpering in a hushed tone. "Oh fuck, sir, you're *very* good at that, shit!"

The tempo of his fingertips perked up a bit before he slipped them out, then pushed his tongue into her pussy as deep as he could get it, feeling her body twist slightly at the new sensation, before flicking his tongue around inside of her. He then slid his tongue back and out, pushing the two fingers back in, having turned his hand to palm up, so he could curl the two digits, the pads of his fingertips pressing against that sensitive spot inside of her, a sensation that made her back arch, her body contorting in pleasure.

"Don't forget when you're about to come," he said, chuckling knowing just how hard it must be for her to concentrate at that moment, "to get that picture for my phone."

"Oh god, yes sir! Any second now!" She forced her eyes open, struggling to get his phone's camera set and ready, pointing it at her face, as he pressed his lips down against her clit again, giving it another buzz while his tongue wormed between his lips to flick against it.

Her body began to tremble and he could hear the telltale click-click-click-click of her trying to frantically get a good picture, but he figured she would just pick one later, as after the four clicks, she dropped the phone to the bed and just continued grinding her hips up against his face, her body twisting and shifting in the throes of her orgasm.

After a bit, he let up on her, pulling his face away from her pussy, as she gasped and panted for air, like she'd been on the verge of drowning, a dopey smile on her face. "I certainly didn't expect that, sir, or that you'd be so talented. Most men are so hesitant to go down on women," she said, trying to sit up but still a little unstable, so she fell back onto the bed.

“Most men,” he said, standing up, “are fucking *idiots*, it turns out.” He laughed, taking two fingertips to rub along his mouth, gathering a bit of her juices from it, licking them clean. “Now, are you sure that—”

He was interrupted by her standing up suddenly, kissing him hard, almost trying to make sure she could get a chance to taste herself on his lips, both of her hands against the back of his neck, like she wanted to hold him against her but also didn't want to be presumptuous about it. The kiss lasted a long moment, and finally she pulled back, but just enough so that her breath still tickled his lips. “That was amazing, but I do believe you owe me a skullfucking,” she said, moving to kiss against his neck, then against his collarbone, trailing kisses down his stomach. “And after that, I want you to slam fuck my drenched cunt so hard that my legs don't work properly tomorrow.”

“Is this what you're usually going to want?” he asked her, sliding a hand down to stroke the top of her head as she pulled his shirt up and over his head, tossing it aside. “To be manhandled and plowed until you can't stand up straight?”

“God no,” she laughed. “But I want my first time with you, our first time together, for it to be filthy, raw, brutal and degrading, for you to push me around and force me to take it all, for you to do everything possible to use and abuse me, so at the end of it, I've seen the very worst you're capable of, enjoyed it, and know what to expect.” She unbuttoned his jeans, unzipping them. “Because I promise you, I will enjoy it, no matter what you're doing to me.”

“You seem amazingly confident that I won't be *too* rough for you,” he said, feeling her tug his jeans down his legs as she dropped to her knees before him.

“You're not built for it, Kev,” she said with a soft giggle. “Oh, I have no doubt that you'll leave me sore and aching by the end of it, but you're not the kind of man who's going to break me. I mean, what would you do if I told you to slap me in the face as hard as you can?”

“I mean, I'd try, but it probably wouldn't be very hard,” he said, sheepishly. “I don't feel comfortable slapping people.”

“See?” she said with a smile. “You won't go too far, no matter how much I'm pushing you to, so I want you to go to the absolute limit of what you're comfortable with, so I get a chance to set that line down in the sand, and know exactly what you're capable of.” She pulled off his jeans and boxers, pushing them aside on the floor.

“We have to have some sign that it's too far,” he said, “just in case I'm capable of more than you think I am.”

“Tell you what, sir,” she said, moving to pull off her bustier, leaving her nude at his knees. Her breasts were quite full, and her nipples were like tiny pencil nubs, hard and stiff at being exposed. “If I'm in trouble, I'll give you an S-O-S tap on your hip if my mouth is full, and if it isn't, I'll say 'pistachio,' and that can be my safe word. Will that make you feel better?”

“Immensely.”

“I'm not going to use it, but you know that I have one now, so are you ready to give me my two loads? To desecrate me and leave me drenched in your cum, my cunt throbbing and aching because it misses the savage pounding you've given it and it wants more.” She moved to kiss the head of his cock, both of her hands teasing gentle along her hips. “Now do I have to keep reassuring you, or are you going to shut your mouthy little whore up with this great big dick of—”

She'd made it abundantly clear to him what she wanted, so he felt like the longer he avoided it, the more he was just getting in his own way, so his hands had been slowly brushing along the side of her head while she'd been talking, and when she finally started to get a little impatient, he sprung into action, his hands grabbing the back of her head, forcing her face down on his cock, pushing hard, much harder than he wanted, but somehow, he suspected, not quite as hard as she'd like.

The suddenness with which he'd stuffed his dick into her throat had made her gag reflex trigger a bit, and he could feel her body trying to push his cock out, her cheeks inflating at the shock of it, but he kept her pinned there, even as her fingernails curled on his hips, a sultry moan burbling on his shaft

when he finally pulled it back and she drew in a deep, almost frantic, gasp of air, only for him to shove his cock back in.

He held her face down for another long moment, and he could tell her eyes were watering, even as her cheeks blustered a bit, trying to make it clear she needed to breathe, but he kept her face on his cock longer than he felt comfortable with, eventually drawing her head back, letting her inhale sharply once more, desperate for another lungful of oxygen.

“That what you wanted, slut?” he said down to her, seeing the mascara on her cheeks had already started to streak downwards in black tears along her cheeks.

She nodded with great enthusiasm, her tongue trying to lick up a bit of the spit and drool that was lining her mouth, but it couldn't do anything to clean her face up any. “More, sir!” Before she could get another word out, he yanked her mouth back onto his cock, before pulling it back and then slamming it forward again, starting a rough and brutal rhythm as he fucked his cock into her throat, making sure she was getting it sloppy and wet.

Each time he thrust his dick into her face, she moaned and whimpered and whined, but never once did she give the tap out signal. If anything, he felt like she was digging her fingernails harder into his skin, as if she was trying to give him feedback how much she was enjoying the experience.

When the pace got more intense, he could feel his balls resting against her chin, as she moved to take one hand up to them. When her fingers started to close around his nutsack, he slapped her wrist, pulling her hand away. “Nobody told you that you could use your fucking hands,” he growled at her, feeling her whimper on his cock in response.

After a few minutes, the assault of her tongue was too much for him to resist, so he thrust forward hard, lodging his dick entirely in her throat, as he fired the first jet of cum against the back of it, pulling back suddenly, so he spurting the second and thrust splurts across her face, as she moaned in excitement. He'd never done that kind of thing before, but it seemed like what she'd wanted.

“Thank you, Master,” she said. “May she take a picture of her face now that it's been used?”

“You may,” he said, panting to catch his breath, his stance a little unstable. “But be quick about it, cunt.”

“Yes Master. Thank you Master.” She hopped up to her feet, and he could see the inside of her thighs was extremely slick, her pussy having dripped out a bit onto her skin. She bent over to grab his cellphone, and as soon as the opportunity was presented to him, he slapped her ass as hard as he could, as a strangled moan burst from her lips, such a loud and feral sound he wondered if she'd orgasmed just from the sensation of it. “*FUCK* Master, you're too good to this worthless slut.”

Once she had a moment, she brought the phone up and snapped a handful of pictures of her face, mascara running down her cheeks in streaks, cum dripping across her nose and hanging from her chin, a portrait of sexual depravity and eager wantonness.

“Put the phone back down, slut,” he said, trying to put as much bass into his voice as he could. This whole persona was unfamiliar to him, but it wasn't a completely uncomfortable fit, even if he did still have a warning light in the back of his head, reminding him that no matter how much he pushed it, it would still likely not be too far for Elizabeth.

She tossed the phone across the bed, and looked back over her shoulder at him, as he grabbed her hips and yanked her to the edge of the bed. The bed height was perfect for a standing fuck, so he brought her hips to the proper placement, then pushed one of her legs open wide, forcing her to slide her knee up onto the very edge of the bed, exposing her pussy to him, that slit heavily slick now with anticipation. She looked over her shoulder at him, an almost deranged grin on her face. “Your cunt is waiting for you, Master,” she said, wiggling her hips a little bit at him. “Break it in.”

Elizabeth had been transparent about what she wanted, and Kevin felt like he needed to deliver, to give back to her for all that she'd already given him. He lined up the head of his cock against her pussy and shoved hilt deep into her, pressing her up against the edge of the bed hard enough to force a startled moan from her throat.

She placed her hands on the bed, using her arms to lift her torso up a bit, but Kevin took the palm of his hand and shoved hard down between her shoulder blades, forcing her back down onto the bed again, as she squealed in delight. Once she was down, he moved his hand up and pressed it atop her head, shoving her a bit deeper into the mattress. “Did I say get on your hands, whore?”

“No, Master! Sorry Master!” she said, her voice lathered in lust and ecstasy, somewhere lost in the delirium of it all. His hand kept her pinned in place as he drew his hips back a bit before grinding them forward again.

He decided he really needed his hands on her hips to get the kind of force she seemed to want from him, so he slid his hand off her head and moved them down along her back, giving her ass another hard slap before he grabbed onto her hips and began to rail her as hard as he could, with enough force that the bedframe was cracking against the wall each time he drilled his cock inside of her cunt.

Once he'd gotten the pace and rough rhythm down, he reached forward and grabbed a fistful of her hair, yanking back on it, pulling her up onto her hands only to see them hanging limp before he realized she was simply following his previous instruction. “Hands out, slut!” he shouted, his other hand slapping her ass once more, feeling the flesh heat red beneath his touch before he grabbed onto her hip again once she'd placed her hands down.

From this angle, he could rail into her fast and hard, his balls slapping against her clit like a paddleball, a constant swatting assault on that bundle of nerves as his cock slammed into her over and over again, stretching her out, feeling his hips grinding against her ass each time he collided with her body, her moans definitely loud enough that the entire house could hear them.

“Destroy me, Master!” she howled beneath him. “I'm your whore I'm your whore I'm your little fucking whore break your fucking whore break her little worthless fuckhole until you've carved your fucking name into it and made it fucking worth something by making my cunt *your* cunt by showing me how to get fucked by a real fucking man!”

His hand in her hair slid down and grabbed her by the throat, curving his fingers on one side of it, his thumb on the other, starting to squeeze until he could hear her gasping a little, her body shivering in delight, wheezing in draws of air, that intake controlled by the grip of his hand.

“I'm gonna cum in that hole of yours, and when I cum, your body's gonna do one thing right and it's gonna cum with me. You're gonna feel it whether you want it or not, and that orgasm's gonna fucking hurt, and it *should* but you aren't gonna stop it, because that's what you fucking wanted,” he hissed at her, feeling his own release creeping up on him, despite the discomfort.

Finally, his hand on her hip shoved her back onto his cock as he thrust forward, making her slam back then fall forward, getting pinned beneath his dick and the mattress, as his balls drew up and started gorging the inside of her pussy full of his cum. As he'd told her to, the minute he started to gush, her whole body lit up like a pinball machine, goosebumps covering her skin as she started thrashing beneath him in a violent shiver, the orgasm so intense that he could feel her locking down like she was trying to crush his dick inside of her before starting to yank and pull, desperate to milk as much of his spunk inside of her as she could, howling out a strangled yelp of pleasure that warbled and croaked.

A few seconds later, his body slumped forward atop of hers on the bed, the two of them lying there, almost lifeless, in the aftershocks of her orgasm. Moments later, she started to giggle, not girlishly, but almost a deranged psychopathic titter of laughter before it devolved into a moan, as his hips pulled back, his limp cock sliding from her.

He slid off atop her, and flipped her over so he could take his hand and wipe sweat, cum and streaky mascara from her face as he leaned in to press a tender kiss to her lips, soft and gentle, as he slid an arm underneath her neck, moving to cuddle her in close to him. “I hope that's what you were looking for,” he said to her. “You've been so good to me, I wanted to be as good for you as I could.”

“That was fucking *magnificent*,” she said, smiling warmly at him. “I'm sore and achey, but nothing's torn, nothing's bleeding, nothing's ripped, and the bruising, which feels fantastic by the by, will heal soon enough.”

He stroked his hand across her face, as he reached down the blanket and pulled it up and over them, making sure her body was nestled in firmly against his, as he continued to give her soft and tender kisses. “And you're sure I didn't go too far? I was a little concerned the choking might have been a bit much.”

She giggled, licking her lips. “I didn't expect that from you at *all*, but it was *wondrous*, and I thought I was going to black out,” she said, nestling her body in against his, keeping his arms and the blankets wrapped around you. “You didn't spit on me, though,” she teased. “I would've liked that.”

“I can do it now if you like,” he said, pretending to summon a bit of spit into his mouth, as she giggled once more, shaking her head frantically.

“Too late!” she cackled. “Too late entirely! The moment's passed!”

“Well,” he said, pretending his mouth was much more full of spit than it really was, “wha do I do wit' all dis?”

She smirked and leaned in to kiss him hard, swapping as much spit between the two of them as they were both capable of. The kiss started soft, picked up pace a little bit, then slowed down once more, as they settled in beneath the bed.

“So I don't want it like that often,” she said to him as her breathing started to slow. “But when I do, I'll tell you, and you can even go harder than that, if you think you're up to it.”

“Next time, maybe I'll try using handcuffs,” he said, which evoked a shiver of anticipation from her body.

“Tease.”

The two of them talked for a little bit longer, but both were tired, too tired to get up and shower, despite how much they badly needed it, and started drifting off to sleep. The last thing Kev thought before he drifted off to sleep was that he needed to ask Elizabeth in the morning if she knew anything about Merlin.

Wizards and witches seemed to have all sorts of plans for him.

That didn't help him sleep any.

### **Intermission Three – Mystify**

When Kevin had asked Elizabeth if she knew anything about Merlin, he'd found her amazingly reluctant to believe in the existence of the wizard, despite her having spent time with a witch named Morgana Le Fey. Over the course of breakfast – a lovely eggs Benedict – he'd eventually gotten her to come around and accept that if Morgana was real, it made sense that Merlin was real as well.

Geoffrey's Gambit was, in fact, a legitimate bar that had existed up in the hills for over half a century, making it one of the older establishments around Los Angeles, and the owner's name was Seamus Madigan the 3<sup>rd</sup>, his grandfather, first of his name, having been the one to build the place after emigrating from Ireland some thirty years before the bar's founding.

Digging around on the Internet found that there weren't *any* crime reports for Geoffrey's Gambit, or any news stories at all, really. The place had never been robbed, never been damaged by an earthquake, never set on fire, not even so much as had a window broken in, as far as Kev could tell. That alone was enough to convince Kev that Merlin had done something to establish a kind of protective field around the place, especially with the window work he'd seen there.

The second most surprising thing that came out over breakfast was that Elizabeth didn't, in fact, have any way to get in contact with Morgana Le Fey. The entire gift had been set up to operate independently of her, post launch, and was self-sustaining. If something went wrong, Elizabeth had been told Morgana would swing by eventually and clean it up, but she couldn't think of any possible wrinkle in her plans that would need for Elizabeth to get a hold over her.

Morgana clearly hadn't expected her handiwork to attract the attention of Merlin.

The rest of their time over breakfast had been spent reading up a little on Morgana Le Fey, but the intense amount of conflicting information made all of their heads hurt. In some stories, she was in love with Lancelot. In others, she was a lover of either Arthur or Merlin, sometimes both. In the earliest stories, she was a mostly benevolent enchantress who sought to help Arthur, but in later works she was, in fact, Arthur's greatest adversary.

By the time they'd finished breakfast, Kev had decided to consider anything written about Morgana or Merlin to just be hearsay, and that it would be impractical to believe any one story over another. He would need to make up his own mind regarding these things, and so far, neither Morgana nor Merlin had seemed to inflict anything but kindness upon him, although Merlin's conversation had been tinged with the slightest amount of mischief, something Kev just *knew* was going to come back and bite him in the ass at some point.

While neither Ashley nor Natalie seemed to put much stock in the conversation, Elizabeth's insistence that Morgana Le Fey was real seemed to give the two other women at least a little pause, as if they were considering what that might mean, not just for them but for the world overall.

If magic was real, what else had it done in the world?

After breakfast, Kev needed to head down into Hollywood proper to meet up with Alice, so Ashley and Natalie hopped into his Tesla Model X, so that he could give them a ride down to where they needed to be – Ashley to do more prep work on campus, Natalie to teach some aerobics classes – while Elizabeth remained at the house to continue scheduling appointments for additional people to bring into his household. The next interview he had was scheduled for tomorrow, a candidate for his bodyguard and driver position, something he still felt was ridiculous, but that Elizabeth was adamant he get as soon as possible. Both Ashley and Natalie said they would take Ubers back to the house so that Kev wasn't tied to their schedules, but he insisted he would check in with each of them before he headed home, so that if their timing lined up, he could just pick them up instead.

It was a bunch of excess driving, but his appointment with Alice had been scheduled for early afternoon, as apparently their reshoots were being done at night, so she wouldn't be up early, although they holding their reshooting schedule today to start even later than normal, so that Kev would have time to go over the rough cut with Alice.

Studio security wasn't too strict, something he found incredulous, but then he looked at his badge and realized it not only said VIP on it, it also said CREW on it. That word hit him like a ton of bricks. He wasn't being heavily scrutinized because he belonged here, because he worked here. A page offered to show him around, but Kev just asked where his meeting was and thanked him for his time.

Half way across the studio lot, he had his first real surprise. A warm voice from off to his side said, "Hey! Aren't you Kev Bishop? I loved Truth Knife! Can I get a picture with you?" He turned to look, a smile already on his face, although that got nervous very quickly as he looked at the man running up towards him, recognizing the guy as one of his favorite directors, Robert Rodriguez. He barely had time to smile before Robert had snapped a selfie with Kev on his phone, shaking his hand afterwards. "Thanks man, I'm a big fan. Was super bummed out to heard you guys broke up. Saw you at the Viper Room last year and you destroyed that room, amigo. What are you up to now?"

"I, uh, thanks! Thanks for being a fan. I'm actually a huge fan of *your* work too, Mr. Rodriguez," Kev said, a nervous laugh escaping him as he just began talking. "You're such a great master at weaving music into your work, from 'El Mariachi' all the way up to 'Sin City,' you're just killing it. Anyway, I, uh, well, I sort of work here? I'm on contract, anyway, for Emily Rouchard's new movie that Alice Karteaux is doing. I'm going to score it for them, or so they tell me."

"That's great!" he said, shaking my hand. "What's your next project after that?"

"I, uh, you know I'm not entirely sure I have one?" Kev laughed. "I'm pretty new to all of this, I'm afraid."

The director reached into one of the pockets of his long jacket and fished out a business card. "Then I want you to have your assistant reach out to mine and set up a meeting for us, so I can set up a project for us to work on together, because you have a gift for sound, my friend, and with Rouchard being your first, I'm gonna be your second, *comprende?*" He laughed, giving Kev a pat on the back. "Maybe we can talk about this 'Escape From New York' remake we're in meetings about. Normally I prefer to do everything in Texas, but I'm here showing rough cuts of 'Alita' to James Cameron and the rest of the studio, plus I've got some meetings with Disney I've got to do while I'm here, but we should definitely do lunch before I head back to Texas next week. Make it happen! Set the meeting and I'll make the time! Great running into you!"

And with that, one of his favorite directors of all time walked away from him, a giant smile on his face, and a promise of scoring work for Kevin still lingering in Kev's headspace. Kev was half-Mexican and half-Caucasian, so he'd grown up watching Rodriguez's career with delight, glad to see people who reminded him of his mother on the screen. There were plenty of successful Latino musicians (if he ran into Dave Navarro on the studio lot, Kev knew he would 100% *lose his shit*), but there were nowhere near as many Latinos working in the movies. He tucked the business card in his pocket and headed on across the campus.

He was still a few minutes walk from building they were meeting in when his phone rang. He fished it out from his pocket and saw Elizabeth's orgasm face on the iPhone peering back at him, which made him grin but also answer the call as quickly as possible.

"Hey Elizabeth, what's up?"

"You *met* Robert Rodriguez?" she asked him, incredulously.

"Wait, how the *hell* did you know about that?" he asked her. "That happened, like, five minutes ago. I was going to tell you when I got back to the house."

"He posted the picture to his Instagram and suddenly you're blowing up all over the place. I have a Google Alert set up for you, and I got, like, twenty hits within the course of a few minutes. Did you know he was a fan?"

"Absolutely did not," Kev laughed. "Apparently he saw us in our *one* performance at the Viper Room, and when he saw me walking across the studio campus, decided he wanted to say hi and ask if I'd score something for him. I'm a huge fan of his, though. I have his business card and everything, so I guess he wants you to set up a lunch meeting between me and him, so we can talk about it?"

“Look at you, networking like a pro! Did he say what the project was?”

“He was talking about his 'Escape From New York' remake.”

She clicked her tongue a little. “Hmm. That hasn't even got a projected shooting start date yet, but okay. If he wants to lunch and you want to lunch, it's my job to make sure you have that lunch, even if nothing comes of it. Take a picture of the business card with your phone and send it to me so I can reach out to his assistant and get the schedule matching started.”

“Got it. I'll do that as soon as I hang up.”

“Good! Now go and be wonderful in your meeting!”

As soon as he'd hung up the line, he took a picture of the business card and texted the image to Elizabeth, so she could start the process. By the time he'd reached the building for the screening, a message had popped up on his phone saying that he and Robert Rodriguez would be having lunch in two days time, at a Trejo's Tacos, and that Danny Trejo himself might even be stopping by for a little bit, something that made Kev grin even more than he was already.

Standing outside the building, he found Alice Karteaux vaping, taking in a long drag from the little e-cig before blowing it out into a quickly dissipating cloud that smelled like a donut. “So I hear you're making friends,” she said to him with a smile. “Rob's a great guy. I hope you two can work your schedules out.”

“I didn't think you two had ever worked together,” Kev said, as Alice tucked the e-cig back into her pocket, leading him into the building.

“Came close a couple of times. I was in talks to play the role in 'Sin City' that Jessica Alba played, but I wanted more money to get my tits out than the studio wanted to pay, and they decided Jessica didn't have to do it,” she said with a shrug. “Different worlds, different times, different places. It also means I didn't have to deal with that scumfuck Weinstein for very long, and thank Christ for that. Dodged a giant fucking bullet there.”

“So I hear.”

“I haven't had lunch yet, so I'm gonna have a buffalo burger with fries sent in while we're watching, since I can have them stop and restart the film any time we want. You want anything?”

“Sure, I'll have what you're having, although no ketchup on mine,” he said, the two of them walking past a security guard like he wasn't even there, heading into an empty 50 seat theater the studio used for test screening and for reviewing dailies.

A young woman in her early 20s, a typical southern California blonde bombshell in business attire, scurried over to them, as Alice chuckled at Kev's statemet. “No self-respecting individual puts ketchup on a burger, and anyone who disagrees can fight me over it. Rose, I need you to get two bison burgers with Swiss cheese and bacon from DeConnick's, and two orders of cajun fries. We're not in any hurry, but make sure you grab the heat bag to keep them warm in case you get stuck in traffic.”

“Yes ma'am, I'll hurry as much as I can,” the young lady said meekly.

“Rose!”

“Yes ma'am?”

Alice smiled at her warmly. “*Relax*. I hired you to be my personal assistant, but that doesn't mean I want you to be a mindless zombie, okay? I'm not going to fly off the handle at you if it takes longer than expected and I'm not going to blow up in your face, alright? Whatever you've heard, I'm just a normal person, same as you. So stop walking around like I'm a time bomb waiting to go off. And grab yourself some food while you're at it, on me. Not going to have you starving yourself on my behalf, goddamn it.”

The young woman smiled a little and visibly relaxed some before nodding. “Yes ma'am. Sorry about that, ma'am. I'll be back as soon as I safely can.”

“There you go.” Alice turned her attention back to Kev, leading them up to a pair of seats about half way up and about half way between the two sides, dead smack in the middle of the theater. “Sorry about that. Breaking in a new assistant. Had to fire the old one for leaking details about my split from

my ex. Fucking nightmare. Anyway, on to bigger and better things. I'm surprised you didn't bring your guitar or a keyboard or something for this.”

Kev shook his head. “On this pass, I'm just going to be taking notes in my little moleskin notebook, writing down scenes and ideas on what I think we should do soundwise for the scene. I'm also going to be scribbling down notes about your existing sound design, trying to make sure whatever music I put down behind it doesn't blend into your FX. Let's just get to it.”

For the next hour or so, Kev watched the first half of the roughest cut of “The Desperate Disintegration” with its leading lady by his side, as he took copious amounts of notes, doing his best to write without looking down the paper while he did. He'd gotten pretty good at that over the years, and he knew that while nobody else might be able to decipher his chicken scratch later, he would at least be able to determine what he'd been trying to get across.

They stopped around the halfway point as Alice's assistant Rose had returned with their food, as well as cold bottled water for both of them. Rose was about to leave, when Alice gestured that she should sit and enjoy her food with the two of them, which the woman did without saying a word.

“So what do you think so far, Kev?” Alice said to him. “I know you haven't read the book because it's not out yet, but just generally what are you thinking?”

Kev shrugged a little. “It's good.”

“No. Stop. Fuck that,” Alice said, gesturing angrily at him with a water bottle. “We're doing reshoots right now, so if you think something's wrong, there's still time for me to make it better, and I'm not asking you to be some fucking Hollywood yes man. I want your honest goddamn opinion about this motherfucker, because I want it to really *work*. I've got a lot of my own money invested in it, so spill the beans, you son of a bitch.”

He grinned a little, nodding. “I can't believe I have to tell *you* this, Alice, but you *need* some kind of action scene in the first thirty minutes. Not like, 'it would be good to have,' but '*need need triple underlined need*' if you know what I mean. It doesn't have to be a long one, it doesn't have to be some elaborate shoot out or wire-fu melee fight, but you need *something* to give that first section some more gas in it, because as good as it is, it kinda drags a bit. It's starting to pick up now, but we're an *hour* into a film starring one of the most popular action stars in decades, and the first hour is just too *slow*.”

Alice suddenly pumped her fist up into the air triumphantly, glancing back over her shoulder to the back of the theater. “I fucking told you, Em! I fucking told you we weren't opening hot enough, and that chase scene we're shooting tomorrow is gonna give it some much needed pop!”

Kevin looked back and saw that at some point during the hour they'd been watching, Emily Rouchard had creeped in from a door in the back of the theater, and he'd been talking about the film right in front of her.

“It doesn't hurt to get additional opinions,” Emily said with a laugh, moving to walk down and get closer to them, as Kev and Alice dug into their burgers a bit. “What else do you think, Kev?”

He waited until he had finished what was in his mouth, took a swig from the water, and then spoke. “I think you're definitely right about wanting to go the retro synthwave approach for the score, particularly with how you've gone in the way of set design, with that aesthetic in how you built everything, even with the handful of effects that look ultra modern. Roland keyboards, old school 808 drum kits, maybe a couple of Korgs... yeah, I'll need to acquire a couple more pieces of vintage gear, but I'm certain I can get you the sound you're looking for.”

“Good,” Emily said. “That's what I want to hear. Reshoots are going to go another two weeks, including a chase scene near the beginning when Alice catches that droid peeping on her in the shower. Instead of it just disappearing, we're going to have her give it a bit of a follow before it loses her. That'll inject some speed into the front half. The back half might even have too *much* action, but you can tell us after you're done watching that.”

“I love the cinematography so far,” Kev said, “even with so many effects in previs. Who's your DP?”

“Roger Deakins,” Emily said. “My first time working with him, but he's great.”

Kevin nodded. “One of the fucking best. I was so glad to see him finally get the Oscar for 'Blade Runner 2049.' He's had it coming for so damn long, all the way back to 'Barton Fink.' You couldn't be in better hands.”

“And you're not bothered by all the placeholder pre-viz stuff jammed in there? I know it feels super weird, seeing everything with green screen backdrops all over the place or that weird placeholder CGI, but this is how making science-fiction films works these days,” Alice sighed.

“We tried to do as much of the set work as we could practically, but there's only so much you can get away with, so a lot of it's getting built in post,” Emily said.

“As long as you've got it looking right in the final cut, nobody should give a shit how the pre-viz stuff melds or doesn't meld,” Kevin said with a laugh. “In terms of main theme, I was starting to think of something like... Bahm bum! Bahm bum! Ratatat ratatat ratatat badda dat badda dat dee deet deet deet deet BAH DAH A little bit of that sort of Miami Vice kinda feel, maybe.”

“I fucking love it!” Alice cackled. “I can't wait to hear it with actual instruments.”

The four of them continued chatting while the three of them finished their lunches, Kevin adding additional notes to his notebook as they talked. After that, they started up the movie, and true to her word, the second half was much more action packed with the first, including not one or two but three third act twists, designed to keep the audience guessing down to the very final frame of the movie. They hadn't added their credits sequence yet so after the last shot of the movie, the lights just came back up again.

“Better?”

“Much *much* better,” he agreed. “And I think if you give the first half just even a handful of minutes of action, it'll flow that much better. What else are you doing in reshoots?”

The conversation continued for another hour or so until another woman, an African-American with cutting edge fashion sense, poked her head in and said, “They're just about ready for you on set, Ms. Rouchard, and I know wardrobe and makeup were hoping Alice would be there about ten minutes ago, so should I tell them you're both on your way or that it'll be a little bit longer?”

“Don't let me keep you,” Kev said. “I've got more than enough to start working up some roughs and get some things sketched out in terms of getting themes and base tone feels, plus plenty of notes on gear I'm either going to have to dig out of storage, or acquire.”

“Anything you need in terms of equipment,” Alice said to him, “you bill that to us, and you keep the gear after you're done with it. My way of saying thank you for stepping in this late into the game when our other composer fell apart.”

“Oh you had somebody else before me?” Kev chuckled. “Hopefully I'm not stepping on anyone's toes by coming in and taking over.”

“I don't think so,” Emily said to him. “We had Hans Zimmer scoring it, but after hearing his first piece of test music for it, the tone was just such a bad fit for the project that we both agreed to part ways. I think he didn't like us saying 'less doom, more neon' over and over again.”

“OOOF!” Kev said. “Yeah, I can't imagine your film and his music was a very good culture fit.”

“I certainly didn't think so,” Emily said, “but one of the concessions I made to the studio in order to help get funding was to let them pick the first composer for the project until I could prove it wasn't a good mesh.”

“The execs saw the gunfight scene at the beginning of the second half with Hans' first pass score on it, and they were aghast at how much it simply didn't work with his music. They couldn't wait to get someone else on the soundtrack, but Emily gets the second pitch, so once we have some of your music temped in, I think the execs won't have a problem with it,” Alice said.

“Then I'll do my best not to let anyone down.”

“Good luck, we're all counting on you,” Alice said, doing her best Leslie Nielsen impression from 'Airplane.'

It was early evening in LA, and that meant rush hour traffic no matter how he went about it, so Kev decided to wait it out a bit, and headed over to Caveman Vintage Music, a place where he was certain he could pick up all the gear that he needed.

Trey, the guy behind the counter, was an old friend of Kev's, and the moment he stepped into the store, it was a little like Norm walking into Cheers, where everyone knew his name, everyone was happy to see him and they were already a few steps ahead of showing him some things they thought he might like. Trey looked way more like a Hell's Angel than a musician, with long stringy salt-n-pepper hair that hung down just past his shoulders, and a shaggy beard that went down even further, stocky and swollen, with a voice that sounded like it had smoked five lifetimes of cigarettes in his sixty plus years on the planet. The giant Coke bottle bottom glasses stood out a bit, though.

But Kev knew that Trey was a hell of a guitarist, having been a guitar tech for Jane's Addiction, Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, Megadeath, Korn and a dozen other less famous bands. About six years ago, though, he'd gotten a major leg injury and couldn't move around anywhere near as well as he used to, so he'd taken his part time job gig as a counter jockey at Caveman and turned it full time. Every so often, though, Kev had convinced Trey to play a bit, and every time was envious of the large man's ability to rip through a blistering lead line and make it look so incredibly effortless. He was going to have to consider bringing the man up as a session player from time to time.

Shopping for gear on someone else's budget was surreal, and he found himself having to remember that all of this would be expensed to the studio, and that while he was paying for it briefly, he wasn't really paying for it at the end of the day. Even still, he didn't want to go overboard, so he only picked up a handful of particularly key pieces of gear he knew he would need, as well as cable to get them all connected to his existing setup.

"Getting a new band together?" Trey asked him as he was ringing him up.

"Nah, doing some composing work for the Hollywoodland people."

"Oh yeah? Anything I'd have heard of?"

"Nothing I can talk about right now, but I'm sure there'll be announcements in the next few months."

"C'mon, Kev, we're old buds. Who'm I gonna tell?"

"My hands are tied, my friend, but I'm sure Variety'll have it pretty soon," he said, putting down the credit card Elizabeth had given him.

"Okay okay, I'll stop asking then."

"Thanks Trey. I appreciate it. I would if I could, but I can't."

"Yeah yeah yeah, I get it, I get it. Just don't forget your buds when it comes time to the premiere, huh?"

"I'll make sure I've got a ticket with your name on it, Trey, assuming you can wait a year."

"Hey, I've never been to a premiere yet, so it'll still be my first. You want Aneet to help you with the stuff to the car?"

"Yeah, that'd be great."

With the back of his vehicle filled up, he called Natalie first, but she'd already gotten a ride back to the house on the earliest edge of rush hour, so the commute hadn't been brutal. She asked when he'd be back so she could prepare dinner, and he said he was going to check with Ashley, but he'd be home within ninety minutes if he didn't need to pick her up and two hours if he did. Natalie said she'd have dinner ready for two and a half hours from then, just to offer up some flexibility.

After that, he called Ashley, and she happily suggested he come and pick her up, having just finished up her day on campus, eager to head back to the house and glad to not have to take an Uber, so he took the Tesla over toward the UCLA campus. The car's navigation told him it would be far faster to stay on surface streets, so he did so, as rush hour was starting to evaporate, but still wasn't entirely gone yet.

'Why couldn't Morgana have given me the gift of teleportation?' he thought to himself as he

pulled up in front of the UCLA library where he saw Ashley and one of her friends waiting for him. The girl was dressed in sporty clothes, track pants and a track jacket, with a bright pink backpack slung over one shoulder. She had dark skin like unsweetened coffee, with black hair in a tightly curled afro that only extended an inch or so from her head. Ashley, on the other hand, was dressed as low key as possible, with jeans and a UCLA t-shirt on, her navy backpack also slung over one shoulder. She moved to hug her friend then half-walked, half-skipped over to the Tesla, hopping into the front seat, leaning over to kiss him hard, both of her hands holding onto his cheeks, before she finally pulled back and slumped into her seat, grabbing her seatbelt to strap herself in. "Thanks for picking me up!" she said to him, cheerily.

"That was quite the warm welcome you gave me," he said, tapping the accelerator to start the vehicle in motion again.

"Duh," she said, rolling her eyes in amusement. "I didn't want Sharice thinking you were my dad or anything, or that she had a shot with you." She grinned a little bit, shifting in her seat to sit as wide legged as possible. "Unless you wanted to have a shot with her. I could probs make that happen if you wanted. She'd totes tucker you out, though."

"Elizabeth is doing the scouting for the house, so I think you'd better talk to her if you're trying to get your little friends into my bed," Kevin said with a laugh.

"Don't be so uptight, Daddy," she giggled. "You don't have to keep everybody you fuck. Sometimes you can just fuck to fuck, y'know? We're sexual creatures, humans, and though we've been denying it, it's best to let our carnal natures come out from time to time. Get down, make love. Besides, she said you were cute, so I wouldn't mind if you just wanted to bang one out with her some time, simply to expand your college sampler platter."

"Are you two old friends?"

"Just met last week," Ashley said. "But she seems nice. We're gonna take Intro to Statistics together once classes start next month. I'm gonna be surrounded by co-ed pussy, Daddy, so you'd better get used to me bringing some home from time to time, although I'm gonna be on campus a lot more, so you better be willing to dick me down when I'm home."

"I'm sure we'll get it worked out at a level that's satisfying both you and me, Ashley."

"Oh, I totes gotta ask... you think you're gonna bang Alice Karteaux? Because she seems dope, and you two seem to get along pretty well."

"We're just co-workers, Ashley," Kevin said. "It'd be extremely unprofessional to do that, and besides, she hasn't shown any interest in me, and I already have the three of you at home, something I can't see Alice being all that into."

"Mmm." The tone the teenager gave seemed to convey she didn't entirely believe him. "Maybs consider asking her out after the movie's been released then. Just to see. You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take."

"That's months away, but I'll try to keep it mind," he said to her.

"You heard anything about this bodyguard candidate you're meeting with tomorrow?" she asked him. "I was trying to get Elizabeth to tell me a bit about her, but she's totes still miffed at me for telling you about Natalie before you met her."

"Not a whole lot," Kev admitted. "Only one detail in terms of her qualifications."

"Oh? What's that?"

"She's ex-Mossad."

"What's *that* mean?"

"The Mossad is the Israeli version of the CIA, I guess."

"Damn. Sound like a bad ass. Did Elizabeth tell you her name?"

"Miriam."

"Dope. Hope she's hot."

"I would think being hot would be a handicap to being a spy," Kevin said with a chuckle.

“You did say she was *ex*-Mossad. Maybs she was Too Hot To Spy.”

“I don't think that's a thing.”

“That's totes a thing.”

“Saying it's a thing doesn't *make* a thing.”

“It's totes a thing.”

“It's *not* a thing...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“It's *totes* a thing.”

“You're so lucky you're cute,” he grumbled.

“And that I give great head! As reminder, tomorrow's wakeup blowjob day, so don't stay up too late.” She giggled, licking her lips. “I wanted to put it on your calendar, but Elizabeth wouldn't let me.”

“Maybe if you put it code.”

“I'll put it code!” she said excitedly. “The Spy Who Blew Me!”

## **Chapter 4 – Thursday's Child**

Ashley did indeed wake him the next morning with a blowjob, but it turned out she wasn't alone in that aspect, as Elizabeth had decided to help her on that particular morning, with the blonde's lips wrapped around the head of his cock while the brunette tended to his balls, two tongues working his flesh with deliberate intent, neither wanting to rouse him from his slumber too quickly, but neither having enough patience to approach their task with complete serenity.

As soon as it had become apparent that he was waking up, the two women had increased their tempo, both moving to take turns pushing their mouths down on his cock, forcing it as deep into their throats as they could before pulling back, kissing each other around the head of his shaft before letting the other have a go at deepthroating him.

After a moment or so, he realized the girls were having some kind of a competition, trying to see who could stay with his cock lodged in their mouth for longer, and Ashley started giggling as Elizabeth struggled to keep pace, her eyes starting to water before she finally pulled her lips back, shaking her head. "No, I can't do it, I can't keep up with you," she said. "You win."

"Well, let's both win then," the blonde cooed purred. "Give me a pat on the head when you're about to cum, Daddy," she said, looking up at him.

"You know how uncomfortable I am when you call-all-all—" he said before his train of thought was completely derailed by her pushing her head down onto his cock, a low groan escaping his throat as his back curved, his body betraying him by trying to shove his shaft even deeper into her mouth, as he felt her tongue slathering over it.

Ashley was many things, and a truly exceptional cocksucker was high among that list of most remarkable, as Kevin had always sort of been lackluster on blowjobs before she'd come into his life. He'd found them never to be as good as the hype had portrayed, but if Ashley was any indication, perhaps he'd just had inexperienced or disinterested partners, because with her, he struggled to remain unpoped. It made him feel a little like a teenager himself again.

It didn't take long, and after what could've only been a minute or two of her bobbing her face down into his crotch, he tapped her head, knowing he was about to burst, and at that point, Ashley grabbed Elizabeth by the neck, pulling her face over, and the two women began to kiss around the head of his cock while the blonde stroked the base of his shaft with her slender fingers, their tongues writhing against each other and the sensitive tip of his cock.

Resistance was useless.

As he released, he could feel the two tongues shift from tugging on each other to scrambling to ensure they each got as much of his release as possible, gobbling as much of his cum into their own mouth, the idea of sharing his release having been forgotten once the opportunity presented itself. They continued to lick and suckle on his shaft until his load was spent. The two women pulled their mouths back, looking up at him with wide smiles.

"Good morning, Daddy," Ashley purred.

"Good morning, sir," Elizabeth echoed.

"Good morning ladies," he chuckled as Ashley gave his cock one final stroke, like squeezing the last toothpaste from a tube, before she leaned down to lick it away. "Decided to share this morning, did we?"

Ashley hopped out of bed, completely naked, as she headed towards the bathroom. "She seemed to think deepthroating was easy, Daddy, so I told her I was going to prove her wrong," she said, stepping into the bathroom, turning the shower on.

Kevin glanced over at Elizabeth with a suspicious eyebrow raised.

Elizabeth winked at him, confirming his suspicion.

The younger girl was still so eager to prove her place that Elizabeth had enjoyed convincing the girl to go the extra mile without even being asked. Kevin had talked to Elizabeth about it, but his

majordomo had insisted that it wasn't causing any problems, and that stoking the girl's competitive urges now and again was simply playing into who she was.

As always, Elizabeth made a compelling argument.

Natalie had left breakfast out for them, as she had to go and teach one of her classes, something Kevin had been adamant she not totally give up. The last thing he wanted was for everyone to be isolated with him in the house all the time, and making sure that each of the girls had their own lives was a high priority for him, so Natalie had agreed to keep a handful of her classes that she was teaching, most of them early in the morning, before Kevin was usually up.

Kevin's schedule for the day was actually mostly open, and he intended to spend most of it putting together some initial comps for Emily's movie. He wouldn't be able to do scene-matching scores until he had the film to watch and pace to, but that wouldn't stop him from getting some initial scoring arrangements down so that Emily and Alice could hear something.

In the afternoon, he had his meeting with Miriam, but until then, he decided to get to work in his studio, turning off his cellphone as he settled in to put the new household studio through its paces. Neither Kerry nor Dandy Randy were going to be by, so it let him get deep into the zone.

The new studio had a ton of potential, but Kevin spent the first hour or so of the day getting the new gear he'd bought yesterday hooked up and into his system. What should've been only a couple of minutes had resulted in him rewiring basically everything, as he needed to swap inputs around, add some splitters into some pathways, and halfway through, he'd thrown the entire organizing system out and started from scratch, putting post-it notes on cables and boxes, sketching out an organizational chart on a yellow legal pad to keep track of what fed into where.

By the time he was done, he wished he'd bought a labelmaker when he'd been out yesterday, but the post-it notes would do for the time being, and he now had access to all of the various levels of gear he needed without having to constantly plug and unplug patches.

It was all worth it, however, for when he finally plugged his Gibson hollow body into the board and let a wildly distorted chord fill the room.

The Truth Knife sound was back, baby.

The next couple of hours, Kev was composing and recording snippets of sound into the computer, a melody line here, a basic drum sound there, not working on full tunes yet so much as setting up a style guide for the sounds he was going to need.

He knew the hardest challenge was still a good bit ahead of him instead of behind him. While he knew how to write sheet music, he'd only done scores with a handful of instruments, most of which he played himself. Thankfully, Emily Rouchard wasn't looking for him to use a ton of orchestral sounds, but he still felt it would be important to have at least one scene in the movie where he used an orchestra to contrast with all the rock and electronic flourishes he was going to be layering their soundtrack with.

He also set up a corkboard map of the movie on one wall, trying to establish what general things he was going to do, based on both his memories from yesterday as well as the notes that he'd been given. Alice had said that a copy of the script would be delivered to him in the next day or two, and he could use that to start bracketing out what each section wanted and needed, and how to approach them, but what he'd written down yesterday gave him a massive head start on that.

Based on what he'd seen, he would be composing about 50 minutes of score, give or take, which sounded like a lot for such a short period of time, but Kevin reminded himself that he'd had even less time to do "The Devil's Confession" and that had still been impressive enough to get this job, so bitching about the time window was only going to be wasted time, and it was better to simply get right down to work.

The main theme itself was going to be the keystone, so he decided to do his best to get that out of the way first, since everything else would flow out from that naturally. He would have Kerry come by and lay down actual drums later, but he set up a relatively basic drum pattern through a sequencer

first, and then began laying down components one at a time – the rhythm guitar framework, the bass pattern, the swells and ebbs of synth beds, then layered it all up with distortion and effects.

He'd intended to just work for two hours, but when he finally felt satisfied with the base demo for the main theme, he glanced at his watch and saw it was nearly four, his interview with Miriam in just a few minutes. He hastily emailed Alice and Emily the file which he'd marked "RoughMainThemeTempMix1NOTFINAL" so they would know how placeholder it was, turned his phone back on and headed out of the studio and upstairs, just in time to hear the gate buzzer ring.

Kevin stopped in front of one of the control panels, pushing the button. "Yes?"

"Miriam Bitam, here to meet with Mister Bishop," the voice on the other end of the line said, so he pushed the button to open the gate.

He headed to the front door, making sure his cat Stu was mostly asleep on one of the couches, otherwise the cat might make an attempt to bolt out of the house, not to go anywhere, but just to be a general nuisance, wandering around the courtyard for a little bit.

The car driving into the little circular driveway was a black Escalade with tinted window, and he wondered if that was what she always drove, or if it was something she used especially for when she was working. They were so ubiquitous in Los Angeles that they had all basically become background noise to him.

Elizabeth had been extremely coy about Miriam, telling him time and time again that she didn't want to taint his opinion of the woman who might basically be by his side for the foreseeable future, and so Kevin was left to form his own opinions.

The electric gate closed once more, and Miriam slipped out of the car, giving the area a looksee, and Kevin wondered if she was considering the area tactically. "You must be Miss Bitam," Kevin said. "I'm Kevin Bishop. C'mon in. Get you anything to drink?"

Miriam wasn't a tall woman, a little over five feet tall, with olive skin and black hair that hung down to her collarbone. She was thin, but he suspected the look was deceiving, and that those willowy limbs of hers held powerful muscles. She wore faded green pants and a black turtleneck shirt that covered most of her skin, and based on the way the shirt bulged, he suspected she had a bulletproof vest on underneath it. She had a leather jacket on over the shirt, and he wondered if she had a gun holster concealed inside. There was a satchel bag hanging around her neck, too big to be called a purse, but not so big as to be overwhelming. She also had on a pair of giant mirrored aviator style sunglasses, so he couldn't see where she was looking.

"No thank you, Mister Bishop. Let's get inside. This area isn't as secure as I would like it to be."

He stepped back inside of the house and waited for her to follow him, closing the door behind her as she pulled the sunglasses from her face to reveal a striking pair of light blue eyes, a dramatic contrast to the darkness of her face. She wore some makeup, but kept it minimal and light, enough to let her blend in and still look very attractive without having to take a long period of time for application, so she was always ready to go at the drop of a hat.

"Welcome to my home, Miss Bitam," he said, leading her down the hall to the dining room that had also become his interview and meeting room, the place where he'd met Alice and Emily not so long ago. "I appreciate you taking the time to drive up here. My executive assistant, Elizabeth, seems to think I'm in need of personal protection services, but I don't know that I see the point, really."

In the first change of facial expression he'd seen from her, she gave him a very tight-lipped and brief smile, almost patronizing or condescending, as if humoring a small child. "Yes, well, I find that most people with newly acquired wealth tend to underestimate their personal security needs, and I can already confirm you do as well."

He cocked his head at her as he moved to sit down at the table. "How so?"

"I gave you my name at the gate, but I could be anyone. You didn't ask me for identification, you didn't verify my identity in any way before letting me past the first line of defense."

"Why would anyone *care*, though, is what I'm struggling to understand?" Kevin asked her. "I'm

just a musician with a nice house and some money. This is Hollywood. Literally any house in any direction is someone worth five to ten times what I am, and most of them don't have private security.”

“And that's *their* failing, Mr. Bishop, but that doesn't mean you should let it be yours also. Yes, you are correct that you are not what I would consider a high value target, but I am meant to understand that your star is on the rise, so it is better for you to get accustomed to private security now, when the stakes are lower, than being forced to adapt when there is a more imminent threat,” she said, moving to sit down across the table from him. “Your assistant seems to think you're going to become both much wealthier and much better known in the near future, and she wants you to be properly defended, so that your safety is tended to.”

Miriam moved with precision and didn't seem to move at all if she didn't have to, like she was conserving her energy in case she might need it suddenly. Kevin found it almost a little disconcerting, although the woman was strikingly beautiful enough not to mind.

“Alright then,” he said, leaning back in his chair a little bit. “Let's start with you first. Tell me a bit about yourself and your qualifications.”

She nodded a little, as if expecting the question. “I am 28, a dual-citizen of Israel and the United States. I joined up with the Israel Defense Forces at 18, and moved to work with the Mossad, which is the Israeli equivalent of the CIA and the FBI rolled into one, when I was 22. About three years ago, I chose to leave that agency and to make the United States my permanent home, after a falling out with my family, which is a personal matter you do not need to concern yourself with.”

Kevin raised a finger in objection. “You might consider it something I don't need to concern myself with, Miriam, but I don't agree, and I like to know everything about the people who are going to be this close to me, wouldn't you agree?”

He saw another brief tight-lipped smile from her only for an instant before she nodded. “I actually do, Mr. Bishop, but I wanted to see exactly *how* lax you are about these sorts of things, and I am glad to see that it is not as bad as I had feared. Yes, my family wanted me to remain within the Mossad, and I had a particularly harrowing experience on a mission that made me rethink what I was doing with the agency. When I announced that I was leaving, they chose to disown me, saying I had shamed the family.”

“What can you tell me of the experience that made you decide to leave? I'm sure some of it is probably state secrets, but anything you can—”

“I accidentally killed a nine-year-old girl,” she said suddenly, cutting him off mid sentence. “There was a terrorist cell operating in a dilapidated building, and the decision was made to take the cell out with a surgical strike, a shape charge that would collapse the building in on itself and kill all the men involved. It did do that, but one of the men had brought his daughter to the hideout with him, and she was killed. 'Collateral damage' I was told by my superiors, and they stressed that I should not concern myself with that, but I found myself unable to continue with further assignments, as I kept seeing the young girl's face. I went to therapy, and while it helped a bit, in the end I decided I no longer wanted to work for the Mossad, or any intelligence agency.”

“I'm... I'm so sorry,” he said, struggling to find the words. “That's horrible. I mean, you obviously didn't mean to kill her, and some times accidents happen in your—”

“That's just it, Mr. Bishop. Whatever I intended is of no consequence, and that girl's mother had to deal with the loss of two people, her husband and her daughter, when only one of them truly needed to die. But I intended to kill that man, and he very much deserved it, so accident isn't the correct word. Carelessness, maybe.”

“What could you have done?”

“Turned off the bombs. Waited another day for when she was gone.”

“Why didn't you?”

She sighed. “I didn't actually see her come into the building, and even if I had, my orders were very clear – the cell was to be killed and no delays were to be tolerated. They were planning an attack,

and we weren't sure how many windows of opportunity we were going to get. When you're fighting people who you know will kill you given a chance, it isn't hard to compartmentalize and rationalize what you're doing as the right thing, but when you also end up killing someone too young to know any better, it becomes that much harder to justify. I suppose the reason I decided to leave the Mossad came not from my guilt over killing the girl, but how callously my superiors seemed to treat the matter, as if the girl was tainted by proximity, that the very act of being near her father made her death an excusable act. If they didn't have remorse about this, how much further would that lack of remorse go? I had been with the Mossad for almost three years, and the more I thought back to my previous missions, the more I came to realize that the agency was about results no matter the cost, and that showed no signs of changing. So perhaps I am not cut out for that line of work.”

“That's no shame on you.”

“My family disagreed, and we argued greatly over it, but my mind had been decided and I would not have it swayed, so I left Israel and moved to the United States full time. Like many attractive women who served in the IDF, they had used pictures of me in uniform for propaganda, and that had drawn the attention of agents for modeling and acting work, so when I arrived here, I got an agent and began auditioning for things. It was soon I would learn that beautiful women are, as your saying goes, a dime a dozen here in Los Angeles, and while I was getting offers for work here and there, many of them were the sorts of work that do not endear themselves to long-term success.”

“Did you want to be a model? I mean, you're certainly stunning.”

Again he saw a smile, but this time it was a bit more surprised, a bit more genuine, and lasted a slight bit longer. “I was less interested in modeling and more interested in acting, but it seemed like if I wanted to be given a real break, I would need to compromise my values in order to progress, something I am unwilling to do. So while still trying to break into acting as a career, I have defaulted to using my old skills, and have been working in the protection services to pay the bills. While I do stand out, many men are willing to have a bodyguard with them if she looks like I do. Of course, sometimes the clients try to get handsy, so that isn't without its own collection of problems.”

“So all of this basically leads me to one bigger question, Miriam. Why do you want to work for me? With all you've told me, I can't imagine why you wouldn't want to take on high profile clients who might be able to get you acting work.”

Miriam reached into the satchel and pulled something out, setting it on the table before sliding it over to him. When it slid out from under her hand, he recognized it immediately. It was a copy of the Truth Knife CD, and he could see through the clear case that the CD sleeve was autographed by all the members of the band.

“When I arrived here, I was still somewhat lost in my own head. I was struggling to find satisfying work, and I had almost no friends to balance my frustrations over the mistakes I had made in my professional life. But I did have one friend, a woman named Noa, who I had served with in the IDF who had also moved to Los Angeles full time. On a particularly brutal night, the anniversary of my incident, she took me out drinking, to try and distract me from the day. We picked a random bar we'd never been to, a place called 'Zeroes,' and that night there was a Battle of The Bands going on, so we figured with seven bands playing three songs each, we would find someone we enjoyed listening to, and it took a while, but eventually, we did.”

Kevin knew just the night she was talking about. It would've been around two years ago, and the band had been in utter disarray. They were playing a handful of local shows to get prepped for their upcoming tour that was going to be cut overly short, and they'd been invited to play a local Battle of the Bands with a bunch of other bands who had recorded their debut albums but hadn't been released yet either. The promoter had called it “The Talent of Tomorrow Today!”

They'd put on a pretty good show, but a couple of the other bands were made up of industry veterans just in new configurations, and so they had much more experience in getting set up for an unfamiliar space, so Kevin's band had come in third, although they'd done okay in both t-shirt and CD

sales. The album had been a few weeks ahead of dropping, but the label had given them two hundred CDs to sell at any shows they did in advance, to try and drum up more anticipation.

“The style of music was unfamiliar to me,” Miriam continued, “but the words, your lyrics, they were unlike any songs I had ever heard. Your songs were more of poetry than I had heard, world-weary and yet somehow also unbowed, unbroken, determined and optimistic, in spite of the bleakness they saw the world surrounding them with.”

Kevin was a little taken aback. “Why, I didn't take you as a fan.”

“I am, Mr. Bishop. I bought your CD that night, and I have listened to it countless times, and each time, I have found new meaning, new insight from your words, and they have given me strength. I went to every local concert I could find you were holding, but then a little while ago, I saw you update the band's webpage to say that you had broken up, and everyone was going their separate ways, and I set up a Google alert to find out what your upcoming projects would be. Just after doing that, I received a phone call from your assistant Elizabeth, asking if I would be interested in providing protective services for you.”

That made Kevin a little nervous. “Did... how much did she tell you?”

Miriam laughed a little. “Let us be frank with one another, Mr. Bishop. You are not what I would objectively call an attractive man, but your words have transcended your form, and shown me the beauty that lays within your soul. That overcomes your physical form, and if you are at all the man your lyrics imply, then I would be privileged to call you a lover, if that's a thing you would be interested in. And your assistant said you were beginning a regimen of physical training and diet that would make your flesh a little less... doughy.”

He smirked, a bit amused and a bit annoyed, shaking his head. “I am, but there's only so much to work with here. I'm a musician, not an athlete. If you're expecting to wake up next to Chris Evans some morning, you're only signing up for disappointment.”

She shook her head slightly. “The idea of being with you brings an emotional satisfaction that overcomes the physical one, sir. The song, 'Adrift On The Horizon,' that sentiment, of being alone yet feeling so close to a turning point, that song became my anthem, knowing that there was someone else out there who understood what it was like to be burdened by some singular moment in time. What was that song written about for you?”

Kevin sighed, scratching at his forehead. “It was a reaction to being surrounded by drug addicts all day, dealing with being the only sober one surrounded by people who were only there for the party. I'd gotten so tired of watching bands fall apart due to drugs, that I wanted to write about it without coming across as preachy or condescending.”

“I can see that, now that you explain it to me, but it does not detract from how I feel the song affected me personally. Songs are like that – they take on meanings far beyond the songwriter's original intent, and reach people in ways they never anticipated. Do you find me an attractive woman?”

“I can't imagine anyone *not* finding you an attractive woman, Miriam. Yes, you are quite breathtaking.”

She looked aside in amusement. “I have had casting agents tell me that my nose is too big, my face is too long, my eyebrows are too thick, I would look better as a blonde, I would look better with bigger boobs and, more often than anything, I should dress 'more femininely.' Hollywood has no shortage of people willing to point out your flaws, Mr. Bishop.”

“That's Hollywood, I guess. You also understand that you wouldn't be my only lover? I wouldn't blame you if that was a dealbreaker.”

“Why would it be? Just because we would be familiar with each other sexually does not mean we would be exclusive emotionally. I am able to compartmentalize my sense of attachment, and if anything, I will channel it into my work.”

There was a buzz from the panel at the wall, to his surprise.

“Are you expecting someone else?” she said to him.

“No?” he said. “Ashley isn't due back from classes for a few more hours, and she has her own key to the gate. Natalie and Elizabeth are both here.”

“If Elizabeth's here, why didn't she answer the door for you?”

“I'm never going to be so fucking pompous that I don't answer my own door,” Kevin said.

“That's going to change.”

He moved up to the panel, and saw there was a van in front of the gate, with a florist sign on the side. “Yes?”

“Delivery for Mr. Bishop. It needs to be signed for,” the man at the van said.

“Yeah, okay,” Kevin said, pushing the button to open the gate. Miriam cursed underneath her breath, and while Kevin couldn't make out the words, the tone of her sentiment was clear. “What's wrong? It's just a delivery. It's probably someone from the studio sending a thank you package for agreeing to take the score after Hans Zimmer didn't work out.”

“I'll go with you, and I'll sign for the package. Let me show you why you need me, okay?”

“You're being overly paranoid, but okay, let's go.”

The two of them headed to the front door of the house, and Miriam stepped out first. Kevin was about to walk out with her, but she turned and pushed him to stay in the doorway. “Do not move from here, and you'll understand in just a moment,” she said, as the van pulled up towards the front of the house.

As soon as they were within range, the side of the van opened and two people hopped out rushing towards the house, one holding a camera, the other holding an extended microphone, shouting “Mr. Bishop! Is it true you're sleeping with Alice Karteaux? Is that how you were able to oust Hans Zimmer and steal the job on Emily Rouchard's new movie?”

On approach, Miriam kicked out the legs of the person holding the microphone, knocking them to the driveway while also forcing them back enough to trip up the person with the camera. “You're trespassing on private property under false pretenses, and you should know that it's absolutely illegal for you to do so.”

She grabbed the camera and tossed it back into the van with no concern for its welfare, the telltale shattering of glass ringing out from inside the vehicle. She grabbed the cameraman next, as the reporter with the microphone was struggling to get to his feet, tossing the man into the van after his camera before turning to face the reporter.

“You... you assaulted us! We've got film!”

Miriam grabbed the reporter's shirt in her fists, jerking the man to point his head in the direction she wanted. “You see that? That's one of the house's several external cameras, and it will show that you drove up a van onto private property illegally, and that you opened the side of the van and hopped out before it had even stopped moving, which made you look a great deal like an abduction team. Why don't you get off the property now, before I call the LAPD and have you arrested?”

“It's your word versus ours!”

She rolled her eyes at him, pushing him back to the van, slamming him against the side of it. “You utter prat. The gate communications are *recorded*. I have evidence of you lying to get in here. Last chance. Either you go now, or I let the police take you.”

The reporter glared at her and then climbed back into the van, pulling the doors shut, as Miriam waited and watched the van turn around and head back out of the driveway, the gate closing behind them. She turned around and headed back to the house, stepping in, closing the door behind her.

“I don't *know* if the gate communications are recorded or not, Miriam.”

She smiled quietly at him. “Well, now *they* think they are.” They walked back towards the office room, and ran into Elizabeth along the way.

“Who was that?” she asked them.

“TMZ or some other paparazzi parasite,” Miriam said. “I handled it. You must be Elizabeth. I recognize your voice from when we spoke earlier on the phone.” She extended her hand to Elizabeth,

who took it and shook it. "I'm Miriam Bitam, but I am certain you knew that already."

"I did, but it's still a pleasure to meet you in person, Miriam. Are we going to have the pleasure of your company?"

"That's up to Mr. Bishop at this point."

"Well, Kev?"

He nodded. "She seems to know what she's signing up for and she's already proven she would be more than an asset to the household, so if she wants in, I'd be a fool to say no."

"As we discussed on the phone, then?" Elizabeth asked Miriam.

"Yes. Short enough that it won't come loose, but not so short that it's choking me."

"I'll be right back," Elizabeth said, heading off. "Meet you in the bedroom!"

"We can do this later if you want," he said, leading her back towards the bedroom.

"Hush," she said. "I'd like to do this now, so you don't question my loyalty or commitment."

They headed into the bedroom, and Kevin wasn't entirely sure what to do, standing around waiting until Elizabeth showed up, holding out a necklace to him. It was as Miriam had described, enough to circle her neck with a little give, but not so long that it would be loose if she had to move quickly, the trademark pendant stone hanging from it. "Can I have your phone now, sir?"

Kevin reached into his pocket, fished out his iPhone and handed it over to Elizabeth. "Did she tell you about this little project of hers?"

Miriam grinned. "I thought she was joking. She's really taking a picture of each of your partners orgasming?"

"She is. You're okay with that?"

"I signed up for all of it, so let's get to it," she said, turning to offer him her back.

He stepped behind her, unclasping the lock of the necklace before sliding it around her neck, bringing it behind her. "You're sure?"

"How many times do I need to tell you to do it before you do it?"

"Just the once more."

"I'm *in*."

He hooked the curve of the mechanism into the loop and let it snap shut, and suddenly he felt her body slump back against him, his other hand moving to hold her up, realizing he'd forgotten that she would orgasm when she put it on.

"Fffffffuck that was fucking good," she moaned, her hand reaching up along her face, pushing that waterfall of hair out of her face. "That came out of nowhere. Get your fucking clothes off."

"Do you—"

"Get them off!"

Kevin was a little surprised, but quickly undressed, as Miriam slid off her jacket, revealing she did indeed have a shoulder holster with what looked like a 9mm pistol in it. She placed that on top of the dresser, then shed the rest of her clothes quickly, revealing a very nice figure, with generous breasts and a small rectangular strip of black curls above her pussy. "Sit down in the chair. Sit!"

He moved over the large armchair and slipped to sit down in it as Miriam approached him, letting him get a good look of her slender yet muscular form. She was fit, even more fit than Natalie, the physique of someone who was certain that her life depended on it. "Damn."

"You like?"

"Some casting agent thought you needed bigger boobs?" he asked incredulously. "They're *plenty* big."

"Mmmm.. bigger is always better, right?"

He patted his belly with a grin. "You tell me."

"Alright, point made," she giggled. She leaned down to touch her lips to his before pulling back. "Just get comfortable and let me do all the work."

She moved to slide up into his lap, reaching down to grab his cock, angling it to push it in,

sliding it inside of her pussy with a startled moan. “Shit,” she whispered.

“You okay?”

“It's just been a little bit, okay? I'm fine. Thank you for asking, though.”

Her hips thrust down into his lap quickly, as she pressed her breasts up against his tilted face, her hands holding onto his shoulders, doing her best to keep him lodged up against the chair. Her hips snapped forward, and she started to whip her hips back and forth in quick jerks, pressing down into him, trying to get him even deeper inside of her.

As deliberate and intentional as they had been with one another up until now, Miriam was galloping quickly towards her release, and their bodies ground against one another in quick intensity before her fingernails raked against his arm. Her moans turned shrill and he heard the click of his phone taking a picture, and he found himself cumming as well, which made her whine double in octaves before she shifted and moved to settle with her lips against his, their bodies melted together, relishing in each others afterglow.

“Don't forget,” Elizabeth said, setting down the phone on the dresser next to Miriam's weapon. “Dinner's in half an hour. See you both there!”

## **Interruption Two – For Those About To Rock (We Salute You)**

The next few weeks or so developed into a comfortable and delicious rhythm. Kevin was pleased to find that the women in his life all seemed to get along with each other very well, Miriam and Elizabeth doing their best to manage his work life, Natalie managed his diet and exercise routine, and Ashley made sure he didn't take himself too seriously.

Elizabeth had reminded him that he still had three spaces in the house to fill, but Kevin had told her he wasn't in any rush, as he already felt a little spoiled for choice. His majordomo seemed to think he might want to bring on a lawyer soon, as well as a personal physician, but Kevin hadn't felt any real pressure to get either of those.

Miriam, it turned out, actually enjoyed driving him around, saying she found the Tesla Model X a joy to drive, and even when she was working, she and he had developed a great rapport, able to carry on conversations about all sorts of things.

The one thing he *had* decided, however, was that women in his household needed to be exposed to more music, as it seemed like all four of them were barely familiar with anything that hadn't been released in the last ten years. From the Beatles and the Stones to Miles Davis and John Coltrane, he had a lot of teaching to do.

Work on Emily Rouchard's movie score continued a bit at a time, as the director and the star both wanted to make endless notes on what did and didn't work. If he'd been picky about it, it might have seemed overwhelming, but instead it basically just told him that they were very much invested in the movie, and wanted everything to land just right. Given their working speed and the amounts of adjustments he was doing, he figured he would be on the project for another month or two.

Kerry had also started talks with people who wanted to use Kevin's studio to record their album, and in this regard, Kevin was going to be incredibly cautious, as it meant letting a bunch of musicians into his home for eight hours a day five days a week, and he knew exactly what sort of pain in the asses musicians could often be. Dandy Randy was helping her sort through the proposals and demo tapes of the people who wanted to have Kevin produce their album, and Elizabeth tried to aid as best as she could in helping manage the process, but in the end, there was just so much going on, that Kerry and Randy had to take on the lion's share of screening.

He had narrowed it down to two options, a band from Dublin called Fire Castles that specialized in sort of psychedelic post-rock swells and a band from Madrid called Children Of Adventure that did good old fashioned sleazy rock'n'roll. Kevin suspected Fire Castles would be easier to work with, but that Children of Adventure would make the more interesting record, although they struck him as very hard partying people, and he worried that sort of attitude would get in the way of making the music. It was a decision he was still mulling over.

Elizabeth had also informed him that there was an official offer from Robert Rodriguez's people for him to be scoring a new movie he was working on called "One Desperate Man," something Rob had pitched to him as "the Mexican 'Falling Down,'" a description which had more than caught his attention. The script was going to be sent over to him in the next few days, and Kevin was scheduled to start having meetings with the director next week, something Kevin was looking forward to for multiple reasons.

Not only was Rodriguez an amazing director, one that Kevin had been a fan of for a long time, he was also a guitarist, meaning they could speak to each other in three languages – English, Spanish and music. And the idea that *he* would be scoring a Robert Rodriguez movie absolutely blew his mind. He couldn't believe how far he'd come in just a month or so.

Lastly, in stolen moments here and there, Kevin had started writing a new batch of songs, although he wasn't entirely sure what he was going to do with them, whether he wanted to form a new band, put out a solo record or just give them to some other band to record. There was a certain appeal to the idea of being a modern day Prince, just gifting hit songs to people because he didn't feel like

recording them himself. He was considering giving one of them as a closing song to Emily for her movie, a track that basically felt like a lost Truth Knife b-side. With Kerry on drums and him playing basically everything else, that wouldn't be far from the truth, since the rest of the band had often been too drunk or stoned to play their parts and Kevin had been forced to step in and record their parts for them instead.

In fact, he was particularly pleased with the song "Mind Heist" that he'd even had Kerry go in and record the drum part for him, so the song was basically done except for some final mastering adjustments to be made, and he intended to send it with his next batch of development mixes of the score over to Emily and see if she was interested in using it as a credits crawl for the movie, something they hadn't really talked too much about yet, because she and Alice were massively busy with the reshoots, having been doing twelve-hour days for two weeks straight, the action scene they were filming for the opening of the movie having gotten more complicated, because of the quickness with which it had been put together, so the logistics were constantly shifting, making it a nightmare, although Emily seemed confident that they were close to wrapping, and Kevin had no reason to disbelieve her.

All of this meant that Kevin had lost track of time.

When he woke up on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the house was completely empty. Ashley was on campus, Natalie was teaching classes, Elizabeth was downtown taking meetings and Miriam was going through the last of the training she needed to take in order to get her guard's license for the state of California. Since he'd moved into the house, he'd never woken up alone, and the feeling was eerie.

He got dressed and walked into the kitchen, finding that Natalie had left out a selection of fruit for him to have as his breakfast, along with a note explaining that he was on his own for the day, and that everyone would be home very late, so he shouldn't wait up for them. At the bottom of the note, Miriam had said that as long as he wasn't heading into any troublesome situations, he should be safe on his own for a day, and that he could consider the privilege of driving himself to be a special treat for the day, and that if he found himself truly in danger, he could call her to come to the rescue.

Kevin was surprised how empty the house felt with just him in it, but took the opportunity to explore it more a little, peeking his head into the each of the bedrooms the girls had claimed, just to look and see how they had customized their living space.

Miriam's room was spartan in its decoration, almost approaching looking like it was unlive in, but there were hints here and there, little things she'd left out on the dresser or the nightstand next to the bed. She'd slept in his bed a few times, but seemed to prefer returning to her own bed most nights. It seemed most of the women in the family were that way – once or twice a week they'd fall asleep next to Kevin, but the rest of the time, they were happier in their own rooms. Elizabeth had said it was mostly so that when eventually they did find him a wife, she didn't feel crowded by all the other women. It would be easy to get accustomed to always being in bed with him, she'd told him, and that wasn't something they could afford to do.

Elizabeth's room also was ridiculously neat, but had far more clutter to it, all the clutter neatly squared away however, making the room feeling insanely organized, everything compartmentalized and sorted. Both Elizabeth and Miriam made their beds with military precision, the sheets tucked in to make the beds almost look like hotel beds.

Ashley's room, by contrast, looked like an earthquake and a bomb had gone off simultaneously. Clothes were scattered around the room, draped over nearly every surface, and empty plastic water bottles formed a sort of forest bed. Most of the floor was covered with either clothes or books, and Kevin wondered how the hell she even got in or out of the room. Opening the door even a little had forced him to push some of the ground clutter in a bit.

Natalie's room was a balance in between, certainly looking more lived in than Miriam's, but nowhere near as chaotic as Ashley's did. Neither Ashley nor Natalie had made their bed, but Ashley's had also had a bunch of clothes stacked up on it, while Natalie's didn't. The doorway between Natalie's

bedroom and her attached bathroom had a chinup bar at the top of it, and there were a handful of weights scattered around the floor, as if she liked having them at hand if she felt the need to pump some iron every now and again.

They'd also gotten all of his stuff moved and settled in from his old apartment, he noted, as he strolled through the empty house, and the new place was finally feeling really like *his*. Putting some of his own stuff up on the walls, concert posters from gigs he'd played at or legendary shows he'd attended, had stripped away some of that sense that he was just living some place he wasn't supposed to be and was making it feel like his own home.

But the house being empty made it feel eerie.

It made him feel like he needed to get out of the house for the day.

While he didn't have Miriam to drive and look out for him, he didn't feel so helpless that he couldn't just drive himself somewhere and do some things on his own. Just for the day.

Just for *this* day.

He grabbed his phone, his leather jacket and his keys, hopped into one of the Teslas and headed down from the Hollywood Hills into Los Angeles proper, not even entirely sure where he was heading, just needing to get away from his house for a while.

Kevin found himself nearly down by the beach before it dawned on him that today was *that* day.

Today was the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Merlin hadn't been specific about what would happen to him on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, only that it would be something he'd called 'Midas Day.'

The day after he'd met Merlin, Kevin had done as much research as he could into the legend of King Midas, a character from Greek mythology who was known to have the ability for anything he touched to turn to gold, but beyond that, he couldn't find anything else that was all that prominent about the legend.

He parked the car near Venice Beach and walked the rest of the way, moving towards the edge of the water, having taken off his shoes so he could let the sand sift through his toes, all the while trying to run the story of King Midas through his head.

What did Merlin have planned for him? Why had the mage seemed so amused by the whole thing? And what sort of excitement could the mage have had planned for him on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of every month?

Kevin kept running these questions over and over in his mind as he walked along letting the water lap at his feet. He'd shown up relatively early, and the weather was chilly in the morning, so he hadn't seen many people milling around on the beach, but the sun was high in the sky now, and people were starting to show up to go swimming or surfing.

He was at the very edge of the water when it dawned on him.

The Midas myth was about how too much of anything wasn't good for you, how it wasn't wise to want more than you were capable of handling. It was about moderation. It was about restraint. It was about how being overexposed to anything would teach you to respect it.

"Oh *shit*," Kevin thought to himself as he looked back from the water and noticed that nearly every woman on the beach was looking his direction, some of them already starting to slowly approach him but most of them just looking onward, like he was the only thing of importance within their entire field of vision.

He stepped away from the water back onto dry sand feeling all the world like the protagonist in a horror film who just realized he's surrounded by zombies, or someone in Jurassic Park who just spotted a pack of velociraptors close enough to be on him in moments.

It wasn't just two or three women looking at him, either, but dozens, maybe even a hundred, of all sizes and shapes, most of whom were in swimsuits, but all of whom had the same almost predatory look on their face.

The most disturbing thing was that they were all *smiling*.

He tugged on his socks and pulled on his shoes again as fast as he could, as the army of women slowly started to close ranks around him, some of them approaching alone, some in packs, more than a couple of them rubbing their hands against their own nipples or crotch through whatever clothing they had on.

The closest woman to him was a Latina girl in her early twenties, fit as a fiddle, wearing a hot pink bikini that covered most of her breasts and not nearly enough of her toned ass. She caught his eyes on her, and licked her lips, curling a fingertip in his direction, making him immediately turn and head the opposite direction from her, still trying to make his way off the beach.

None of them were moving quickly so Kevin realized that as long as he was keeping at a quick pace, he could easily stay ahead of them, although he did notice that they seemed to be marginally accelerating just a little bit with each passing moment.

He sprinted across the beach, weaving between the women who seemed to be slowly working to close ranks as best they could, making him have to cut around clusters of them every so often before he finally reached the sidewalk, the parking lot still feeling like it was a million miles away.

There weren't anywhere near as many women around, now that he'd gotten off the beach, but the ones that were there were moving more quickly now, Kevin doing his best to keep constantly in motion, always drifting away from the largest packs of women he could see.

He couldn't see any easy and clear way to get to the parking lot, but on the other side, he saw there was an LAPD vehicle over by one of the food trucks, a male officer standing near it, enjoying an ice cream of some kind.

Kevin had never been so happy to see a cop in all of his life.

The pathway to the cop was relatively clear, and Kevin found himself jogging over towards him, seeing a handful of women starting to converge on that area. Kevin reached the cop and tapped him on the shoulder. "Officer, excuse me, but I think I'm in need of help."

The cop looked exactly the kind of person Kevin wanted right now – he was over six feet tall, square jawed, wide shouldered, bulging with muscles straining against the uniform like he was ready for a fight at the drop of a hat. Blonde hair, blue eyes, and a neatly trimmed beard that just screamed 'please fuck with me, it would make my day.'

"Oh, hello Mister Bishop," the officer, whose name tag read 'Wilton,' said to him. His face contorted in a warm and almost unnatural smile. "Happy Midas Day!"

And then the cop turned away from him, like he wasn't even there.

"Office, please, you need to help me!" Kevin said, grabbing the cop's shoulder.

The officer turned to look at him once more, this time a harder look on his face, as those steely blues stared him down, the man's voice sounding not entirely like his own. "Look, Mister Bishop. It's your first Midas Day, so I'm going to forgive that, but no man is allowed to help or even talk to you on Midas Day. This is your day, where every woman on the *planet* is going to want to fuck you. The later in the day it gets, the more intent the women are going to be and the less about your feelings they're going to care. The trial of the day ends when you fuck a woman you've never fucked before. All the women Morgana's introduced to your life are always going to be busy on Midas Day. No matter what you say or do, you will always be alone on Midas Day, until you fuck a woman you've never met before, or until you survive an entire Midas Day unscathed. But we both know that's going to be a complete impossibility," the cop said, with Merlin's voice mostly overlaid in his words. "Oops! They've almost got you, Mr. Bishop! Better run!"

Kevin looked over his shoulder and saw that less than thirty feet away, there were three women in their early twenties, all in workout clothes, and they had linked arms, as if they were going to use themselves as a barricade to prevent him from getting away.

He moved to run around them and headed towards his car in the parking lot, only to see the Tesla was surrounded by a ring of women who were grinding their asses against the surface of his

vehicle, facing outward, daring him to try and approach his vehicle.

“Of course they've got the fucking car,” Kevin muttered to himself before turning to head off on foot along the street. He needed to stay in motion, but everywhere he turned, he saw women of all ages, shapes and sizes suddenly turning to face him as soon as he got close enough for them to see him. He wondered if there was some sort of proximity to it, because clearly not every woman in Los Angeles was trying to come and get him right now, but it sure seemed like a whole hell of a lot of them were, as he saw women slowly filing out of the corner Starbucks, including a couple of the barristas. If there was any consolation, it was that they weren't in the classic arms up zombie pose, so at least it felt a little less creepy.

Not much, but a little.

As he kept making his way down the sidewalk, a long line of women was forming behind him, and now they were starting to jog a little, making Kevin have to work to keep a bit ahead of them, although something in him knew he couldn't keep up this tempo forever. In fact, he was starting to notice additional women coming out of buildings in front of him, and just like that, he was pretty sure he was out of escape routes.

Suddenly, an Escalade whipped up alongside of him on the street, and a door opened, as an Asian girl in her early twenties hopped out from the back seat, tossed him into the Escalade, then hopped back in, slamming the door shut behind her as she yelled, “Jade, *drive!*”

As the Escalade squealed off, Kevin realized he was in between two women, with two more in the front. The woman on the left of him was the woman who'd throw him into the car, dressed in tiny blue gym shorts and a blue sports bra. The woman on the right of him was an over six foot blonde girl, around the same age as the girl on his left, much bustier, however, wearing an outfit matching the girl on his left. “Don't you dare lay a finger on him, Elle, until we settle who's getting him,” the driver, a brunette girl said over her shoulder.

“But Jaaaaade,” the Asian girl whined, her hand rubbing down on his cock through his jeans, “he smells so fucking good, and I don' wanna wait...”

“Del?” the brunette said.

The blonde reached over and grabbed Elle's wrist, pulling her hand away from his crotch. “Jade said wait, so we wait,” she growled. “Otherwise I'd have had that dick buried in my fucking throat already, so cool it, bitch.”

The girl in the front passenger seat looked Indian, with long black hair and deep brown skin, pointed over to the side. “There, just drive up to the top of the parking garage, and that'll give us plenty of time.”

“Good thinking, Rose,” Jade said, turning the car into the parking garage, stopping only long enough to get a ticket from the entry machine before making the vehicle squeal, starting to drive in the circles needed to ascend the vehicle multiple floors.

“You ladies don't have to do this,” he said, daring to speak for the first time.

“But we *want* to do this,” Elle giggled.

“I'm just saying—”

“You can shut him up, Elle,” Jade said as the Escalade continued to rise floor after floor.

Elle took that cue immediately to grab him and shove her lips against his in a primal, almost uncomfortably forceful kiss, her pierced tongue blazing past his lips and into his mouth, as both of her hands held his head in place, the other girls squirming just a little bit, as he felt the car continue its journey.

After either only a few seconds or several lifetimes, he felt the vehicle come to a complete stop, as Del pushed Elle back, the Asian girl whimpering a little bit. “Okay, now we figure out who gets the big prize,” Rose said, looking back at him. At that point, Kevin realized they were *all* wearing the blue sports bras and short gym shorts, like some kind of uniform. He could see out the windows that they were up several floors in some kind of parking garage, but not on the roof.

“Draw straws?” Del asked.

“Did you bring straws with you, Delilah?”

The blonde giantess shook her head.

“Rock paper scissors tourney?” Rose asked.

“Yeah, okay, that'll work. Front seat bracket, then back seat bracket, then winner's bracket,”

Jade said.

“Just fucking *hurry*,” Elle whimpered. “Somebody's gotta fuck him before I go outta my fucking *mind*.”

Jade and Rose went first, Jade being Rose by throwing rock to Rose's scissors. Elle then beat Del by throwing paper to to Del's Rock. Jade and Elle sized each other up for a moment, then Rose counted off. “1, 2, 3!”

Elle had thrown paper.

So had Jade.

Rose counted again. “1, 2, 3!”

Another tie, both throwing scissors.

Rose counted a third time. “1, 2, 3!”

The frustration grew as both girls had thrown rock.

“Oh for fuck's sake,” Del snarled. “If you don't settle it this time, it's first who gets him, gets him, and I will beat you bitches to make sure it's me he's fucking.”

“1, 2, 3!”

Elle groaned as she looked at Jade's hand. Elle had thrown scissors again. And Jade had thrown rock. “You fucking bitch,” Elle grumbled, starting to open her car door, but Jade was already crawling into the backseat and onto Kevin's lap.

“Nothing beats rock,” Jade said, as Kevin got a good look at her for the first time. She had an athlete's body, but he was certain that sports bra of hers was doing more than its fair share of work, as she was easily the bustiest of the four. She peeled the bra up and over her head, letting those large tits with tan nipples spring free as she grabbed his head and shoved his face into them. “If you girls want to help, though, I wouldn't say no...”

“Do it yourself, bitch,” Rose grumbled, as she slid her hand down the front of her own shorts, starting to rub her fingertips against her pussy, Del doing the same.

Elle, however, reached in and unbuttoned Kevin's jeans, unzipping them before reaching in to fish out his cock while giving it a firm stroke. “God, he's got a nice dick,” Elle whispered, rubbing the palm of her tiny hand against the head of his cock to get some of the precum smeared against her skin, pulling it back, reaching to draw it up to her lips before Jade grabbed her wrist.

“Did I say you could taste him?” Jade said, light green eyes focusing on the other girl.

The look on Elle's face was that of a junkie in need of a fix. “Lemme taste him, Jade, and I'll help you ride him,” the Asian girl pleaded. “Please?”

“Oh alright,” Jade said with a grin, and as soon as she'd let go of Elle's hand, the girl had lifted her hand to her lips, her pierced tongue flitting out to lap up the tiny bit of cream on her skin, a whorish moan escaping her as soon as her tongue touched it, like an orgasm had just punched her in the gut.

“Motherfucker tastes so fucking good I think I came...” Elle mumbled.

“You bet your ass I'm gonna cum,” Jade said, looking down at Kevin, who felt more like a prop than a person right now. “Let's get that dick where it's supposed to be.”

She reached down and grabbed hold of Kevin's cock, tugging her shorts aside with her other hand, refusing to pull them off, just making way as she exposed her pussy and then pushed her hips down, sliding her soaked snatch onto his cock, and she was *soaked* Kevin realized, feeling himself slip right in until she settled on his lap, her hands smoothing along his head.

“Fuck that feels nice,” she purred at him. “You can touch my friends if you want. I think they might appreciate a helping hand, especially Elle. She really had her heart set on fucking you stupid.”

As soon as Jade said that, he felt each of his hands grabbed by a different girl, his left hand shoved down the front of Elle's shorts, his right down the front of Del's, doing his best to stroke and caress each girl's pussy, as Jade started to buck and bounce in his lap.

"That's it," Del hissed. "Fuck that slut's brains out. Fuck her stupid. Fuck a whole in her teenage twat."

"Teenage?" Kevin said, tilting his head.

"Mmmm... nineteen year old pussy too tight for you, old man?" Jade said, shoving her hips down into him again and again, making her ass clap against his thighs.

"God, you lucky fucking whore," Elle moaned. "I wanted to get fuuucked..."

"Well, you can't, Elle," Jade said. "Fuck, you're tops. Hammer my fucking hole, dude. C'mon. Pound my cunt like it owes you fucking money."

"You've got the wheel," he panted at her. "I've got my hands full."

"Oops!" Jade giggled. "Forgot!"

She started to bounce and thrust faster, clenching her pussy around his cock again and again, as he did his best to finger each of the girls flanking him. The sounds of four women squealing and whimpering in the confines of the car's interior was loud enough to be nearly deafening.

He wished he could've lasted longer, put up a better showing, but they were giving him no option, and before he knew it, he felt his body tense up as he started spewing inside of Jade's creamy twat, feeling it send her into an orgasm atop of him, the girls on either of his hands also starting to shake and quiver.

Jade slumped forward against him, as he finally was able to draw his hands back, but before he could get them out of the girls' shorts, he saw two hands grab onto Jade's hips and push her up and off his cock, which was starting to soften. Then he felt Rose's mouth push down onto his cock, her tongue lapping up at it, cleaning his shaft clean of both his and Jade's fluids. Once she had him mostly clean, she tucked his cock away and crawled a bit further forward, kissing Elle, who moaned as she tasted the few stray flecks of cum on Rose's lips.

"That was pretty fucking dope," Jade panted in his ear, still catching her breath. "But we gotta go, and so do you." She reached down to readjust her shorts as she pushed Rose back into the front passenger seat with her other hand. "C'mon bitches, we gotta get back to campus."

"Can't be driving topless," Rose laughed, handing Jade her sports bra back.

"Good point," Jade giggled, pulling it on before climbing back into the front seat. "Get him outta here."

Delilah opened her door, sliding out of the SUV. She grabbed Kevin by the arm and yanked him out of the car, his jeans still unzipped and unbuttoned, not even helping him to his feet, just pulling him onto the pavement a few feet from the Escalade before hopping back into it.

"Thanks for the fun!" Elle said, waving at him, as Del slammed the door in his face. Jade whipped the vehicle backwards and then zoomed off back down the parking garage.

The rest of Kevin's day was completely uneventful.

### **Interruption Three – Thunderstruck**

“I thought I told you *not* to leave the house while I was gone,” Miriam said to him for what felt like the seventh or eighth time in the last ten minutes. “I was *very* clear on the matter.”

“And I told *you* that I felt almost compelled to go out, and that it was also this damn Midas Day thing that I was warned about,” Kevin said to her with a sigh. “But I can see you don't believe me, which is why you're going with me to talk to the wizard.”

“You keep saying that,” Miriam replied, “as if constantly saying the word 'wizard' over and over again is going to make it sound less insane.”

Kevin shrugged. “I don't know what else you want from me. I'm being as open and honest about all of this as I can be, so it's up to you what you do and don't want to believe.”

“Why are we walking there, anyway?”

“It's not that far, and I feel like for some strange reason the only way to approach the bar is on foot,” he shrugged. “You don't believe in magic anyway, so you can see all this for yourself.”

“If I see anything that freaks me out, I'm yanking you out of the bar and taking you home.”

“I think it's really *not* up to you, but I guess we'll see. That's the place up there,” he said, as Geoffrey's Gambit came into view. The Liquor Outlet next to it was in far better shape than he'd seen it a few weeks ago. The window that had been plastered over with cardboard had been fixed, and bars had been put over each window to give the building more of a fortress vibe. Even with all the imposing bars and grating, however, the store looked less hostile than it had before, as if an actual effort was being put into keeping the building in less dismal shape. It wasn't until his second glance that he noticed one of the windows on the Liquor Outlet was now a stained glass image similar to those on the shop next door, this one portraying a giant man cutting into his own arm, the blood dripping out on top of a keg, the bottom of which filled the mugs of dozens of tiny people.

Geoffrey's Gambit itself hadn't changed at all, and still looked like it didn't belong in a Los Angeles neighborhood, with its wooden front and almost frontier vibe. None of its windows had any bars over them, and the only sign of outward modernity was the neon OPEN sign illuminated in the main front window, the lone bit of the tavern's windows that wasn't stained glass.

“You're telling me that there's a wizard in yon olde timey pub-y?” Miriam said.

“You just keep making jokes and we'll see if he turns you into a frog or something.”

Kevin and Miriam entered the tavern, and he waved to the bartender. “Hey there, Seamus,” he said to the giant monster of a man. “How they hanging?”

“A bit sore an' a bit t' the left,” he responded, his voice still dripping with Irish brogue. “He's in his booth in th' back waitin' for ye.” He reached behind the bar and pulled out a tall wide brimmed glass, setting it atop the wooden bar. “Your usual, I reckon? An' fer the lady?”

“The lady will have a club soda,” Miriam said. “She's working.”

“OooooOOooooo...” Seamus said with a laugh. “As m'lady wishes. I'll have'em back for you in two shakes, but best not to keep the old man waitin'.”

“I heard that, Seamus,” the voice of Merlin said from the back corner of the bar, as the bartender stuck his tongue out at him and tossed two fingers in the air in his direction.

The two of them walked deep into the bar, heading towards the booth in the far back corner. Merlin was nestled into it, his back to the door, and for half a second, Kevin wondered if that was bravado or just disregard on the mage's part.

Merlin looked much like he had last time Kevin had seen him. He still had fingers covered in rings, his hands covered with tattoos of all sorts of unusual symbols and drawings, all something Kevin suspected was part of the man's magical defenses. Instead of the pin stripe suit, however, now he was wearing a Panamanian hat and a Hawaiian shirt that hung incredibly loose over the man's wiry frame, his exposed chest covered in a thick nest of black and gray hairs. He also had on large wooden circular glasses over his eyes, and he was writing or sketching in a moleskin notebook. Off to one side was the

same copy of "Infinite Jest" he'd seen weeks ago, and he thought the bookmark looked as though it hadn't moved.

There was a woman seated across the table from him, somewhere in her early twenties, pretty enough, Kevin supposed, but it was Los Angeles, and nearly everyone was pretty enough. She was dressed quite provocatively, with an incredibly low cut top that seemed like her generous tits were threatening to spill forth at the slightest amount of encouragement. She had blonde wavy hair that hung down to her collarbone and a piercing set of light blue eyes that refused to look away from Merlin. In front of her was a rolled up scroll of parchment, and her hands were folded atop of it. Her lips were painted a bubblegum pink, and she was fidgeting impatiently.

"I signed your damn contract," she said to him. "So do I get it or what?"

He tapped his pen atop the page he'd been doodling on, as if he was considering it for a long moment before he set the pen down and moved to rip the single page out from his notebook, taking it in his slender hands, folding it in half before placing it down on the table, setting his palm atop of it.

"And you're quite certain you read that contract thoroughly before you signed it? You're willing to do all the things it asks of you without reservation? You have until you pick up the paper to change your mind," he said, sliding his palm and the paper across the tabletop from his half of the table to hers. "I wouldn't want to be accused of being unfair."

He lifted his hand up and she pushed the scroll across the table at him before grabbing the sheet of paper greedily, tucking it into her cleavage, as if pressed against her tits was the only place she felt like it would be safe. "Whatever it is you're going to ask me to do, it'll be worth it."

Merlin shrugged with that millenniums-old grin. "Then the only final piece of advice I have to you is to follow the instructions *precisely* in every way, shape and form. Practice the words out of context before you go through the ritual, because even the slightest mistake can have disastrous repercussions that would be no fault of mine."

"As long as you've got pronunciation guides on the paper, I'll get it just fine," she said with a viper's smile. "I'm quite exceptional with my tongue."

"I'm very certain that you are, my dear," Merlin replied, placing his hand over the scroll, taking it off the table, tucking it into a satchel that rested alongside him. "Go. Enjoy. I will see you soon enough to collect on my end of the deal."

"But the contract said—"

"I know exactly what the contract says, my dear, and I assure you that I will honor it to the letter."

The woman didn't seem to know how to respond to that, so she simply nodded and slipped out of the booth, sliding past Kevin and Miriam, keeping a comfortable enough distance that Miriam didn't seem to feel the need to put herself between them.

Kevin moved to slide into the booth and Miriam slid in next to him, positioning herself so she could keep one eye on both the door and the woman who'd just left, as if she expected her to return at any moment. "So you're a wizard, hm?" Miriam said to him. "You don't look like much."

"You also look too lovely to be a protectorate, daughter of Moses," Merlin said, amusement spread across his face, "but I won't prejudge if you won't. I imagine your beauty must be quite a detriment to your previous career choice. Your new role as the guardian of Morgana's savior won't have any such detriment. I suppose I do not have to guess as to the reason you've come by?"

"You told me to the day after what you called 'Midas Day,'" Kevin said to him. "What the fuck was that?"

"That, my dear boy, was you getting a little touch of chaos, something to liven up your life some, and the gift that Morgana has given you," the wizard said, reaching over to his cup of tea, picking it up to take a sip from it. "Did you enjoy it?"

"I think I'm lucky to have *survived* it," Kevin said, knowing the expression on his face was one of discomfort.

“Pish posh, bish bosh, boyo,” Merlin replied. “You will always be as safe on Midas Day as you would any other, if not safer.”

“Somehow my bodyguard mysteriously found herself busy on that day, and I can't say that makes me particularly safe.”

“Yes, well, the first Midas Day has to establish some of the ground rules of the game, and I know your guardian is extremely capable, so I simply diverted her for the day, but she will be by your side for all the rest, if it makes you feel any better, however *her* safety is not as guaranteed as your own.”

“So what the hell *is* Midas Day?”

“I thought it was rather obvious, but I suppose I can explain to you a few of the broadstrokes and you can simply discover the rest.”

“Or you could tell me everything?”

“My boy, what would be the fun in that?” Merlin grinned, taking a sip from his tea. “Every Midas Day, you have a challenge before you, but I won't reveal what that challenge is. What I will say is that every hour that goes by where you haven't completed the challenge, your lure range expands, and I mean that by distance not desirability. You'll become ground zero of your own little beautiful apocalypse. You fail the day when you have a sexual release with a woman you've never had one with before. But be warned, the longer the day goes on without success or failure, the more intent the women will get. By sundown, they will show a sort of relentlessness you have yet to witness in your lifetime, the sort of thing that will both wind you up and chill you to the very bone. One at a time, several at a time, working in tandem, competing with one another... you will be swarmed with female flesh en masse until you cannot even trip without falling face first into some pussy.”

“What a way to go, I guess,” Miriam said with a laugh. “And you ensure his safety?”

“As much as anyone possibly can, my dear. None of the women will harm him, and no women who would bring sickness to him will look his direction. Also, none too young nor too old. I want him to enjoy the experience, even if it is lined with a bit of fear.”

“More than a bit,” Kevin replied. “Yesterday I was chased off a beach, run down the street, grabbed into a van, mauled by four women and then dumped on the side of the road without so much as my pants pulled up. That was awkward.”

“But you *did* climax with them, didn't you?”

“Yes, but almost against my will.”

Merlin rolled his eyes. “You can lie to yourself, Kevin, but lying to a mage is significantly more difficult. You will always *enjoy* Midas day, but it will come with moments of shock and fear, points where you feel like you are being overwhelmed.”

“You're not going to tell me what the challenge is, though?”

“If I told you that, it would become too easy,” the wizard laughed. “But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a chance to win a single clue, something to start you down on the right path.”

“What do I have to do?”

“Nothing,” Merlin laughed. “Which is what the problem's going to be. Seamus, can you run next door and grab Victoria?”

The bartender nodded, then realized the wizard couldn't see him nod. “Aye, m'lord.” He glared at Kevin for a second. “An' don' you be helping yourself to the bar while I'm gone.”

“You certainly do like your games, don't you, Merlin?” Miriam said to him. “What if I were to tell you I didn't believe in magic?”

“I would ask what it would take for you to believe me?”

“Something completely impossible, something indisputable, something that there is no possible way it could be false or fabricated.”

Merlin grinned, mischief glimmering in his eye. “I could provide such a thing, but as with all things, there is a price. I will set this price low, however, and all it would cost you is a secret. One

singular secret.”

“I'm full of secrets,” Miriam said, her own eyes full of mirth. “I'm certain I could spare one.”

“Ah, but you don't get to choose which one. I will extract one from you, one of real worth, one that you won't even know you'll be saying until the words have already left your lips. Is that a secret you're willing to surrender?”

“Only if what's given in return is of equal value. Not some quick thing, but something worth the price that's paid.”

“Oh, I think that can be arranged,” Merlin said, picking up his notebook, looking through the pages. “But for something like that, there will be one more stipulation with it.”

“And what's that?” the Jewish girl next to him asked.

“You will have to care for what I am going to gift you, for the rest of your life,” he told her.

“This is no momentary flash in the pan. I am going to bond you to another living creature, give you a companion for your life. Are we agreed?”

“Since I don't believe in your magic anyway,” Miriam said, “then I agree. The deal is struck.”

Merlin chuckled, tapping a page on his book. “Then let us begin. The price and then the profit.” He read a few lines from his book and then his fingertips crackled for a moment, a spark leaping between him and Miriam. “Alright, you may pay the price.”

“I don't...” Miriam said, a confused look crossing her face before she turned to look at Kevin, surprise on her face as she found herself beginning to speak. “Kevin, I must confess to you that I have been listening to your album nonstop since my arrival, and while we've become good lovers, I want more than that. I have fantasized about bearing your child, about you shoving your cock inside of me and breeding me, not like a woman but like a bitch in heat, like a beast, to be pumped full of cum over and over again until I know for certain there's no way you couldn't have knocked me up. I do not want to be your wife. I do not want to be your number one. But I want to give you the greatest thing I am capable of. I want to give you a child, from my loins and yours. I want to be bred. I am so scared to admit this, but I want this more than anything I have ever wanted in my entire life.” She looked at him, and slapped her hand over her mouth, her eyes starting to water up before she peeled her hand away, looking at Merlin. “You *bastard*,” she hissed at Merlin, pointing a finger angrily at him. “If you do not live up to your end of this deal, I will end you.”

The dark skinned mage wagged a finger back at her. “Of course I will live up to my end of the deal. Watch and learn what true magic looks like.” He grabbed a pack of matches from next to his tea and opened the booklet, tearing a single one off before striking it, letting it spring to flame. Once a lit, he tossed it upwards into the air and the flame began to swirl and bend until a form began to solidify within it.

A few seconds later, a tiny little green dragon, no bigger than a few inches, landed atop of Miriam's fingertip, clinging to it with minuscule claws that sunk into her skin enough to him give purchase, but not so deep that they broke the skin.

“Miriam,” Merlin said to her, “I give you Strazo. Say hello Strazo.”

The dragon blew a tiny jet of fire into the air.

“What...” she said, looking at the dragon in shock and astonishment. “Is... is he real?”

“As real as you and I,” Merlin told her, “but most people will look at him and think he's just a gecko or some other kind of lizard. He'll keep his wings concealed when anyone's around who shouldn't know about him, and he'll outlive you, so you needn't worry.”

“He looks so tiny and delicate, though,” Miriam said quietly, like fawning over a newborn puppy.

“He's not, though,” the mage told her. “If you were to sit on him, for example, you're more likely to damage your own ass than you are to do a scrap of pain to him. You're quite the creature, aren't you Strazo?”

The tiny dragon blew two tiny rings of smoke into the air and then shot a nearly invisible stream

of fire through the center of them, almost seeming like he was laughing.

“Do you believe in magic now?” Merlin said as Strazo took flight once more, spiraling around the air a bit before landing on the edge of the bowl of pretzels, dipping his spiked tail into it to snag himself one, bringing it up so he could gnaw on it.

“I... I suppose I must,” his bodyguard said. “What do I feed him?”

“He'll tend to his own needs but I have learned over the years that his particular strain of dragon loves salty things, so it wouldn't go amiss to leave out a bowl of pretzels.”

The door to the bar opened again and Kevin leaned outward enough to see Seamus walking into the bar, followed by a blonde woman who looked like she was in her early twenties, wavy nearly platinum blonde hair hanging down past her shoulders with a single blue streak down the middle of it, dressed in a large Van Halen t-shirt and cutoff jean shorts, her eyes behind large black-framed glasses, which made her give off a little bit of a hipster vibe.

“Got Victoria,” Seamus said, as he moved behind the bar, seeming to go back to work.

Victoria, on the other hand, shuffled quietly across the room, heading straight back to the booth. Her mouth opened and she said something to Merlin in a language he didn't immediately recognize. After a few seconds, he was fairly certain it was Czech, when Merlin was responding to her, his intonation changing, clearly speaking the language fluently. The woman looked at him and asked Merlin another question, to which he nodded and she shrugged.

Merlin tilted his head out to look over to the bartender once more. “Seamus, can you bring me the egg timer please?”

The bartender grumbled, but then grabbed an egg timer from behind the bar, carrying it over to the corner booth. “Y'know, y'could've just magicked the bugger over instead of making me lug it to you.”

“I truly and well could've,” Merlin admitted, “but where's the fun of that?” He picked up the egg timer, as Victoria got down on her hands and knees and crawled under the table. “So to win this, all you have to do... is nothing.” He turned the egg timer to two minutes and let it start to tick, as Kevin felt Victoria's hands unbuttoning his pants.

“Now wait a minute...”

“It shouldn't be all that hard, if you'll forgive the pun,” Merlin said. “If she can get you off before the egg timer goes off, you lose and she wins, and she'll get what she's playing for. If she doesn't, then you win, and I'll give you a clue.”

Kevin was about to reach beneath the table, but felt his hands suddenly affixed to the table as Miriam leaned in to glance beneath the table, as Victoria fished his cock out and slowly wrapped her lips around the head of it.

“You can do this, Kev,” Miriam said to him, placing one of her hands on top of his. “It's purely a matter of mind over matter.”

Kevin inhaled a slow deep breath, but Victoria *was* an excellent cocksucker, and it was hard to think. He opened his eyes and focused carefully on Merlin. “Tell you what, Merlin. Double or nothing. If she wins, I'll tell you a secret of my own. But if she doesn't, not only do you give me my clue, you also give Victoria whatever she's playing for.”

The blonde's mouth descended onto his cock, her tongue lashing along the underside of the head, her breath hot on his skin. Her fingertips were soft and kind, as they fondled his ballsack, and he was certain she must not have spoken any English, because she was working her lips up and down, caving her cheeks.

“You have a ridiculous level of confidence, Mister Bishop, but I have to admire that. You're just game for anything, and I find that refreshing after centuries of people being reticent to have a little fun when magic rolls into their lives,” Merlin said, sparks rolling across the tops of his knuckles, moving like a serpent of energy slithering over his skin. “But what sort of immortal trickster mage would I be to turn down a bit of sport? You're on.”

Kevin's nostrils flared, doing his best to remain in control of the moment, even while Victoria's lips worked of his dick with an accomplished skill that was taking every scrap of willpower he had. Despite the fact that he was now regularly sexually active, Victoria was going at him like her very life depended on it, raking her fingernails along the underside of his ballsack.

"Just breathe, Kev," Miriam said to him. "In and out. Don't let this pissant magician control this moment. You have control, not always, not often, but for now, in this singular point in time, you are in control of everything. Do not surrender. Do not give in."

Regardless of how much he was fighting, he suspected that he might lose, especially as Victoria started to bob her head up and down quickly, forcing the tip of his shaft into her throat, doing everything she could to possibly coax his release from him.

He closed his eyes, doing some of the breathwork that Natalie had been teaching him, also trying to tap into the meditation practices Elizabeth had been making him do three days a week. With Miriam's hand on top of his, he just needed to imagine Ashley teasing him to incorporate all the girls in his family into his resistance, and that made things much easier, because no man is an island, and he had a whole family standing behind him.

Once he pieced together how all the parts were making him stronger, he found the rest of the time just flashed by and the egg timer dinged before knew it.

As soon as it did, the mouth lifted off his cock, not even putting it away, moving to crawl out beneath the table, standing up, her head refusing to lift up, looking down at her folded together hands, tears starting to trickle down her cheeks until Merlin spoke again.

Kevin assumed Merlin was explaining to her that he'd bartered for her to also win, but for all he knew of Czech, he could've been reciting nursery rhymes to her. Still, after the mage finished speaking, she looked up at him, then over at Kevin, her lip quivering. She leaned across Miriam to wrap her arms around Kevin's neck, giving him a firm hug before pulling back, looking back down again. She said one more thing to Merlin, and he replied as quickly, and then the girl made her way to the door and out of the bar.

"What was she playing for?" Kevin asked the mage.

"She wanted to be reunited with her sister, Ursula, who still lives behind the Iron Curtain, married to a rather wretched man. In sharing in your victory, I will have to go and remove Ursula from his presence and bring her here to the states," Merlin said. "Why would you even do such a thing, to stake a woman you didn't even know to profit from your success?"

"A rising tide lifts all boats," Kevin replied immediately.

"You know, of course, that's horseshit."

"It's an ideal," Kevin said with a grin. "And if I'm not trying to live up to it occasionally, what am I even doing with my life?"

"Well played indeed, sir. Then let me provide you with your clue. To escape the trap that is Midas Day, you must do something specific on that day, a thing you have never before done in your lifetime, something you would certainly remember were you to have done it."

"That's a rather open-ended clue," Miriam said.

"It's better than nothing, though, wouldn't you agree?"

"It's almost nothing," Kevin sighed.

"Fine. Then I will add that it's in keeping with your other gifts from Morgana. And if a season's time you are no closer to an answer, then you can come and play again for another clue."

"A season's time means three more Midas Days," Kevin pointed out.

"Allow me to at least have some fun, Kevin," the mage said. "Now I think I should take my leave of you, so perhaps you should finish what the other girl started, my dear."

Miriam suddenly leaned forward and pushed her head down onto his cock, but as good as Victoria had been, Miriam knew him intimately, and within moments, Kevin felt his own head leaning back as he began to cum into Miriam's mouth.

When she lifted her head up, and Kevin tilted his head back down, they both found that Merlin had disappeared into the wind.

## **Chapter Five – Friday I'm In Love**

For the next few weeks, Kevin simply went about his new life as best he could, trying to think of everything as normal when it was anything but. It hadn't been all that long ago that he'd been two bad weeks away from his life imploding. But since Morgana's gift had fallen into his lap, his life was a polar reversal of what he'd felt like it was before. He kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, and yet it seemed more and more likely it wasn't going to.

He'd split his time between making sure the studio was in working condition and getting the score done for Emily Rouchard's upcoming film, although Elizabeth informed him that he was going to need to attend some of the reshoots in a week's time. After that, he would give Emily a show of what he'd been working on overlaid on her footage, so she could get a feeling of how all the scenes were coming together. She'd loved the "Mind Heist" track and told him that not only was she going to insist it be the end crawl for the film, she wanted to put it out as a single as well, and do the full promotion behind it. She even wanted him to use the Truth Knife name for the track itself, something he was still giving serious consideration to. He *did* own the name, and Kerry had played on the track, so it wasn't truly a complete solo piece, but he wondered if the members of the band he'd kicked out would come crawling for a piece of the action. Elizabeth assured him it wouldn't be a problem, but he still wanted to take some time to think about it, something Emily told him he could naturally have.

Kevin was proud of his work, more confident now more than ever that the path of movie composer was a great fit for him, something that certainly made Elizabeth more at ease, as she was already starting to book him for more projects. In addition to the movie stuff, she also had a stack of twelve demo CDs he needed to listen to, a chance for him to decide which band he was going to be producing first, in between composing gigs. He'd asked her why it was so many options, and Elizabeth reiterated, as she often did, that he needed to make his own decisions in these matters, and where he saw potential, she might have accidentally overlooked it. She'd done an initial screening and thrown out all the duds and bad style matches, and had whittled it down to those twelve.

Ashley was getting more involved in her classes, something that Kevin actually found relaxing, and it made their encounters more intense, more meaningful, the distance acting as a bonding agent rather than pushing them apart.

Insisting that Natalie continue teaching her classes had also helped with that, as absence was indeed making the heart grow fonder.

Elizabeth always seemed to be around when he realized he needed something, but busy when he was just spinning his wheels, so he couldn't use her as a distraction for when he should be working.

And Miriam, it turned out, had two modes – working in public and relaxing in private. The two couldn't be much further apart than they already were. Whenever they were out in public, she was all business, no sign of their personal and sexual relationship, but when they were back in the relative security of the house, she opened up and warmed up significantly.

The press had tried on the idea that he was screwing Alice Karteraux, claiming it was how he had landed the gig, but Emily herself had gone on record saying that Hans Zimmer simply was taking the project in a different direction than what she wanted, and cited that old Hollywood chestnut – creative differences, although it was clear she meant it. Once the director had made it repeatedly clear that the decision was hers and hers alone, the story had almost died overnight.

He'd also gone and had his first couple of preliminary meetings with Robert Rodriguez about the "One Desperate Man" project he was lined up for next, and the conversations had gone remarkably well, with the two of them even spending some time jamming out together on a pair of acoustic guitars, something Rodriguez's assistant had filmed for eventual inclusion in the behind the scenes for the movie later on. They were talking about Pedro Pascal for the lead, and while the deal wasn't set in stone yet, Rob seemed to think it was only a day or two before the ink was drying on the contracts.

It had been rather a remarkable couple of weeks, and his second meeting with Rodriguez had

ended at 6:30 on a Friday night, something that Kevin groaned about, as it meant Miriam would be driving him back to the house through LA's legendarily horrible Friday night traffic, but instead of heading up to the house in the hills, he noticed Miriam had taken the car southward.

"Aren't we heading back to the house?" he asked her.

"Negative, sir," Miriam said to him, her tone professional and in control. "You have a dinner appointment tonight that Miss Elizabeth told me about, so I'm making sure you get to that."

Kevin's face scrunched up in confusion. "I don't remember her telling me anything about it."

"I'm sure it just slipped her mind, sir."

"Do you know what it's *about* or who it's *with*?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir."

Kevin harrumphed, even if he was a little amused by the whole thing. "Some help you are. How the hell am I even going to know who I'm meeting?"

"You have a table reserved for you at Moonshadows, sir, so I supposed you'll find out when you sit down to eat," Miriam said. Kevin thought he saw a flicker of a smile on her face, but decided he must have been imagining it, because Miriam wasn't one for letting her guard down. "It's a 7:30 dinner, sir, and by the time it's done, I'm certain we'll have a much easier time coming back up the house, as traffic will have died down."

"Traffic doesn't die down until Saturday morning, Miriam," he grumbled. "You've been in Los Angeles long enough now that you should know that."

"Yes sir, sorry sir."

She certainly didn't *sound* sorry.

As the call pulled up to the parking lot of Moonshadows, Kevin was surprised to see it nearly empty, an impossibility on a Friday night. The place was one of the most popular restaurants in Malibu, and was always packed with customers. Miriam pulled the car up to the front of the place, as a doorman moved to open Kevin's door for him.

"Don't worry, Kev. You can go in safely. I'll just park the car and meet you inside in a little bit. The person you're meeting with, her security's already swept the place."

"Her?" Kevin said, starting to get out of the car. "I thought you said you didn't know who I was meeting with..."

"Mmm. I did say that. Be in in a few, sir."

The valet closed the car door, and Kevin could swear he heard Miriam laughing inside as she drove the car over to the parking lot herself. "This way, sir?"

Kevin followed the man up the stairs and to the front doors of the building, as the valet held them open for him, the maitre dee waiting inside for him with a giant smile on his face. "Ah, Mister Bishop. Perfectly on time, as expected. Your companion is waiting for you at your table out on the terrace, where you will have the best possible view of the ocean while you dine."

He chuckled, feeling more than a little under dressed for the fancy restaurant, wearing a Cure t-shirt and long black jeans, but if the staff wasn't going to say anything about it, he wasn't either. "Did you happen to catch her name?"

The man laughed a little nervously. "Mister Bishop, you truly are as funny as they said you would be. This way, please." Inside of the restaurant, there was only one table with place settings, a small circular table with two plates, apparently for whenever it got too cold outside to continue eating. He tapped the man, making him stop walking. "Yes sir?"

"Please set up another table so that my bodyguard and my companion's security detail can also have dinner. Whatever they want to eat, you can add to my tab."

He looked a little caught off guard and then shrugged. "Your companion is picking up the tab for dinner tonight, but if you wish us to cater to your staff, it would of course be a great honor for us. Once you're seated, I'll see to it."

They moved across the unnaturally empty room and over to the balcony terrace along the side

of the building facing the ocean, where he could see a single woman seated at a table. As he approached her, he felt like he was expected to recognize her, but truth be told, he truly didn't.

She was dressed in a very expensive looking dress that was high cut at the top and low cut at the bottom, but with a long daring slit from the collarbone down to her naval, and matching daring slits from the ankles up almost to her hips. She was of Indian heritage, if he had to hazard a guess, her hair onyx black and her skin a coffee brown. Her brown eyes were covered by large octagonal shaped glasses that looked both trendy and still somehow perfectly matched her face. She was unlike anyone Kevin had ever had in his life before, and she was stunningly beautiful.

“So are you this mysterious appointment I have that somehow made its way onto my calendar without me knowing about it?” she said to him, her voice utterly dripping with a London accent. “They said I was likely to recognize you on sight, but I am afraid I simply don't.”

“They told me the same thing, but I'm afraid I don't recognize you either,” he said to her as she stood up, offering her hand for him to shake. He brought it to his lips to kiss instead. It was an utter cheeseball move, but he just couldn't help himself. “Kevin Bishop, musician, composer and general gentleman rogue, I suppose.”

“Fatima Davies,” she said, a tiny whisper of a smile crossing her lips when he kissed her hand. “But I'm sure you knew that already, and were just being courteous.”

“Nope,” he laughed, moving to sit down in the chair opposite her. “I honestly, genuinely have no idea who you are.”

Fatima openly grinned at that, craning her head to one side, as if she didn't believe him. “No! Really?”

“Really,” he said, grabbing the water glass, taking a sip from it. “Should I?”

“I was on Fortune's Thirty Under Thirty list for the last two years straight.”

“Oh!” he said, nodding like it meant something to him. “Well done? I guess?”

She relaxed a little, as if suddenly she felt like she didn't have to put on an act any more. “You truly haven't the foggiest who I am?”

“You know what could fix that,” he said with a laugh. “You could *tell* me who you are, and then I might know what the Fortune Thirty Under Thirty even is.”

She began to laugh, shaking her head wildly. “Fuck no! We are going to have dinner like two regular normal people on a blind date, and we are not going to talk about my work until the very end of the evening, if at all. You hear me?”

He winked a little bit. “You're tempting me with a mystery you're dangling before me, and challenging me to be patient and allow things to unfold? Very well, Miss Davies, I can play your cunning game and allow you to work your feminine wiles upon my unwitting innocence.”

“If you're innocent, I'm a slaggy wag from Cheshire,” she cackled.

“I'm going to assume those words mean something to someone from the UK, but it's all just strange sounds to me,” he said. “So, we're thinking our assistants set this up as a blind date, are we?”

“It's certainly well in line with the kinds of things my assistant might do,” she said with a nod. “Yours? Sound like it's in her wheelhouse?”

“Sounds like it's the sort of thing she'd build a summer cottage around. But she's got my best interests at heart, so I shouldn't be too harsh.”

For the next few hours, Kevin had what could only be described as his first real date in half a decade, as he spent time learning as much as could about Fatima without brushing her career. Her mother was from India, her father from London. She had a home there as well as one in LA, and claimed dual citizenship about five years back. And whatever it was she did for a living, it kept her mercilessly busy.

Fatima spent as much time as she could changing the subject from herself to him. She'd never heard of Truth Knife, and while she'd heard of Alice Karteaux, she seemed a bit unimpressed by Kevin's reveal that he was scoring her next movie, although the more they talked, he decided it wasn't

that she was being dismissive, but more that she was interested in him without his career coming into it, as if it was a safety valve to prevent her from talking about her own.

There was an immediate spark of attraction, at least on his part, and he found that within the span of a couple of hours, they were already comfortable enough with each other to finish each other's sentences every now and then.

While she didn't seem to care all that much about his more recent time composing, after his first story about some of the nightmares of touring, it was practically all she wanted him to talk about, as if the life of a C-list rock star was the most fascinating thing she could hear about.

She confessed that ever since she had arrived in the States, first to attend university then later to live, she'd wanted to simply rent a car and drive from one ocean to the other, seeing as much of the country in the middle as she could. He told her that he'd done that drive, and while there were so many parts of it that were majestic and should not be missed, there was often a whole lot of dull nothing in between them. She said to him that if he went with her, she thought it wouldn't dare be a boring trip.

They'd gone through an appetizer and the main course before Kevin even noticed that Miriam was sitting at a table inside across from a rather large muscular black man dressed in a very expensive suit, while a white guy in a matching suit stood by the main door of the restaurant. Miriam raised a glass of red wine in salute to him, smiling his way, so he raised a glass of water back at her.

The waiter told them that they were working on the dessert, if they wanted to move their meal inside, at which point Kevin noticed the time, and that it was nearly ten o'clock. He and Fatima had been talking and laughing for hours, and the time had just blinked away.

When the two of them walked inside, the speakers inside the restaurant played a familiar little drum fill before a bouncy guitar riff cut through the tension of the air. "Would you like to dance?" he asked her, as she seemed to recognize the sound of The Cure's "Inbetween Days," an uptempo number far too fast to slow dance to, and yet not so fast enough to lose yourself in it.

She giggled, and the two of them started to wiggle their bodies and throw their arms around in shapes as the song's delightful chugging rhythm carried them along, moving together and apart again and again, as he clearly mouthed the lyrics and she started to doing the same.

*"Come back come back come back to me..."*

It was only a three minute song, so before they knew it, the song had climaxed and faded, as Miriam and the two other security guards clapped at them. Fatima blew a raspberry at them before she started laughing all over again, heading over to their table inside the restaurant, where two decadent chocolate lava cakes awaited them.

"God, this was *so* much fun," Fatima told him, digging into the lava cake. "I think my assistant's always been trying to set me up with real estate moguls and tech bros and movie stars, like I'm going to be fucking impressed by any of that lot, you know?" The more the evening had gone on, the more the ice queen demeanor had melted away to be replaced by the kind of girl he'd always expected to run into in any old London pub on a Friday night. "I could tell you who I am, and I bet you couldn't be bothered to give a damn."

"You could tell me and find out, I suppose," Kevin told her in between bites of the decadent chocolate. "I mean, I've been patient and haven't asked. The mystery is intriguing, but so many times when you know the magician's tricks, it loses some of the luster."

"Oh dear," she said in mock distress. "I certainly hope that won't happen to me. But I can't dance around it all night, I suppose. My father is Glenn Davies."

"Ah, I see, that explains everything," he lied. "The infamous Glenn Davies." He nodded. "Shipping magnate?" he guessed.

"Prick!" she cackled in amusement before she paused, looked at him again, as he shrugged at her, and she only laughed harder. "Omigawd, babes, you really don't know who he is, do you?"

He nodded with a smile. "I'm afraid I really don't know who Glenn Davies is."

"English footballer? Helped them win the World Cup back in 1966? I'm his youngest daughter."

"I don't really follow sports, I'm afraid," he told her with a sort of embarrassed smile. "I'm guessing by the name 'World Cup' it's a big tournament?"

She rolled her eyes, almost mind blown by his lack of knowledge regarding football. "Yes, dear, the biggest one in the world. That's why they call it the World Cup."

He shrugged a little bit, a wry smile on his face. "I know that baseball has the World Series, but you know which country's won that every year since it started? Shocking. So sometimes names aren't something events live up to."

"Yes, well, people seem to think that since I'm the daughter of football royalty that I'm going to have a deep interest in the game, when I really couldn't care less. He founded an athletic apparel company after he retired from football, and I think he always intended one of my older brothers or sisters to inherit it, but none of them seemed to make any good business decisions in their test runs at the company, whereas my first idea expanded our market nearly 50%."

"Oh yeah?" Kevin asked. "What was your idea?"

"I convinced Father to add sports bras to the company's lineup," she said confidently. "There'd been a sort of ingrained sexism in the company since it was founded, that only boys needed athletic gear, and when I told him that we should at least try testing the waters with gear for girls, I think everyone expected me to fall flat on my arse, but it was an overnight success, and now I'm in line to eventually take over the company. GDGear is one of the top five companies making athletic wear these days, and Dad's already turned down at least a couple of offers from UnderArmor to merge, so that should tell you something."

"It tells me that you're willing to stand up to your father and all the rest of the idiots at the company, and that's a very admirable and sexy trait," he told her. "I have to admit, though, I'm surprised a former footballer is that well known here in the States, even with having won the World Cup. '66 was quite a long time ago."

She reached across the table and playfully slapped him on the arm. "Yes, well, like I said, I'm the youngest of nine children, born in 1989, and Dad was 45 when I was born. Besides, most people know him these days from the telly rather than his footie days."

"Your dad's on television?" Kevin asked, finishing up the last of his lava cake. He hadn't meant it to be a gotcha question – he was just making conversation, but it seemed like the very tone of it confused her.

She looked at him in a combination of delight, surprise and awe. "You genuinely don't know, do you? How is it possible you live in Hollywood and have literally no idea about me or my family?"

Kevin shrugged a little. "One thing I've noticed having lived out here for a while – everyone always seems to think their reach is much bigger and broader than it is, because we all sort of live in an echo chamber. For a while, everyone I met was talking about how much they loved my old band, but at the end of the day, I know what the record sales were like. I remember what the turnouts for the shows were like. I have a much better idea of what the band's *actual* reach was, and barring some lucky breaks here and there, we were never even close to successful. We were a critic's darling band at best. But if I believed the hype of everyone around me, you'd think we were the next Rolling Stones, cut off before being allowed to mature to our prime. So I try not to buy into the bullshit people are selling. When someone says they're a fan of my music, I always just ask them which song is their favorite. If they can't list the title of even a single song, I know it's all for show. So I don't try and feed anyone's ego, and I never lie and say I'm familiar with shit that I'm not. The whole city could use with a bit of ego deflation if you ask me."

She reached across the table and grabbed his hand in hers, a soft and kind gesture that caught him a little by surprise, and he felt his heart skip just a beat or two in excitement. It was a sort of kind and intimate moment. "I couldn't agree more, Kevin," she said to him, smiling at him, unable to look away from his eyes. "Anyway, he's on a show called 'Sugar Daddies' which is, c'mon, a cheeky ripoff of 'Shark Tank,' but it's done well enough to run eight series back in London, and the US version

launched last year and seems to be doing quite alright here. He's one of the three silverbacks who people pitch their business to in exchange for a chance of seed money. The network has those bloody billboards all over town, so I can't even go five miles without seeing Daddy's smug mug grinning down at me from above. It's horrid, but it's part of the price I pay, I suppose."

That did sort of ring a vague bell in the back of Kevin's mind. "Wait, the three broad shouldered old guys in black suits and black shades with red ties?"

"You *have* seen the billboards then."

"I have, but I think I always assumed from the billboards the show was some sort of Sopranos parody or something, so I never really had any interest," he said. The waiter had quietly moved up to them and laid a leather billfold with a piece of paper sticking out of it in front of him.

"No no," Fatima said. "I'm paying for the meal."

"Yes madam, but Mister Bishop insisted we feed both your and his security, and that he pick it up, so I am bringing him that bill."

Kevin reached into his wallet and pulled out one of his new platinum credit cards, sliding it into the billfold before handing it back to the waiter. "They enjoyed their meals, I hope?"

"Oh very much, sir," the man said. "In fact, one of them left you a little thank you note inside." He gestured to the billfold with a demure smile. "May I take a photo of the two of you, to commemorate the evening?"

"Of course," Fatima said, unlocking her phone, handing it to him as she stood and moved around the table, sliding her arm around his waist as he stood up, resting her head on his shoulder, smiling at the waiter took several photos before handing it back to her as Kevin reached down, grabbed the billfold, opened it and found there was the bill – which was more than sizable – and a folded cocktail napkin, which he took out and read to himself.

*"He shoots, he scores! Good luck, mate! -Jax"*

"You really didn't have to do that, Kevin," Fatima said to him.

"Most people tend to overlook the importance of taking care of the folks who work for them in this town," he said. "When I sort of stumbled into money earlier this year, I promised myself I wasn't ever going to be one of them. And when they told me you'd already picked up the bill for the night, I couldn't get away without looking like a tight-ass without paying for something, now could I?" He tucked the folded napkin into his pocket. "I'm guessing Jax is one of your security detail?"

"Jackson, yes," she said. "He's my lead bodyman, making sure I don't walk into any room I can't walk out of. I probably would've thought all the security was nonsense, except that my oldest brother was killed in an abduction attempt in Mexico City back in '94."

"Oh my god, Fatima, I'm so sorry," he said, taking her hand this time, squeezing it. "That's terrible. Tell me they at least found who did it."

She nodded. "They did. I was only five at the time, so I don't even really remember him all that well, but I remember the house getting very sad for the next year or so, and the security becoming massively important to all of us. I've had a bodyguard service basically all my life. Makes dating sort of complicated, I'm sure you can imagine." She interlaced her fingers with his, clenching his hand firmly, refusing to let it go. "I got a message from my assistant during dinner telling me that she hoped my date was going well, but that I should ask you about *your* complication, and to believe you, no matter what you said. So let's have it then. It can't be all that unusual."

"Let's go have a walk on the beach, and then we'll put your resolution to believing whatever I tell you to the test, shall we?" The waiter brought back Kevin's card, and he assigned a 100% tip to the staff on top of the bill. He was certain Fatima had done something similar, considering she'd bought out the restaurant for the night, but he liked to make sure he was contributing his own portion to it.

They walked down to the beach and started strolling along the water line beneath the moonlight as she hooked her arm into his, nudging him in the side. "Well then, let's have it, shall we? No need to beat around the bush. Hit me with both barrels."

He laughed and shrugged a little. "Okay then, you asked for it. I saved the life of legendary enchantress Morgana LaFey and in exchange for that, she gifted me magical powers, including what she calls an 'ethical harem,' which will eventually consist of seven women all co-existing in a house with me."

"Oh, obviously," she said, clearly not believing a single word he was saying, but being amused by the story of it all. "Like one does. And I take it your security guard is one of your seven?"

"Well, I don't *have* all seven yet," Kevin said sheepishly. "I'm only at four, and so far they've all been arranged by Elizabeth, my... well, to call her my *assistant* would be doing her a major disservice, so she's my Majordomo."

"And she's *also* a member of your little ethical harem."

"She is," Kevin said. "I would've made her the first member of it, but she wanted to prove herself to me, so she wouldn't let me make it official until after she'd given me the first two members."

"And these members of your harem," Fatima said, obviously going with the flow now, "you make them wear belly dancing girl costumes around the house and such, as one does?"

"*God* no," he laughed. "In fact, I've sort of gone out of my way to ensure they aren't giving up their normal lives for whatever this gift Morgana is giving me is. Natalie, the second member of the family, she's a fitness instructor when she isn't being my personal chef and trainer. Ashley, she's a full-time student. And Miriam, well, she's my bodyguard, but we're entirely different at home than we are when we're out and about."

"And you're still going to get three more people in the house?"

"That's what the message from Morgana LaFey said, and what Elizabeth seems to believe. I know, it all seems too fantastical to be true. I thought so myself, until I started living this life. I suppose any doubts about the magical aspects of it all were put to bed pretty definitively by my encounters with Merlin, and his damned Midas Day."

"Merlin," she said, incredulously. "As in King Arthur and the Knights Of The Round Table? *That* Merlin?"

"The very same."

"It's impossible to believe any of this, you know," she said with a laugh.

"If I can change your mind, you promise not to scream?" he asked her.

"If you can change my mind, I promise to give you something remarkable in return," she said. "I've always wanted to believe magic was real."

He stopped in his walking and looked back over his shoulder. "Hey Miriam, c'mere a sec," he said to her.

Of their security details, one of Fatima's men had been walking ahead of them, the other walking behind them alongside Miriam. Miriam shrugged and walked over towards them, standing in close. "What's up, boss?"

"Introduce Fatima to Strazo."

Miriam arched a refined eyebrow at him. "Are... are you sure? He's keeping tabs from up on high right now."

"Fatima's security is doing more than enough, and I need to prove a point."

"But... are you certain it's a good idea, boss?"

"No, but sometimes in life, you just have to take a leap of faith, Miriam, so I'm taking one here. If you would?"

Miriam looked up to the sky and gave a little nod, and there was a distant buzzing sound that grew louder, almost like a tiny drone, before it slowed and stopped. Then on Miriam's shoulder, Strazo appeared, dropping his camouflage. As it turned out, the tiny dragon had an ability like a chameleon to change his pigmentation to give him almost a level of invisibility, allowing him to move unnoticed throughout the modern world. It was so effective that Strazo seemed to basically not exist if he didn't want to be seen, immune to being captured by any camera or visible to the naked eye.

Fatima gasped a little bit in shock and surprise, then giggled, the twenty-something businesswoman replaced by a child lost in awe and wonder at the sight before her. "Is... is that a dragon? An honest to god dragon?"

"Strazo, don't be an ass," Miriam playfully chided. "Give the lady a proper hello."

Strazo whipped his tail to one side and extended it towards her, as Fatima reached forward and gave it a little shake. The dragon almost seemed to be smiling.

"And, forgive me Strazo, but you aren't just a trained iguana or something, are you?"

Strazo's tail flicked in annoyance to one side before a tiny jet of fire belched from his mouth, just for a moment, then stopped, as he looked back over his shoulder at Fatima again, checking to see if she was satisfied.

"You mean, all of what you told me, it's all real?" she said, looking back at Kevin again.

"Morgana, Merlin, the harem, the sudden influx of money, all of it?"

"Haven't told a single lie tonight," he admitted, as Miriam and Strazo both moved back to their position with Fatima's security.

"So your family, it has the cook, the bodyguard, the assistant and the student? What... what was all this about then?"

"You tell me," he said with a soft smile. "I didn't know a thing about you or this meeting until almost right before I walked in the door. And from that point on, I guess I sort of assumed it was a blind date or something set up by our two assistants, without our knowledge of the matter."

"And what the hell do you think I would do in your household?" she said, a touch of anger undercutting her voice. "Be your accountant? Your business adviser?"

"God, Fatima, I'd never ask anything like that of you," he said, feeling her tense up and slip away from him. "If anything, I would want you as a partner, an equal, if not my superior even."

"Oh you say that now, but you've got magic on your side," she said warily. "You could make me think whatever you want."

He sighed, shrugging defeatedly. "I don't have any control over the magic," he admitted. "I just have whatever gifts Morgana gave me. And despite the fact that I think I fell in love with you at first sight, if you don't want to be part of this, I completely get that. It's a weird situation, the absolute weirdest, and it's *definitely* not for everyone. Morgana told me all the women I would have in my life would be bisexual, her little cherry on top, but I don't know if that's really true or not. I didn't even get to *tell* Morgana what I wanted as my wish for saving her life, because she said I would only ask for something less than what I deserved, and that nobody ever really admits what they want, not to anyone and certainly not to themselves."

"No responsibility for your actions?" she said coldly. "That's quite convenient."

"I take as much responsibility as anyone will let me, Fatima. Part of the deal that my assistant told me about is that nobody has to remain in the household if they don't want to. They're free to come and go as they please, and if they ever decide it's not working for them and they don't think it can be fixed, they *have* to tell me, and we part ways as friends. That hasn't happened yet, but Elizabeth seems to think Ashley and I will drift apart at some point as she gets older, and then she'll simply leave the family, with my blessing." He threw up his hands as Fatima continued to back away from him.

"Whether or not I want to admit it to myself, this gift from Morgana, it's apparently what I've always wanted, deep down, and just couldn't get myself to say out loud. A bunch of women who get along with me and each other. I didn't *have* to take the gift, I suppose, but my mom always told me when someone does you a kindness, you should be thankful and appreciate the gesture, so that's what I'm doing."

"And you... you expect *me*... to join in this... this thing?"

Kevin laughed again, turning to look at the water. "I just went out on the best date of my life, Fatima, one that I didn't even know I was walking into, otherwise I probably would've shown up looking a little less like a musician bum, not that you seemed to mind. I didn't *expect* anything when I showed up tonight – I just went with the flow and had the time of my life. It's like I wrote in one of my

songs. 'I'm never looking which way the wind is blowing; I just let it take me and I keep on going.' I don't *expect* anything of you now. I just know that I enjoyed myself tonight, more than I think I ever have, and I wish this conversation didn't have to end, but I can see you're not comfortable with it, and what kind of man would I be if I was making you uncomfortable? So I'm going to go. I'd love to see you again, to have another date, but if that's not possible, if that's not something *you want*, well, I get that, and I wish you all the best of luck in your life moving forward, and let me just say it was one of the greatest pleasures of my life simply meeting you. Obviously, our assistants know how to get a hold of one another, so if you decide you want to give it another go, all you have to do is reach out." He offered her a little bow, as she seemed to be dumbstruck, standing there staring at him. "May the fates bring our paths together again, you magnificent woman. Good night and good luck."

With that, he turned and walked away from her, heading straight up the beach towards the car, as Miriam quickly sprinted up to walk alongside him. "Didn't go well?" she asked.

"I had to tell her about Morgana's gift, and I think that put her off."

"Did you try kissing her?"

"It seemed like it would've been an imposition," he told her.

"Mmm. Because to me, it seemed like she really wanted you to kiss her."

Kevin let out a deep sigh, rolling his eyes as he got into the back of the vehicle. "Now you tell me. Anyway, it's late. Let's get back to the house. Traffic should be at least manageable now."

About half way back to the house, his phone beeped at him, a text message from Elizabeth. -  
*How'd the date go?-*

*-With the exception of the last bit, great. I told her about Morgana, and I think it freaked her out. Even more than seeing Strazo did.-*

*-Give her time. It's a lot to process.-*

*-Oh, I know. I just think it's too much. Time's not going to change that for her, I'm guessing.-*

*-What's that line you wrote? 'Time favors no one' or something?-*

*-That's it, exactly.-*

*-So take your own advice, dummy. Be patient. Let the wind take you.-*

He ended the conversation by sending her back the emoji with the tongue sticking out, and just as they started to head up the hill towards his house, he saw one of the billboards they'd been talking about earlier, with the three men in black suits beneath the logo that said in large letters 'SUGAR DADDIES' and in the bottom right corner was the channel and the time slot. Kevin considered it a bad omen as he leaned his head back against the seat.

As the car pulled past the gate and onto his property, he looked at his phone to check the time, seeing there was a message waiting for him, sighing as he opened it, knowing exactly what it was. Fatima had sent him a copy of the picture taken after dinner, her body up against his, with a million dollar smile plastered across her face, looking like she didn't have a care in the world. The text message was sent at 10:45 pm, and it was nearly approaching midnight.

After putting the car into the garage, he headed into the house, seeing both Miriam and Elizabeth frantically typing into their phones, about what, he truly had no idea. Maybe trying to salvage the disaster he'd made of the end of the date, trying to convince Fatima that he was a great guy deep down and that maybe she should give him a second chance.

He wasn't even entirely sure he'd blown it, but the look on her face, the sheer scale of astonishment and incredulity writ large there... he'd had to get out of there before he settled into the funk of it, needed to get away before he heard something that broke his heart, and he wasn't quite sure he was up to that.

About ten minutes later, there was a sound of a knock at the door, something that made Kevin jump about five feet in the air. People buzzed at the gate before they got to the door, so the sound of a knock was completely unexpected and unnerving. "Miriam, door!" he called out, not because he expected her to get it, but because he felt absolutely certain she'd be angry with *him* if he did.

"It's for you. Fatima sent something over," Miriam hollered back from down the hall. "It's been cleared for you to go and get."

"Well," Kevin said, standing up, "if I'm allowed to answer my own front door, I think I'll enjoy that privilege." He wondered what she would've sent over this time of night. A note from one of her assistants telling him never to contact her again? An invitation to meet up again on another night, and try to have another normal date? Whatever he expected, he would've been wrong.

Once the door was open, he saw Fatima standing there, having changed from the expensive dress into a very heavy washed-out UCLA t-shirt and a pair of yoga shorts, and just as it was dawning on him that she was standing there, she rushed him, tackling him and knocking him off his feet and onto his back in the entryway, as she started kissing him feverishly.

The intensity with which she locked lips with him caught him entirely by surprise, but the kiss was such a unique and intense delicacy that he couldn't think to turn away. They made out like it was the first time either of them had ever tried kissing before for what felt like an hour, but couldn't have been more than a couple of minutes, the door still wide open behind them.

When the kiss finally broke, he looked at her in surprise. "I thought you didn't want anything to do with me or this life."

"You didn't *let me tell* you what I was thinking, you git," she giggled. "You just dumped all this on me and then disappeared before I had my wits about me. I promised to give you something magical in return for you proving magic was real to me, and you left before I could do that."

"Oh," Kevin said, feeling a little ashamed and embarrassed. "Sorry?"

"I want in," she told him, tapping his chest with a fingertip on each word. "With one condition that is absolutely, positively, unquestionably set in stone."

"Tell me, and if it's within my power, I'll agree to it."

"You and I, Mister Bishop, we're *equals*. That means my opinion matters, in all things. You're the most amazing man I've ever met, and I'm pretty sure you're going to be my husband, sooner rather than later, but I don't want you thinking you can order me around when that happens."

"I wouldn't dream of—"

"I'm not finished," she said, pushing him back down onto the floor. "That *also* means you aren't to let me push you around. I don't want a whimpering sycophant or a spineless worm. I want someone by my side, not in front of or behind me. You can't *let me push you* around, and that's sometimes harder than it should be, because I like getting my way. So I may pout or whine or shout in anger, but I promise you I will work through it with you, and that no matter what I say in the moment, I want you as an *equal* and not just arm candy, okay?"

Kevin laughed a little bit, nodding. "I mean, yeah, I can agree to that."

"Great," Fatima said, pulling her shirt up and over her head, revealing her bare brown tits, supple and firm but also petite and matching her frame. "Bring it here, Elizabeth!" she called down the hallway, and his Majordomo strode down the passage with long, almost leaping steps, a wide grin on her face.

"Nice to finally meet you, ma'am," Elizabeth said, offering her hand down to shake, which Fatima did, but then yanked Elizabeth in close, pressing her lips against the brunette's with a soft yelp of surprise on Elizabeth's part before she giggled into the kiss.

"Likewise," Fatima said as their lips parted, a coy smile widening on her lips. "Are all the members of our harem as pretty as you are?"

"*Our* harem?" Kevin asked, more than a little surprised.

"Oh come off it, love," Fatima said to him. "You told me that Morgana said she was only going to let bisexual women into your life. I am, and I assume the others are as well, so I'm going to want to savor their delights from time to time. Would you deny your partner such a pleasure?"

Kevin laughed, shaking his head. "Not at all. I'm just surprised at how fast you're taking to all this, now that you're here."

“There are two things a woman cannot do 'just a little,' Kevin – fall in love and get pregnant. My pendant?”

Elizabeth moved to slide a long double braided silver cord around Fatima's neck, a little hourglass shaped pendant hanging from it, the bottom half of it empty, the top half filled with black smoky onyx, a gem to match all the others. As soon as it was clasped shut, Fatima's eyes rolled up and back into her skull as her whole body began to shake, a velvety moan pouring from her lips as she fell forward, clinging to him.

When she started to breathe again, she laughed, wheezing for breath, nuzzling her face against his cheek. “Do you believe in magic? I hope that you do...” she quietly sung to him. “Now, to give you something truly magical.”

“What's that?”

“*Me.*”

She stood up, her stance a little wobbly, as she gestured for Elizabeth to pull off his pants as she moved to shuck her shorts from her body, along with a pair of violet cotton panties she had on underneath, leaving her completely nude before him, a healthy block of hair just above her shaven snatch. Elizabeth yanked off his jeans and boxers, as Kevin laughed a little bit. “We can go to the bedroom, you know. We've got lots of bedrooms here.”

Fatima shook her head, a sultry smile on her lips. “Oh no,” she said. “I want it here and now, so whenever you're meeting someone in this entryway, you've always got the memory of our first fuck lingering in the back of your mind. Now, let me give myself to you.”

Elizabeth moved down to fold her legs, sliding Kevin's head up to rest along her calves, as Fatima moved to lower herself down onto his cock, a brief shudder of delight bolting up her body, making it wobble and wiggle. Above him, he heard a click-click-click and realized that Elizabeth had taken a picture of Fatima's face in that moment with his cell phone. “I thought that was for when I made them cum the first time,” he asked Elizabeth before feeling Fatima's hand turning his face back to her as she leaned down, bringing her lips almost atop of his.

“Silly boy,” she whispered to him. “You just did.”

Her hips began to post on him like he was a horse she was riding, and while he could feel the cool stone of the floor against his ass, she was keeping his attention focused elsewhere, the tempo and speed just the perfect rhythm, their lips spending more time together than apart.

He wasn't fucking her and she wasn't fucking him – they were fucking *each other*, and they were both moaning into each the other's mouth as his cock felt like her cunt was clinging to him as she continued their lusty tempo.

Kevin wanted the moment to last forever, but Fatima's hands were clenching at his t-shirt and her thighs were spreading just that tiny bit wider, getting him even deeper inside of her twat, as the melody changed from verse-chorus-verse to moan-shudder-moan, and the climax, *their* climax, was inevitable and inescapable. As soon as he felt his balls starting to draw up, that familiar surge at the base of his cock, he felt her clench down and begin to tremble, and they orgasmed simultaneously, in a release that took them both by storm.

Fatima had given him a very magical gift indeed – her heart.

### **Interruption Four – She's Got Balls**

It turned out Fatima's entrance into Kevin's life upended more than a few things because however fast he might have thought she'd wanted them to go, it wouldn't have been as fast as Fatima had made it happen.

Within a week, she and her security team had moved everything Fatima owned from her LA home into Kevin's. They were partners now, and Fatima intended to spend as much time with him as she could, even when her work schedule kept her busy. It also meant bringing her security detail – Jackson, the black man, and Mike, the white guy – into the fold in terms of knowing what was going on, in terms of magic, Merlin, Morgana and Strazo. Watching the two giant, lumbering men reduced with wide-eyed children in wonder at the sight of the tiny dragon was easily one of Kevin's favorite things to happen to him since the entire chain of events had started.

True to her word, Fatima did like getting her way, and there had been a few points in the first couple of weeks of their relationship where things had gotten a little tense, but eventually they'd found middle ground and worked through it, by listening to one another and by Kevin refusing to be walked all over.

All the girls in the house had taken to her incredibly well, and the first time that he, Fatima and Ashley had played together had been far spicier than expected. Fatima had taken a very firm hand with the teenager and had turned her into a rather filthy and eager play partner for both of them, leaving Ashley so exhausted and fucked out that she'd skipped the next day of classes. Even when she'd come to dinner, she'd been limping a little, much to Kevin's amusement. He might have been worried they'd overdone it with her, except Ashley couldn't stop grinning all through dinner.

After dinner, he'd gone to spend a few hours in the studio, working on starting to put together some initial music thoughts for the Robert Rodriguez project when Fatima and Miriam came to swing by. He had a little silent buzzer so that people could let him know they were outside without them knocking, so if he happened to be recording something, it wouldn't get interrupted. It was a nice little orange sign that said “visitors” which would flash, and when he saw it blinking, he finished up the drum pattern he'd been laying down and then moved over to open the door for them.

“Hey ladies, what's up?” he said. It was unusual for them to come by his studio workspace, much like Kevin had learned to leave Fatima be when she was in the room she'd converted into her office in the house, so their presence, especially together, meant they likely had something important to talk over with him.

The two women moved past him and into the studio, moving to sit down on the couch he had had there. “So Miriam tells me you need to walk me through what's going to end up happening tomorrow, because it's, in her words, 'a magic thing,' which I can't say pleases me much,” Fatima said as she looked up at him. “Fine. Tell me, what's Midas Day?”

“Ah *shit*,” Kevin grumbled. “That's tomorrow, isn't it?”

“It is,” Miriam confirmed, “and while I know that *I'm* permitted to hang around you, I don't know that *she* is, and I figured you might want to tell her in advance why she's going to feel compelled to be away from you tomorrow.”

“I'm sure you told me some of it, but tell me again, because I'm certain based on Miriam's face when she was reminding me about it, I clearly wasn't paying anywhere near enough attention,” Fatima said, perching her chin on top of her folded hands. “What is it and why should I be worried?”

“So, as I told you before,” Kevin chuckled. “It's the day every month when I wake up apparently irresistible to all women in the immediate area, and that area slowly increases minute by minute, and Midas Day ends when I have sex with somebody I've never had sex with before. On the last Midas Day, all the girls of the house mysteriously had reasons not to be around me, and nobody thought it strange, so I imagine that'll happen again. You'll probably get some urgent business call that you have to handle in person or something. No kidding, magic does strange things.”

“Alright,” Fatima said, her hand reaching out to stroke along Kevin's thigh in a gesture more reassuring than sexual. “And what's the point of it?”

“Other than Merlin fucking with me? He says it's to play with Morgana's gift to me, but also just to have a little fun with someone newly exposed to the world of magic. To escape it, he said I have to do something specific on Midas Day, something I've never done before, because I would surely remember it. For a while, I thought it might just be to survive a Midas Day without having any sex, but I've gone plenty of days in my life without having sex, so I reasoned that couldn't possibly be it.”

“This Merlin sounds like a clever bastard indeed, much like his namesake.”

“Not his namesake,” Miriam corrected. “All those old stories are about *him*.”

“Wait, it's not someone just using the *name* Merlin, but the *actual* Merlin? Does that mean Morgana La Fey is—”

“Most assuredly so,” Kevin replied. “And the relationship between Merlin and Morgana is depicted a lot of different ways over a lot of different stories, so who the hell knows what parts of them are true and which are fake? In any case, it doesn't seem like either of them really wants to *hurt* me. Morgana's gift in particular was taken straight from my mind because she thought I would ask for something too small for the high reward of saving her nearly immortal life. Based on how Merlin's acted since I've seen him, I'd assume it's best to think of them as friendly rivals at worst, affectionate contemporaries at best.”

“Lovers?” Fatima asked.

“Maybe,” Kevin admitted. “Merlin plays it insanely close to the vest, so getting him to give anything up without giving up even more seems nearly impossible. But he did seem to think of his minor modifications to Morgana's gift to me as his way of saying thank you for helping keep her alive, so I wouldn't be surprised to find out if they had been lovers at some point, maybe even currently. It strikes me as a bit more of an on-again, off-again sort of thing, though. Both of them seem very much like people who carve their own path first and foremost, and without any consideration for any partner's thoughts or feelings on the matter.”

“Back to the original thing,” Fatima said. “How irresistible are we talking here, luv?”

“On the last Midas Day, I ended up having to flee a public beach chased by probably a hundred women in swimsuits, only to be captured by a van full of college girls, who had their way with me before I even really got my bearings.”

Fatima started giggling, holding her tan hands to her mouth, trying to keep herself somewhat quiet, but it was clear the image was absolutely delighting the woman. “That sounds mental!”

“I couldn't get into my car because I knew I wouldn't be able to drive it away – they were ready to completely surround it, and even if I got in and locked the doors, they'd probably eventually have just smashed the windows in and pulled me out and taken me right there on the pavement.”

“A lustful zombie horde,” Fatima managed to get out before starting to giggle all over again, completely unable to contain it at this point. “I know! I know it's serious, luv, but even you have to see how bloody ridiculous it all sounds, how wild it had to have looked to anyone not affected by the magics. Even with all this, Merlin *promises* you're going to be safe?”

“Within reason, he told me,” Kevin sighed, sitting down on the couch between them finally. “He can't *completely* guarantee I'll be safe, but he says none of the women will ever want to hurt me, they'll always be of a fair age range and they'll never bring any illness upon me. And when it comes to that much, I certainly believe him.”

“Oh?” Fatima asked.

“Mmm. It would ruin his game if I was sick or wounded for the *next* Midas Day, and that would mean he couldn't have his *fun*,” Kevin said. “And I think the thing I've learned I can count on most with Merlin is that he likes a good show, and that he's going to be watching me. I'm *certain* he was watching me on the last one.”

“What on earth were you doing at the beach if you knew it was going to be Midas Day?”

"I suspect there's some magic compulsions involved that prevent me from doing things like just not leaving the house, or isolating myself somewhere completely inaccessible," Kevin said with a smile. "Although the idea of locking myself in a bank vault and watching a swarm of beautiful women breaking me out does have a certain appeal to it."

"Do you *own* a bank vault, luv?"

"I do not," he responded patly.

"Then let's not worry about things you cannot do," she sighed. "I'm going to assume that Merlin's magic will take me away from you, so I'm going to have to insist you do whatever it takes to ensure his safety, Miriam."

"Naturally, ma'am."

"Couldn't you just accept the first woman to approach you, and be done with it?"

Kevin tapped a finger in the air. "You know, I thought about that a lot after he'd told me the rules, but for some reason, when it all started to happen, I felt compelled to run, as if it was my obligation to make it as difficult as possible for the women to catch me. I suspect that may be part of the game, some side effect of the spell. A need to flee from women in general, otherwise where's the sport in it?"

"So I'm going to need to prepare for a good amount of running then, I take it?" Miriam asked him. "All on foot?"

"Vehicle transport is too easy to swarm and physically prevent from getting far. Even if we were already in a car when the whole thing starts, all they really need to do is surround us and we're stuck where we are."

"You don't think they'd get out of the way of a car speeding at them?" his bodyguard queried, as if she found it all very hard to believe.

"I think Merlin promised that *I* would be safe, and the women not having any sense of self-preservation is very on brand for him, especially since it gives me constraints to have to work within. So, no, I don't think they'd get out of the way of a speeding car."

"What if we were in a helicopter?"

Kevin chuckled, shaking his head. "I think they would get in a second helicopter and would attempt to swing over to us on grappling hooks or something similar," he told them. "You need to take me seriously on this. It's going to be one of the most overwhelming things ever, but eventually, some woman's going to get a grip on me, and then it seems like it's just a matter of going with the flow from that point onward."

Fatima took his hand in hers, holding it gently. "You'll do wonderful, I'm sure of it, babe. Not much I can do but wish you good fortune and to at least have a little fun with it. And don't stop thinking about what might be Merlin's exit route he's laid down for you."

"He *did* say if I was still completely clueless by the time the next season rolled around, I could play him again for another hint."

She looked over at Miriam and grinned a little. "Might I ask a small favor from you?"

"Of course, ma'am," Miriam replied. "You're as much my boss as he is at this point."

"Can you both wear GoPro's clipped to your chests, so I can watch this back on film later?"

Kevin smirked, shaking his head. "It almost sounds like you're taking a little enjoyment in this," he said to her.

She put on the most over-exaggerated expression of offense he'd ever seen. "A *little* enjoyment, babes? Oh *no*. I'm going to take a *lot* of enjoyment from this. I can't wait to hear what sort of madness you get up to tomorrow, and being able to watch it back will bring me endless amounts of joy," she said, snuggling up against him. "Beyond that, I'm just going to have to trust in the magic, won't I? And hope that Merlin's good for his word, and that he'll keep you safe during all of this."

"He's particular about each and every word, ma'am," Miriam said, "but he's good for it."

"Then I wish you both a fun and enjoyable Merlin Day tomorrow—"

“*Midas Day*, ma'am,” Miriam corrected.

“I *know* what I said, Miriam,” Fatima teased. “Anyway, enjoy the day and we can watch the footage together over family dinner when you're all done, yes?”

The rest of the evening passed quietly enough and, as expected, next morning, he awoke again to an almost completely empty house, with Miriam curled up naked against his side, her arm draped over his chest protectively, as if even in her sleep she considered it her duty to keep him safe. He shook her to wake her from slumber as she grumbled at him. “Can't we stay in bed a little while longer?” she muttered, even as she was starting to move.

“You can if you want, Miriam, but I think my body's getting a head start with or without my consent,” he told her as he stood up and started pulling on clothes with little care as to whether or not they matched or even looked good together. Not that he normally cared about his appearance all that much, but generally even he wouldn't have put on green camo sweatpants and a purple t-shirt together as a combination.

“Right right,” she said, hopping very quickly out of bed, tugging on clothes as fast as she could, as if the muscle memory of needing to get dressed in a hurry was coming back to her. “I won't bring the gun, simply because I don't want the risk of it just going off.”

“Whatever, Miriam,” Kevin said, his legs starting to take him down the hallway, as Miriam grabbed two GoPros and moved to keep up with him. “It looks like we're going!”

The two of them moved out to the front of the house and climbed into the red Tesla Roadster parked out front, and Miriam was making a point of staying one step ahead of him, because Kevin seemed to be completely out of control of his own actions.

“It's so strange,” he told her as he started up the vehicle, heading down the hill from their home up in the Hollywood Hills. “I can feel my body doing things, but I don't feel like I have any control of it right now, and I also don't feel at all alarmed about it, which should, in and of itself, *be* alarming.”

“Any idea where we're going?”

“The last time I drove down to the beach, so I can't imagine we're going to do the same thing,” Kevin told her, while she was hanging a GoPro on a lanyard around his neck before doing the same with herself. “It clearly hasn't actually started yet, by the way.”

“How can you tell?” she asked.

“Nobody in the cars we're driving past is looking at me yet,” he said with a chuckle. “This sort of happened last time as well, with my body sort of wanting to get me to some starting place, as if it was important for me to get positioned before the whole game began.” He glanced at the map, trying to discern where it was they were headed. “Looks like we're heading towards West Hollywood, maybe?”

The Roadster kept heading south on N Curson Ave, even as it crossed Hollywood Blvd. He would've been surprised by the lack of traffic, but it was a Sunday and on a Sunday morning, driving through Los Angeles was *just* about bearable.

“Past Santa Monica Boulevard,” Miriam said. “Where the hell *are we going*?”

“I can't imagine we're going over to Pink's Hot Dogs or something,” Kevin told her. “But this is Merlin we're talking about. He does love his surprises.” Kevin felt himself turning the wheel to the left, as they turn eastbound on Melrose Avenue, a dry chuckle lingering on his lips. “Although we *are* headed that way.”

“Maybe you can stop at Yum Yum Donuts and we can get some breakfast,” Miriam said to him, amusement in her tone of voice. She had seemingly decided to roll with the punches and just enjoy the madness that the day held before them.

“Not Pink's then,” Kevin said, as they crossed North La Brea Avenue, then North Highland Avenue a minute or two later. “Oh. Fuck. I think I know where we're going.”

“You sound a bit more concerned than you did a second ago.”

“Well, Los Angeles is covered with endless places to hide, typically, but where we're going, it's going to be... well, a lot more complicated than that,” Kevin said. “And the kind of people we're going

to have to worry about, it's more than your average girl on the street.”

Sure enough, Kevin felt his hands turning the wheel to the left on North Bronson Ave, heading up towards the main gate, as he heard Miriam gasp a little. “I mean, there's no chance they let us in, is there?”

Kevin pulled the car up to the security gate, and a guard walked out to meet him, smiling as the man recognized him, giving him a polite wave. “Hey there, Mr. Bishop,” the guy said to him. “Mr. Wyllt said you'd be coming by to the studio today and that I was to give you and your bodyguard All Access badges. He also said to let you know there aren't any tours of the studio today, so only the talent and the crews would be around. He said you'd know what that meant.”

A glance at the guard's name tag gave Kevin enough information to seem like he was supposed to be there. “Thanks, Marvin,” Kevin said to him, as Marvin handed him a clipboard to sign in on. “I do know what that means, and hopefully we won't be loitering around your lot too long. I just have to make sure I come back out this way, right?”

“Yep,” Marvin said, handing each of them a badge on a lanyard. “So you can return these. And if you leave the studio with them, they're got transmitters on them so we know where they are, and we'll have to bill you for the cost of sending someone to retrieve them, so please don't do that, okay, sir? I know you're one of Mr. Wyllt's favorite composers, so the last thing I'd want to do is disappoint him.”

“No worries, Marvin,” Kevin said, tossing the badge around his neck. “We will be back to return the badges before we head home for the night, although we may be here for most of the day.”

“Yep, totally get that, sir,” Marvin said, waving his hand. “One question, though. Uh, what are the GoPros for?”

“Mapping the path between my place and set, Marvin,” Kevin said, not skipping a beat. “Mr. Wyllt asked us to do it. We know better than to take them onto active shooting sets, though.”

Marvin shot him a thumbs up. “All I needed to hear. Have fun, Mr. Bishop, and welcome to Paramount Studios!”

Kevin gave a friendly wave as the gate was lifted, driving his Roadster onto one of the most famous places in the entire world. Even on a Sunday, the place was humming with activity, because filming never really stopped anymore at the movie studios, unless sets were being built or torn down.

He'd been given a tour of the studios once, a long time ago, but he barely retained any of the knowledge from that, as he'd been reasonably drunk at the time, the band celebrating after a relatively successful gig when a movie star fan had offered to show them around the lot, so how could any of them say no?

(Literally, the band had all *forgotten* the word 'no,' they were *that* drunk.)

Miriam let out a slight sigh of relief as they drove onto the Paramount lot. “Thank god Miss Rouchard's film is being produced over on the Fox Studios lot. I can't imagine running into her on a day like this.”

“Or Alice, for that matter,” Kevin said with a little nervous laugh. “How the fuck would I explain that at the next regular meeting to review my work? 'Sorry you couldn't help yourself with the overwhelming urge to fuck my brains out. That wasn't my fault. Magic did it.’”

Miriam giggled a little bit. “God, that shouldn't be as funny as it is.” She glanced around, almost as if she was doing her best to memorize as much of the layout of the area as she could. “Who's Mr. Wyllt?”

“It's another name for Merlin,” Kevin sighed. “After I realized I was dealing with the *real* Morgana La Fey and Merlin, I did as much reading about the two of them as I could, and let me tell you, *that* is an utter pain in the ass. Like I was saying last night, the two of them are such popular figures in mythology, and there's *so* many interpretations of them all across the board, *none* of which are in line with *any* of the others. The only thing that seemed to be consistent across the board is that they're both somewhat of tricksters and while they'll adhere to the letter of any deals made, they'll also

try and find as many loopholes in those deals as they can, not out of malice, but out of the joy of outwitting someone and getting the better end of the deal.”

“There he is over there!” Miriam said, pointing out the car window, but Kevin couldn't bring himself to slow, much less stop, the car. “Damn, I am certain that I saw him.”

“That doesn't surprise me,” Kevin replied. “He strikes me as the kind of man who likes to keep an eye on his games while they're running.” The car slowly moved to park in a spot marked “Mister Bishop” not far from the Blue Sky Tank, which was filled with water for filming some sort of sci-fi film where it looked like a red metallic ship was floating atop an ocean, a strange skyline with pink clouds and three suns in sunset behind it, although only part of the ship had been built, enough for the shot but not much more past that in either direction, clearly the rest of the craft going to be filled in with CGI. There were three figures sitting atop of it, as a camera crew filmed them, one man, one woman and one character that looked like it was going to be CG'd in later, a combination of green balls and sticks, their backs turned to the camera, looking at the sunsets.

Kevin and Miriam got out of the car and started walking away from the Blue Sky Tank, Kevin's feet still moving entirely on their own without his plan or consent. “Wonder what they were filming back there?” Miriam said to him. “The craft design looked very unique.”

“I think it said something about a storm on the back of one of the seats, but I didn't take a good look at it,” he told her. “The last thing I want to do is disrupt someone's filming, although I have a feeling that's going to happen here, no matter what my intent is.”

“Well, you're about to be the biggest flame to women *ever* any minute now,” she said with a soft laugh. “So I'd say your intent matters for jack and shit.” She glanced around. “Where the hell are we going?”

Kevin felt his feet slowly come to a stop as he looked up, finding himself underneath the Paramount Studios water tower. He glanced up and muttered beneath his breath in a singsong rhythm, “there's baloney in our slacks...”

“That was the Warner Bros. Watertower, Kev,” Miriam said with a grin.

“I never would've pegged you for an Animaniacs fan.”

“Everyone's an Animaniacs fan, Kevin,” she said. “What are we doing here?”

“It's...” Kevin glanced around, noticing heads were starting to turn his way from the distance. Nobody close by, nobody right on top of him, miles and miles of distance between him and any woman who wasn't his bodyguard. “It's starting. Take a look.”

There were women on the edges of his vision, nothing more than ants in the distance, but they were starting to make their way over towards the two of them. It was different than the first time. It wasn't sudden and there wasn't an immediate rush of people. The first time had been like being in the middle of a zombie horde movie. The second time, it was like being a paranoid 1970s spy thriller, where anyone anywhere could suddenly be holding a gun in his direction.

He wasn't sure if it was better or worse.

Kevin wasn't sure which direction he should be going, so he simply started walking, and quickly, with Miriam at his side.

The chase felt different too, as he didn't feel compelled to go as fast as possible. It wasn't about running; it was about *evading*. But no matter how he moved, no matter where he went, knew in the end, he wasn't going to escape, he wasn't going to get away. This was a game he was scheduled to lose each and every time.

Except the one time he didn't.

This wouldn't be that one time.

He scurried into one of the soundstages and was glad to find that nobody was filming today. It was built up to resemble the lobby of a hotel, with couches scattered around, and an impressive front desk that looked like it was rigged to explode, although the actual pyrotechnics weren't deployed, just places for them to be put. Kevin almost wished he could take the time to explore, but he needed to keep

moving. It was odd, knowing that each of the walls was just an illusion, and that stepping around to the other side of them would reveal exposed wood.

Kevin moved across the fake lobby and was hoping to run across to the other side, but as he was passing by the edge of the lobby set, a pair of hands reached out and grabbed him suddenly, pulling him over to one side.

“Got you!” a younger woman laughed, pushing him to sit his ass down on a couch with a quick ‘oof!’

He got a glance of the woman seeing a second woman coming to join her. The younger woman looked like she was in her early twenties, a little mousy, wearing contemporary fashion – slacks and a button-up red silk blouse, but the look seemed uncomfortable, like she wasn't entirely familiar with how it should all fit together, brown hair pulled into a ponytail and green eyes behind bright red librarian styled thick rimmed glasses, a thin chain with a golden cross hanging around her neck. “Hello?” Kevin said, as Miriam moved to stand alongside the couch.

“You got him, Ellie,” a second woman said, a sharp contrast to the mousy woman. She was tall, bold, blonde and strident, and whereas the mousy woman seemed awkward in her fashion, the taller woman made the fashion work for her, inhabiting the latest fashions with a confidence that controlled the entire room. She wore her hair long, her silver shirt open enough to show off a dark black lacey bra on display, the skirt high with long leather boots running up to mid thigh. “I don't know how you did it, but you got him.”

“Yes, Miss Bassini,” Ellie giggled. “I figured he didn't have far to go, so if he came this way, we'd nab him.”

“I did agree that if you got him, you could have us use him as you wanted,” Miss Bassini said. Kevin recognized Lily Bassini, one of the biggest movie stars working today, taking on loads of dangerous and daring roles, getting another Oscar nomination – her fifth, only one of which she'd won – for her most recent film, written and directed by Aaron Sorkin. “So what are we doing?”

“First and foremost, Lily, you are going to sit the fuck down,” Ellie said, shoving Lily down onto the couch next to him, the blonde's eyes widening suddenly. “You have pushed and shoved me around nonstop since I became your assistant seven months ago, running me fucking ragged, so I'm going to make sure this man runs you just as fucking ragged.”

“Now Ellie, I'm not sure—” Lily started to say before Ellie reached out and slapped her, the sound of her fingers striking Lily's face ringing like a clap of thunder in the quiet sound lot. The hit was certainly not all that hard, but it was more than enough to shock the blonde, whose mouth dropped open wide, unable to find words.

“No room for uncertainty, you wicked bitch,” Ellie said to her. “I have listened to your shit about the smallest and pettiest of perceived offenses each and every day since you brought me on. Your coffee wasn't hot enough, or it was too hot, or it didn't have the right amount of cream or sugar in it, and you were inconsistent about it the whole time.”

Miriam laughed a little bit, but as soon as Ellie's wheeled to look at her, his bodyguard raised her hands in mock surrender.

“You have constantly mocked my appearance, insulted my style and yet whenever I have asked you for help, you have scoffed at it,” Ellie told Lily, shoving a fingertip in her face the entire time. “Since you have given me free rein for this, with no consequences for my actions during it, I intend to fucking use that to show you what a hellacious *bitch* you've been, not just to me, but to your coworkers, your exboyfriends and just generally anyone who's ever had the unfortunate circumstance to ever come into your orbit, you vacuous *cunt*.”

Lily's eyes were as wide as full moons in the night sky, and Kevin couldn't help but feel he was caught up in someone else's drama.

“Your last boyfriend, Kurt? He came crying to me, asking if *he* was the problem or if *you* were, and because I worked for you, I couldn't tell him how much you'd been manipulating him for months,

just for the sake of a promotional tour,” Ellie sneered. “Yank up that skirt and show this fine specimen of a man just what a slut you are.”

Lily didn't seem to have a bone of resistance left in her, so she reached down and started tugging the silver skirt up to her waistline, revealing her uncovered, completely bare snatch, catching her bottom lip between her teeth, looking all the world genuinely nervous.

“See that? She can't even wear panties to the set,” Ellie said, leaning over Lily, reaching a hand down to grind her slender fingers hard against the blonde's twat. “She likes the crew to smell the scent of her dripping *cunt* whenever she's around. Because she's a fucking cocktease. Isn't that right?”

Lily nodded from behind hooded eyes, as if a child caught in a lie by a parent.

“If you're *lucky*, I'll let him fuck you a bit, but first, he's got a more important person to drill,” Ellie said, her hands unbuttoning her slacks. “Me. Get over here.” Ellie was positioning herself at the edge of the couch, leaning just ever so slightly over the arm of it, her face almost right in line with Lily's. “I want her to see my face while you fuck me.”

Kevin stood up, looking over at Miriam, who looked like she could explode into giggles at any moment, then moved to stand behind Ellie, who was unceremoniously shoving her slacks and a flimsy black thong down to her knees. She thrust her ass back in his direction, wiggling it a bit, so Kevin moved to get his cock out, only somewhat stiff.

“You need a bit more of a show to get that weapon ready?” Ellie said, glancing back. “Okay then. Slut, get your tits out for him. Let him see those breasts that you've steadfastly refused to show on camera no matter how much fucking money they've been willing to throw at you.”

“But Ellie,” Lily said. “They've got cameras on.”

“And they can do whatever the fuck they want to with what they're recording,” Ellie taunted into Lily's face. “How does that make you feel?”

Lily's eyes rolled back into her head as she moaned carnally, so much so that Kevin thought she might be having an orgasm. “Out of control,” the blonde finally forced herself to say.

“And what did you tell me your number one turn on was?” Ellie laughed.

“*Being out of control*,” Lily moaned again, this time just a moment before Ellie leaned in and kissed her, the blonde reticent at first before getting very much into the moment, her hands reaching down to try and unbutton her shirt before growing frustrated, just ripping the last few buttons open, then unclasping the front of her bra, letting those massive breasts of hers spring free, at least C cups but maybe even Ds or even Es, they were so generous.

Kevin couldn't help but feel his cock surge as he watched one of Ellie's hands reach down and heft up one of Lily's large tits, as if making sure he got a good look at it, the rosy pink nipple like a pencil eraser, so stiff and firm.

Ellie broke from the kiss to look back at him, a maddened smile on her lips. “What are you waiting for? C'mon and fuck me, stud. Or should I call you Daddy?”

This was clearly going to be his Midas Day encounter for the month, so he decided to simply go along with the flow and enjoy the moment, the smile on Miriam's face even as she moved around, trying to capture as much of the scene as she could with the GoPro hanging around her neck. He lined the head of his dick up against Ellie's pussy and pushed forward, finding her more than ready for him, her tiny body leaning back onto him, making sure he didn't skimp on how deep the thrust was going to be, because clearly she wanted it balls deep.

“Fuck you feel good,” Ellie moaned at him. “But I need you to pull out, just for a minute.”

“What?” Kevin asked.

“Just fucking do it, alright?!”

He shrugged a little bit, sliding his dick out from within her wet folds as Ellie grabbed him and pulled him over around towards the front of the couch, as Lily's eyes focused on the sight of his wet cock in front of her.

“That's it, you bitch,” Ellie said to Lily. “You're going to get a taste of his dick, but only now

that it's got *my* cunt all over it.” She grabbed Lily's shoulders and shoved her off the couch and down onto her knees as the blonde's hands reached up to grab his shaft, making sure it was aligned, because Ellie kept pushing, forcing the actresses head onto his cock until he could feel the head of it lodged against the back of her throat, seeing her cheeks puff a little bit in slight panic, her airway blocked off, which Ellie kept her at for a long moment before pulling her head back, letting the blonde suddenly wheeze and gasp for lungfuls of desperate air. “You want more of it, don't you, cunt?”

“I do, Ellie,” Lily said, nodding frantically. “You know I do.”

“Well, get used to disappointment,” Ellie laughed, tugging Lily back up onto the couch. “If you're a good little whore, maybe I'll let you have sloppy seconds, but he's gonna fuck me first, and you're gonna suck his cum out of my snatch.”

Kevin moved back to his position behind Ellie, the small woman's glare telling him where he was supposed to be without her even saying so, and moments later, he was thrusting back inside of Ellie's pussy, feeling her shiver and quake around him.

“Fuck he's so good, Lil,” Ellie taunted. “Such a big fat daddy dick in my tight young pussy... I've fucked like half of your ex-boyfriends you know. Fuck, that's it, harder, daddy. They come to me, after you've thrown them away like expired milk, and they just need someone to comfort them, to tell them it wasn't entirely their fault, so I've fucked so many goddamn Hollywood A-listers, but none of them ever fucking stay. I make them feel better, I give them a fucking hole to dump their sadsack sperm into and then they go away, back to hunt more starlet snatch instead of staying with me, a woman who might give a *shit* about them or their lives...”

Lily was rubbing her own twat now, her fingertips jamming against her clit even while Ellie talked down to her, their faces only inches apart, Ellie taking a kiss from the blonde every now and again.

“God, I can't wait to feel you cumming inside of my pussy,” Ellie said, looking back to Kevin, drawing him back into the moment. “I'm gonna make her lick it out of me, and if she's doing a good enough job at it, I'm gonna let you fuck her bitch brains out while she's doing it. But only if she's doing a good job.” Ellie swatted her fingers against Lily's face again. “I think that's fair, don't you, cunt?”

“Yes, Ellie,” Lily whimpered in eager desperation. “Very fair.”

“C'mon, Mister Man, Mister Big Daddy Dick,” Ellie said, lowering her head down, her ponytail threatening to completely fall out of the scrunchy. “Hammer it into me and make me take your cum. That'll make cum so fucking hard myself... make this whore even more jealous...”

Miriam wiggled her eyebrows in Kevin's direction, almost daring him to do it, so he shrugged and with one hand grabbed Ellie's ponytail and gave it a sharp yank, forcing her head to lift back up as the most carnal moan he'd ever heard in his entire life erupted from this tiny creature, the most wanton and sexual plea for more he could've imagined, as he shoved his dick hilt deep into her spasming snatch, feeling her body bloom into overwhelming orgasm without hesitation, every muscle inside of her clenching and squeezing, and at the suddenness of the multitude of sensations, he found his own body giving way, as he started to count out on-tempo blasts of hot jizz inside of her slender body, one-two-three-four.

After the four count, he slumped forward a bit, feeling his orgasm subsiding as hers did as well, as she began to giggle, then laugh, looking back at him with tears in her eyes, such an intense emotional release that it seemed to overwhelm every floodgate in her body. “Holy motherfucking *shit*, I've never cum that hard from fucking *anything*,” she laughed, unable to stop laughing, half a year of mental frustration all flowing out of her in that moment. “You still want him to drill you too, Lily?”

The blonde Oscar winner nodded shyly. “I'll do whatever you want me to if you'll let me get fucked by him, Ellie.”

“You know what you have to do,” Ellie said, sliding off his cock, moving around to sit down on the couch, and Lily couldn't get down onto her knees fast enough, but before she could get her face to Ellie's cunt, Ellie wagged a finger. “You can't expect him to crouch down that much to fuck you. Get

on the footstool, so he can take you at his leisure.”

Lily nodded frantically, pulling over a footstool before laying down on it in prone position, her face moving to rest between Ellie's thighs, as she started to lick the brunette's slit, catching the first few loose droplets of cum before diving right in, shoving her tongue into Ellie's cunt.

“Holy *fuck*, she must really want you to plow her, mister,” Ellie said with a giggle. “But it's up to you. If you want to fuck her, you can. But you don't have to if you don't want to.” Ellie gave him a playful wink before mouthing the words 'take her ass' to him.

Lily was wiggling her hips in his direction, and that infamous Hollywood ass was practically calling him, so he moved around to the back of the footstool, reaching down to give that ass a spank, hearing Lily moan throatily into Ellie's cunt in response.

Miriam stepped over, pulling a small bottle of lube from her bag, drizzling a bit onto his cock for him, reaching down to stroke it a little bit, leaning in to kiss him. “Aren't you glad I'm here keeping you safe?” she teased.

“You call this safe?” he joked back.

“Safe as houses. Now get in there and have a good time,” she said with a laugh.

Kevin moved into place, reached down with both hands to pry those pale white cheeks apart to expose that pucker, and as soon as he pushed the tip of his dick against it, he could feel Lily trying to lean back into him, almost forcing him to impale her on his cock faster than he'd intended.

“Fuck yes yes *yes yes* fuck fuck how did you fucking know?” Lily howled. “How did you fucking know I wanted to be your anal whore? Do it! Drill my whore ass!”

“Your mouth isn't doing what it's supposed to b– OH!” Ellie said, scolding Lily like she was going to have him stop, only for Lily to dive face first into her muff once more, this time with even more enthusiasm and fervor than before, as if she would do just about anything to keep Kevin from stopping.

His hips did his best to a good tempo, but good lord, was Lily Bassini's ass *tight*. He set a sledgehammer rhythm, not able to push or pull too much, but trying to give as much force as he could, smacking his dick into her ass, making those toned cheeks jiggle just a little still. But the sight of her continually eating his cum out of another woman, combined with the compressions she was giving around his shaft, he found himself cumming again before he knew it, and when he did, it set off an orgasm so intense in Lily that he was glad her face was shoved against Ellie's snatch because otherwise the shriek of pleasure might have drawn security guards from all over the studio lot.

He felt himself slip softly out of Lily's ass abruptly not long after his orgasm, even as Lily finished licking his cum completely out of Ellie's snatch. Kevin tugged his boxers and pants back up, Miriam standing next to him for balance. He was about to leave the actress and her assistant to each other, but as he was preparing to go, the two women suddenly seemed to realize they weren't quite finished with him.

Lily stood up first, taking the top of her wrist to wipe across her mouth, making sure she didn't have any of his or Ellie's cream on them, then moved over grabbed Kevin's hair, pulling him into a searing hot kiss, pressing her generous tits right up against his chest, turning a little bit with him, making sure that Miriam's camera got the perfect angle of the two of them connected in a heated lip lock for what felt like days.

After pulled back from the kiss, Lily licked her lips with an almost coy smile. “Ellie? Headshot, please.”

Whatever power Ellie had wielded moments again, that spell was broken, and the mousy girl stood up quickly, moving over to grab her back, pulling out a leather folder, tugging a headshot from within, holding it and a silver sharpie out to the movie star.

“You know, I don't think I ever caught your name,” Lily said to him with a shy smile.

“It's, ah, Kevin. Kevin Bishop. I'm a composer.”

“Of course you are, dear.” Lily took the headshot from Ellie along with the sharpie, then spun

Kevin around, so she could use his back as a surface to write on. After scrawling on the glossy headshot for a second, she spun him around again and kissed him a second time, this one less intense and more playful. “I hope I won't see that footage anywhere, but if I do, well, I did agree you could do whatever you wanted to with it,” Lily said, biting her bottom lip again. “Thank you for a *lovely* afternoon. Don't forget to turn your badges in on the way out.”

She handed him the headshot and then she and Ellie simply walked away from them, even in their state of half undress and full dishevelment.

“What'd she write?” Miriam said.

“All *that* just happened, and *that's* your question?” Kevin asked with a laugh.

“It's a fair one.”

“It says, 'To Kevin, You fuck better than anyone I've ever met. I'll give you my Oscar for another go. Your anal whore, Lily Bassini,’” he said, turning the picture to show her.

“Well, you're definitely *framing* that.”

### **Interruption Five – Streets Of Fire**

The aftermath of Midas Day was surprisingly light the second time around, and Kevin found himself in much better spirits about it, even if he didn't have a clue what was happening to him or why. The next day it was as though everything had simply returned to normal, and none's the wiser for whatever had happened. They had the camera footage, of course, and so he and Fatima had watched it back with him running for his life like he was in some sort of found footage horror movie. Fatima had had a proper giggle that lasted several minutes watching it, even needing him to stop the film every so often so that she could recover her breath, all of which Kevin found rather embarrassing.

“You don't have to laugh *quite* so hard, dear,” he told her at one point, when tears were streaming down her dark cheeks, her breathing so roughly staggered he was afraid she might pass out from inconsolable mirth.

“Oh babes, if you can't laugh at this, I dunno what'll ever make you laugh,” she said in between giggling fits. “I know it's less funny 'cause it's happenin' to you, but jaysis, you have to admit there's a sense of wondrous insanity about all of it. And you say there's supposed to be some kind of reason for it?”

“That's what Merlin claimed,” Kevin said with a shrug.

“You say that like he could be dickin' with ya,” Natalie grinned, sipping from whatever was in that glass of green liquid she was drinking from.

“It's Merlin,” Kevin replied. “I think 'could be fucking with you' is the first line in anyone's description of him. He's practically a leprechaun. He likes getting into the middle of people, introducing trouble and then fucking off, leaving someone else holding the bag. Sure, there's the depiction of him as the kindly old wizard, helping Arthur get his feet placed as the King of England, but it all goes a bit off the rails pretty quick after that.”

“And you think he'd lie about there being a reason?”

“No, I think that his 'reason,' whatever it is, might only make sense to him personally, or that it might be related to something outside of anything I might actually know anything about,” Kevin said, as they turned off the television, the three of them sitting around the living room. “But then again, it also might be something so painfully obvious that I'm going to kick myself when I figure it out.”

“There's also the chance that it's something specifically to irk Morgana,” Fatima replied. “The two of them have a pretty intertwined history if half of the stories are to be believed.”

“Don't believe half of what you see and none of what you hear,' is how that one Lou Reed song goes,” Kevin said. “So, I'll believe just enough to believe that I don't know much of anything at all. But yeah, you asked, love, so that's what Midas Day is pretty much like – an endless swarm of women throwing themselves at me until one of them has their way with me. And each day, in the hour or so before it starts up, I'm compelled to take myself to some different location. That's happened both times now, so I suppose that shoots down the idea of locking myself in a bank vault or something. I suspect that compulsion's mostly to prevent me from doing something crazy like trying to isolate myself away from women. I think that if I planned to go on a ten-day drive across the middle of central Asia with Midas Day somewhere in the middle of it, I'd still find myself near a major metropolitan area when the actual Miday Day itself came.”

“Sneaky lil fucker, innit he?”

“I imagine one doesn't live this long as a magician without being especially clever.”

“What's on our agenda today?” Kev asked, glancing around. “I should probably be asking Elizabeth that, shouldn't I? Where is she, anyway?”

“She's off doing background research on the next person she wants to present to you for here in the house,” Fatima answered. “Which I *told* her today would be a good day for, because it wouldn't let you duck out of the thing that *I* have on your schedule today.”

“Uh oh,” Kevin laughed. “What's that?”

“You're meeting my father for a late lunch this afternoon,” she told him.

“The footballer media mogul? *That* father?”

“He's a great big pussycat, so you shouldn't worry too much.”

“But I should worry some?”

“Well,” she grinned, “worrying a little anytime you're about to meet someone who used to play the footie professionally is a fair cop.”

“That completely puts me at ease, Tee,” he groaned. “Thank you for that.”

“If you weren't at least a *little* nervous, how would it be any fun?”

“And we're not going to tell him about the whole magic thing, I take it?”

“I think that would be best,” Fatima replied. “The last thing I want is to have to explain to my father all about magic or that you've met people who knew King Arthur.”

“But I could've made a joke about your dad being old enough that he would've known King Arthur as well.”

“Hardy har har.”

“Who's watching over us? Miriam, Jackson or Mike?”

Fatima stood up, stretching her lithe arms over her head. “I figure we take Miriam and Jackson, so if we decide we need to split after lunch, we've each got someone keeping tabs on us.”

“Yeah, sounds good.”

Natalie took her time making sure Kevin and Fatima both got a good workout in, although Fatima was in *far* better shape than Kevin was, but Kevin's upper body strength impressed both women, something Kevin wrote off to spending hours playing guitar, bass, banjo and basically any other stringed instrument he could get his hands on and teach himself. (Keyboards didn't involve much upper body strength at all unless he was playing a keytar, something he refused to do any circumstances. His exact reply involved the band A Flock Of Seagulls and a biologically and anatomically impossible action.)

After the workout, the three of them decided to take a shower together, which was an entirely different collection of messes. Kevin climbed into the shower first, fully expecting to have the shower to himself, but a minute or so after he'd started soaping up, he felt a set of hands against his back.

“Decided to join me, Tee?” he asked. 'Tee' was the nickname Fatima had suggested to him as a way for him not to have to say her entire name each time, much like she preferred calling him 'Kev.'

“Not just me,” Fatima replied as her hands moved to slide across his stomach, her breasts pressed against his back, as he felt another hand start to wrap around his cock. “Nat decided she wanted to lend a hand.”

“Not just a hand,” Natalie said with a giggle as she stroked his shaft while water poured down on all three of them. One of the nicest parts of the house was that the shower was designed in such a way that the showerhead could be set to one of three settings, covering increasingly large areas of space, so that everyone in the shower was getting hot water. “But whatever part else I need to lend.”

Kevin's breath caught as he felt Natalie kissing down his stomach before wrapping her lips around the head of his dick, sliding her mouth down to the base of it. He tilted his head upwards to make sure the soap was washed clear from his eyes before he turned to look down, watching Natalie's dark hair sliding back and forth, her fingertips cradling his nutsack while Fatima's hands slowly dragged her fingernails against his chest.

“She's good at this,” Fatima purred into his ear. “Did you make her pass a dick sucking challenge before you offered her her necklace?”

Natalie popped her lips off his shaft with a grin, looking up at her. “No, but then I was stretching with one foot flat on the floor and the other leg resting up on his shoulder when we were discussing whether or not I could fit in here.”

“That sounds very impressive,” Fatima said, the last word catching a little in her throat, which Kevin realized was the result of Natalie taking her other hand and stroking it along Fatima's pussy.

“Quite the showoff, aren't you?”

“If I wanted to show off, ma'am, I'd be doing this standing on my head, which I could do.”

“She's kidding, isn't she Kev?”

“She was part of Cirque Du Soleil for a while, Tee, so I doubt it.”

“Was? What happened?”

Natalie moved to stand up a bit before leaning her face over Kevin's shoulder towards Fatima. “My tits were too big for a lot of the sorts of moves they wanted me to do, so I moved here and started teaching fitness while working on my cooking,” she said, leaning up to kiss Fatima's lips for a moment. “I think I may eventually want to start up my own restaurant, but I'm worried it'll take me away from Kev too much.”

“I never said you shouldn't chase your dreams, Nat,” he replied, feeling Natalie's stiff dark nipples running through his chest hair, stiffening up at the sensations his fine dark hair sent up her spine. “If you want to open a restaurant, I'll be your first investor.”

“Awww, thanks Kev, but it takes more than one investor to open a restaurant...”

“I'll be second in line, then,” Fatima said, arching an eyebrow. “And you know I have the money to be all the investor you need. You should start planning for it.”

“You're teasing me,” Nat said, pausing as she looked carefully at Fatima's face. “You're *not* teasing me? Oh wow, like, holy shit! Okay! Okay. Right. Let me think about that before I start asking you for money. I'm not in a rush am I?”

“Take all the time you need,” Kevin said, feeling one of Nat's legs lifting up to wrap around his waist, pulling him and Fatima closer, backing the three of them up against the wall of the shower. With a sudden leap, she lifted her other leg up and pressed her thighs to his hips, as she moved to get his cock lined up and slid within her snatch, a filthy groan escaping from her lips, Kev's breath catching a little bit as well.

The Asian girl was limber and the fact that Fatima's body weight was pushing into his, making sure he was grinding her up against the edge of the shower only made it that much hotter. “That's it, love, give it to her,” Fatima purred at him, one of her hands reaching down to take over playing with his balls. “I like watching you give the hired help the ol' one-two.”

“He's.... nnnhhh... he's giving me more than one-two, ma'am,” Nat said as Kev begin to try and snap his hips back and forth, but he found it was actually easier to use his upper arm strength to lift and drop Nat up and down, her back just slipping against the wall of the shower, considering how wet they all were.

Fatima's other hand moved to push between Kev and Nat, doing its best to work down to let her thumb rub against Nat's clit while Kevin was jerking her up and down on his dick, his eyes closing a little, as Nat's athleticism was making this even easier than he'd thought it would be.

The three shades of flesh played well off one another, and before he knew it, he felt Natalie's cunt start spasming around his shaft, her face buried into his shoulder, the high pitching whimpering noises almost like little chipmunk squeaks. It took a moment but eventually he felt her slowly uncurling her legs from around his waist, lifting up to slide his cock out from inside of her before lowering one foot then the other onto the floor of the shower. “Do her next, boss,” Nat groaned at him.

“Now now, Nat,” Fatima started, “I don't know that we've got tiii—”

She was interrupted by Kevin spinning her in front of him, pressing her face-to-face against Nat, pulling her hips back and kicking her legs apart just enough so he could just slide his still hard cock up inside of her Indian pussy.

The two women were of similar heights, which meant pressed together like that, their tits were jammed up against each other, Nat's back against the wall giving her no room to go anywhere, even as her lips moved to press against Fatima's, their tongues getting tangled up with one another even as Fatima did her best to try and lean back into Kevin's thrusts, but Kevin was hellbent on making sure she couldn't think straight, trapped between delights both in front of her and behind.

Each time Kevin's hips smacked against Fatima's ass, her ochre flesh rippled even as she would moan into Natalie's mouth. The pace was hard and strong, and sooner than Kevin would've liked, he could feel his body starting to tense up, his teeth catching his bottom lip as he started to orgasm and began to blast hot cum up inside of her snatch, giving the woman shivers of delight.

He was starting to pull back from the two women as they were breaking the kiss, a wicked laugh rolling from Fatima's lips. "So, everyone gets an orgasm but me?" she teased the other two.

"You came in there, you can't fool me," Natalie giggled back at her.

"Did not!" Fatima said, grinning like maybe she had.

"Well then, we can fix that!" Natalie spun Fatima around so that her back was up against Natalie's chest. Nat's left hand slid around Fatima's waist, as if to hold her in place, as her right hand reached up to grab one of the detachable showerheads, lowering it down before pointing it directly at Fatima's pussy, sending the Indian Brit into a fit of shivers.

"N-n-n-not f-f-f-fair!"

A moment or two later, it was clear that whether Fatima had gotten an orgasm before when Kevin was fucking her, she was definitely having one now, her hips gesticulating wildly, as if trying to get closer to the shower head or, more likely, away from the intense sensations. During her orgasm, Kevin had to step in to help keep Fatima from slipping down to the floor of the shower.

The three of them took a bit more time getting clean again before they finally headed out of the shower to get dressed, not that anyone else said a damn thing about it. Miriam had been on the receiving end of Kev and Fatima before herself and enjoyed it far too much to complain about others having a longer than normal morning.

Kev and Fatima sat in the back of the Escalade while Jackson drove and Miriam sat shotgun keeping watch, as their giant SUV blended in with the seas of endless other vehicles just like it, heading over towards a southern part of LA away from where they'd intended to be heading, as Miriam tensed up a little.

"Jackson, what are you doing?"

"I'm... I'm not entirely sure," the giant black security agent replied. "I'm starting to think this is some sort of magical compulsion I'm being given, because wherever it is I'm driving, it isn't where I'm intending us to go. It's... fuck, it's frustrating feeling my body not do what my brain's telling it to, but while I know I *should* be worried, for some reason I just *ain't*."

Kevin sighed. "Maybe text your dad, tell him something came up and we're running a bit behind schedule. That sounds exactly like a Merlin compulsion."

"How late should I say we'll be?" Fatima asked, fishing out her phone from her purse.

"Merlin's generally not all that chatty, so maybe tell him an hour or so? Best to keep it open ended. You can even blame it on traffic, looking at the satnav." He glanced and noticed Jackson was turning off the 110 at the N. Hill street exit. "Looks like we're close to wherever it is we're being rerouted, so maybe we'll get lucky?"

"Da says he's running late anyway, so he's asking if we can reschedule to dinner around 6?"

"Tentatively tell him yes."

The SUV didn't have much further to go, pulling into the parking lot at Los Angeles State Historic Park, something that made Kevin frown a little. "Well, this isn't where I'd typically meet Merlin, but maybe he's up to something new."

Jackson pulled the SUV into a parking spot, then turned the car off, stepping out of the vehicle, mostly in control of himself. "We're supposed to go over the Roundhouse Bridge," he said, stepping to open the door for Fatima while Miriam opened the door for Kevin.

"Well, the sightlines are easy as hell to maintain," Miriam said. "So assuming we're just worried about kidnapers and not snipers, everything should be fine."

"Why the hell would I be worried about snipers?" Kev asked her.

"I don't know about you, but I'm *always* worried about snipers," she replied in that dry tone that

made it impossible for him to tell if she was kidding or not.

The four of them moved out of the parking lot and started walking down the bridge towards the end overlook point, where there was a solitary figure waiting for them, but certainly not the one that anyone expected to be.

While it was the first time most of them had laid eyes on this particular individual, Kevin had an immediate sense of recognition, even at a distance, even with the changes in appearance. It was the endless number of rings covering her fingers that was the dead giveaway.

They walked down the concrete path, and Kevin got a chance to notice exactly how *different* Morgana Le Fay looked from the last time he'd seen her. When he'd last seen her, she'd looked to be in her early 50s, but now she appeared as though she couldn't be a day over 30, her hair a dark color of red, like that of a fine Merlot or Pinot Noir, still hanging loosely around her face, although now it was cut into bangs that the woman somehow made look good. Her general facial structure didn't look *at all* how he remembered her appearing, slender where it had once been rounded, rounded where it had once been slender. In fact, she looked almost nothing like the woman Kevin had pulled from that burning car what felt like four or five lifetimes ago.

"Hello my dear boy!" Morgana said, waving one hand at him in the most aggressively friendly gesture she could manage. "I know I said we weren't going to meet again, but I understand there's been some kind of tinkering going on with the gift that I gave you? Any idea what that's all about?"

Down below the overlook, in a concrete ring off in the distance there was a tall Germanic man swinging a large sword through the air, as if he was going through some sort of training, although there was no one opposing him that Kevin could see. The man's attire was mostly leather or denim, and the fact that he had a beard, even though it was neat and well-kept, might give someone the impression of a homeless man fighting with imaginary demons in the park.

"I know exactly what it's about, Morgana," Kevin chuckled as they moved to stand before her. "It's supposed to be a 'thank you' from an old friend of yours. Chap by the name of Merlin."

Morgana's wide and playful smile disappeared almost immediately to be replaced with a look of consternation. "You didn't seek him out, did you?"

Kevin held his hands up in surrender. "I mostly certainly did not. I was in the house one day when I suddenly had this urge to go out for a walk, and before I knew it, I found myself outside of a bar cal—"

"Called Geoffrey's Gambit," she finished for him. "I'm familiar with where the Myrrdin likes to hang his hat up when he's meeting with civilians." She sighed a little, shaking her head. "Did he say specifically what he was doing to you?"

"He said he was adding something called Midas Day to the experience, and that eventually it would even itself out, once I figured out what it was and what it was for."

"He referred to it as 'a gift'?" she asked. "You're sure of that? He used that exact wording?"

"As I recall, he said something like 'you did a solid for Morgana, which means you did one for me as well,' and then he said something about introducing a bit of his magic into yours, but that it would be, well, something a bit more Merlin like."

Morgana moved closer and reached forward to suddenly take Kevin's right hand, lifting it up so she could look at the ring she'd given him. Her fingertips were cold to the touch, but somehow that didn't bother Kevin. She lifted to raise one hand to wave it over the ring and purple sparks shot out of it towards her as she jerked her hand back suddenly.

"Well, the old fool's certainly done *something* to it, but I can't tell entirely what it is. But if he described you saving my life as 'doing me a solid,' then maybe he's in one of his more positive and friendly moods this decade," she sighed. "Maybe he's finally forgiven me for taking us both to that key party in 1969, although I swear, he's held onto it longer than he has any right to."

The giant man with the sword laughed and yelled over to them. "You went home with Jimi Fucking Hendrix, Mo!" he bellowed in her direction.

“Well, I didn't know he was Jimi Hendrix at the time!” she laughed back at him, shaking her head again before looking back to them. “How was I supposed to know I was shagging one of the greatest guitarists of all time?”

“*One of?*” Kevin said. “You mean *the* full stop, end of sentence.”

“Hell of a lay in the sack too,” she giggled. “But that's me telling stories again. Who's your friends, Kev?”

“This is my partner, Fatima Davies. That's the head of her security detail, Jackson. And next to him is *my* bodyguard, Miriam.”

“Aaaaand...?”

“Oh? Oh! Oh, and the little dragon flying overhead is Strazo, who was a gift to Miriam from Merlin during her one meeting with him.”

“What did he ask of you in return, my dear?” Morgana said to Miriam sympathetically.

“One secret of his choosing,” she said, blushing a little. “One which I hope you won't make me repeat here and now.”

“No no,” Morgana said, snapping her fingers to dismiss the thought away. “That was your bargain with the wizard, and Strazo looks like you're looking after his health as much as he is yours in turn, so that's good.”

“He likes sweets a little more than he should, especially salted caramels.”

“Mmmm. Don't let him have too many or he'll fatten up, and that won't be good for either of you. Are you happy you've got Kevin in your life, Fatima?” she said, turning to look at the Brit.

“Yeh, he was the sort of man I didn't know I needed until I found him, or until you sent him to me, I guess, or until you sent Elizabeth to send him to me... who, actually, sent him to me in the first place?” Fatima said with an odd smile. “I'd like to know who I should be thanking.”

“A little bit of both. I certainly gave Elizabeth a long list of names whom I thought might make an excellent pairing with Kevin's wants and needs, but she had every right to decide how and when it was used,” the sorceress said to them.

“There's a list?” Kevin asked.

“Mmm,” Morgana confirmed. “One which you will *never* see, Kevin, so don't ask.”

“I wasn't asking to see it,” he chuckled. “I guess I was just wondering how long it was.”

“Nothing overly large. A few thousand names or so.”

“*Thousand?*”

Morgana made an overly dramatic exasperated noise at him, shaking her head. “I think there was, when I was putting your gift together, about four thousand women or so that I thought would be 98% matches or better, although that number fluctuates all the time, so I wanted to give Elizabeth a leg up. Can't expect the poor girl to do all the work, now can I?”

“I guess not.”

“Other than Merlin's meddling, everything else pleasant enough?” she said. “If I had known it was just Merlin sticking his nose in where it didn't belong, I might not have revisited you, but when my magics have been tampered with, I take an interest in it, because no one will ever accuse Morgana Le Fay of not holding up her end of the deal.”

“It's all *very* generous of you, m'lady,” Kevin said, bowing his head a little, which made Morgana giggle a little bit more.

“See, Kai? Some people still know how to offer up a bit of respect to someone who's doing them a favor!” she yelled over at the man with the sword, who had tucked it into a scabbard on his back and was walking towards the bridge.

When the man got close to them, he jumped up into the air and onto the bridge, probably an entire story upwards, making the entire motion look easy and effortless, as he landed next to her, and Kevin immediately felt tiny, as the man towered over them, his broad shoulders making him look almost like a cross between a biker and a Viking.

"I'd like to think we're about even on the favors, Morg, wouldn't you?" he said with a sly grin, bending down to press a kiss to her forehead. "Otherwise I can pick up where I left off last night..."

She reached out and swatted at him with a hand, although Kevin could swear she was blushing. "Not while there's civvies present, you oaf," she said. "Kevin, Fatima, Miriam, Jackson, may I introduce to you Kai, also known as the Ostrogoth."

Kai raised one hand in salute and Kevin realized the man's fingers could easily envelope his own head. "Afternoon, good and gentle people."

Morgana sighed. "Well, Kevin, as much as I would love to tell you that Merlin's meddling is the end of it, unfortunately his magics have a tendency to draw all sorts of magical misfits towards it like moths to a flame, so I'll reach out to Elizabeth and give her some contact information for me. I should stress, however, that the time between when she reaches out to me and when I reach out to you might be quite a bit, as I don't always check my deaddrops as often as I should. I'll try, though!"

"Magical misfits?" Miriam asked cautiously. "Dare I even ask?"

"I'll send you a care package, dearie; a gift from me to you, no strings attached, although you'll probably need to spend some time practicing with it. Nothing you shouldn't be able to handle, though. I can't imagine it'll get anything bolder than a vampire, and even they generally know better than to try and feed off those touched by mages. The blood's too volatile for their liking. It can catch fire in their veins sometimes."

"Not literally, of course," Fatima said.

"No no, *quite* literally," Morgana corrected. "But the rush of danger is part of the thrill for them. Anyway, it isn't all that much to get in a tizzy over. Just mind your P's and Q's and everything'll be right as rain as long as the rain keeps coming."

"And this Midas Day?" Kevin asked.

"Knowing Merlin like I do, he's got some sort of endgame in it. You just need to figure out what it is."

"That easy, huh?"

Morgana giggled, rolling her eyes. "Nothing easy about it, but nothing to be gained by complaining either. Go forth, Kevin Bishop, and continue enjoying the gift I've bequeathed you," she said, lifting her left hand to make a sort of silvery-purple cloud of mist start to envelope her and the Ostrogoth within its vapors. "And maybe give me a thanks in the liner notes of your next album. I always like seeing my name in print."

Before he could answer, the column of vapors collapsed, and the space where the two had been standing was now completely empty.

"Magicians are strange folk," Miriam said, breaking the silence, which made the other three start laughing.

"Off to meet Dad?" Fatima asked.

"Sure sure," Kevin replied. "After this, how rough can he be?"

## Chapter Six – Always Saturday

The next few weeks passed relatively without incident before Kevin got the sort of one-two punch of a day like he couldn't possibly have anticipated. It started off relatively light, with him having a meeting with Alice Karteaux with a few final notes about last minute tweaks and adjustments to the score. He would've been worried that Emily wasn't there for the meeting, but she was wall-to-wall booked in terms of editing, final effects and getting as close to final picture lock as she could. Alice had teased him about how many tickets he was going to need for the premiere, asking him if he could keep it under ten.

When Alice and Fatima had first met, Kevin had been absolutely certain the sparks were going to fly and not in a good way, but it turned out the two women had several common interests and mutual friends, so they hadn't had even the slightest bit of professional jealousy or annoyance with one another. Alice hadn't even freaked when Fatima had dropped the fact that Kevin's household was a polyamorous one, with Kevin having multiple partners. Instead, she'd joked that having three or four men to cater to her own needs might be something she'd have to consider moving forward. Neither Kevin nor Fatima thought Alice was actually kidding, judging by the sly smile on her face.

After that meeting, they'd headed back to the house, where Kevin was told he had another interview scheduled, someone they thought the household needed, an attorney.

"You know having a lawyer on tap always sounds like a great idea until you realize that means you've got a maneater sitting around the house," Kevin teased as Miriam drove them back up the hill towards the house. "Constantly hungry. Looking for something to bite."

"You're paranoid, darling," Fatima teased, rolling her eyes as she glanced down at her iPhone, typing furiously onto it. "We need to have a lawyer on call, for both you and me, and Elizabeth found us an excellent candidate that I won't mind seeing naked as part of her interview."

"You know, that's not *typically* part of the interview process," he laughed, reviewing his notes from his meeting with Alice, making sure everything was set up and actionable over the next two days, considering how urgently they were needed. "Are you sure this woman knows what she's getting into?"

"I trust Elizabeth to handle all the necessary pre-interview screenings, don't you?"

"She hasn't led me astray yet," Kevin replied. "And she somehow made that TMZ scare go away, although I haven't the slightest how she did that."

"Elizabeth has a lot of influence in a lot of dark corners," Fatima said. "That's part of the reason why Morgana chose her for you."

"I've often wondered *how* Morgana found Elizabeth. I can't imagine that's just a standard spell somewhere in the repertoire for mages just getting started."

Fatima looked up from her phone and turned to gaze at him quizzically. "Do you think mages learn everything from a series of handbooks?"

"I mean... I don't have any *idea* how mages learn to do what they do," he laughed. "When I wanted to learn guitar, I found a book, I found a teacher and I started practicing."

"And the book taught you how to get that deep synth bed sound, full of echo and reverb?"

"Well, *no*," he admitted. "I learned a lot of that through endless experimentation."

"So, think of the kind of experimentation you could do if you had, say, a few thousand years or so to fiddle around?"

He paused for a long moment, then nodded. "I can see your point." He could only imagine the sort of fun he might have been able to have given that much time, the songs he could've written, the melodies he might have discovered. "You're sure I need a lawyer?"

"I'm sure *we* need a lawyer, Kevin," Fatima sighed. "Besides, Elizabeth said she's got an excellent candidate all lined up for us, and that she's extremely different than anyone in the household right now. She has a kink that might take a bit for you to wrap your head around, but you'll be fine with it in the end."

"I think it's fascinating," Miriam said from the front seat of the car.

"It's certainly something," Jackson said from the driver's seat. "But she's a good looker, so I suppose at some point when you look good enough, you can get away with anything."

"What about you, Jackson?" Kevin asked with a laugh. "You got somebody special? I could set Elizabeth on it, give her another task to have going around inside of her head. She'd probably give me all sorts of guff about it, but I think she'd probably enjoy the challenge of it."

"Negatory there, big chief," Jackson chuckled. "I've got me a smokin' hot girlfriend who's a doctor over at Cedars-Sinai, and I'm actually thinking about putting a ring on it, since we've been together two years now, and she's been patient as hell with me."

"How come I haven't met her yet, Jax?" Fatima asked, looking up from her phone, an almost hurt expression on her face. "Are you afraid I'm going to scare her off?"

"I might be afraid you're gonna try and steal her away from me, boss," Jackson laughed so they could both tell he was kidding. "It's just her schedule's been so busy, as has mine, that we don't always get enough time to see each other, much less do social shit. You're right, though. If I'm gonna pop the question to her, I probably should let her meet you guys."

"Bloody right you should," Fatima growled, looking back down at her phone. "Make an appointment for us to all have dinner at the house over the next week or so, and we can iron all of this out properly."

"Yes ma'am."

The rest of the drive wasn't too bad, even though they were fighting traffic something fierce until they hit the hills themselves, when it all thinned out and they could make their way up towards the house, pulling the car through the gate before it slid shut behind them. They tended to leave the SUV out front unless it needed to charge, so Jackson just pulled it up in front of the front door. There was an additional car in the driveway, a silver Audi e-tron, impressive and expensive looking, clearly from the candidate for their position of lawyer.

Elizabeth was waiting for them at the doorway, dressed in a smart crimson skirt that went down past her knees, brown leather boots that made up most of the distance up her legs to the skirt, and a brown button-up blouse with the top view buttons open so that her pendant was on proud display, that smoky crystal framed right in the center of that pale flesh. "Evening, sir, ma'am. The candidate is waiting in the dining room for you both, whenever you're ready," she told them.

"Let me go toss my notes down in the studio and then I'll be up. You can go in without me if you want, 'Tima, or wait there and we can go in together," he said as he turned left and headed towards the stairs. "Won't be a minute."

He headed down the stairs, walking briskly down the hall to his studio. He opened the door and moved to set his bag down, sighing as he saw the studio hadn't been left in the best of states. Dandy Randy had been working with a group called The Dusty Sages, getting some of their initial demo work put together before they started recording their actual album in earnest. Kevin liked to be able to hear the rough song structures before working with the artists to take their skeletons of songs and develop them into something fully fleshed out. That said, Randy wasn't the best at cleaning up the studio afterwards, and Kevin had been very clear about nobody other than him or Randy reorganizing the studio, so it had a tendency to be messier than most of the rest of the house.

Kevin didn't feel comfortable just leaving food and half-empty beer cans out, especially around sensitive recording equipment, so he did a quick pass to get the place into a shape where he wasn't ashamed of how it looked, and there wasn't anything to draw ants or could spill left in the place. It only took a couple of minutes, and while he felt he hadn't left Fatima waiting too long, he still felt a little guilty about taking longer than he'd planned.

When he came up to the dining room, he saw that Fatima had already gone in and started talking to the candidate, which was good, because he trusted Fatima's judgment and she had a good eye for people. "There's my man," she said with a smile. "Randy left you a mess, didn't he?"

"I swear, at some point, we're going to hire a maid for the house, and let them have an hour a day just cleaning up the studio, after I've spent an entire day training them on what can and can't be moved," he laughed, rolling his eyes. "I know Randy means well, but he's too easy on the clients and doesn't make them pick up after themselves."

"Potato chip bags?"

"Half-finished beers mostly," he sighed. "Hi. Sorry about the wait. I'm Kevin Bishop," he said, offering his hand as he took a look at the woman sitting next to his partner.

She was in her mid to late 30s with wavy, almost frizzy hair the color of oak that hung just down to her shoulders in a way that looked stylishly disheveled. She had a bit of a sharp nose, but it gave her face a sort of fierce beauty, with high cheek bones and small painted lips filling out the rest of her face. Her skin was a natural shade of tan, her body slender yet still distinctly feminine. "Leah Fox," she said, taking his hand and shaking it. "Pleasure to meet you, Mister Bishop. I've only heard excellent things about you from everyone I've asked, and that isn't a common thing here in La La Land."

Leah had shown up in a business suit that still bristled with sex appeal, the skirt hanging past her knees but slit up dangerously high on either side, and the blouse unbuttoned down a bit to offer an invitation to look at cleavage on display, the edges of a lacy red bra peeking at the fringes. She also had a briefcase with her, sitting on top of the dining room table off to one side, and a couple of sheets of paper in front of her, sliding one over for him to look at, a copy of her resume, which Fatima was already done looking at.

"So Leah, tell me a little bit about yourself while I skim through this real quick. Elizabeth likes me to know as little as possible before meeting anyone, simply so I don't set expectations in my mind before I get to know them on their own terms."

"Well, I'm 36. I grew up in New York City and went to Yale to get my law degree. I was also involved in a bunch of academics while I was there, and after I graduated I went to go work for a firm called Ariton, Oriens & Associates."

"Never heard of them," Kevin said, noting that she'd worked for them for about six years.

"Nor should you have. That's how they like it. They're... well, they're as much fixers as they are lawyers, so I spent a lot of time learning how to make problems disappear without having to go to trial."

"Is that a euphemism for killing people off?" he asked cautiously.

She laughed hard enough to close her eyes for a moment. "Nothing so ridiculously dramatic. I mean, there may have been some mild extortion and/or blackmail, but nothing with actual violence involved. Anyway, after half a decade or so, I sort of lost the taste for it. I didn't mind the work so much as the people who I was working *for*, the sort of clients that AOA brings in. It was always people who'd done something bad and needed someone to make it go away, and in the six years or so I was at AOA, I don't think I had a single client that I would've wanted to spend any time with socially. So I decided not only to leave AOA, but also NYC and move out here to the West Coast."

"How did the change in locale treat you?"

"My parents can't just casually swing by my place anymore, so *that's* definitely progress," she said with a laugh. "I took a job working with Dreamworks for a while, focusing on entertainment contract law. I've been there the last five years, but I'm ready for a change, and something entirely out of the corporate environment."

"If you'd be working for us," Fatima replied, "you wouldn't be *entirely* out of the corporate environment, Miss Fox. I've got all sorts of things tangled up in corporate structures."

"But you aren't entirely a corporation unto yourself, ma'am, so that's the important thing," Leah replied. "And I looked into GDGear, and it doesn't have any ties to sweatshops or unethical production practices. Plus, they have their own lawyers, so I wouldn't be dealing with most of that. And what I learned during my time at Dreamworks would be *incredibly* beneficial to you, Mr. Bishop."

"Call me Kevin, please. Especially considering what you know about what else this position

would entail,” he said. “I've got a number of irons in the fire, in terms of not only music but also work in film and now even in television, it sounds like. And I'm not just a musician, I'm also a producer, meaning I'm helping other people with their music as well.”

“That means lots and lots of contract law, Kevin,” Leah said with an inviting smile that seemed a mismatch for a lawyer. “I don't mind contract law. It's fun and there's lots of odds and ends to keep track of, making sure you get paid for your work, that your royalties keep coming in and that nobody tries to shortchange you for what you did.”

“Do you think that's likely?”

“Well, I asked Elizabeth to show me your contract with Miss Rouchard, and while I don't think it was intentional, there's a couple of ways they could screw you in the deal,” Leah said. “I'd actually suggest you file an addendum to the contract, just as an 'in-case' protective measure.”

“Like what?”

“Well, for example, if the soundtrack was put out on vinyl, they wouldn't have to pay you royalties for that. That's the way your contract is worded. You're only guaranteed rights on usage in the film itself and from digital releases. Hell, if someone put it out on CD, you wouldn't get a cut of it, not that anyone really uses CDs anymore.”

“Some people happen to *like* tangible tech,” Kevin scowled. “How could I have missed that?”

“Because it's like 80 pages, and nobody ever wants to read quite that much legalese unless they have to. It's basically another language. We do that shit on purpose, you know. Lawyers do everything we can to make sure our services are desperately needed forever.”

“She's got you there, luv,” Fatima giggled.

“Any deep dark secrets hiding in your past we should know about?” Kevin asked her.

“I'm a lawyer, Kevin,” Leah replied without hesitation. “Yes, I'm hiding about a million deep dark secrets I don't want you to know about, that *you* don't want to know about. I've done a hundred things that I'll be ashamed about until the day I die. I've done a dozen things that'd probably get me arrested by any cop worth her salt to carry her badge in any state in this country. I've done two or three things that might be severe enough to get me abducted and tried in front of an international tribunal, maybe even in the Haig, for war crimes.”

“Really?” Kevin said, narrowing his eyes to look at her.

“No,” Leah laughed. “Not the last one anyway, but the rest of it, pretty much. At DreamWorks, I serve a dozen different masters, so I'd like to whittle that down to just... two. To still have challenges waiting for me every morning, while I have front row seats to the Hollyweird lifestyle without having to get caught up in it when I don't want to. So yeah, I'm very interested in getting this job. And there are all the other side benefits, assuming they're actually true.”

This was the point where Kevin was a little wary, not entirely sure how much Elizabeth had told the woman in advance. “Let's assume that whatever you've heard might, in fact, have some truth to it. It's not all wine and roses. It's got loads of complications, things that'll blow your mind, and you may never be able to sleep perfectly well again. That all still something you're on board with?”

“On board with?” she said with an enthusiastic smile, like a child under the Christmas tree looking out upon an endless sea of presents, just waiting to be opened. “I can't *wait* to be a part of it. I even had a specific request for the marker I'd wear, something Elizabeth was able to get Lady Morgana to make for me. If you decide not to invite me into your family, then she also included something to revert it back to itself, but I'm hoping I've convinced you that I can be a very welcome asset to your family and household.”

Kevin leaned back a little. “I hadn't heard anything about changes made to Morgana's gift. But both she and Elizabeth signed off on this, you say?”

“Mmm,” Leah said, reaching across the table to grab a glass of water, taking a sip from it, as if for the first time during their entire conversation she found herself a little bit nervous. “Morgana toned it down slightly from my original ask, but I can respect her reasoning and accept the changes.”

“What did you ask for?” Fatima said, clearly as curious as he was.

Leah set the glass of water down on the table then folded her hands together. “What I need you both to understand is that I am a woman supremely in control of her own destiny, who has carved her own path of her own choosing for every step since she was able to walk. It's made me... well, something of a control freak. Part of the reason I've been single so long is that, well, I tend to look at personal relationships like I do business relationships – if you don't spot the way the other person is trying to fuck you over early on, then you're getting way more fucked over than you can allow, and you should get yourself clear as quickly as possible.”

“That's... cynical.”

“Maybe,” Leah admitted, “but that's me. So what I want out of my sexual relationships is for someone to use me, roughly and coarsely, without breaking me, and to make sure that both they and I are sated at the end of it. But I also have this little kink that I've never be able to scratch. At least, not before now, when it sounds like magic can allow me to have that.”

“Tell us about it,” Fatima said.

Leah laughed a little bit, looking down at her hands, before looking up, realizing if she couldn't voice it, it was never going to happen. “Have you ever heard the expression 'fucked stupid' before?”

Fatima grinned a little bit. “It's figurative, but sure.”

“What if it didn't *have* to be?” Leah said, leaning forward slightly.

“Then I would imagine you would rapidly become a very *bad* lawyer to have in our employ,” Fatima said, toying with a strand of her own dark hair.

“I don't mean permanently, naturally, but to have sexual gratification... simplify everything for you, just for a short while. To let it cleanse your brain and reduce everything down to its most basic elements. There's a name for the kink – they call it bimbofication, and I don't want it to last forever, *GOD no*, but for a few hours. I'd wanted it to be for six-to-eight hours, but Morgana insisted that if she did that, it could run the very real risk of interfering with my ability to do my job, so she's shrunk the timeframe down to just a couple of hours instead.”

“Wait wait *wait*,” Kevin said. “So, let me make sure I'm understanding this correctly... you...” He stopped for a moment, trying to find a way to get the words to make sense in his head. “You *want* sexual encounters to turn you stupid, but only for a short while?”

“Yes, exactly,” Leah exhaled, clearly relieved that Kevin hadn't thrown her out of the room immediately. “I want sexual gratification to temporarily reduce my intelligence, so I'm not overthinking that post-coitus sexual glow, that I'm not immediately reverting to worrying about what I have planned for tomorrow or the next day or the next week, and can simplify down my thoughts to just... to just *be*, to just *exist* in a moment for a while, to have that sexual delight still running aftershocks through my body and making me feel all warm and tingly and not being so smart as to distract myself from the wonderful sensations.”

“And the necklace from Morgana's been changed for you?”

“It has. Your cum will temporarily diminish my intellect, just for two hours, enough time to let me savor the sensations and drift off into a restful sleep without my mind continually working on problems. When I wake up in the morning, I'll be back to myself. Ah, even if you just wake me up in the middle of the night with some sort of legal emergency, I'll be of clear mind again. But I shouldn't be trusted to operate heavy machinery after being fucked stupid,” she giggled. “Or even be allowed near my cell phone. It's a handful of things to remember, but it's something I think you two shouldn't have any trouble managing.”

“It doesn't sound all that complicated,” Fatima replied. “Anything else?”

“One more thing,” Leah said with a shy smile. “In addition to that, I'd like my sexual encounters to be radically different than my day-to-day life. I live a life of high power, massive control, utter and total dominance over my realms, the legal challenges falling in my wake. I am a queen among the rabble, a force to be reckoned with and never taken lightly. But a girl needs a change of pace.”

“Which means what?” Kevin asked.

“I want to be degraded, vilified, spoken poorly of. I want to be talked dirty to and treated even dirtier.”

“I’m not sure—”

“Sorry, Kevin,” she continued. “I wasn't quite finished. I want all that. From her.” She nodded over to Fatima, a sly smile on her face. “With you. For you. There is something remarkably thrilling about being bent to a woman's will for a man's delight, and that is what I want from our sexual relationship, the one I am willing to submit to with the two of you. If that's something that interests you, of course.”

There was a pregnant silence in the air for a moment, neither Kevin nor Fatima which of them should speak first before Kevin finally broke the pause. “I think it's more of a question of if you're into it than if I am, my love.”

“Oh, I think I can certainly wrap my head around it,” Fatima said, licking her lips a little bit. “And it's agreed that you won't be sore about anything you're called during said encounters?”

“Not at all, ma'am,” Leah responded. “As long as it's restricted to just during those encounters and doesn't contaminate our working relationship.”

“Then I think I can live up to my end of the bargain, love,” Fatima told him. “What about you? Think she looks like someone you'd like to fuck?”

“I suppose that all depends,” Kevin laughed softly. “Are you going to be this uptight when we get you into the sack, with such formal and stoic speech, or are you going to loosen up a bit?”

“You could always remove the stick from my ass and replace it with your cock. Sir.” Leah licked her lips a little bit, tapping her fingertips across the top of the table. “I'd probably like that.”

“What he's asking, Leah, is if you're going to talk all stuck up the entire time we have you in the sack,” Fatima replied.

“I'm asking you to call me a filthy cocksleeve, a degenerate cum catching slut, and you're worried I'm going to come across as a goody two-shoes?” Leah genuinely asked them with a giggle.

“It's a fair point,” Kevin chuckled in reply. He picked up his phone and typed a message into his phone, sending a note to Elizabeth, asking her to bring in Leah's necklace and to take care of the other thing they'd talked about earlier. “Shall we head down to the bedroom? Elizabeth will be there waiting for us with the necklace.”

The three of them stood up and walked down the hallway to the master bedroom, Leah giving Jackson a little bit of a wave on her way past, something Kevin noted. “You know Jackson?”

“Uh huh. He's how Elizabeth found me. His girlfriend, Naomi, is my little sister,” Leah said as they moved to enter the bedroom, nodding to Elizabeth. “You're always networking, aren't you missy?”

Elizabeth smirked a little bit, giving a tiny playful shrug. “Never hurts to be on the lookout for new talent,” she said. “So I take it all the terms have been agreed upon?”

“Oh, I forgot to tell her about your photo th—” Kevin started to say before Leah interrupted him.

“Elizabeth mentioned it to me. As well as telling me about Miriam's dragon and most of the other mystical secrets you've all witnessed.”

“Didn't freak you out any?”

“Only turned me on even further,” she said with a smile before grabbing a pillow off the bed, tossing it down onto the floor before moving to get on her knees atop it. “Let's do this. We've been talking about it so fucking long that I'm already itchy in my skin.”

Elizabeth pulled the necklace from her pocket, extending it to Kevin, who took it from her and then moved to stand behind Leah, as he considered it. She'd chosen a woven gold rope and a cameo locket with the smokey stone shaped into forming a sort of palm tree in the center of it. It felt warm in his hands, almost thrumming, like it too was impatient. As soon as he was standing behind her, Leah slid her hands back to lift her hair up, piling it atop her head so that her neck was perfectly bared for him to slide the necklace around.

Kevin brought the necklace slowly up along her neck, seeing a shiver running down her spine as he did so, finally opening the clasp, hooking the curve in and letting it close, as a filthy moan bellowed from her throat, her hands balling up into fists, her head leaning down before she drew in a sharp, giggly breath.

“Okay, fuck, I don't know why I doubted that part, but I did,” Leah said as she tilted her head back up.

“Now why don't you bend over the edge of our bed and pull your skirt up,” Fatima said to her.

Leah dutifully moved up off her knees and placed one hand on the middle of the bed as her other reached behind her and pulled the long skirt slowly up to reveal that she didn't have any panties on beneath it, her snatch swollen and slippery already with anticipation.

“Open that shirt and get that bra off, slut,” Fatima sternly told her. “When my man's fucking your brains out, I want to see those tits bouncing.”

She reached up and unbuttoned the rest of the buttons before working to pop the bra loose, sliding it down and off one arm then the other, tossing it aside. Kevin moved to stand to see her, and admired Leah's smaller breasts, like perky teardrops with light brown nipples atop them, as Leah whimpered, wagging her ass, like she was trying to lure him to get around behind her once more.

“I think she's impatient, love,” Fatima said with a laugh, as Kevin leaned in to give his girlfriend a long, tender kiss.

“She can wait just a minute,” he said before walking around, sliding his hand over Leah's toned ass, lifting his hand up before clapping it down. “She's *very* fit. Natalie's going to have a field day with her. Someone else to keep up with her merciless workouts.”

“Oh Kevin,” Fatima sighed. “She's looking at me with those soft, needy puppy dog eyes that say 'I'm in desperate need of your boyfriend's dick. I've got a wet little cunt that I want so desperately to have stretched open until I ache.' Go ahead. Make her moan again. I'll bet the little whore will cum just from you giving her her first real cock.”

He unbuttoned his jeans and unzipped them, sliding them down to his knees as he pulled his shaft free from his boxers, moving to get in position before both of his hands grabbed onto her hips yanked her back as he slammed his thick shaft inside of her pussy, a wild groan escaping her lips as Elizabeth snapped a handful of pictures for his phone.

Leah placed both of her hands on the bed so she could push back, forcing her hips into his thrusting shaft, burrowing his dick hilt deep inside of her, eager to lean into whatever lunges he was throwing her way.

Fatima grinned and then reached forward to tweak one of Leah's nipples, pinching it firmly.

“She's so adorably cute, Kev,” his partner told him. “Her tongue hanging out while you rail her on your generous cock over and over again. Say thank you, slut.”

“Thank you, sir!”

“Sir?” Fatima said with a frown on her face. She scrunched up her cheeks and then spat directly onto Leah's face. “Try again!”

“Thank you, Master! Thank you, Mistress!”

“Better,” Fatima said, reaching a hand to ruffle Leah's hair like she was a favored pet. “Go on, Kevin. Fuck her stupid. Pound her pussy until you're ready to nut up inside of her. I rather like the idea of you flooding our lawyer's cunt to seal the deal. Do it. Beg him for it, whore.”

“Please, Master! Pour your cum inside of my mind and fucking empty it!”

Kevin would've loved to keep on thrusting into Leah, but her pussy walls were clasping on his shaft so tightly that he couldn't hold it in. His hands grappled hard onto her hips and held her ass against his pelvis as his cock began to drown the inside of her cunt with a healthy load of his jism.

There was a slight glowing around Leah when he did before she slumped forward, sliding off his cock and falling on her belly on top of the bed, as Fatima moved over to kiss him, her tongue tangling up against his until he could feel a second tongue running along his prick.

When he pulled back from the kiss, he tilted his head, nodding downward, as Fatima looked to see that Leah had flipped around and was licking his cock clean of their combined juices, pausing to look up at them with a dopey smile. “Leah thirsty.”

Fatima gestured to the bathroom. “Go get some water from there, Leah.”

“Okay!” Leah said in a vapidly sing-song tone, hopping to her feet, heading into the bathroom.

“God, that really worked, didn't it?” Kevin said.

“Oh bollocks,” Fatima giggled. “She's looking in the cupboards. We should help her.”

They headed into the bathroom, where Leah was lifting the towels in the closet, as if water was an object she could find beneath them. Fatima moved over to the sink, filled a glass with water, then moved to hand it to Leah, who stared at it in confusion. Once Fatima helped her lift it to her lips, it seemed like Leah figured out the rest, drinking the water before smiling. “Thank you!”

“Why don't you go lay down on the bed and sleep, Leah,” Kevin told him.

“Okay!” Leah bounded off without a care in her empty mind.

“What can't magic do?” Fatima chuckled.

“Before we go to join her and have ourselves a little nap,” Kevin said. “We've got one other thing I wanted to talk about.”

Fatima was looking into the bedroom, watching Leah move up to lay down on top of the bed, curling up, not even using a pillow. “What's tha—”

When she turned back, Kevin was on one knee and was holding up a diamond ring in a box.

“Fatima Davies, will you marry me?”

She started nodding, as she helped Kevin take the ring from her box and slide it onto her finger. “It's about bloody time, you pillock. Now let's go to bed...”

## Intermission Six – The Stairs

Much of the next month of Kevin's life was spent hip deep in work, although he certainly made time to enjoy himself here and there. The film was scheduled to be content locked in just a few days', and that meant endless amounts of tiny twiddles. He was starting to lose his damn mind with the amount of slight decibel tweakage he'd done in the past week alone. He wanted to tell them to let their sound engineer handle it, but it was his first major film project, so he wanted to be a team player and help out wherever he could.

Fatima's father had been ecstatic that they were going to get married, telling Kevin that he'd been starting to think that maybe his daughter would never settle down. The fact that her father hinted so heavily that they should provide grandchildren soon was a little disconcerting, but Kevin decided to let all that slide for the time being.

The wedding had been set in a year's time. If it had been up to Kevin, it would've been done quickly and without much fuss, but Fatima's family had been adamant it be a massive production. On one hand, it meant that the entire wedding would be paid for, and incredibly extravagant, but on the other hand, parts of it were going to be filmed for an episode of her father's reality show, which wasn't thrilling to either himself or his bride-to-be. Still, as she pointed out, trying to fight against her father's wishes was like trying to swim upstream. You might make some progress, but it would far more exhausting than it was probably worth.

Once he'd gotten past getting the film score to final lock, he found that his days opened up a bunch more than they'd seemed, which let him sort of relax and focus on his other half, looking for groups he would be willing to produce. While at first it had seemed like a number of opportunities would be springing his way, he'd found many of the people who had sent him demo tapes to be, well, excessively dull and unoriginal. It wasn't that they were *bad* per se, but they just didn't do anything all that unique, they had derivative sounds that reminded him of too many other bands he'd heard over the years. There was another stack of demos waiting for him to listen to, but for the time being, he needed a break and had decided to spend a few minutes noodling on his guitar.

As it so often did, a few minutes turned into a few hours and before he knew it, the door to his studio space was opening as Ashley made her way inside of the studio room. She'd come back from classes and had obviously come right down to the studio, because she had her backpack slung over one shoulder. She was dressed in bright pink leggings that clung to her svelte legs and a cropped t-shirt that left a more than generous amount of her midriff exposed. Her long blonde curls were up in a boisterous ponytail held in place by a fluffy neon pink scrunchy. All in all, she very much had a sort of 1980s aerobics instructor vibe going on. "Hey Kevin, Elizabeth said you'd been down here for hours and hadn't even really poked your head out," the energetic college student said. "It's not good for you to zone out and lose track of time."

"I've been sketching out a song idea, so I wouldn't say I lost track of time," he said, placing his guitar on the stand next to his chair. "How were classes?"

"Boooooorrrrrinnnnngggg," the teenager said to him. "I mean, I get that freshman year in college is supposed to be shit you already know, but, like, why does it all have to be taught like we *don't* know it? I mean, give us new shit to learn here and there!"

He was about to answer when she moved over to slide into his lap, settling her ass down on top of him. She reached her hand back to drag her fingernails against the back of his neck, leaning in to gently press her lips against his. It was a soft and tender, but quickly started to ramp up as her tongue braced its way into his mouth, her nubile form starting to writhe against him some.

"See? You could be doing something much more exciting than picking away at your guitar."

"Oh yeah?" he chuckled. "What could I be doing more exciting than that?"

"You could be doing *me*," she purred as she reached down and tugged the croptop off, casting it to the floor of the studio, leaving her perky tits completely unveiled for his eyes.

“Don’t you wear a bra to class?” he teased.

“Usually, but not today,” she said, sticking her tongue out. “Figured you might need some relaxation and I didn’t want all that much between you and these puppies.” Ashley’s hands grabbed the back of his head and pulled his face to press between her breasts, as her other hand mashed one of them up into him even more.

There was always something energetic about Ashley, like she was a giant kitten and all of life was just a laser pointer for her to scurry around, chasing for her own amusement, no real desire to catch it, but just enough for tucker her out for a bit.

She shifted and swayed her ass in his lap, grinding down on him until it seemed like she was convinced he was ready as she scooted forward and pulled his cock out, giving it a long stroke as she giggled once more. “I know we’re not supposed to play much in the studio, but I’ve never listened much to what you tell me,” she purred, as she shimmied her leggings down to just mid-thigh before scooching back up into his lap, holding his dick in place before she pushed herself down onto it, settling into his lap. “Fuck, I’m never gonna get tired of this.”

Kevin had taken some time to get used to the girl’s exhaustive sexual appetites, but if anything was ever truly too far, he didn’t have a problem putting his foot down and saying he needed a time out, and all the women in his life understood that sometimes he could be a little overwhelmed with it all. Ashley, however, had taken it entirely to the next level, willing to do most of the work for him, because she knew what she wanted, she’d figured out what *he* wanted, and she liked both of them enjoying themselves and having a great time.

Once her ass was nestled against his crotch, she started bouncing, not long thrusts, but tiny little bounces, at least at first, whipping down harder each time, making sure his cock slotted in good and deep inside of her each time. The pace started to pick up as her hands clenched onto his thighs a bit more, bucking herself up and down in his lap.

“Oh God fuck fuck fuck oh God omiGAWD!” she said as she suddenly stood up and hopped forward towards the stack of demo tapes that were resting the mixing console in front of her. “Holy shit, Kev! Holy fucking shit!” Her hands pushed the first four or five off the top and onto the floor as she grabbed onto one of the CDs towards the middle of the stack. “You’re doing this, right? I mean, aren’t you?” she said, waving the CD towards him, her leggings still clinging to the center of her thighs.

He couldn’t help but chuckle at how they’d come to a screeching halt, and as she held out the CD to him, he glanced at the writing atop of it, letting him know who it was and what it was for. “I… don’t know? I’ve never even heard of, who is that? Kathy Zin?”

“It’s Christy Fucking Zen, dude!” she squealed, jumping up and down, looking at him in utter disbelief and maybe even a touch of condescension. “How the fuck do you not know who Christy Fucking Zen is? Like, did you just ignore pop music for the last ten years or something?”

“More than that,” he chuckled, tucking his cock away, since clearly they’d moved on to other things. “Okay, so enlighten me. Who’s Christy Fucking Zen?” he said, gently mocking her enthusiasm a little, just enough so that she would spot it as teasing.

Ashley pulled up her leggings to her waist, but didn’t bother to grab her shirt as she hopped back into his lap, this time sideways, so she could sit in his lap like he was Santa Claus. “So, like, ten years ago there was this show on the Disney Channel called ‘Amber’s Adventures,’ and the girl who played Amber, her name was Christy Zen, and she was, like, the most pure and optimistic girl I’d ever fucking seen. And she grew up on this show, having all these adventures, going to all these places, and when she was a teenager, she started recording all these poppy, catchy songs, all written by her, all based on her own life, and they were, like, totally the best. They were about school and boys and the problems of having unreliable friends and things that every girl could totally fucking relate to. I mean, she was the soundtrack of my fucking youth!”

“Yeah, maybe you haven’t really listened to the stuff we make down here, Ashley, but I think I

couldn't record a pop single if you gave me a million dollars," he laughed. "I am so *not* the kind of person she wants producing an album."

"No!" she said, hopping off his lap, taking the demo CD from its case and putting it into the player on the desk. "No no no no, listen listen, she's totally moved beyond the whole pop star things, and she's gotten into, like, punk rock and industrial and like old people revival rock, like grunge and nu metal and that kind of stuff! That's what all the rumors say!"

Kevin in terror mouthed the phrase 'old people revival rock' before trying to relax his knee jerk tendency to reject anything that scoffed at the music that had been en vogue when he'd been growing up. The fact that people were describing grunge as 'old people' music made him want to get angry, but he had to let her slide, because she wasn't old enough to know better.

"And you think I should produce her next album, do you?"

"Clearly she wants you to," Ashley said, moving to sit down on her knees, her heels under her ass, holding the empty CD case in her hands. "Otherwise, she wouldn't have sent you a demo tape, would she? I want to meet her so fucking bad. She's like my total fucking hero. She was doing the pop thing until she couldn't take it anymore and then went off to do her own thing, to make songs that really spoke to her. And at 18, she emancipated herself from her parents, because they were spending all of the money she was making, which is total bullshit. They weren't out there doing any of the work! She was acting! She was singing! She was touring *while* still making a television show!"

"It does sound like a whole hell of a lot of work."

"It totally was! And then Disney tried to come down hard on her when she came of age, trying to make her sign a contract that said she couldn't do anything that would embarrass them, or represent them in an inappropriate light!"

"Did she?"

"NO! Well, I mean, not until after she left Disney's employ. Once she stopped working for the mouse and started working for herself, and then she didn't answer to nobody!"

Kevin sighed. "And what if I don't like what I hear on the demo tape?"

"But what if you do?"

"I've already got a bunch of clients, Ashley. Taking on another one is nothing light or easy."

Ashley whined a little bit, setting down the demo CD case, folding her hands in front of her. "I don't think I've ever asked you for anything serious, Kevin, but I'm asking for this. I will do whatever it takes to get you to produce her next record. You can pick out any girl at my college and I'll get her to fuck you. I'll even fuck you with her! Or fuck her with you! Or both! I will clean the whole house for a month! Whatever it takes, Kev! I just... I just gotta meet her, okay? She's... she's my inspiration."

Kevin frowned a little bit, as he stood up. "Fuck, I really hope she's a good songwriter," he said, making his way over to the console and pushing play, waiting to have his fate decided. Something inside of him said he was going to hate it, that it was going to be the worst trash he'd ever heard. It was going to be hippie folky trash, or it was going to be some poseur trying to pretend to be as good as the things she'd heard other people listening to.

He braced himself...

...and pushed play.

For the next twenty minutes, he and Ashley sit and listened as the music played, song after song, unable to bring words to his lips. Five songs, each no shorter than three minutes and no longer than five minutes. And by the end of it...

...Kevin knew he was going to produce Christy Zen's next record.

The chord progressions were interesting and not at all what he'd expected, certainly not sticking to the G-C-A he'd gotten used to from pop melodies. More importantly, however, the songs weren't just about boys and parties and typical vapid pop bullshit. One of the songs was about how betrayed she'd felt by those who were supposed to be protecting her, taking care of her. How could she trust again, how could she love again? Another was about what kind of legacy would she be leaving behind

if all she ever did was smile on television? The vocal tones were plaintive and emotive in a way that he certainly hadn't expected.

"Damn," he said as the last few seconds of the demo CD played. "That was unexpected."

"Right?" Ashley said. "So, you'll do it? You'll make her album?"

"I've got a two-week window starting in two days, and if she can make that work, yeah, I'll produce her record."

Ashley hopped back to her feet and threw her arms around his neck. "Thank you thank you thank you! Any time I'm not in classes, I'll be here to be her assistant and yours and do whatever needs to be done around the studio or in terms of getting her lunch or dinner or whatever you need to make sure—"

Kevin laughed, interrupting her. "I got it, I got it, Ashley. You're her number one superfan and you want to make sure she makes a great record."

Ashley kissed him hard, her fingertips stroking the back of his head. "And I want to say thank you..."

After that, everything moved ridiculously fast. Zen's people were so excited about working with him that they actually cancelled a couple of appearances she had planned during the two-week period so that she could spend the entire time working on the album. They said that Zen didn't want to talk to him until she showed up on day one, but once she got there, she was going to be all in.

On the first day of recording, Zen was scheduled to show up at noon, as Kevin made it clear he didn't fare well in the mornings, especially considering how they had exactly fourteen days to get a dozen or so songs, with no room for either of them past it.

She showed up at 11:30.

Kevin met her at the front door to his house and found that Christy Zen had even taken her efforts to making sure they had a good working relationship to a new level. He opened the door to find her standing on the other side, wearing ripped jeans and a dearly loved and faded Truth Knife t-shirt. She wasn't pushing the punk look too far, a green stripe through her dark brown hair, nothing extreme about the cut, although he thought he could see hints of an undercut just above one of her temples. She was a lot shorter than he'd expected, barely an inch or two above five feet tall, with an almost plump face although she was curvy in all the right places, filling out that shirt better than almost anyone he'd ever seen before.

"That can't *possibly* be yours," he laughed as he invited her and her bandmates in. The guitarist was a local kid named Jaden Yang whom he'd seen playing in several bands, although he just hadn't found a place to call a home of his own. The bassist, Tanya Willis, was one of the best session bassists in LA, and had been on tour with loads of great bands. And the drummer, well, Nicky Ice literally was the best mercenary drummer that money could buy. To say that he'd played with everybody would be underselling his resume.

"I had to sneak in to see you guys playing The Viper Room, but Truth Knife was one of my favorite bands when we were making 'Amber's Adventures,' and I had to sneak out to make it to the show," she said as they made their way downstairs to the studio. "I was totally exhausted the next day on set, and my folks were super pissed, but you know, fuck them, I'm a big girl and I get to make my own decisions, especially now that I'm out from under them."

"*One* of your favorite bands, but not your absolute favorite?"

"I could lie to you and say yes, but no, my ride or die is Nine Inch Nails," she said as her band lugged their instruments into the studio downstairs. "I've seen Trent live every chance I can. He was one of the other people we sent the demo to, but he's busy recording a score for the next Pixar film, if you can believe it. So if you weren't going to produce the record, we were going to have to move on to my third choice, which I wasn't thrilled with."

"Who was?"

"The Matrix," she sighed. "I put them on the list just to make the record label happy, but I didn't

want them to be the one shepherding this record to the finish line, because it needs to really get beneath the skin, you know? And those two are fantastic at making hit singles that get stuck in your head, but they don't focus on making something that'll have any legs for long-term masterpieces. And you know how to make a song that'll slowly burrow its way down to your psyche."

True to her word, Ashley spent as much time as she could working as a personal assistant to Christy and to Kevin himself, and trying very hard not to fangirl out, even if she did get a selfie of the two of them every day, and a couple of autographs.

Christy was surprisingly down to earth for a giant star to millions and was always willing to take criticism and direction without putting up too much of a fuss. The session players were all troopers, and they established an easy rhythm with both Kevin and Dandy Randy. Kevin was even happy to pick up his guitar and add a lead here or there.

Except for one song that everyone thought had potential but that nobody could see a way through to get to work, a number called "Pocket Supernova," which had good verses, but a chorus that just didn't seem to take.

On the very last day they had to work on it, Kevin was getting increasingly sure they just weren't going to get there when Christy sent everyone else home, leaving her and Kevin to try and get it figured out well into the evening.

"Maybe we're just not going to get there," Kevin said to her. "I know you had high hopes for it, but sometimes a song just isn't ready."

Christy sighed, tying her hair back into a small bun against the back of her head. "It's *right* there. I can fucking feel it. It's just stoppered up. Maybe we should have your assistant Ashley come listen to it."

"Ashley's not really my assistant," Kevin said with a grin.

"Daughter?"

"Uh, most *definitely* not."

"Oh. *Oh!*" Christy laughed. "I thought you were engaged to Fatima. Isn't that what she introduced herself as a couple of days ago?"

"Oh, I am. But Fatima encourages me to get around a bit and play the field, as long as it's just physical connection, and that I promise she's always got my heart," Kevin said with a little shrug. "But hell, Fatima's even played with her and I before. Made Ashley squeal in a pitch I'd never even heard before, so maybe my skills aren't as good as I hope they were."

"If you're juggling two women, you can't be *that* bad."

Kevin chuckled a little bit, looking sheepishly off to the side. "It's, uh, it's a bit more than that..."

"Well, shit, maybe we can just get past this writer's block then," Christy said, as she grabbed her shirt and pulled it up and over her head, exposing a silky black bra she had on beneath it.

"Whenever I'm stuck on something, I just clear my cobwebs with an orgasm, and if you're stuck too, we can do it together. Not a lot of people think sex can just be something transactional and fun, so it's good to know you're that way too."

"I mean, I *wasn't*, but I've kinda gotten that way this past year."

Christy reached behind her and unfastened the bra, letting it slip from her breasts, exposing them to his eyes. They were rather small and slight, one of her puffy pink nipples with a silver barbell through it, but considering how slender and thin she was, they were the perfect size for her frame. "So why don't we just have a quick fuck and see if it clears the mind any?"

"Are... are you sure?"

"It's *just* sex, *duh*, and we'll both think clearer after we've gotten our rocks off. So, open up those pants, mister. You want me on top? On my back? Bent over the couch?"

"What's your favorite? I'm just the producer," Kevin said, standing up, peeling off his own shirt. "You're the artist here."

She giggled a little bit, shimmying out of her pants and panties. “Bent over the piano, I think. I need to really feel it deep, so just have at it and don’t hold back, okay?”

“You’re sure?”

She placed her elbows on top of the couch’s armrests. “Mmm. Very. Just drill the shit out of me. Pound me like you’re trying to fuck that roadblock loose.”

Kevin had learned to stop arguing with things like these and moved to stand behind her, tucking his pants down enough to fish out his cock, guiding it into place before slamming forward, pounding his cock deep and raw inside of her cunt, delighted to find it already slippery. “Mmmm... somebody’s already wet.”

“It’s the creative process,” she purred before it turned into a filthy groan of pleasure. “I’m always worked up when I’m creating or performing.”

“Hopefully this will clear up the stress.” His hips started smacking against hers quick and fast like she’d asked, plowing into her enough that the couch threatened to skid a little. They were so caught up in the moment that neither of them heard the door to the studio open.

“I thought you might need a break,” Ashley said as she walked into the room. “So I got cof—” She suddenly dropped the tray with three coffees onto the floor, but it seemed like the plastic lids were on tight enough because none of it spilled. “Holy fuck!”

“Oh, the not-assistant is back,” Christy moaned. “C’mere, girl.”

Ashley’s eyes were as wide as possible as she moved over toward the middle of the couch, looking at Christy’s face while Kevin plowed into her. “Um, okay.”

“If you’re not his assistant, Ashley, nnnhhhh... then what the hell are you?”

“I, uh, I don’t know if I should say.”

“It’s okay, Ashley,” Kevin told her.

“I’m, um, I’m his...” Her voice dropped down to almost a quiet whisper. “Fucktoy.”

“What mmmppphhh what was that?” Christy said. “I didn’t hear you.”

“I’m a fucktoy,” Ashley said, licking her lips. “I’m *his* fucktoy, as a matter of fuck, er, fact. And I’m the one who convinced him to listen to your demo tape.”

“Are you gggnnnnhhhh jealous that he’s fucking *me* right now?”

“Nuh uh. It’s... it’s really fucking hot.”

“What nnnngghhh what if he’s not doing it hard enough?”

“Um, you could ask him to do it harder.”

“Or I rgggnnnn could get you to do it.” Christy grabbed Ashley’s hair in her fist and yanked her over, forcing the blonde to lock lips with her, Ashley squeaking at first but quickly getting caught up in the moment, moaning into the kiss until Christy pulled her back. “Whatever you need to say mmmppphhh to him to get uuunnnhhhhh to get him to fuck me like he wants to fucking break me...”

“I think she wants it harder, Daddy,” Ashley purred at him. “I don’t think you can go too hard at her. She, mmmm, she likes it rough...”

“How rough?” Kevin asked, his hand lifting up before slapping down on Christy’s ass with a loud crack. He rubbed his thumb a little bit against the pop star’s asshole, and instead of shying away from it, she almost squirmed back onto his touch.

“Rough enough,” Christy groaned, “that if you wanna do what you’re nnnngghhh suggesting, you’d better fucking *really* do it and not just dick around... mmmpphhhh... and you better not just pop off right away....”

“I don’t go off easily,” he said, sliding back before pressing the head of his cock up against her asshole, rubbing his shaft against it to smear some of those juices she’d been dripping onto it along her pucker, getting it good and greasy.

“Good, so get in there, motherfuckerrrrrrr...” She drug out the last syllable, her hand clinging on to Ashley’s hair, keeping the student’s face right next to hers. “God, has he fucked your ass yet?”

“MMmmmmhuunnnhhhh...”

“Felt fucking great, didn’t it?”

“God, it was the second most full I’d ever fucking felt,” Ashley said breathily to her.

“*Second* most full?”

“Uh huh...”

“What was the *most* full?”

“Mmmm... I, uh, I let Fatima, uh, kinda, um, *fist* me?”

“Oh fuck, that sounds fucking hot.”

Kevin began to pump even harder and faster into Christy’s ass, and she dug her heels down, slamming her ass back into him, before both of them began to squeal as ecstasy overwhelmed them, Kevin spilling his seed into Christy’s ass, which set off an orgasm of her own.

A few minutes later, he finally had enough strength to stand fully upright once more and slipped back and away from her, as a smile crossed his lips. “I’ve got a chord progression,” he said confidently.

“And I’ve got lyrics,” Christy giggles. “Let’s get recording.”

And that was how Kevin got his co-writing credit on his first number one charting single, and how Ashley got a special thanks in the liner notes of the album.

### **Interruption Six – Walk All Over You**

By the time his third Midas Day rolled around, Kevin was getting more annoyed with the whole thing than he’d expected to be. The idea of literally every woman on the planet lusting after him was amusing in concept, but in execution, it meant the whole day was completely shot, and he hated the anticipation of not knowing exactly when on the day it was going to start or what it would entail. There had been a bit of an escalation between the first and the second days, but he’d had at least a little bit of warning in that the compulsions that gotten him onto the Universal lot had been easily recognizable from the start, and it had given him time to get his game face on, to put himself in the right mind set to deal with the chaos scheduled for him.

So, when he woke up on the morning of the third Midas Day out to sea, he was more than a little confused.

He and Miriam woke up around the same time, the two of them somehow out on a speedboat, several miles off the coast, although thankfully they could still clearly see which direction land was. Then it occurred to Kevin that there were no guarantees that land was what he *thought* it was. He had no idea where they were or how they’d got there. If he was lucky, it was still California he saw off in the distance, but he didn’t have anything to prove that. It could’ve been Greece, Australia, Russia for all he knew, which wasn’t a whole lot. In fact, he had to admit to himself that right now he knew very little for certain other than it was early morning and that they were on a boat.

*Somewhere.*

“We’re on a boat,” Miriam said, clearly reaching the same conclusions he’d just been going over in his own mind. “And we’re in our pajamas.”

“Better than being naked,” he told her.

“Mmmm,” she agreed. “It’s still damn cool out here.”

“I can poke around and see if there are blankets or a change of clothes stashed anywhere.”

“Take a good hard look at the motherfucking boat, Kevin,” she sighed, exasperation in her tone. “It’s a speedboat, not a luxury yacht or even a houseboat. How the hell did we get here?”

“You know what I’m going to say.”

“Don’t you dare say magic,” she grumbled.

“If you already know, then why bother asking?” Kevin glanced around and grew a little nervous. “Is Strazo nearby?”

She seemed to panic for a moment, glancing around before she felt Strazo settle on her shoulder again, and his camouflage dropped as he nuzzled in against Miriam’s neck. “Oh, thank God, he’s here. He says he’s been flying overhead for the last hour, but he doesn’t know how we got here

either. He says we're about 15 miles off the coast of San Diego, so we're not quite in international waters, but we definitely moved magically at some point while we were sleeping. At least we're not in some other hemisphere, for fuck's sake."

"Mmm," he said to her. "It's Midas Day. None of the usual slow build up this time, it seems. Just fall asleep the night before and wake up out to sea on a boat with no idea how we got here. I'm hoping you know how to drive a boat?"

"They aren't entirely that complicated, Kevin."

"It's still more complicated than driving a car, at least as far as I know." Kevin then frowned a little, as if something she'd said earlier had just dawned on him. "Wait, Strazo *talks* to you?"

"Well, it's more like we can think *at* one another," she said, as she started up the engine on the boat, bringing the motor to a sputtering tempo. "It's not exact words, but it's communication on some level, and we just sort of seem to understand what the other one is thinking. So that may not be *exactly* what he was thinking, but it's close enough." She spun the wheel to aim the front of the boat towards the shore and then started to crank up the engine. "I've got us doing about thirty right now, so we should be on shore within about half an hour. That should give you a little bit of time to prep and plan how you want to do this."

Kevin sighed and began stretching out, wanting to get good and limber for when he was going to inevitably have to start running, although he didn't have shoes on, which gave him cause for great concern. "I wish I could figure out what the hell I need to do to get out of this mess, but whatever Merlin seems to think I should have figured out, it hasn't been at all obvious." He shook his head. "And no matter what he thinks, I'm *not* fucking a mermaid out here. Half woman, half fish is still a bad percentage for my liking."

"Well, what did he tell you before?"

"That the thing I had to do to get Midas Day to stop, it was a thing I've never before done in my lifetime, something I'd definitely remember."

"Are there other rules to Midas Day that you remember?"

Kevin rubbed the bridge of his nose, considering for a long moment. "Merlin promised I won't be harmed during it. That the ridiculous lure effect wouldn't affect women too young or too old. And that the longer it went into each day, the stronger the lure would become and the more... aggressive the women would get."

"That's not a whole lot to go on."

"I get that, but that's what I've got."

The speedboat continued to move towards the coast, as the sun slowly climbed higher into the sky, and Kevin felt like pressure was building up inside of him, a sense of nervousness about what he was going to find as soon as they hit the beach.

Neither of them had much experience around San Diego, and so they weren't entirely sure what to expect, but even as they got closer, Kevin could see there were a couple of boats starting to approach them, including one that said Coast Guard on the side of it.

The boats weren't what bothered him, though. He was more bothered by the fact that he saw paragliders circling overhead like vultures. And he was *most* bothered by the fact that Strazo seemed to be impatiently shifting back and forth across the top of Miriam's shoulder.

"What's he nervous about, Miriam?" Kevin asked her.

"He says there's... supernatural things afoot nearby," she said. "Nothing dangerous or threatening, but he still says it's... unusual stuff."

"Like... like what?"

"He's not sure, so neither am I," Miriam said. "He just thinks it 'smells of magic.' I figured you'd like to know that."

"It may just be him smelling Merlin nearby."

"No no, Strazo knows *exactly* what Merlin smells like, and sure, he's around. So is Morgana, as

is that himbo that was hanging out with her last time we saw her, but they're far enough away that they aren't what Strazo is being bothered by. He's not even sure what it is he's smelling, other than it makes him feel uneasy."

Without much warning, a humanoid form jumped from the ocean and hopped up and onto the boat. It was a rather bulky looking man with dark, chocolatey skin, dressed in tight pants and no shirt, his muscles massively flexed as he glanced around the boat. He looked a little like a combination of Idris Elba and The Rock, and the amount of sheer strength the man had to possess was terrifying.

Miriam had eased off the boat's acceleration as she turned to look at the man, who obviously wasn't entirely human. There were gills flexing on his neck, although it seemed like he also had lungs, because he wasn't struggling to breathe out of the water. His midnight hair was in tiny, crimped curls against his skull, and his eyes were an uncomfortable shade of yellow that peered straight at Kevin, who'd backed up towards the edge of the boat.

The man from the ocean made a series of unintelligible noises in Miriam's direction before turning his gaze over to Kevin. He made a second series of odd gurgling sounds then seemed to realize Kevin wasn't understanding him. He banged his fist against his chest, coughed a bit, and then tried again, but this time the sounds that escaped his lips were English, even if the accent was thick and difficult to understand, although it was no accent Kevin had ever heard before. "Why are the females of the sea pursuing you with such conviction, human?"

Kevin chuckled a little bit. A few months ago, this might've thrown him for a giant loop, but in the interim between then and now, he'd had more than a few brushes with the magical and the supernatural, so a merman wasn't even worthy of a second-tier shock. "I've had a bit of a run in with a couple of magicians, who have decided to give me a couple of gifts, things completely outside of my control," he told the fishman. "It's a game one of them likes to play with my life once a month, making me so appealing to any women in my general vicinity that they lose all self-control and eventually one of them fucks me and then the day ends until it starts all over again a month later."

"What's the object of the game, human?" the man asked him. "How do you win and stop the day from happening any further?"

"I don't know," Kevin replied. "He won't tell me, but he's going to keep futzing with my life on a monthly basis until I figure it out."

"You are not fornicating with a female of my kingdom, human," the merman said to him. "So, I will provide escort until you reach shore, and thus I can ensure my subjects' safety."

"Your subjects? Are you the lord of all the oceans?"

The man bristled in amusement. Kevin suspected the seafolk didn't deal with outsiders all that often, so his complete lack of knowledge of their customs probably entertained him. "No, simply of the aquatic kingdom of Bistrania, one of the smaller sea kingdoms, but one you happen to be over, and which happens to be mine, so it's my subjects you're drawing right now with your lure." He moved over towards Kevin, and his amber shaded eyes slowly combed across his body, as if he could see things that neither of them could. The man lifted a massive hand to grab Kevin by the chin, tilting his head a little forcibly, although not in a cruel way. "Yes. Yes, I see now this magic that's been draped over you. Old magic. None of this new technowizardry that the modern shamans use, a brand of sorcery and circuitry that reeks of experimentation. No, this is the kind of magic practiced by my ancestor's ancestors. The kind of magic that predates even your people walking on these nearby lands. It's an uncomfortable sort of spellcraft, a casual defiance of tradition that spits in the eye of those who might advise caution. It is a spell which unnerves my very core. Who has placed this enchantment upon you, human?"

"Two mages," Kevin said. "One after the other, with a bit of time inbetween. The base mechanic was done by Morgana La Fey, and the modification was done by the mage known as Merlin."

The sea king scowled, crossing his powerful arms over his chest. It was at this point that Kevin first noticed the merman had sharp fanged teeth at four points, almost like the mythical vampires did,

although had to concede vampires were probably *also* real, given what he knew now. “The Merlin did this? He has caused much consternation to the kingdoms of the sea over the millennia.”

“Yeah, well, he ain’t always done so hot up here either,” Kevin told him. “We really should probably turn the engine speed up, Miriam, otherwise the king’s subjects are going to start to overtake the boat. Sorry, your kingship, didn’t catch your name.”

“King Vihantian of Bistrania,” the giant man told him with what seemed like an unflappable amount of confidence. “And you are?”

“Kevin Bishop, of Los Angeles,” Kevin said, not entirely sure how to indicate who he was beyond his city of origin. He’d not spent a lot of time with royalty. “This is my bodyguard, Miriam, and her companion, the dragon Strazo. We’ve both sort of had our lives heavily tampered with by Merlin, so we know how powerful his magics are, and learned to respect them a long time ago.”

“No matter how strong the magician’s lures are, they will not overcome my subjects’ need to respect my dominance over their lives, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles,” the king boasted. “A king’s dominion is all.”

Normally Kevin would be entirely respectful of such claims, but he’d seen the effects of Midas Day firsthand twice now and knew exactly how ravenous women could get the longer he tried to avoid them, and the king’s confidence only entertained him more than he knew what to do with, so he felt like he was almost obligated to give the man a little tease. “You willing to make a wager of some kind, your majesty?”

“What could you possibly offer me?” the king chuffed, although he seemed at least a little interested in Kevin’s proposal. One thing Kevin was learning about mystical beings – they did so love novelty and newness in their lives, so if he could provide that, it would make them more amenable to any bumps that sprung up along the way.

“If you’re right, and if we can slowly get from here to shore without any of your subjects boarding the boat, I’ll write a song for you and do my best to make the name of King Vihantian something renowned around the world,” Kevin told him. “Don’t worry, I’ll keep it proggy and mystical so it’ll sound like I’m just talking about a long-lost legend, or someone I made up, so humanity doesn’t come looking for you. But if I’m right, what can you offer me?”

The king seemed to consider for a moment before nodding. “We have a magical artifact that might be of some use to you, especially if you’re encountering more and more mystical influence in your life these days. Do you consider this a fair wager?”

Kevin extended his hand, which the king took and shook. “You’re on. Miriam, set the ship for somewhere between five and ten miles per hour. That should be plenty of time.”

“You sound remarkably confident that I do not have my subjects in check,” the king grumbled, sounding almost a little annoyed by how unshakable Kevin seemed to be in his assertions. “Do you have such little faith in my ability to instill fear in them?”

“Not at all, your lordship,” Kevin chuckled. “I just know Merlin’s magic will not be stopped by time nor tide. The man is a force of nature unto himself, unnerving just in his very presence, and his magical workings are terrifying in their power.”

“More powerful than a subject’s faith to her king and kingdom?”

“Having seen what I’ve seen, your majesty, I’d said maybe even more powerful than the urges of self-preservation,” Kevin told him. “I wish I could tell you I was exaggerating my claims, but I assure you, I’m not.”

“Then we will soon see, will we not, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles?”

Kevin wondered how long it was going to take, as even he wasn’t sure of how fast Merlin’s magics would affect other people, but he could see there were a handful of women pacing back and forth on the beach, although a few had even started swimming towards the boat. He could also hear boats approaching in the distance and saw there were even a couple of paragliders dropping from their gliders as close as they could to the boat. He wondered if they were going to get to the boat before

Merlin's spell broke through the resistance of the seafolk that were swarming around the bottom of the boat like eager piranha.

He was starting to weigh the odds in his head when three forms leapt from the water and landed on the boat with heavy shaking. They were dark skinned, powerful looking merfolk women, beige flesh with small pink flaps at their necks, dressed in straps of some kind of aquatic leather, although they only covered around their hips, and even then didn't seem to fold down, functioning more as skirts than anything else. Their proud breasts were on full display, heavy sepia toned mounds of flesh with thick chocolate nipples atop of them, although Kevin's eyes were more drawn to their muscles. Each of the three women were quite strong, their physiques that of warriors accustomed to constant physical exertion daily. Kevin was certain any one of them could probably bench press him with just one hand, and that meant putting up any form of resistance would be useless.

He'd never felt more cornered in his entire life.

The king, on the other hand, looked personally offended. "My own royal guard has betrayed me? Sophilia, Elendria, Maxillia, how dare you contradict my standing orders?" He pointed at them with a finger. "Back into the water with you!"

"We are sorry, my king, but we are compelled and there is no resisting the force that is being exerted upon us," the tallest of the three said. "We will endeavor to make our betrayal as swift and painless as we are able. Maxillia, help me hold our lord back while Elendria claims her prize."

The one that had spoken and the next tallest rushed over to grab the king's arms, moving to restrain him as the shortest of the three merfolk women, the one named Elendria, started approaching Kevin. "Listen, human," she said to him, her voice affected by an accent similar to the king's, "we can do this with or without you resisting. I would rather you simply lay down and enjoy it, but I can and will restrain you if necessary. I am Elendria of Bistrania, and I am offering you the chance to surrender willingly now. I will make no such offer a second time."

"I understand," Kevin said, grabbing the only towel he'd found on the boat, laying it down in what little available free space he could make. "I will offer you no resistance, Elendria of Bistrania, as long as you and your colleagues do no harm, not just to me and my protector, but to those attempting to siege the boat."

"Once we've begun, they'll know to back off," Elendria said, hiking up her leather skirt, revealing her pussy, dark curls of inky black hair in a trimmed but still generous patch atop it. "I will be the first seawoman to bear an amphibomorph in centuries." She licked her lips as she moved towards Kevin, and he worried that the scent of her was going to put him off a little, but there was something entrancing about her yellow eyes that made his resistance melt away immediately. She wasn't as large and intimidating as her two compatriots were, and somehow also a little more feminine. Her black, braided hair didn't have anywhere near as many adornments, and her skin bore less of the tribal tattoo work that the others had. "Get those pants off, landwalker, lest I rip them off in my eagerness. I am not usually so forward, but it seems I am hardly myself on this day."

Kevin nodded and pushed his loose-fitting pajama bottoms down to his ankles, pausing a little as he heard three gasps, looking up to find shocked faces. The confidence that had been all over Elendria's face had been replaced with a sense of shock and almost intimidation, an expression Kevin saw mirrored on the two other merfolk women. "Ye gods, human, are you abnormally blessed in genetics, or are all landwalkers similarly equipped?"

He tilted his head in confusion, glanced down and then looked up with a laugh. "Are you asking me if I've got an oversized cock? I mean, it's not small, but I certainly wouldn't say it's anything outside of the norm. Why, are merfolk men not as large?"

The king glanced over and shook his head, even from his restrained position. "Perhaps half as you, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles, and that is those of us who are well-equipped for our kind. Perhaps we have taken on differences for our aquatic needs over the years."

"If you feel uncomfortable, sister..." Sophilia said.

“No!” Elendria said, raising a hand to signal back at the others. “No, I will make this work. All passion comes with pain, as our great poet Yarny once wrote. But I will ask that you lay down, landwalker, and allow me to control my own tempo.”

“Of course, Lady Elendria,” Kevin said, moving to get down on his back atop the boat’s deck. The merfolk woman didn’t wait, and moved to straddle him almost immediately, rubbing the length of his cock against her slit, and Kevin could immediately see why she was concerned. Her snatch seemed smaller than a human’s would be, and he worried that he might not fit inside of her, although the merfolk woman seemed determined. “You don’t have to—” He couldn’t finish the sentence because she had aligned the tip of his cock with her cunt and then pushed herself down onto him, letting out a loud shout of pained pleasure, at which point the sounds of people attempting to scale the boat stopped, and Kevin could vaguely hear people swimming away from the ship, although it was more than a little difficult to focus.

He was extremely thankful Elendria was as slick as she was because it felt like he’d just slipped his cock through a bottleneck, the very entrance of her pussy immensely tight, but with much more space once he’d gotten inside of her, the rest of her body stretching to accommodate his shaft. He could feel the ring of her entrance around the base of his cock trying desperately trying to relax and expand to handle his girth, but it seemed like it was all being complicated by the fact that Elendria was in the throes of an orgasm the likes of which he’d never seen before, every inch of her body shaking like she was being held to live wires.

Moments later, when the tremors stopped, she slapped both of her hands on his chest, and turned her gaze down at him with an almost demented grin upon her face as she began to laugh, unhinged and almost unrestrained. “Fuck you, mortal man, and your magic fucking cock,” she spat at him through an eager, toothy grin, exposed fangs like the king had making him just a bit more nervous. “That was fucking amazing. But you have work left to accomplish. You have a garden untended, seed unplanted, and the sea will have its due.”

“It’s almost a shame we don’t have your cellphone to take pictures with, Kevin,” Miriam teased, having brought the boat to a full stop, now just watching to make sure he was okay and not being harmed. She seemed mostly confident that Merlin was good for his word that Kevin wouldn’t be in danger but wanted to keep tabs on him anyway.

“Do you like being apart of the ocean, landwalker?” Elendria teased him. “Does it excite you to know that you are the first mortal in centuries to bed a merfolk? That you are fucking uncharted territory?” She undulated her hips in a serpentine roll, making his cock sway and bend, sliding partly out before pushing back on. It was more comfortable for both of them to keep the thrusts short and shallow, to leave as much of his cock buried inside of her they could, because the opening to her cunt was still much tighter than he was physically accustomed to. “What about me? Do you think me beautiful, by your land standards?”

There was no doubting that she was, by anyone’s standards, a remarkably beautiful woman, with high cheekbones and a symmetrical face that was both entrancing and somehow also borderline confrontational. Kevin didn’t wish to offend, so he simply nodded.

“Then fill me, human,” she purred. “Place your seed in my garden and give me that which is mine, that which I have laid claim to, as the eldest daughter of Nolgana, mother of all royal guard of Bistrania. Make me a fucking legend, you monster dicked human. Cum within me. Cum!”

The sensations were all too intense, and the pressure around all of his cock was almost unbearable, so when he felt his scrotum clench, it came as no surprise to him. He started to spurt his thick, ropy spunk inside of her, and felt her womb almost milk and suckle it deeper into her body, as if refusing to let even a drop of it flow back, nestling it inside of her form, protecting it, ensuring it would find purchase in her eggs.

His cock began to immediately soften, but so snug was her seal that it wasn’t until she exhaled a deep moan of satisfaction and relaxed her body a bit that he could finally start to feel his shaft

beginning to retract and slide out of her, although her body was mostly pinning his down, keeping him trapped in place, smothered beneath her slightly cool flesh.

Despite the fact that she was a merfolk, the other differences between his species and hers felt mostly minimal. Sure, he had noticed that her flesh was a bit less pliant and soft than humans, almost as if it were intentionally denser, to retain heat better, he suspected, because while her body temperature on the outside felt several degrees below his own, when he'd been inside of her, her pussy temperature had felt several degrees *higher* than his body temp. He'd noticed the webbing between her fingers and toes but felt it would be impolite to mention them.

After a minute or two, Elendria seemed to find her composure once more, pressing her hands on either side of him to lift her slumped body off of his, pausing only to offer what felt like an almost nervous kiss, a stark contrast to the ravenously sexual creature she'd been moments earlier. "Thank you for this gift, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles. Know that I will bear you strong children and that they will carry your lineage proudly through the empires of the sea for centuries to come, although I fear you shall never meet them. What is your profession?"

"I'm a musician, a bard I guess you might say."

She nodded, almost ritualistically. "Then the first of our offspring shall be trained as a songsmith and a poet, as is our custom. But now we must bid you farewell, Bearer of Light. I doubt we will ever see each other again but know this has been the highest honor for me and my sisters." She kissed him one more time and then moved to stand up, although her stance was more than a little shaky, as if the experience had left her unsteady out of the water. She nodded to her two sisters, who released the king's arms, and then the three of them jumped back into the Pacific Ocean, disappearing into its depths, leaving the king behind, an amused look upon his face.

"The Merlin is a right son of a bitch," he stated before offering a little shrug. "I have lost. How can I send a package to you, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles, in order to pay off my portion of the wager? If I leave a bundle marked 'For Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles' upon these beaches, will it make its way to you?"

"I can have someone wander up and down the beach on a given day."

"In three days' time, then, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles, I will leave a package for you upon these beaches with your name upon it just before dawn, wrapped in a bundle of thick leather. Do not have your messenger open it – it will be for your eyes only." The king looked at Kevin for a moment, shook his head and smiled. "I do not envy your burden, stranger, but you seem quite capable of acquitting yourself well of it. Good luck, Kevin Bishop of Los Angeles. I would hope that we may meet again under better circumstances."

With that, King Vihantian of Bistrania jumped back into the sea, and the waters were calm again, the beaches normal, everyone acting like nothing had happened, as Miriam turned her eyes forward again and started bring the boat's speed up.

Kevin pulled his pants back on, rubbing the back of his neck, everything that had just happened to him slowly sinking in. He couldn't help but laugh at how ridiculous it all felt.

"You know, boss, I have to tell you one thing," Miriam said, as the boat started to pull up towards a pier.

"What's that?"

"Believe me when I say, *you fucked a mermaid.*"

### **Interregnum One – Presto**

Three days later, early in the morning, Miriam was out jogging on the beaches and found a leather wrapped package left for Kevin up behind some rocks, to prevent it from washing back out again. Inside was a large necklace made of some kind of seashells that Kevin couldn't recognize along with a note in large, slowly written letters, as if the King was unaccustomed to writing in English.

*Kevin Bishop. In accordance with our wager, I am hereby presenting you with the Ancestor's*

*Gaze, a talisman which imbues the wearer with the ability to see magicks. It has often been the purview of those Kings and Queens who are unable to pierce the veil with their own vision, something I am able to do, as I have studied the teachings of our finest mages and learned from their ways, as I will do to my own children. Still, considering your dealings with both the Merlin and the Morgana, I think you will find it a useful addition to your arsenal. Perhaps we shall see each other again, Kevin of Clan Bishop, but based on our last encounter... I rather hope not. May the tide ever be in your favor.*

The sea lord didn't sign it, because, well, why would he?

Kevin tried the necklace on a few times, and each time he could see an amber floating cord between his ring and each of the pendants and necklaces his partners wore, almost linking them together, the color a nice pleasant warm shade, like a tropical sunset. It was too large and unwieldy to have on day-to-day, but he hung it up in his studio, so he would always have it at hand should he need it, and it became something of a conversation piece for the next few weeks.

It didn't give him any idea of what to do about Midas Day, but halfway to the next one, in the middle of the night, inspiration struck him, and he hopped out of bed and ran down the hall, heading into his office before grabbing a large sheet of paper and a pencil.

And then he began drawing.

After about half an hour, he went back to bed, but everything he thought he needed to beat Midas Day was on that sheet of paper. The start of it, anyway.

The next morning, over breakfast, he explained to Ashley what he'd need from her, giving her the paper, telling her it was a high priority. Ashley understood, and as amusing as she found Midas Days, she completely understood why Kevin didn't want to have to endure it any further.

He was starting to have to do interviews with music channels, magazines, and radio shows about having produced Christy Zen's new album, and it was a surprising amount of people calling what she was doing a departure from her previous work and asking if he'd had a hand in getting her to experiment. Kevin was adamant that she'd come to him with the new sound already mapped out ahead and that she'd picked him because she felt he could help her deliver on that. He didn't want to take any credit where it wasn't due and went out of his way to just say he was helping her pull that sound out of her team and her songs, although the critics all seemed to be delighted when he admitted he'd played guitar on almost half the tracks on the album.

There were also starting to be more inquiries about other projects he could start scoring, with the Robert Rodriguez project starting to move along very quickly, and it seemed like the score he'd done for Emily Rouchard was generating more than a little bit of buzz. Between that and the Christy Zen album, it felt like nearly everything was happening all at once, even though he'd been working on it all for month and months.

The list of film pitches he needed to consider was growing bigger and bigger. The number of demos he had to review and listen to grew higher and higher. But it was a good thing, being busy, knowing there was something always on the schedule for the next day.

Elizabeth hadn't found the final person to bring into his group, so the seventh pendant, the last in the box, was still there, waiting for someone to claim it. Kevin had been worried about that at first – ending projects was often as hard, if not harder, than starting them – and sticking the landing was something he wasn't entirely certain he was going to be able to do. But Elizabeth assured him things were going well in her search, and that she wanted to be sure to give him the absolute perfect person to close out the house, and she had Fatima's complete and total confidence in taking her time.

And the people in Kevin's world weren't stagnant either. Fatima's bodyguard, Jackson, had proposed to his girlfriend, even though he'd yet to bring her around the house, which was slowly driving Fatima mad. The decision had been made that Jackson would bring her by the house within the next month or two, or Fatima was going to demand they drive straight to the hospital where she worked and refuse to leave until they'd broken bread.

It was a good life.

Two days before the next Midas Day, he was sitting out in the back yard with an acoustic guitar, playing Tom Petty songs around the pool when Ashley came to join him with a giant smile on her face. “You think you’re going to be ready for this?” she asked him.

“Dunno,” Kevin said. “You ready to live up to your end?”

“Think so. We’ve got your phone set up so I can track you wherever your mind seems to want to take you, and I think we should be able to head you off at the pass enough to make sure we get to try and see if you’re right about this. Can I ask what made you think about it?”

Kevin tilted his head with a sly little smile. “I started thinking about the way he said it, how it was something I’d never done before... and I kept remembering thinking to myself, ‘You don’t *know* me, man... you don’t *know* what kind of life I have or haven’t lived...’ So how would he *know* it was something I’d never done before, unless it was something I *couldn’t* have done before I met him? From there, the list of options shrinks rather dramatically. And I could still be wrong about this. While the list shrinks, it’s not just one or two things.”

“So why this one?” she said, moving to sit down on the deck chair next to him, so she could snuggle up against him, setting the guitar aside for him.

“Let’s just say it feels like proper Merlin sneaky, and even if I’m wrong, it’s one thing off the list,” he said, wrapping his arms around her. “Your end wasn’t hard?”

“Nah, although getting past the initial hurdle would’ve been much easier if I’d have taken Strazo with me,” she giggled.

“Strazo goes where Miriam goes, and Miriam doesn’t like leaving my side,” Kevin sighed. “So, no joy if I can’t leave the house, and we’re trying to keep this as quiet and on the down low as we possibly can. I don’t want Merlin to know I’ve got a thought about how to beat his silly game.”

“I’m glad you trusted me with all this,” Ashley said, leaning her head back against his chest, nuzzling into him as the sun was slowly setting. “I’m so used to everyone treating me like a child because I’m still a teenager, that it’s nice to be treated like I’m an adult.”

“You’ll be twenty-one before you know it, and then you’ll spend the rest of your life bitching about how much you miss being a teenager,” Kevin said with a chuckle. “Everyone thinks they’re 21 and invincible until they wake up one morning and realize that they aren’t. Sometimes the reminder’s subtle and sometimes—”

“Sometimes it’s a former bandmate’s death being announced in a newspaper article before anyone’s called you personally to tell you about it?” Ashley said. “I saw the article on the counter. ‘Former Truth Knife vocalist found dead in homeless shelter; drug overdose suspected.’ That why you’re out here playing Tom Petty songs?”

Kevin sighed. “Yeah. Danny and I were at each other’s throats a lot of the time, and yeah, he absolutely was the misogynist prick that Kerry makes him out to be, at least when he was drunk or stoned, but back when I first met him, he was just a waiter at a shitty Mexican restaurant, living paycheck to paycheck while doing any karaoke or vocalist audition he could, trying to get somebody to take a chance on him. I’m a little surprised nobody’s called to ask me to comment.”

“They have,” Ashley said, taking his hand and holding it within her own. “Elizabeth’s told them all to call back in a couple of days, so you can have time to grieve and come to terms with it. She knew you wouldn’t want to say anything right away, otherwise it might be something you’d regret.”

“Like, ‘I’ve been expecting his junkie ass to OD as long as I’ve known him’ kind of regret?” Kevin said, hissing out the air. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m pissed off enough that I might’ve said some shit like that. I tried to get him into rehab, into treatment, into admitting he has a huge fucking problem, but that’s the thing about guys like that – you can’t make them do anything they don’t want to do, and he didn’t want to do anything but get high all the time. Making music became just a way to fuel his drug habit, and when I caught him pawing off one of my amps... *MY* amps... he wasn’t even pawing off his own gear, he was stealing from the rest of the band to try and fucking fuel his addiction, that was when I broke up Truth Knife. Kelly was almost as bad, but at least he wasn’t fucking *stealing* from the

rest of us. Maybe this'll be a wakeup call for him, and he'll check himself into rehab."

"Hey. Hey hey hey," Ashley said, as Kevin was starting to tear up a little bit. "Danny was a fucking *adult*, okay, and you were *not* his fucking keeper. You weren't supposed to force him to do anything he didn't want to do, because it wasn't going to take. If you'd tried to stage an intervention—"

"He'd have jumped out of a window and run off into the night," Kevin said. "There's a reason I never even considered bringing him up here – he'd have been looking to see what he could steal and pawn off easily to use for drugs the moment he got here. It was extremely bad towards the end. It was affecting his singing, which had always been the one thing I could count on him to deliver on. But he was slurring words, forgetting lyrics, dropping in and out of songs, trying to convince the audience to do singalongs for sections he just couldn't remember the words for... he was a fucking mess. But there's some part of me that just remembers that scrawny ass waiter who auditioned for us singing Tom Petty's 'Free Fallin' desperate for someone to give him a chance and it still fucking hurts, you know?"

"Of course it hurts, Kevin," Ashley said, looking up at him. "He was your friend, and maybe 'was' is doing a lot of heavy lifting in that sentence, but you don't just forget about somebody who played an important part of your life, especially in the band you had that broke and got some recognition. You're allowed to grieve and for it to hurt, as long as you don't blame yourself for his decisions and you don't get so caught up in the grief that it affects the rest of your life."

"Fucking heroin," Kevin sighed. "Whole fucking generation of singers just gone to that shit. Ain't never gonna be me."

"And we're all very glad for that," she said. "Whole generation?"

"Heroin figures into the deaths of Kurt Cobain, Andrew Wood, Shannon Hoon, Layne Staley, Dee Dee Ramone, Scott Weiland, maybe Chris Cornell and/or Chester Bennington... that's a whole lot of fucking *good* singers... It's heartbreaking how many of them just OD'ed on that shit, or did just enough to impair their judgment and take their own lives."

"You never got tempted?"

"I danced with the bottle a bit," Kevin sighed. "Booze can be a cruel mistress by itself, but I sort of knew that if I let it take control, I wasn't going to get it back, so I kept it in check. Besides, we were never enough of a big success that the temptation was all around us. But now..."

"But now..." she echoed.

"I've got all of you to help keep me on the straight and narrow," he chuckled. "Even if I am getting dragged to parties where there's endless booze on tap and the doorman's offering me a bump of cocaine any time I want it."

"I've never done coke—"

"Don't," Kevin said sharply. "I did it once, and I've never been so fucking paranoid in my entire goddamn life. I didn't trust anyone for hours and felt like I was operating on live electricity. My hands were shaking, my head hurt and I nearly put my fist through a goddamn wall. I haven't gone back to it since, and I don't think I ever will."

"Anything you *are* cool with?" she said.

"Oh, *sure*," Kevin laughed. "Mostly the natural stuff like peyote and pot and whatnot, but even then, you do that shit in moderation and don't let it get out of control. Same for alcohol. You want to get blitzed drunk every now and then, that's fine. But when you start thinking 'I need a drink to get through this day,' that's when you know it's time to start cutting down, because it's gone from a thing you enjoy to a thing you *need*."

"That sounds like a lesson learned from experience."

"Dad died a drunk," Kevin said. "He could've stopped drinking any time, but instead he just let shit slide further and further into his own pit of misery, until one night he was driving home drunk from a bar, and wrapped himself around a telephone pole."

"Jesus. Kevin."

He raised a hand up. "I'm... I'm mostly over it, because you never *totally* get over something

like that, but I vowed that was never going to be me, no matter how good or bad shit ever got. So I've had to make a lot of key decisions that way, and remind myself that no matter how much of my father is in me, I am *not* my father."

"How old were you when he died?"

"Sixteen," Kevin said. "Total kick in the head. Mom sort of fell to pieces after that, and I had to hold her together, but after I went off to college, she fell ill anyway. Ovarian cancer. Insanely aggressive. She was dead before I even graduated."

Ashley's hand clung to his firmly. "Why have you never talked about any of this, Kev?"

"Because it's foundational stuff," he sighed. "It's the *past*, and nothing ever *changes* the past. It's just part of who you are, and talking about it doesn't fix it, doesn't adjust it, doesn't repair the damage done. Those holes that my father dug out of my soul, they're going to be there for the rest of my life, and there's nothing I can do about that other than try and grow things out around the edges. There's no such thing as half a hole, Ashley. But I consider those bumps in the road behind me, and I'm not driving in reverse – when it comes to the story of a person's life, the only direction is forward."

She giggled a little. "I remember that song of yours. 'Only Forward.' I really like that one, especially how it feels like it's sort of dancing on the edge of steep cliff, twirling around a bit before Kerry's drums come crashing in and it goes rampaging down the hill like a skier trying to outrun an avalanche."

"Danny's vocals on that one..." He sighed. "I mean, *I* wrote all the lyrics, but he brought them to life. I'm only an okay singer, but damn did that kid have some pipes on him." He reached up and wiped a tear from his cheek. "Aaaand I'm back where I started."

"It's okay to mourn him, Kevin," Ashley said, turning over to make sure she could snuggle up against him as hard as she could. "You're human. You lost someone, and even if he wasn't part of your life anymore, for a time, he was right there in front of you, helping you make that music that's always been running around inside of your head. And any time you go back to listen to the album, you'll still have a part of him there with you."

"I may have to steal that for my next song," he said, running his hand over her arm.

"It's not like I came up with it, Kev. It's wisdom as old as time."

Two days later, when Kevin woke up early in the morning and started heading for the car, he had at least enough control to make sure he grabbed his phone. When he got to the SUV, Miriam was there waiting for him. "Fucking Midas Day," she said. She was dressed in her morning workout gear, clearly having hoped to get her morning run in before the day started, but the biggest problem with Midas Day was that there was never really any exact moment when it started. "I feel like I'm driving us into downtown again, but I won't really know until I'm behind the wheel."

Kevin climbed into the back seat of the Escalade as Miriam hopped into the beginning. "Fuck it. Let's do it." He had just enough control of his body to lift his phone and send the text message to Ashley. *-It's GO time.-*

The Escalade pulled out of the driveway and started rolling down into downtown Los Angeles, it still early enough that traffic hadn't gotten heavy or was threatening to slow them down. If anything, Merlin liked to make sure they were exactly where he wanted them for their little game and didn't want traffic to impede them. It was all about motion and movement.

As they kept moving, it felt clear they were heading towards Santa Monica, and Kevin almost wondered if they were heading for the pier, or maybe Marina Del Rey. But they started moving down Venice Boulevard, their final destination seemed obvious – they were heading for Venice Beach.

Obviously.

There wasn't really a time day or night where Venice Beach was empty, which meant it was going to be a challenge, even knowing what he did. They brought the car to park at 1613 Speedway Parking, and both hopped out, heading towards the beach.

Kevin, thankfully, had enough control to bring his phone with him.

“I think it’s gonna be another runner, Miriam,” Kevin sighed. “Why does the goddamn wizard want me to run so much?”

“Maybe it’s his way of telling you to lose weight.”

“Are you calling me fat?” Kevin laughed with a mock offended look on his face.

“Am I a fucking wizard?” she countered with a laugh of her own.

They were in good spirits, at least, as they made their way to “Declaration,” a piece of public art that was right up against the beach itself, and Kevin could feel his pace starting to slow. There was generally some kind of ‘go’ flag, whether it was a dozen heads turning to look at him all at once, or the sign of someone chasing in his direction.

-Where are you?-

-Think you can make the restrooms to the north?- came back the reply to his phone.

-Maybe, but we’ll be running.-

-Do it. Meet you there.-

He could see a couple of people over at the police substation starting to walk his direction, and he looked at Miriam. “We go north. Quick. If anyone gets in between me and the restrooms there, cover me and make sure I get there.”

“You need to piss *now*?” she shot back as they started lightly jogging, hoping not to draw too much attention to themselves, but after a minute or so, it was clear that the game was on, and Kevin could see women starting to sprint in his direction.

At this point, having been through a number of Midas Days, he could at least see the humor in it, as if they were recreating that scene from Monty Python’s *Meaning Of Life*, where the guy had been allowed to choose the manner of his death. He wondered if that was where Merlin had gotten the idea from, or if maybe he’d done this before and that had inspired the movie.

The problem with the park was they were running past part of a skate park, and a couple of women on skateboards were trying to make a go after Kevin along the sidewalk, so him and Miriam cut across through the grass, each of them running as fast as they could now.

For a moment or two, Kevin wasn’t entirely sure they were going to make it, but eventually he could see the Public Restrooms just ahead of them, and there was a single woman running out of them towards them. But it wasn’t who they were looking for – just a random blonde in a string bikini that was barely holding on for dear life.

Miriam ran forward like she was about to bodycheck the blonde, but suddenly Ashley stepped out behind the blonde and tasered her, letting her fall down to the ground in shock. “C’mon, Kev!” Ashley hissed at him. “Hurry the fuck up!”

“I’m... *trying*...” he wheezed as he ran to Ashley, who pulled him down the line and opened one of the bathroom doors before pushing him into it, closing the door behind him, her standing on the outside along with Miriam.

And there, before Kevin’s eyes, was a familiar face, dressed in the same blue shirt and blue shorts she’d been wearing last time. This time, at least, she was alone.

“Mmmmm,” Jade purred. “I thought Ashley was talking shit, but here you fucking are...”

“Are you glad to see me?” Kevin said, or tried to anyway, but Jade was already lifting his shirt up and over his head so she could kiss at his neck and chest.

“You were the hottest fuck I’ve ever had,” Jade whispered to him. “My teammates were *soooo* fucking pissed that we threw you out of the car after I was done with you, but it felt like the moment had passed, y’know?” She reached her hand down into his shorts and started stroking his cock. “But I think that might’ve turned you on, or maybe it was just all the hot teenage pussy all around you.”

“What are the uniforms for?” Kevin had the clarity of mind to ask, even as he felt her fingertips tugging on his shaft.

“We’re all UCLA volleyball players,” she said, pulling her shirt up to expose those generous breasts he’d seen before, the tan nipples so stiff they almost looked painful, as she bent her legs and

crouched down, pulling his cock loose so she could push her face hard onto it, shoving the head of his dick right against the back of her throat, keeping it there for a good moment as she looked up at him, her eyes watching his face, as if the girl had something to prove. His eyes must've started to widen because she slide back and smiled wide. "I didn't get to show that off properly last time, but you actually sent one of your girlfriends to get me to schedule a repeat performance." She bounced her head on his shaft for several seconds before pulling back, rubbing the tip of it against her cheeks, smearing her spit and his precum on her skin. "God, Ashley's so fucking lucky to have this dick on tap, any fucking time she wants it. It's not like college boy dick, so nervous it'll go off given even a little bit of a chance. This time, though, I'm gonna make you do more of the work."

"This time," Kevin said, "I know a little bit more about what I'm getting into." He pulled her back up and this time decided he should be more of an active hand, so he pushed his hand down the front of her shorts, finding her pussy soaking wet, her hips lunging down to his touch, as she moaned wantonly, nodding feverishly at him.

"Whatever you want, mister, you can fucking take it and all I'll say is hell yeah," she whimpered, grabbing her shorts, shoving them and her everyday panties down to her knees.

He hadn't had a picture of her, so he'd been forced to draw a rough sketch of what he remembered Jade looking like for Ashley to find. He'd thought it had been an impossible task, at first, but when he'd mentioned that she and her friends were wearing blue outfits, Ashley seemed to know exactly where to look, and sure enough, a few days later, Ashley had identified Jade and the friends she'd had with her when they'd caught Kevin months ago.

Kevin spun Jade around and made her place her hands up against the walls on either side of the tiny little enclosed stall, bending her over just enough to make her ass stick out as he reached down and grabbed his cock, getting it lined up before thrusting it inside of her with one hard shove, which made her squeal in excitement.

"Fuck yeah, that feels so fucking good, Mister... drill that little cunt. Fucking own it. Plow my pussy until my fucking knees give out..." She tried to spread her thighs a little wider, but the tiny area gave them almost no room to work with. Out of a lark, he reached up, slid his fingers through her hair and grabbed a fistful of it to tug, as she let out one of the most carnal sounds he'd ever heard. "Don't stop. Fuck me more. Fuck me harder. Fuck me faster. Holy fuck. I fucking love this. Just keep on fucking me."

He licked his lips even as he started to bang into her, his other hand reaching down to spank her ass, which made her giggle and clench around his shaft. "Fuck, you're tight."

"Fuck right I am," she groaned back. "I almost feel bad for not bringing one of my teammates with me, but those bitches would've tried to snake this dick out from under me and I wasn't fucking having that."

The pace was Kevin's, and as much as he wanted to rush towards finding out if he was right, Jade's cunt was such a marvelous fit around him that he wasn't going to be able to hold out for too long. He was more than a little surprised when Jade's moans suddenly grew frantic, and she started to shake at the knees, but he realized the girl was just having the kind of earsplitting orgasm that she'd wanted from him.

"Please, cum inside my tight little cunt, mister. Cum so hard I'm stuffed full of your fucking cum, so that it's dripping out of me for days, that it's gonna risk breeding me... fuck I'd love that... I'd love to feel you cumming hard inside... pumping me full of that cum... please? Please mister? Let me fucking feel it... do it... do it do it do it fucking do it to me!"

He really wished he could've savored the moment more, but Jade had turned her head back enough for him to see those green eyes of hers that she must've been named after, peering right into his soul, giving him all the green lights he could've ever asked for.

When he started to spew cum inside of her, the whole inside of the bathroom stall started filling with gold light until he had to close his eyes to try and shut it out, the sound of rushing wind gusting

through the air. He felt his balls almost drain dry as the whooshing noise passed and he opened his eyes to see the golden light had disappeared. As soon as he could see again, Jade grabbed him by the back of his neck and pulled him to shove her lips against his, holding him in one of the most intense kisses he'd ever felt, her fingertips clenched on his neck, her body still trembling in aftershocks as she finally pulled back from him.

"Oh *fuck*, I'm going to want that all the fucking time," she purred at him. "And I'm going to want more and more and more."

"Not kicking me to the curb this time?" he chuckled, feeling his cock starting to soften.

"Never fucking again," she giggled. "And unless you want me calling you 'Daddy' forever, you'd better tell me your name."

"I'm Kevin."

"Well Kevin, your newest little fucktoy's name is Jade, and you better figure out if you want any of my teammates to join in, because the minute I tell them I know where to fucking get you now, they're gonna want in... And, no lies, just thinking about the idea of you dominating Elle and fucking her so hard like you did while I'm watching... shit, I'm almost ready to go again right fucking now..."

He glanced down and saw that on the formerly unmarked flesh of her ass, there was now a golden marking.

+1

"You're sure about this? We don't have to—"

"*You* may not be sure, but *I* fucking am..." she giggled. "After our first time, I've been thinking about that experience every time I needed to get myself off. It wasn't just the hottest thing to ever happen to me, it was the hottest thing I'd ever even thought of. And when your girl Ashley said I could have again, at least one more time, I told her I'd do whatever it fucking took... Now I'm not letting go. Not now, not ever."

And that was how he beat Midas Day.

By fucking someone he'd fucked on Midas Day *before*.

At least... that was how it worked *the first time*.

But Merlin's gift was designed to keep on giving...

## **Chapter Seven – Easy**

With only a few weeks until the wedding, Kevin was so glad his responsibilities ended with *attending* the wedding. He'd offered to contribute as much or as little as Fatima wanted, but it turned out that when her father's show had offered to pay for the wedding, they'd taken on more than a little bit of control of where and how everything was going to happen.

The last thing Fatima wanted was for her wedding to go full-blown reality television, but it offered them a chance to promote all sorts of things. Fatima would be promoting GDGear, albeit indirectly, and a bunch of the B-roll footage they'd taken over the last few weeks played like a massive trailer for "The Desperate Disintegration," Emily Rouchard's new movie, set to open just a few weeks after the wedding episode would air. Thankfully, because the wedding episode was going to be her father's "season finale," they would go from filming straight into editing and then airing it just a month or so later.

They'd chosen the Bella Blanca Event Center in North Hollywood, and Kevin had picked out his tuxedo a few months ago, as well as organizing his groomsmen, which consisted of Dandy Randy, his best and oldest friend Bill Hitch and Kerry, who looked more natural in a tux than she would've in a dress. Kev had offered her the option, but she'd insisted on playing the part. Fatima had appreciated that because Kevin had kept his groomsmen list so short, it meant she could only have three bridesmaids as well, and if anyone bitched about how they should've simply had more people in the wedding party, Kevin would immediately have his tragic upbringing story at the ready, the only child of two parents who'd died when he was just twenty, and usually that was more than enough to stop even

the most overbearing of wannabe bridesmaid.

The only thing Kevin had been adamant on was his ability to set the playlist for the ceremony and the reception, because while he didn't care much about the particulars of the wedding, the last thing he was going to do was let someone insist he march down the aisle to some bloody Ed Sheeran song that was having a trendy moment. The licensing department of the show had been somewhat adverse to it, claiming they wouldn't be able to get permission to use some of Kevin's choices, but Kevin was willing to call in literally every favor he was owed to make sure all of the music was of his personal choosing, and a sizable chunk of the budget had gone in to getting Robert Smith and the rest of The Cure to come and play a handful of songs live at the reception. The fact that he and Fatima would walk out to The Cure's "Halo" was a personal point of pride for him. Smith was *still* working on his band's latest album, and had, in fact, been at it for years, but they had some mutual friends in production, and had decided that a little gig for a friend of a friend was something they could do. And Fatima's father was enough of an old school Brit that he couldn't bring himself to argue with The Cure.

Because of the location, the guest list had been very heavily cultivated and curated, simply because too many friends and coworkers of Fatima's father had wanted to attend, and Kevin's circle of influence wasn't all that big, although there were a handful of celebrities who'd RSVP'd as yes.

All of that, however, was still a week away, and all the planning was done, as far as he knew. Every so often, Elizabeth or Fatima would ask him about something in terms of seating, but for the most part he could just stay focused on his own work instead. He was in full composing mode for Robert Rodriguez's new film, having seen some of the dailies, able to start putting together early sweeping approaches at melodies and themes, but not so much that he could score minute by minute yet. He was also starting to listen to demos that'd been sent to him so that he could line up projects he wanted to work on after he'd gotten back from his honeymoon, something he knew absolutely nothing about. He'd told Fatima to surprise him with whatever she'd always wanted to do, and he would be happy with whatever she'd had in mind.

His soon-to-be wife had tasked nearly all the women of the house with helping her get prepared for everything, and that included Jade, who'd moved into the house after Midas Day had either been beaten or gone on hold, Kevin still wasn't sure which, but it had been a few months of utter quiet, something Kevin had been massively thankful. There were hints that Midas Day wasn't gone for good – little notes from Merlin telling him to "enjoy his holiday" – but it was clear that Midas Day wasn't happening every month for a while. He wasn't sure what to make of the mystical tattoo that read "+1" on Jade's ass, one that it turned out only appeared when he was nearby. When he was within a few feet of her, it glowed like it was beneath her skin, and it wasn't anything small either, almost the size of his fist on her left ass cheek. But when she moved away from him, it disappeared, like it wasn't even there. Jade had insisted she was part of the family now and forever more, something Kevin had been more than a little surprised by, but the tenacity of her claims made it clear he wouldn't win the argument. And Jade had proven to be a great assistant to Fatima, almost as if she was trying to emulate Elizabeth's position with him. It helped keep his mind from thinking too much about the wedding.

It was all still in a week's worth of time, however, and the last thing he wanted was to be distracted by problems along the way, or things pulling his focus off trying to get through all his work before the wedding and the honeymoon. So he'd been spending as much time as he could in the studio, applying himself to one task or another. So much so that it was starting to burn him out, and when the light started flashing, indicating someone was outside of the studio door and wanted to come in, he welcomed the distraction, and moved to open the door, a little surprised to find Fatima, Elizabeth and Miriam standing outside of the door together.

"Love, we have a problem," Fatima said, "and I know we all promised to let you hunker down—"

"I need a break anyway, baby," Kevin said to her, leaning in to give her a soft kiss. "What's the problem? Something with the wedding?"

“No, it’s something much more personal than that, Mr. Bishop,” Elizabeth said. “I’m afraid we’re having a problem talking to Ashley.”

Kevin arched an eyebrow in concern. “What do you mean you’re having a problem *talking* to her? Is something wrong?”

“Well, yes and no, sir,” Miriam said. “I think it would be best if perhaps you went and talked to her. The only person who’s been with you longer than she has is Elizabeth, and even that, only by a matter of hours. In fact, you fucked her before you did *any* of us. She’s... she’s got a problem, one that I hope you can help her with, sir.”

Fatima smiled, placing her hand on his shoulder. “I don’t understand all the rules of your little pact with the sorceress, love, but I’m sure you’ll find some solution that’s to everyone’s satisfaction.”

“Any of you want to go in there with me?” Kevin asked, optimistically.

“I will go, Master,” Elizabeth volunteered. “As the keeper of the gift, it’s my job to be around when the rules and expectations are being discussed.”

“This isn’t my place to decide, beloved,” Fatima said. “So I will trust your judgment to do the right thing, not just for yourself, but for the entire family.”

“And your health is in no danger, Master,” Miriam said to him. “Your physical health, at the very least. Should emotional damage result from this conversation, well, that isn’t the sort of thing Strazo and I can protect you from. She’s in her room, and Natalie is with her.”

“Alright,” Kevin sighed, stepping over to power down the console, his amp and his instruments, so that nothing was consuming power and/or heating the room while he was away. Everything had been saved or written down before he did, and the last thing he wanted was for a fire to catch while he was away dealing with some problem.

Kevin and Elizabeth headed towards Ashley’s room, a place Kevin hadn’t spent much time in. One of the rules the members of his house had asked of him early on was that they each get their own bedroom, and that whatever sexual hijinks they got on with, they didn’t do so in the girl’s private bedrooms – that was their space and their space alone, a rule Kevin was more than happy to accede to.

Ashley’s door had a whiteboard on it, where she’d written out her class schedule, along with her designated appointments with Kevin. Every one of his partners liked to see him for a few hours twice a week, once by themselves and once with a partner of their choosing. This was a time she was supposed to be in class, but even with her door closed, he could tell she was in there.

She was crying.

Kevin hoped like hell he could solve her problems when he knocked on the door. “Ash? It’s Kev. I’m here with Elizabeth. Can we come in?”

“Aw gawd, I guess,” she said in between sobs. “It’s open.”

Inside her room was the sort of thing he expected it to be – a college girl’s first apartment. Posters all over the walls, pizza boxes scattered across the floor, dirty clothes draped over things instead of put in the hamper, and loads of drawings plastered across the walls. The one thing Kevin *was* surprised by was the fact that his cat Stu was curled up on Ashley’s bed alongside her, with Natalie, the house’s cook and fitness instructor, on the other side of her. Natalie was in workout clothes, as was Ashley, and Kevin wondered if maybe something had happened when they were in their morning session. Both had their hair up in ponytails, and the slightly older Asian woman had her arm around the blonde’s shoulders.

“Hey Ashley, what’s wrong?” Kevin said, walking into the room.

“I’m sorry, Kevin,” Ashley said, looking up at him, her eyes reddened from obviously having been crying for a while now. “I know you’re supposed to be trying to get work done before your wedding, and here I am, making a mess and distracting you.”

Kevin walked into the room and crouched down, kneeling in front of her, looking up into her baby blue eyes. “Well, I’m here now, so let’s talk about it. What’s the problem?” He took her hands in his own, finding her fingers trembling, as she looked down at them before forcing herself to lift her

gaze to match his own.

"It's... I shouldn't have any reason to complain about it, sir," Ashley sighed. "I knew what it was going to be when I signed up for this, but..."

"But what Ashley?"

"It's... it's silly, because it's still *years away*, but..."

Kevin waited, and then finally prompted her again. "But *what* Ashley?"

"But... but I don't wanna *go*, Daddy," Ashley said, tears starting to spring up in her eyes again. "I *knew* when I got into this that I was just going to be with you for a few years, for the length of my college career at the max, but in the year I've been with you... I've grown *attached*. And I don't like the idea that sooner or later, it's all going to end. I don't *want* it to end."

"Does it have to?" Kevin asked, first looking at Ashley before turning to look at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth nodded. "I can't talk too much about the rules of the Gift, sir, but I *can* confirm that the 'fucktoy' position is meant to be a rotating one, and that by the end of her college career, her pendant will simply fall off, and her attachment to you will fade."

"I don't *wanna*, Master!" Ashley said. "I don't *like* the idea that it's hanging over my head, like this deadline where I *gotta* go. I want to stay! With you! And Mistress Fatima! And the rest of the house! I... I love you, Kevin!" The blonde teenager whimpered, balling her hands into fists. "I didn't think I was going to, but you've been so fucking nice to me, when all you really had to do was just fuck me and pay my bills! But you've been helping me with my schoolwork, you introduced me to Christy Fucking Zen, and Fatima's been so fucking kind and generous with me."

"But I'm going to keep getting older," Kevin told her. "Wouldn't you be happier with someone your own age?"

"No!" Ashley shrieked. "And I'm getting pretty fucking tired of people telling me I'd be happier if I did what they told me to do!"

"Whoa! Whoa there, Ashley," Kevin replied. "I'm not telling you what to do!"

"You said I'd be happier—"

"No, I *asked* if you'd be happier with someone younger," he corrected. "I didn't *say* that you would. I know far better than to tell you what you, or anyone else for that matter, would or wouldn't want. I'm just trying to figure out how to help."

"How to help? How to *help*? You can find a way to keep me in the family! You can find a way to prevent the gift from rejecting me!"

"What recourse do I have, Elizabeth?" Kevin asked, standing up, Ashley still clinging to his hands with her own.

"I'm... I'm honestly not sure, sir," Elizabeth said with a frown. "The rules of the 'fucktoy' position are *very* clear, in that it's a position that has to be held by a college student."

"And?"

Elizabeth's brow furrowed. "And what sir?"

"And what other conditions are there?"

"That's it, sir."

"Really?"

"Yes sir."

"Well then, we can at least buy you some time while we consider the matter, Ashley."

"Sir?" Ashley said, cocking her head.

"You told me when we first met that you wanted to become a veterinarian, didn't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Is that still the plan?"

"Yes sir?"

"Well then, we can technically keep you in the family another *seven* years while we're figuring it out."

“Sir?”

“Since you’re planning on becoming a veterinarian, you’re going to need a four-year undergraduate degree, and then another four years in veterinary school, which could be considered just an extension of your college education, and therefore, still in college.”

Ashley smiled a little bit, sniffing a big drippage back into her nose. “It’s a start, but I don’t want to leave at the end of that, sir.”

“It buys us *time*, Ashley,” Kevin said. “What else can you tell me, Elizabeth?”

“About which part, sir?”

“Let’s start with who the last necklace is supposed to go to. I assume there’s a role intended for that person, like how Natalie took on the trainer/chef role, Miriam took on the bodyguard role and Leah is our lawyer.”

“The last role that’s supposed to be on staff is physician, sir,” Elizabeth said quietly. “I’ve been working to screen through potential candidates, looking for someone who would be a good match, not only for you, but for the rest of the family as well.”

“So there’s another option for you, Ashley.”

“Sir?” the blonde asked him.

“Instead of being a vet, you could instead become a real doctor, with me instead of pets being what you’re practicing on.”

Ashley frowned a little. “I don’t think I could do that, sir,” she sighed. “Working on animals, that’s one thing, but working on people? That’s something entirely different.”

“Well, we aren’t exactly in a massive rush, as seven years is quite a long time,” Kevin said to her. “Is that enough time that you’ll at least stop crying?”

“What do you think the odds are we’ll find a solution between here and there?” Ashley asked him, trying to get herself to stop crying.

Kevin couldn’t help but laugh at that. “If you’d asked me a year ago, what were the odds that I’d be living in the Hollywood Hills because I’d saved the life of the world’s most powerful sorceress? I’d have told you that you were *insane*. So I don’t know what we’ll be like in a few days, much less a few years. But we have the greatest weapon of the ages on our side.”

“What’s that?”

“Hope.”

He’d meant it in the most positive and optimistic way, but the moment the words left his mouth, he’d known they’d sounded more than a little corny and hokey, especially when the girls started to laugh at him.

“This! Is! Our! Independence Day!” Natalie teased, as all the girls laughed. “No no, it was a good speech, Kev. I’m just saying the saccharine levels might have been dialed up a little high. I feel like you were about to ask us to go marching into battle alongside you.”

“I just don’t want you to think we’re giving up on you, Ashley, because if you want to stay with us, if that’s what you *truly* want, I’ll do everything I can to make it happen.”

Ashley threw her arms around Kevin’s neck and clung to him so tightly, he was afraid she was trying to choke him out, but he could tell the tears running down her cheeks were tears of joy. “I was just worried that you’d tell me ‘Rules are rules,’ and that I had to go because it was what Morgana decided for you.”

“Morgana’s Gift is very powerful, Ashley, but I decide what happens in my own life, and that means if you want to stay, and I want you to stay, we will find a way for you to stay, alright?”

Ashley grabbed his head and kissed him with a feeling he’d never felt from the teenager before – gratitude. He’d felt her growing closer and closer to him over the year, but it wasn’t until that moment that he had realized that she’d grown increasingly attached to him *beyond* just the physical and sexual aspects of it all, and in hindsight, he’d been kind of an idiot for missing it for as long as he had. She’d organized her entire class schedule around spending as much time with him and the rest of the

members of the house, ensuring that when she left for the day, she'd only leave the once, with all of her classes concentrated together in a block, as if she was worried that coming and going too much might make her too much of a hassle. "I love you, Kevin," she whispered to him. "I was scared about saying it before now, and I know you think I'm too young to know what true love is, but I'm true and I do love you. I'll find some way to repay this to you, I promise."

"I know, Ashley, I know."

The rest of the day proceeded mostly quietly, but when it came time for bed, all Kevin's partners decided to pile into bed with him at once, something they'd never done before, but it seemed important to everyone, considering the sort of stressful day that Ashley had, that she be smothered in love, everyone surrounding her in a pile of human flesh, making sure someone was hugging each and every part of her.

Kevin had intended to be right at the center of it, but in the middle of the night, his bodily needs had come a calling, and he'd gotten up, sliding out of the pile so he could make his way to the bathroom. As much as he disliked it, he wasn't as young of a man as he once was, and he was starting to get the sense that getting up once or twice a night to take a leak was going to become a new habit for him rather than something that happened when he'd been drinking too late at night.

But after doing his business and flushing the toilet, he peered from the bathroom at the pile of bodies sleeping in his bed, tilting his head to one side, as he counted them. Once he'd double checked his count, he went about seeing who was missing. Ashley, check. Fatima, check. Natalie, check. Miriam, check. Leah, check. Jade, check. Elizabeth? Elizabeth?

Hm.

His majordomo was nowhere to be found, something that caused him great consternation.

(Also, his cat Stu wasn't on the bed, but that was less concerning. Stu liked to wander.)

He was a little nervous at first, but realized, it was *his* house, and even if Miriam was asleep, some of Fatima's security were always tending to the perimeter, and he could wander within the walls of his home and castle with impunity. He'd just never really gone walking at night since he'd moved in. But he needed to figure out where Elizabeth had gone, and so he slowly started checking the house room by room.

Around the fifth room, it occurred to him – he had a *big fucking house*. It was going to take him another ten minutes or so to check all the rooms, and even then, he was going to have to be moving quickly. But thankfully he didn't have that many more rooms to check, as he saw the light on coming from the room they'd used as Elizabeth's office. He headed down the hallway towards the low luminescence he could see wafted through the air towards him. The light seeping into the hallway had been a cool yellow at first but had shifted into a lustrous lavender before returning to a neutral soft white just as he reached the door.

When he opened the door, he saw Elizabeth in her nightie standing in front of the original box she'd brought with her, something Kevin hadn't looked at in months. The box was closed, but on top of it was a piece of paper with glowing letters, the paper itself floating a few inches above the top of the box, as if waiting for someone to pluck it from the air it was suspended in the middle of.

"Kevin?" Elizabeth said, rubbing her eyes. "Where am I? What am I doing?"

"You apparently sleepwalked down to your office, Elizabeth. Or, more likely, you were summoned down here by Morgana, who left us a note," he said, gesturing to the piece of paper, which was starting to lift a little higher off the box now, as if it was annoyed that its levitating trick wasn't getting the attention it deserved. "Maybe you should grab it and read it?"

"What? Oh. Oh!" She finally noticed the piece of paper and grabbed it from the air, as the glow from the letters on the paper lit her face from below, almost like he'd done around the campfire as a kid when telling ghost stories. "You're right, it's from Mistress Morgana. Should I just read it aloud?"

"That would be best."

Elizabeth smiled a little bit and began to read the note aloud to him. "Dearest Kevin. It seems

there has been something of a minor ripple in your household, and your first chosen fucktoy is having regrets about not asking for a position with a bit more longevity to it. I also understand that Merlin has decided to add onto your gift, something I am uncertain whether was intended in the spirit of mischief, the spirit of gratitude, or perhaps the spirit of both. I have checked out Jade, this new +1 you seem to have, and she seems to have no malice in her heart towards you or any other member of the house. There are no hidden motives there, no plots lying in wait to disrupt your life. In fact, she's never met Merlin – never seen him, never talked to him, never even been within a hundred feet of him, so I am hoping that you can simply allow her to be a member of your household in good conscience. I wouldn't trust that his 'addition' is over yet, though, so I urge you to be vigilance. +1 certainly implies there is likely to be a +2 and so on, because that's completely in line with the sort of thing he would get up to. I have loved and hated that man in equal measures over the centuries, and although I think I know him better than any other on this planet, I think that's somewhat comparable to saying I'm the greatest weatherperson on the planet – I'm right more often than I'm not, but sometimes we all get taken off guard. Merlin, like the wind, is a fickle bitch. Regardless.

“Back to the issue at hand. I have slipped into your house, reviewed the facts of this matter and spent some time pondering what to do with Ashley. Many options were before me, and with my level of power, there were several things to weigh before I chose any particular path. I decided against changing her mind for her, simply because that felt like intrusion, an invasion of her mind, an attack on her thoughts and feelings. While I'm certain I could've rewritten them entirely and left no trace of what I'd done, I somehow felt that I would be doing a great disservice to Ashley and her feelings, all of which she came by naturally. One of the differences between me and Merlin is that I am a great deal more concerned with the outcomes of my magics than he is. The old fool likes to kick the beehive just to watch the bees grow angry, whereas I'm more interested in making sure the hive survives. As such, I jettisoned the concept of wiping her mind or her feelings.

“Instead, what I have decided to do is offer you a singular addition, one additional pendant, which you will need to place around Ashley's neck after removing the other one. Also, as part of this, she will be required to find you a new fucktoy to fill that role, and it is *she* who is responsible for finding someone who is a better fit for the expected responsibilities of that role, one that is meant to be without emotional attachments, purely focused on transactional pleasure. *She* must set the expectations correctly for whomever she gets to take on her old responsibilities, and as such, she will also be responsible for their dismissal at the end of their tenure, and for the procurement of each and every woman who ever steps into your college girl fucktoy position henceforth. She wanted more than she had, and I can respect that, but there is a price to be paid for ambition, and it seems unfair to ask *you* to pay it, since all of this was a gift to you for your moment of heroism and kindness. Her new role in the family is 'fucktoy catcher,' but it will still allow her the freedom to continue chasing her dream to take care of animals, a noble pursuit if ever there was one. That said, if I learn that she is not taking her new responsibilities seriously, my wrath will come down upon her like the fury of a thousand suns, so encourage her not to shirk from this.

“I thought about waiting for a few years and stringing this out, seeing if it would change her mind at all, but in peering inside of her thoughts, I saw that prolonging my decision would simply bring both her and you more grief, and my gifts are not meant to cause pain. I will not allow them to. Talk to her in the new light of the morning, make her read this letter and then change her old pendant out for the new one resting loose in the box below. By the time you return from your honeymoon, she needs to have found her replacement, or the pendant in the box will disappear and she will lose her place among your house. ... Just kidding. But it will mean I will need to stop by and have a conversation with her about not fulfilling her duties, and nobody wants that.

“Other than that, I hope all is well. The Ostrogoth says to say hello. Congratulations on your upcoming nuptials. I didn't receive an invitation, but I assume that's only because you didn't know where to send it. Maybe we'll show up, maybe we won't. Either way, thank you again for your

kindness, Kevin Bishop. You truly are ‘one of the good ones.’ Toodles!”

Elizabeth held out the paper to him as she reached down to lift the cover of the box and revealed the inside of it, where the one remaining pendant had been joined by another that was sort of casually laid atop the spots where the other pendants had been neatly tucked away. A little smile crossed her lips as she looked at it. “You think she’s going to be happy?” she asked him.

“I think she’s getting exactly what she asked for, so if she isn’t, I think I’m going to have to paddle her ass red,” he chuckled.

As it would turn out, Ashley was so happy she began immediately bawling, throwing her arms around Kevin’s neck, clinging to him as she giggled, tears rolling down her cheeks. “I’m going to get you the best fucktoys ever, Kevin,” she told him. “I promise you I’m going to make sure you’re never unhappy with whoever I bring in, and that she understands it’s only for a good time and not for a long time, so that nobody gets too attached. And if they do get attached, well, I’ll deal with it, or I’ll talk to Mistress Morgana about what it would take to solve the problem.” Ashley was so happy she was practically trembling as she clutched at him, refusing to let him go for the longest point. “I was so afraid I was going to have to go, Daddy, and I don’t ever, *ever* want to let you go.”

“Now you don’t have to, Ashley,” he said, stroking her blonde hair. He was a little surprised how attached she’d grown to him, but there was also a sense of relaxation that surged through him in realizing she didn’t have to leave their family. She’d carved a place among all the others, and all of the women hugged to her tightly.

“By the time you’re back from your honeymoon, I’ll have a fine young piece of eager teenage ass ready and lined up for you to play with,” she purred into his ear.

How, he wondered, had his life ever come to this...

## **Chapter Eight – Blue Monday**

The wedding had gone off without so much as a slight hitch, so much so that Kevin had to wonder if there were magical forces at work during the event, but while he’d never considered himself a superstitious man, he was smart enough not to say anything out loud.

The ceremony had been exquisite and refined and tasteful, and most importantly, Fatima’s self-proclaimed footballer hooligan father hadn’t gotten so drunk so early that he’d gone off the rails before most of his television show’s filming had been done. They’d gotten plenty of footage, stuff with him having a talk with Fatima in her wedding dress, her walking down the aisle, celebrating with her bridesmaids, smashing cake into Kevin’s face, and her first father/daughter dance as a married woman. But never once did anyone let Kevin forget that it was just as much an entertainment production as it was his actual wedding.

He even had to say ‘I do’ twice because someone had sneezed when he’d said it the first time and the boom mic had still picked it up on background.

Hollywood.

The reception had continued far on into the evening, and that was when Fatima’s father’s drunken nature had started to rear its ugly head, with the sort of loud buffoonery that made for excellent television but not so great wedding memories, and that had been their cue to duck out, so Fatima had led Kevin and the rest of the family out the back door and down to the limo that let them make their escape to the plane that was waiting to take them down to the Bahamas for the honeymoon.

There had been some rattled apologies from Fatima’s father over the next few days, but mostly they’d all just gone to voice mail, as Kevin, Fatima and the whole rest of the family had been enjoying the sun and sand. Kevin had never been to the Bahamas before, and found the insanely vibrant colors of it almost psychedelic in nature. He’d been told he couldn’t bring *any* musical instruments with him, but Fatima had relented and allowed him to bring an iPad with GarageBand installed on it, so he could jot down ideas and musical thoughts given the opportunity, although she’d also limited his screen time to

an hour a day, making sure he wasn't going to spend the entire honeymoon buried in writing songs, which he had to admit would've likely happened without the guidance.

Instead, they'd had a lovely honeymoon, Kevin had written an entire album, Strazo had molted a layer of skin and all the girls had gotten a lovely tan. One particular surprise, however, was that Ashley had spent quite a bit of time on Zoom chats or FaceTime calls, spending a decent amount of time ensuring that when they came back to the states, there would be a replacement for her waiting. Ashley spent as much time as she could, however, having those conversations and doing that research out of the prying eyes of either Kevin or Fatima, who were enjoying the honeymoon too much to focus on what was going on.

Most impressively, neither Merlin nor Morgana had made a peep during the wedding or during the honeymoon. Oh, both of them had been *present* at the wedding – Merlin in a grand crimson suit and Morgana accompanying him in a deep scarlet dress – but neither had chosen to say anything at the reception, despite Kevin calling them out during his thank you speech (though not explicitly by *name*, as he figured there was no reason to make things more awkward than they already were). Kevin *had* been more than a little surprised to see the two of them *together*, like *together* together, acting like a traditional couple, holding hands, trading kisses in moments when they thought nobody was watching them, like a pair of teenagers out on a date with adults for the first time. Kevin had asked the wedding photographer to make sure and try and get some pictures of them, but word had come back that only one of the various pictures of “the couple in red” had apparently been a good one, but that it would be sent to Kevin and Fatima, as per their request.

Kevin hadn't seen any sign of either of them in the Bahamas their entire time there, either, much as he kept an eye out for them. He'd half expected to find Merlin dressed in cargo shorts and a giant loose-fitting shirt sipping something tropical on one of the beaches somewhere, but alas, the magus was nowhere to be found.

During the honeymoon, it seemed like Midas Day (or whatever was to become of the event now that it was being replaced?) was also placed on hold, with a day where it should have happened coming and going and so Kevin's wondering of what the follow up to Midas Day was going to be continued on, unfulfilled and like a pregnant pause in the rhythm of his life. But after the first hour or two of Kevin jumping at shadows and Miriam reassuring him that nothing was happening, Kevin had gotten back to enjoying tropical drinks and swimming in water too blue for the human eye to accept. He'd even brought the Ancestor's Gaze, the necklace given to him by the merfolk lord, as a sort of back up insurance, but it had turned out that he hadn't needed it.

Most of the time, Kevin and Fatima had kept it just the two of them in the main suite, with the other girls staying in a nearby suite, but it seemed like most nights they would rotate one of the other girls into the room with them, to help spice up the play.

But all things must end, and ten days later, they were wrapping up, getting packed and heading back towards the airport when it occurred to Kevin that Morgana's imposed deadline on Ashley was quickly approaching. He didn't want to interfere with the girl's process, but her window was closing. Still, best to let the girl stand or fall on her own two feet. The last time she'd mentioned something about it to him was the middle of the honeymoon, and that she was close to narrowing down her selection into something that would ‘blow his mind.’

By the time they were working their way back through customs, however, Kevin had basically forgotten all about Ashley's boast, and his mind was instead starting to work on all the various song sketches he'd compiled during the trip, and he had in mind a new project, one he was going to need to recruit a female vocalist for.

It was going to be a strange blend of tropical and psychedelic, with heavy shoegaze guitars layered over almost soothing rhythms, maybe played on steel drums. The Cocteau Twins meets Jimmy Buffet with maybe some Paramore meets Slowdive mixed into the whole wash. He'd need someone who could both control the tsunami of sound but also ride it like a surfer on a wave.

It would also be a chance to incorporate loads of types of instrumentation he'd never needed before. He was entirely certain that Kerry had never touched a set of steel drums in her life. While he was certain she could pick it up given enough time, there wouldn't be any hard feelings if he went and found someone who specifically had spent a lot of time learning the steel drums and hadn't been in much demand in Hollywood as of late.

He also wasn't sure there was an audience for that kind of project, but that was a problem for somebody else. Sometimes a person just needed to put a creative project into the world to see if there was an audience for it. Maybe the idea of shoegaze guitars and breezy Caribbean melodies was just something the world didn't know it was waiting for.

The drive back to the house was mostly pretty quiet, with everyone starting to acclimate back into their own lives again, lots of people attached to their cellphones, as he fully expected them to be. Natalie was scheduling deliveries to start back up, with food scheduled for just an hour or two away. She was also scheduled the classes she was teaching to start back up. Leah was informing her support staff she'd be checking into the office again tomorrow. Miriam had reminded the rest of Fatima's security team that they were back and that standard rotations were going to start up again. And Elizabeth was talking to people about what his schedule looked like for the next few weeks, now that he was back from his honeymoon.

Emily Rouchard's picture was 'in the can' as the expression went, and now it was just the strange, long waiting time before anyone outside of a handful of industry people got a chance to hear the score he'd done for the flick. He'd done his first pass for Robert Rodriguez's movie, but that meant he'd come back and add more beds, new scenes, new themes and adjust what was there based on both Robert and the studio's notes. Hopefully the studio didn't decide to blow a gasket, but Rodriguez was known to stick pretty close to his own vision, so with any luck, the revisions wouldn't be too excessive.

The cars pulled into the driveway, and as soon as the vehicles were parked, everyone was bailing out of them like they couldn't wait to get back in the house, leaving Kevin to unpack all the suitcases from the car until Jackson come out from the front the house, laughing himself silly. "They really didn't grab their own shit? *None* of them? Not even Miriam?"

"Nope," Kevin laughed. "Fatima's married me and now I'm just the handyman who unpacks her bags and occasionally bangs her brains out."

"More than occasionally," Jackson teased. "It's a nice house, Kev, but word gets around. Not that I'm sayin' it should be otherwise. She's your wife. I'm just still amazed she's cool about all the sidepieces."

"You know she's banging *most* of those sidepieces herself, yeah?"

"How *do* I get a life like yours, sir?"

"Save the life of the world's most notorious sorceress?"

Jackson chuckled, shaking his head a little. "I was hoping it'd be something more manageable and less complicated, like, hot yoga or something."

"I mean, Nat teaches some great yoga classes. Besides, you're engaged yourself, and your fiancée seems pretty damn happy with you."

Jackson nodded. "I dunno, I just... the idea of two women at once has always been a fantasy of mine, and now that I'm getting married, I don't expect I'll ever get that."

"Why's that?" Kevin said, relaying suitcases by the pair from the back of the car to the inside of the house while Jackson did the same.

"The upcoming missus never seemed all that adventurous in the sack."

"Have you talked to her about it?"

"*Talked?*"

Kevin chuckled and sort of tilted his head to look at him. "You haven't even *talked* to her about the sort of stuff you have daydreams about?"

"They're just fantasies, boss man; so why bother talking about them?"

“Because she’s got the right to know the kinds of things that go through your head in your spare time, and because if she loves you, she’s not going to care,” Kevin sighed with a world-wizened smile. “That’s your real problem, Jackson. You’ve got to be open, and you’re used to living a life under scrutiny – timetables, schedules, routes, planning. Everything has to be in order and precise, but people, they’re not like that. Your soon-to-be-wife isn’t like that. She just wants to know the things that’ll make you happy, and the stuff that runs through your mind in the idle moments. Maybe she’s open to it. Hell, maybe she’s *into* it. You gotta let her have her chance to tell you all that, you know.”

“You think she’s going to be okay with it?”

“I think you’re never going to know until you talk to her about it, and if you haven’t talked to her about it, it’s still too early for marriage,” Kevin chuckled.

“That’s fair,” Jackson agreed. “I’ll talk to her about it.”

“I think it’ll go better than you think it will.”

“You think?”

“I think you are *always* looking for the worst in people, Jackson,” Kevin chuckled. “And I think that’s not the way to approach your *wife*, y’know?”

Jackson looked sheepishly down at his feet. “Yeah, you’re probably right about that.”

“Honesty, optimism and openness,” Kevin said. “That’ll get you through 90% of the problems.”

“And the other 10%?”

“You’re on your fucking own there, man,” Kevin laughed. “That last ten percent is basically where all musicians, storytellers and artists make their living, in trying to discern meaning from the madness. There’s nothing there but chaos and confusion, so best to just ride the flow and let the universe take you down whatever path it chooses.”

“That’s not particularly reassuring, boss.”

“Life sucks. Wear a hat.”

“Anyway, I was supposed to tell you that it looked like someone left something for you by the pool while they were house sitting. A sort of welcome home gift.”

“Who the... you know? I’m not even going to ask anymore. I’m just going to go see for myself.”

“Probably for the best, boss.”

Kevin had pushed the bags mostly in, but at that point, he just wanted to know what the hell was going on, so he headed out towards his backyard overlooking Los Angeles with his massive pool, a gorgeous sight, with the sun just starting to go down. But he could hear someone swimming in his pool, doing laps.

He moved towards the edge of the pool to see a small, lithe, very pale girl swimming laps in the nude before she caught sight of him, and started making her way across the pool, reaching the edge, hopping out to slide out to stand in front of him.

She couldn’t be more than 5’ tall, with very alabaster skin covered with freckles in heavy spotting down all the way to her toes, dusted more generously around her shoulders, tits and ass. Her hair was probably a glorious reddish amber when it wasn’t wet, but the dampness from the pool had soaked it into deep mahogany, although there was also a generous V shaped bush that glimmered a little more brightly colored copper shade. Her breasts were on the smaller side, and overall it gave the impression that she looked younger than she might’ve been.

“Hey there, Daddy,” she purred at him, her eyes the deepest, richest shade of emerald he’d ever seen with his own two eyes. “My name’s Megan, and I’m here to audition to replace Ashley. I know it’s a pretty big set of stripper heels to have to be stepping into, but I intend to make sure I make my mark.”

“I’m not sure—”

“Shhhhhh,” she said, reaching up to press a single fingertip against his lips. Her skin was cool to the touch, having just gotten out of the pool. “I am. I’m not going to get attached the way Ashley did, but I am going to blow your fucking mind.”

Kevin wanted to say something, but Megan's other hand was already starting to rub his cock through the sweatpants he'd worn on the plane. He certainly wasn't at his best looking, but the smoldering intensity with which she was gazing at him almost felt like he was a side of beef on offer to a starving woman. He'd had more than his fair share of partners, but there was kind of fervor to the way that she looked at him that said he was going to be more than a little exhausted when she was done with him, and that it would be that way and not the other way around.

"You know, other girls always say they want a cute boy, or a pretty boy, or a buff boy," Megan said as she dropped down onto her knees, pulling his sweats and boxers down to his knees. Her face started to cuddle up along his cock, which throbbed eagerly, having swollen up immediately to earlier ministrations. "They're dumb cunts, you ask me. I want an older guy, a smarter guy, a wiser guy. The shy guys are always the ones who really know how to get a girl off. My big sister told me about that when I was growing up, and she's always been right." She pressed tender kisses along the length of his shaft, flicking her tongue across the size of it. "Jocks think because they're easy on the eyes means they don't have to do any work or take an active hand. But you'd better be active with me, or I'll be very cross. You ought to want me as much as I want you, and then you ought to take me to show that."

Kevin had heard talk like this before, but there was something challenging, almost daring in Megan's eyes, as she stared him down, pressing her lips to the head of his cock, holding there, the look on her face trying to push him, so he decided to push back, grabbing her head with both hands and forcing her face down onto his shaft until the head of his cock pushed against the back of her throat while she moaned and clawed her fingernails against his hips, eventually cupping his ass, not to pull him away but to make sure he *didn't* draw back.

He'd seen some voracious cocksuckers before, but Megan was absolutely decadent, her lips closing around the base of his cock, her tongue snaking out to flick at his balls before closing the seal tight once more, then dragging her lips backwards slowly, pulling tightly on the skin of his cock as he groaned, shifting his stance a little, hoping like hell there weren't neighbors or paparazzi pointed at his pool right now.

She wasn't taking pauses to breathe, and he had to wonder how she'd gotten so good at bouncing her head like this without needing to gasp for air. Her gaze was this combination of mischievousness, lust and innocence all balled together.

"Fuck, you better be legal, or I'm gonna kill Ashley," Kevin muttered beneath his breath.

It made Megan's lips pop off his cock with wide eyes, only long enough for his brain to start to panic before she giggled. "I turned eighteen last week, silly. Now gimme my treat..."

He would've loved to have a witty retort, but the unwavering suction she was applying to the entire length of his dick left him no room to speak, his breathing hitting frantic pace, and before he knew it, he was firing a searing hot volley of blasts against the back of her throat and into her mouth, her soft hands cradling his nuts, as she swallowed down heavy ropes of his semen, drawing his cock back so she could milk the remaining amount from him into her gullet.

"You were monumental," he panted, although his eyes widened, feeling her still stroking his limping shaft. "You can't be thinking..."

Megan giggled again, a sound that was both ridiculously sexy and somehow slightly taboo. "If all I can get out of you on my first go around is *one measly load*, Daddy, then no way in hell do I deserve the role of fucktoy..."

There was laughing coming from the patio door, and Kevin glanced over to see Ashley approaching. "I see you found my present, Daddy," she teased. "How is she?"

"We've only just begun," Megan purred at Ashley. "But he's so fucking tasty."

"Oh, I know. But now you'd better lure him into using you, girl," Ashley said, stepping in close, helping Megan off her knees, kissing the redhead on the cheek before her tongue snaked out to snap up a little dollop of loose cum she had on her skin. "If you have to do all the work, then maybe he's not that into you."

“Nuh uh!” Megan pouted. “You saw the way he was skullfucking me back there!” Megan’s fingers stroked along his thigh. “I’m gonna make sure he’d totally spent before he’s done with me.” She moved over to climb up onto one of his deck chairs, spreading her legs as she reached back and gave her own toned pert ass a quick slap. “You gonna fuck me blind or just stand there, Daddy?”

Kevin moved over towards her, finding that the freckle splatter pattern on her ass was even more generous than it was almost anywhere else. His hand brushed across her smooth skin, and she felt so tender and soft. His hips moved as he looked at the expression on her face, one with such excitement, as he lined up the head of his cock and pushed forward.

She was tight, the snuggest pussy he’d ever wrapped around his cock, and the sound she made when he penetrated her almost startled him, but she lunged her hips and ass back into him, pushing onto his cock like she was trying to wrap him up inside of her and never let him go. He could feel her feet moving to the outside of his legs and pull him closer.

He almost wanted to pop immediately, the intense pressure around his cock ridiculously overwhelming, making it nearly impossible to concentrate, but it seemed to bring out an animal side to him, as he started to buck into her, shoving his cock inside of her, almost feeling like her body was straining to stretch around his shaft, clinging for desperate life, like if maybe she could keep him within her a moment longer, she wouldn’t feel the forceful swell of his member thrusting back inside of her again, making her howl in eager delight.

“Fuck yeah, daddy,” she whimpered. “Pound me! Drill my fucking pussy open! Split that teenage snatch wide! Carve your fucking name into me! Make me a good little whore for you! Rail me until I’m a proper little fuckslut for you, Daddy... God, you’ve got *such a big. Fucking. DICK!* Shit, I feel so fucking small and tiny, so stuffed fucking stupid! No fucking boy’s ever dicked me like this, daddy! Harder! Rail your tiny slut harder on your big fat daddy dick and stretch me open! Fucking ruin my little pussy, so that nobody’s ever fucking good enough ever again!”

Ashley had moved to stand beside him, leaning in to press a kiss to Kevin’s lips, her fingertips stroking the back of his head. “She’s an eager little slut, isn’t she, Master? You said you’d never had a ginger before, so I decided that simply would not do, and made it a point for us to remedy that.”

“And you don’t think she’s going to get attached like you did?” he said in between kisses with Ashley, one of his hands moving to pull her closer by her ass.

“She knows better, Master, and knows what a miracle it would take for her to overstay her welcome more than four or five years, but she very much wants this... you can feel how tight she’s clenching on your cock, can’t you?”

“Almost *too* fucking tight, Ashley,” Kevin said, having to slow his pace down so as to keep himself from just going off again. “And just eighteen? I’ve got to be too fucking old for her...”

“No no, Master,” Ashley purred into his ear. “She wants experience. She wants muscle. She wants confidence. She wants a man who isn’t afraid to give her a bit of pain with her pleasure.” Ashley lifted a hand and then brought it down on in a hard slap on Megan’s freckled slender ass, not even that much flesh as to truly jiggle. “Isn’t that right, slut?”

“Yes ma’am!” Megan moaned. “I think... Jesus fucking Christ... I think I’ve already cum two or three times already... maybe fucking more... I think... fucking shit... I think I blacked out for a second? Or maybe just whited out in the pleasure of it all? I lost a few seconds of time? Maybe a minute? I’m super fucking sorry, Daddy, but I just felt soooooo fucking goooooood...”

“That’s fine, Megan, I’m trying to hold back myself but...”

“Don’t, daddy! I’ve... I’ve never let anyone cum inside of me before... but I wanna feel you... I wanna feel you painting my belly up from the inside... I wanna feel that warm gooey feeling inside of me, knowing you could’ve knocked me up... that you could’ve bred me like a good little bitch... That I could be a good little breeding whore for Daddy to impregnate... god, it makes me go brrrrr.... Do it, daddy... pump your cumdump full of what she’s yearning for...”

He might’ve held out a moment or two longer on his own, but he could feel Ashley’s fingertips

closing around his nutsack, cradling them, stroking the tiny balls, coaxing them to release another load, this time inside Megan's rapidly spasming twat, feeling her trying to milk it out of him, only for his body to eventually yield, another firehose spout blast erupting from inside to coat her womb with his cream, which sent her into another wave of quakes and quivers.

He slipped back, letting his cock drip out of Megan's pussy, seeing it twitch and contract, almost as if withdrawing his cock had left her feeling empty and vulnerable. He chuckled and moved to sit down on the deck chair next to her, as Megan slumped her face down onto her folded arms, her knees still keeping her ass lifted up in the air. "I think that's just about all for me," Kevin said with a playful little laugh.

"Oh no no no," Ashley said, dipping down behind Megan's body so he couldn't see her. "That simply will not *do*, Master." There was a wet slurping sound, at which point Megan's body gave another big shiver, and then Ashley's head peeked up over Megan's ass, a bit of his spunk still on Ashley's lips, as if she'd sucked some of the load out of Megan's pussy. "You need to have the full run of this girl before you can say yes or no."

"The mind is willing, Ashley, but I dunno about the flesh..." he said with a little laugh. "I'm not sure I could even *stand* up, much less *get it up*."

"Oh! I can handle it, Daddy!" Megan said, putting her hands down on the deck chair before moving to rise up, arching her back first, like a cat waking from a long slumber. "It's probably best that way anyway, so I make sure you don't hurt me too bad..." She looked genuinely shy for a moment. "I've never had a *real* cock in my ass before, so I like the idea of controlling it myself..."

"Don't go rushing into anything on my account, Megan," Kevin said, laying back on the deck chair, even as Ashley was raising the back of it up a little more. "If you're not ready..."

"Oh, I'm fucking ready, Daddy!" Megan purred. "I'm totes excited about feeling you take my last virginity, giving the last of my innocence away to you... I've been training myself for weeks now. And you look *sooooooooooooo* big, but I want it *sooooooooooooo* much..."

Ashley popped open a bottle of lube, drizzling it over his cock before she started stroking his shaft, and as much as he thought he would remain limp, the look of excitement Megan had on her face was electrifying and contagious. "She's gonna do it, Master, so you'd better get used to the idea."

"I couldn't say no if I tried."

Megan moved over to take the bottle from where Ashley had put it and smeared some lube on her hand, reaching down to smear it over her asshole. "Ready or not, Daddy, here I come..."

"You already did that a *few* times, Megan," Kevin chuckled, even as Megan was moving to straddle him on the chair.

"God, I'm so going to fucking feel this, but I want it so fucking badly," Megan purred, biting her bottom lip as she reached down to take Kevin's mostly stiffened shaft from Ashley's hand, rubbing it against the slippery pink pucker of her ass.

"You don't *have*—"

He never got to finish that sentence as she pushed the tip of his cock against that rosebud and felt it give way, popping the head of his thick shaft into her ass with a loud squeal somewhere between pleasure and pain, her head leaning back to look up at the darkening sky as evening was starting to roll in on top of them.

"It's like a fucking arm up my fucking ass!" she whimpered. "I feel so dirty, so fucking naughty... and so fucking *good*..."

"Too late to turn back now," Ashley giggled.

Kevin wanted to do as best as he could, but Megan's rear passage was even tighter than her pussy had been, and he knew there wasn't going to be much he could do to keep from popping, so he was mostly just keeping pace with her, feeling her hands on his shoulders, her feet against his hips while she pushed her ass down onto his cock, not all the way, not at first, but pretty quickly, she got the hang of it, and was starting to ride him pretty good.

It wasn't his best showing, but he didn't completely muck it up either, and when he finally popped that third time, it set her off as well, her body trembling like a leaf on the wind before collapsing against him, her body gasping for breath, and shivering.

When he finally had the strength to look up, he saw Ashley holding up a pendant expectantly, to which he could only nod his affirmative before he drifted off to sleep.

## Interregnum Two – Roll The Bones

A few months later, Kevin Bishop had what had to be the strangest day in his entire life. When he'd woken up in the morning, he and Fatima had realized that they both had an appointment on their calendars that neither of them remembered making or agreeing to.

"Elizabeth? What's this M&M lunch meeting that 'Tima and I are both scheduled for?" Kevin asked her over breakfast. Fatima wasn't as bothered by it as he was – she had meetings scheduled all the time that she never knew what they were entirely for, and so she'd often be on her way to a meeting and having to call and ask what it was about, as Elizabeth had taken over the role of her executive assistant as well, neither Kevin nor Fatima's life so demanding that one person couldn't handle both.

"I'm not entirely sure, sir," Elizabeth told him. "But it is coded in purple in your library, which means it's a top priority, and should not be cancelled. It looks like it goes back quite some time, though, so I imagine it's an appointment you need to keep.

"Alright, alright," he sighed. "Then I guess we have a lunch date we can't get prepared for, love," he told his wife as he kissed her cheek. "I'll try not to get too freaked out about it in advance."

"I'm sure you will anyway, love, but that's one of the things I love about you – you're always trying to take control of things that you have absolutely no control over, just to try and feel like you're in charge of the ship of your life," Fatima said with a wry grin.

"I'm not?"

"You're a ship without a rudder, babe," Ashley said with a smirk. "And like the Lemonheads said, 'a ship without a rudder's like a ship without a rudder's like a ship without a rudder...'"

"It's okay, boss," Natalie told him. "Too many people try and fight the current when they should just be going with the flow. That's the thing you learn when you're learning how to surf – if you're fighting the waves, you're doing it wrong."

"Alright then, I'll just go along with it and we'll see what happens," Kevin said. The day wasn't too packed, as he had a few days before his next gig was scheduled to start, a few weeks of producing a new band in the studio in his house, so he was taking meetings, entertaining ideas and generally just trying to find something to catch his interest.

His first stop in the morning was meeting with a band called Bald Riot on whether or not he'd produce their next record, and within two minutes, he knew he needed to get the fuck out of that meeting. The lead singer was talking about how they weren't making music; they were making *scripture*, and that was point where Kevin tapped out. He was fine with musicians thinking they were making *high art* but when it turned into a *religious experience*, that was the point where he had to tap out. He would politely listen for the rest of the meeting, but they were already clearly in the hard no column, so he didn't have to pay *too* much attention, which made the band's drummer try and call him out at one point.

"Man, this fucker's not even *listening*," the drummer said, as Kevin smirked and looked over at him.

"Are you Mike Portnoy?" Kevin asked the guy.

"Who?"

"The drummer from Dream Theater, has a billion drums in his kit."

"No."

"How about Neil Peart? You writing all the lyrics for the band in addition to drumming?"

"No."

"Maybe you're more a Stewart Copeland/Danny Carey kinda guy, can keep any tempo, any signature."

"I'm not bad."

"You're not bad," Kevin told him. "But you're not *them*. Yeah, I checked out of this meeting

about five minutes ago, but you don't want me anyway. Your leader singer wants someone who's going to buy into his whole 'congregation' bullshit, and I'm just not that guy. I like making music. I don't believe in movements or being a trendsetter. Write your songs, and if they connect, that's great, but if they don't, you pick yourself up and try again. Don't go thinking you're going to be the next important person joining the 27 club. That moment has passed and it's never coming back, so it's either write great songs or go work at Starbucks, and right now, your demo didn't have much in the way of great songs, so maybe go back to square one and lose some of the pretention."

"Our first album sold loads," the drummer said.

"Went gold, did it?"

"It went silver."

"That's not even a real thing here... that's a UK designate, and it means you sold sixty thousand copies," Kevin scoffed. "And I know you're talking UK sales, because if you'd told me you went gold, you'd get away with most people not asking where the certification was, and thinking you'd sold half a million copies, which is what it is here in the States, and a hundred thousand copies, which is what a gold record is in the UK. But the last record I worked on went platinum within a couple of weeks, and that's US platinum, not UK. So I know what's good and what isn't, and you aren't the kind of thing I could make good right now." Kevin tossed the band's demo CD on the table. "Track 4, Lost In The Undertow. That's your one good track on the demo for your next record. Scrap the rest, look at what makes that one track good and maybe try me again in a few months if you can lose the egos and rediscover the joy in making music again. If not, best of luck to you with your next one, kids."

He didn't generally like being so dismissive, but he'd taken a number of these meetings, and he was now at a point in his life where he was in such demand that he could afford to only take on the projects that he liked and was interested in. If people were going to be too much of a pain in the ass to work with, he didn't need them, and he didn't want to waste their time by leading them on that he was passing on them in order to drive up his prices. There were only two kinds of people he ever found trying to make albums. Either he heard people trying to make art, or he heard people who formed a band hoping it would help them get laid.

The latter folks could go figure out their personal problems on their own.

An hour or so later, Miriam was pulling up outside of some LA popup Kevin had never seen before called "Fiddler's Green," just around the time Jackson was pulling up with Fatima. Kevin smiled at the synchronicity of it. "Looks like we made it here the same time," he told his wife, who moved over and kissed his cheek.

"And we still have no idea what it's for?"

"Not a scratch," he told her.

They headed into the restaurant and were surprised twice – first, by being met at the door and being told the place was closed for private parties today, and second by being asked if they were there for the private party.

"We're here for an M&M meeting?" Kevin asked, cautiously.

"Mister and Missus Bishop?" the maître de replied.

"That's us," Fatima said cheerfully.

"Right this way madam."

The man lead them through the empty restaurant filled with plenty of tables and chairs and across the room to the far back, before through a set of double doors into a small back room with a cozy little table, and a couple of familiar faces to Kevin, although he'd only seen them together the once – at his wedding.

"So, it seems like you figured out the first stage of my game, boy," Merlin said to him with quiet confidence. "And faster than I expected you to, much to my annoyance."

"Come come now, love," Morgana said from her position sat next to him. "Don't be a spoilsport because he's smarter than you expected him to be."

In looking at the two of them, Kevin was surprised to see Merlin leaning against Morgana, almost doting on her, until he realized they must be back in one of their on-again phases of their off-again, on-again relationship. Merlin had his hand on Morgana's back, and was moving in small circles there, and she was leaning back into him. The two made an odd if somewhat delightfully mismatched couple. "I mean, look at him," Merlin said with a laugh. "When you look at him, he doesn't exactly jump out at you and scream 'I saved one of the two most important people in the entire history of the world,' now, does he?"

"From humble beginnings come great things, my love," Morgana said, snuggling in against Merlin, reaching up to stroke his beard gingerly. "And dear Kevin here was smart enough to do the right thing when he was at the right time and place. That's all we can ask of any woman or man."

"Mmmm," Merlin said, as Kevin and Fatima moved to sit down at the table across from them. "And you, m'dear?" he asked Kevin's wife. "Do you feel like you've come out well in this deal?"

"I've got the best husband a woman could ask for, and he came with his own collection of female joytoys for me to play with," Fatima said with a smug grin. "What could I possibly have to complain about?"

"Well, the fact that my partner keeps mucking up his life, I would've suggested," Morgana said with a wild laugh. "Which is part of the reason we sort of got back together again. I wanted Merlin not to constantly be poking and prodding at one of the most elaborate pieces of spellwork I've ever crafted in hundreds of years. So he asked me to make a compelling argument—"

"—which she did—"

"—and now we're back together again. For a time, I'm sure."

"Not for good?" Fatima asked.

Morgana smiled, much like a parent would when being asked by her child if a divorce was permanent. "Merlin and I... we're good in phases, but never in seasons... we come together and connect for periods of time, but they never last, and we both learned long ago not to try and force it. So we will see how this time goes and how long we remain in parallel orbits, but when the time comes that we need to part ways from each other's company, we both know it won't be for good, and we'll be back to doing this dance before they've even had the chance to change the fashions again."

"I've had relationships like that," Miriam said from her place on watch near the door to the back room. "Too good to let go of, too rough to hold on to."

"I meant to ask you, dear Miriam, how has Strazo been treating you?" Merlin asked her with a wry smile. "It's been a long time since one of the fey dragons wanted to cross over into this realm, and I'm hoping he hasn't come to regret crossing over."

Strazo poked his head out from beneath Miriam's large coat and offered a quick series of smoke rings, three small, three large and then three small again, followed by what Kevin could only describe as a sort of reptilian laugh.

"Oh, ha ha, Straz," Miriam said with a smirk. "He's fine. He's taken a liking to deviled ham, weird little critter that he is. His favorite thing in the world. Wants a can for breakfast and a can for dinner, each and every day."

"Well, I realized that in bringing him over so hastily, I forgot to ensure that he would be completely taken care of," Merlin said. "So I intend to rectify that. Kekira, come meet the only other fae dragon not in hibernation."

From within the folds of Merlin's robes, another small dragon, similar in size and shape to Strazo but with a dark blue hue to her scales, climbed free and flew over towards Miriam and Strazo, the two little dragons beginning what a more innocent pair of eyes might construe as a playful wrestling match, and a less pair of innocent eyes would suspect was a rather intense makeout session. It didn't last long, however, and eventually two tiny dragon heads poked out to keep an eye on the surroundings, Strazo returning to his duties, at least for the time being.

"I'm pretty sure he says thank you," Miriam said. "Although I hope you aren't expecting

anything from me in return.”

Merlin tapped his temple with one fingertip. “Good thinking, Miriam, but no. This one is simply me settling a red mark in my own ledger, and honoring the terms of my agreement with Strazo when I brought him over here. Crafty little devil included a loophole in his side that I didn’t spot, and which he didn’t point out, knowing I’d eventually come across it on my own and feel honor bound to abide by the letter of the agreement. Clever fellow that one. You two are well suited for each other.”

“I hope that’s intended as a compliment, m’lord.”

“It is, m’lady,” Merlin said with a slight chuckle.

“And your man Jackson?” Morgana asked Fatima. “He and his new bride are doing well?”

“They are, m’lady,” Fatima replied with a broad grin. “It took him so long to ask that she was impatient and couldn’t wait for the wedding, so they just did so quickly and are enjoying their time as newlyweds.”

A waiter came over to take an order from them, and it took Kevin nearly ten seconds to realize that the waiter had long fangs and a pallid candor. When the pale man shuffled off, Kevin tilted his head to look at Merlin. “Is our waiter a vampire?”

“He is,” Merlin said, “but don’t hold that against him. Vladimir makes excellent food, and he only has pop ups once every few years or so. Keeps his exposure minimal. He hasn’t ever violated the accords, but some in the hunter community haven’t been holding up their end of the bargain as of late, and he doesn’t want some overzealous vampire hunter thinking he’s fair game, when he’s done everything in his power to respect the accords.”

“I swear,” Morgana said, taking a sip from her wine. “The hunters truly have gotten rather bestial over recent years. I’m not sure quite why, unless it’s frustration that the accords have worked as well as they were intended to, and they haven’t had their sport anymore.”

“I suspect that’s it, my love,” Merlin answered. “Anyway, we didn’t bring you two here to discuss the current political state of affairs regarding the supernatural community. We brought you here to discuss the current state of my lovely partner’s gift to you, and my tampering with it.”

“Did you *enjoy* the struggle of Merlin’s adaptation to your gift, Kevin?” Morgana asked.

“Parts of it, I suppose,” Kevin said with a laugh. “I didn’t mind feeling insanely wanted, but when it crossed over from ‘being highly attractive’ to ‘being the only human alive in a zombie movie,’ maybe you might say you went too far.”

“Alright then,” Merlin said. “What I’m going to do then is make some alterations to my addition to your gift, to make it more palatable and manageable. It will still retain a certain level of unpredictability, because I *am* Merlin, and I *do* have a reputation to uphold. But we will dial down the frequency of it, and instead it will be more aligned with how I suspect my partner would prefer. Once a season, a new partner will pursue you relentlessly, and after you have fucked them once, you may decide to bring them into your family, or simply pass and send them on their way. When you have selected six more to keep, bringing my gift in line with the seven partners Morgana gifted you with, then they will stop arriving and you will be free to do as you see fit. But I shan’t be outdone by my dear partner in showing off how much her life means to me, er, us, to all of us in the magic community.”

“You old softie,” Morgana laughed. “You’re not fooling anyone, you know?”

Merlin smiled sweetly, a look that Kevin found odd on the old mage. “I’ll do what I must to keep things in the right balance, my love,” Merlin told her. “Speaking of which, I have to ask Kevin... how are the merfolk?” The magus grinned rather impishly at him. “I’ve been known to be adventurous, but I’ve never fucked one of the sea folk, so I hate to be boorish... but what’s it like?”

“I’m *so* tempted not to tell you, Merlin, but I suspect if I did that, it would only come back and bite me in the ass, so instead, let me just say that it was a remarkable experience, albeit one I felt very much out of control under.” Kevin smirked a little bit, rubbing his chin. “I would advise that while they have great beauty, the smell was a bit unpleasant. Nothing they would have noticed as being unnatural, but the smell of the sea is quite strong, especially to a landlubber like myself.”

“Fun at parties, but bring air fresheners,” Merlin said, almost as if taking notes for himself. “Got it, check.”

“Anything else you’d like me to fuck that you haven’t had the courage to stick your dick in?” Kevin asked Merlin, feeling just a little bit smug for the moment.

“Oh, lad, don’t tempt me like that, or I’m going to throw all sorts of things your way,” Merlin said. “Could you imagine, love, if I made him have to go through all seven tribes before my portion of his gift ended? That’s simply too good. Maybe I’ll just—”

“Merlin, you will do *no such thing*,” Morgana scolded as she reached up and grabbed his hand, pulling it down. “This is a *gift*, not some idle spell you’ve put into the world you can eternally monkey with. If you want that sort of experiment, you need to start on your own base, Merlin’s Graft or some such. I will not have you causing such problems with what is meant to be a gift.”

“Oh *alright* my love,” Merlin sighed in a highly overly exaggerated motion. “I suppose I’ll just have to find someone else in the world ready to find someone from each of the tribes and—”

“One of the new Captains already has that idea,” Morgana said.

“Oh? Which one?”

“Tommy, the new Captain of the Green Wizards.”

“Hmmm. Well, I’ll have to have a chat with him then, shan’t I? See if I can give his life a little bit more extra meaning,” Merlin chuckled. “How did you hear about this?”

“As it turned out, the Dragonborne owed Tommy’s family a favor, and Silversmith came to me to ask for my help in making sure the spell he was gifting Tommy was the sort of thing that would truly make an epic splash,” Morgana giggled. “I’m told it had *quite* the impact, even if Silversmith did pass off the spell as his own and made no mention of all my assistance in the matter.”

“Let the man have his pride, love,” Merlin said with a smug grin. “He’s not one we’d like as an enemy anyway. I don’t doubt that the two of us unified could handle him quite hastily, but should we be apart?” He shook his head cautiously. “That isn’t the sort of thing I’d like to gamble either of us on, you nor I. So let’s not poke that bear unless we have good cause.”

Kevin felt a little bit like he and Fatima had drifted into the background as the two magicians carried on their chat, and on one hand, he wanted to desperately eat his lunch and excuse himself, but on the other, there was so much power across the table, and such fickle personalities behind it, that he didn’t want to do anything to possibly offend either of them. Then, of course, the conversation came back around to him once more.

“I’m surprised you went in for allowing the wedding to be televised, Kevin,” Morgana said to him in between bites of her steak. “You always struck me as the sort of performer who preferred to let the work speak for itself and didn’t have any real need to be standing in the spotlight.”

“That’s on me, I’m afraid,” Fatima said with a smile. “My father made quite the stink about it, insisting he get to film part of his show there, and Kevin agreed, as long as he had complete and total control over the soundtrack for the episode. He used that to make my father pay through the ass for all the music rights needed to air the episode, all of which went to underexposed artists. Kevin also threw in some of his own music for it, which resulted in a few more scoring gigs for him. It’s remarkable how quickly he went from a respected but, frankly, D-list washed up musician to one of the most popular scoring musicians in Hollywood. All your doing?” she asked Morgana.

Morgana smiled, waving her hand slightly. “I have only a hand in connecting the dots,” the sorceress said. “The talent was always there, and it just needed to be put in the right ears. Once it got there, Kevin’s remarkable skills spoke for themselves.”

“Well, they do say in Hollywood, it’s all in who you know,” Merlin said with a laugh. “I keep trying to find someone to get a much better version of mine and Morgana’s story committed to film, but I can’t seem to find a screen writer who’s willing to take on the project.”

“Everyone’s more interested in the old King Arthur days rather than what we’ve been up to for, oh, the last couple thousand years,” Morgana sighed. “As if Arthur’s time wasn’t boring enough as it

was. Besides, that story's been told more than enough times. It's time for new stories to be told, more interesting and unusual ones."

"Try telling that to a screenwriter, or, worse still, a lawyer who thinks he's a screenwriter. He'll continually try and argue the minutiae of a point while failing to realize the entire argument has burned down around him," Merlin sighed. "It's arguing placement of silverware on the sinking Titanic as the boat's already upturned. I do not understand people who refuse to look at the bigger picture on such things."

"Some people just like to argue," Kevin chuckled. "We had an A&R guy like that with Truth Knife at first. Didn't care about the bigger argument at hand, just winning on the technicalities, and never seemed to give a shit about what actual earthly impact it had on the people *in* the argument. He was basically going to fuck up our album release until I convinced the label head to give a listen to my opinion and what the A&R guy was telling us to do."

"What was the A&R guy telling you to do?" Morgana asked in amusement.

"He wanted us to release 'Misery Torrent' as our first single," Kevin chuckled.

"Wait. Wait wait wait," Morgana started giggling. "Your old A&R man wanted you to release the *sixteen-minute track about how sleep is the only thing keeping you from death... AS YOUR FIRST BLOODY SINGLE?*"

"Your reaction seems quite a bit similar to mine," Kevin said. "I think I described it as 'commercial suicide' while the A&R guy said it wasn't about being successful – it was about taking a stand and saying that long depressing songs have a place on modern radio now. He said any band with the balls to rerecord Iron Butterfly's 'In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida' and release it as a single would make a killing, but until then, this would have to do."

"And the label head?" Merlin asked, mischief in his eyes.

"Thought the A&R guy was out of his fucking gourd. Sacked the man immediately, gave us a new A&R man and our first single, 'Midnight Survivors' started getting serious radioplay two weeks before the album came out."

"I kept meaning to ask you about this, Kevin," Merlin said. "I've heard the album. It should've been a massive success the first time around. What happened?"

"The label went broke the day before the album was released, the label's founder absconded with most of the money to parts unknown, but probably without an extradition treaty. We were scheduled to play opening gigs for some big bands for about a week, and then launch on our own tour, but the money that had been set aside *to pay* for the tour was gone with the label's founder, and the last night we were playing an opening gig, our lead singer was so drunk he couldn't remember the words and our bassist was so stoned, we unplugged his bass before the show started and he didn't even notice there wasn't any of his sound coming through his in-ear monitors. After the show, I pulled the band aside and told them either they wanted to make music, or they wanted to get high, because they clearly couldn't do both. And the people who wanted to make music could call me the next day. Only Kerry, our drummer, called me, and she said she understood the band was breaking up, but whatever I was doing next, she was in for. And so she and I still work together, and the rest of the band went their separate ways. Our old lead singer died several months back. I've actually been working on a series of songs that I think Kerry and I might do another Truth Knife record for, about the people we lost along the way."

Morgana smiled at him kindly. "I knew I made the right choice in giving you such a powerful gift," she said, reaching across the table, patting the top of his hand. "And I think that sounds like a lovely record to make. Daniel, troubled soul that he was, would've loved the idea of it. What happened to the other guys in the band?"

"Charlie was just a guy we took with us on tour to handle the basic rhythm stuff, and he never really cliqued with the non-druggie members of the band, and Kelly," Kevin said, pausing to whistle. "After I caught him selling some of my effects pedals to pay for his drug habit, I never wanted to

fucking see him again. People who get so caught up in their addictions that they start taking advantage of other people's kindnesses, they gotta get cut off sooner or later."

"You know, I was going to offer to try and magic away his drug addiction for you, but I don't think it's worth it, and I don't know that it would take," Merlin said. "Opioids are a terrible plague brought upon man."

"Yeah, well, we gotta keep blowing ourselves up somehow," Kevin said with a chuckle. "Thank you for the dinner. It truly was excellent."

"No hard feelings?" Merlin asked, extending his hand to shake.

Kevin took the hand and shook it, offering a wry smile. "You have to take your fun where you can get it," he said. "I should also tell you, Ms. La Fay, that I do have a song dedicated to you on the next Truth Souls album we're working on in our spare time."

"Indeed?" Morgana smiled. "What's it called?"

"One Woman Universe," he replied.

"Brilliant."

## **Chapter Nine – Eight Days A Week**

Kevin's life carried on for a while without much in the way of disruption, which was, in and of itself, something of a disruption. He began suspecting that Merlin's addition to Morgana's gift had gone into a form of seclusion, lying in wait for the moment he got complacent before springing into action again. But whatever Merlin had planned, it wasn't set up to appear monthly. It didn't even seem to be set to appear seasonally, as summer turned into autumn, and nothing happened. There weren't women chasing him like zombies. There weren't days where he woke up in places and didn't know how he got there. In fact, his life seemed to be quiet, stable and on track.

This was, of course, yet another way of Merlin fucking with his head, Kevin decided, and to let Merlin get to him would be letting the mage win, something he had resolved not to let Merlin do.

He'd be damned if some silly ass magician was going to get the better of him.

"The Desperate Disintegration," Alice Karteaux's movie that he had been working on for what felt like forever, had finally come out, and it had become a decent-sized hit. It wasn't the slam dunk the movie studio had been hoping it would be, at least not at launch, but the film had *legs*, and it stayed in the Top Five movies in theaters for nearly four months, never at number one, but never lower than number five. Critics had been incredibly kind to Kevin's score, and with the Robert Rodriguez project in the can, the Christy Zen album climbing up the charts, it felt like the demand for Kevin's time was skyrocketing faster than even Elizabeth could keep up with, and she'd hired an assistant.

Kevin had been delighted that the assistant was a dude, and not some additional woman a magician or sorceress was trying to foist upon him.

The decision had been made that Kevin could probably juggle around four projects at once without getting too overworked, with another two on deck. There could be two film scores in the works and one in negotiations, and the same was true for music projects, although when he was working on his own compositions with an eye for release, that would often eat up more of the time than he expected.

There was another Truth Knife album on the books for next year, but Kevin didn't want to rush it, and so he and Kerry were recording tracks here and there while he kept busy on other projects. Lots of people who he'd grown up being fans of were suddenly eager at the idea of working with him, and that meant every week held some new surprise meeting where he'd suddenly find himself in a room with the likes of Ridley Scott or Steven Spielberg, and by the end of the meeting, they'd be penciling in time on his incredibly booked schedule moving forward.

Kevin was starting to wonder if his next month off would really be in 2021, or if they were just overbooking in case projects inevitably fell through. As popular as he was, that still happened to him. There'd been talks about working with Jim Cameron on a movie, and he'd spent four different two-hour meetings talking with the man before Cameron suddenly pivoted and decided he wanted to try working on the sequel to Avatar again, a project he already very much had a composer attached to.

Keeping all his partners satisfied was also something of a juggling act, but one he'd gotten pretty good at. Everyone had different rhythms and tempos, different wants and needs, and staying one step ahead of them had been the bit of personal scheduling that he'd just taken to doing on his own, with his own notes and schedule in the Notes section of his iPhone.

Just like music, it was all about tempo, rhythm and harmony.

Set the beat.

Introduce the melody.

Keep all the various parts in harmony and rhythm.

Tempo tempo tempo.

But it mostly meant that Kevin didn't have a whole lot of awareness of what his upcoming days would look like before he got up in the morning and looked at his schedule for the day in question as it started. Sure, he could've tried reading a day ahead, but Elizabeth had learned how to keep key portions of his day off his schedule until the day of, so he didn't get too worried, too overly focused, too lost in

thinking about the next day rather than the day in front of him.

As much as it could frustrate him from time to time, it *was* a very good system.

Any time Kevin set his sights on the horizon, he could lose focus on the here and now. “Stop thinking about the *next* song, and focus on what you’re playing,” Elizabeth had told him repeatedly. “Here and now. Leave tomorrow for tomorrow.”

He’d liked that last line enough that he planned to steal it for a chorus of an upcoming Truth Knife song, assuming he could find the proper melodic thread to hang it on.

It might even be the title of the album.

“Leave Tomorrow For Tomorrow.”

It had a great ring to it.

Because of how often Elizabeth over managed his schedule, he wasn’t entirely surprised when he woke up and saw that his afternoon was booked for a meeting that was scheduled to run up until dinner, and it was given no details other than it was happening at the house.

He reached over and rubbed Fatima’s belly that was just starting to swell. She was awake, naturally, but always made a point of letting Kevin sleep until he woke up or his alarm went off. This morning, he’d beaten the alarm by almost fifteen minutes, which meant he felt slightly out-of-tempo, like he was half a beat ahead of where the drummer wanted him.

“You know anything about this meeting I’ve got tonight, ‘Tima?” he asked his wife, not entirely sure she would answer him, and even if she did, he wasn’t certain it would be relevant information he could fully trust.

“I do,” she said, and didn’t elaborate, something Kevin had learned meant he could dig for more detail, but that it wouldn’t be forthcoming easily.

“Anything I need to worry about?” he decided to ask, testing the waters just a little bit, as if he wanted to see what she would give him with just a little light prodding.

“Whatever you decide, I want you to know the whole house will be behind your decision,” she said, her tone sounding almost amused that he’d been ballsy enough to just ask. “Either way is fine. Don’t think you need to run anything by us. We trust you and love you.”

“That sounds serious,” Kevin said with a slight smile on his lips. He’d learned that his wife was much smarter than he was, and if she felt it was important for him to know that he had their support, it meant he was going to be left alone, to make whatever decision it was without any form of outside influence. He could make an educated guess what the meeting was about, then.

Elizabeth had found his seventh and final partner, possibly.

And everyone wanted him to decide just for himself.

He did his usual morning preparation, and by the time he was out of the shower, Miriam and Elizabeth were already prepping him on his day, both giving him the exact same caveat, that whatever he decided in the evening meeting was okay with the entire household. Instead of it being the sort of thing where there was always another opportunity around the corner, this one was unique, being that it was the final piece of the puzzle, the last addition to Kevin’s life, barring whatever mischief Merlin still had cooked up for him.

While he knew it was normal to feel a bit of nervousness about reaching an ending, he couldn’t help but feel like this one was going to be more significant, weightier somehow, for reasons he couldn’t put his finger on.

Thinking about it in advance, however, would simply drive him up a wall, so he decided to do his best *not* to think about it, and went about his day, the meeting simply another blank spot on his calendar that he resolved to get to when he got to it.

The morning had plenty to keep his busy with anyway. His first meeting was about whether or not he wanted to add a month playing producer to one of his favorite bands from Japan called Dragon Ash. The main concern was that Kevin spoke no Japanese, and the band’s English was... dicey at best. That said, Kevin had always loved their sound, and so he suggested that maybe they pencil in a week for a

trial run, to get a single and a b-side together and see if there was a workable chemistry there between them as a group. The test run was agreed upon and was set up for a month in the future.

His second meeting of the day was to go over studio notes for a film he'd agreed to work on simply for the street cred, the fourth in the Final Mile movies. He was the second composer to come onto the project, and the score was literally all that was holding up the release of the movie, something that seemed to be a constant sore spot for the director, who was getting yelled at by the action star actor prima donna who seemed to have even more notes than the studio. But Kevin was a professional and had taken the notes in stride, hoping they'd be the last round of notes, when, of course, he'd felt that way about the *previous* round of notes.

Kevin, thankfully, had found himself so busy that he'd made it to the ride back to the house before he was thinking about the meeting. When he headed into the house, he was told by Elizabeth to head down to the lounge on the lower level. His appointment was already there, he was told.

"Anything I need to remember?" Kevin asked Elizabeth as he tried not to fidget.

"Well, remember that in addition to interviewing the person to be added to the family, you're also interviewing them to be your personal doctor, and the family doctor," Elizabeth said, placing a hand on her shoulder. "But we've done our homework, and we feel like that doctor part's probably a slam dunk. It's more a question of personality mix. But we all trust you. Just remember that!" She dusted his shoulders off, moved to kiss him on the cheek and pushed him on the ass, sending him towards the stairs leading down to the lounge.

"I wish people would stop saying that," he muttered to himself.

For the most part, he'd been pretty good about not getting nervous when being introduced to his last few partners, simply because they'd come at him quickly, or he hadn't been given much warning, but even with the half-days' notice, he'd been surprisingly good at keeping it out of his mind.

In retrospect, he'd realize that all the additional warnings and notifications had been given for a reason, but as he walked down into the lower lounge, he wasn't thinking about any of that, and just wondering who his potential last partner might be.

That was why her appearance hit him like a ton of bricks.

Sitting in his living room was a face he hadn't seen in over a dozen years, much more a woman now than the last time when he'd seen her as a girl barely old enough to drink. She'd left him sitting on the porch of his college house with little more than a goodbye and a kiss on the cheek.

This was the first love of his life.

The one that got away.

The first woman to break his heart.

Ruby Young.

"Heya Kev," she said to him, her smile far more nervous and vulnerable than he remembered her ever wearing, but the intervening years had been kind to her, far kinder than they had to him, he expected. "How've you been?"

"Ruby," Kevin said, as if giving voice to the name would make it more real, more concrete, rather than the sort of surreal moment that was playing in his head. "I... if... when... how are you... *here?*"

"Your executive secretary, Elizabeth, reached out to me, told me about your... family situation... said you were looking for a doctor, and if I wanted the opportunity, I could come interview for it," Ruby said, that nervous smile not diminishing one bit. "So here I am."

Ruby was of Scottish heritage, with bright coppery hair done up into two braids that were tied together at the back, making like a little crown of her radiant locks. Her skin was still as freckled as ever, and she hadn't lost a step in terms of fitness from her youth, although her attire was much more mature and restrained than the tattered jeans, ratty t-shirt and leather jacket she'd normally worn when they were together what felt like eons ago. Her face certainly showed hints of the years in between, tiny hints of frown lines carved into her porcelain skin, but those piercing green eyes of hers still looked like they could punch a hole right through to the back of him without even trying.

“You... you became a doctor?” Kevin asked with a slight laugh. “Whatever happened to Miss I Want To Go Out Into The World And Fight Against Dictators? *She* became a doctor?”

“She did the thing you always told her she needed to do, Kev,” Ruby sighed, looking down at her hands, as if she had convinced herself she was already digging herself into a hole. “She grew up. I knew I could go into political science and then law enforcement or paramilitary work, or I could go into medicine and try and help people. The more I thought about it, the more I realized law enforcement meant a lot of other people telling me what was right and wrong, and I didn’t want that. I wanted to do what was right, not just what was legal. Instead of becoming a cop, I graduated premed and went into med school right after that.”

“What was your focus?”

“I decided just to become a general practitioner,” she said to him, looking around the room nervously before her eyes returned to him once more. “I’m... I’m sorry at how we left it. I... I wasn’t at my best back then.”

“Wasn’t at your best?” Kevin said with a slight frown. “You told me you thought I was a dreamer who was too caught up in what he wanted to create and didn’t focus enough on how he was going to survive. You told me that even though you were hoping I’d make it, you were worried because I didn’t have a backup plan. You told me the world is a harsh place for dreamers, and that I should be prepared to have my heart broken a few times along the way.”

“Which I did, by breaking your heart right then and there, I know,” she said, struggling to not break into tears. “This is going all wrong. Maybe this was a bad idea.”

Kevin inhaled a deep breath and then slowly let it out again. “It’s... it’s just an old wound I wasn’t expecting to have reopened today. And I shouldn’t be so quick to rush to judgement. You’ve had time to think about it, so... why are you here? I know it’s partially because we need a doctor, but why are you coming back to me? Now that I’m successful you want to be another person to jump onto the money train and see how long you can ride it?”

“No!” she said, reaching out to grab Kevin’s hand with her own, the first moment they’d touched in decades, and he felt his pulse skip a few beats. “No, that’s not it at all, Kevin. I’m... I wanted you to know how *proud* I am of you, of how impressed I am that you went against everyone’s advice and just carved your own path. I know it hasn’t been easy. I... I kept tabs on all your musical projects, and I came and saw Truth Knife a couple of times, but I... I just never had the courage to try and talk to you after the shows, so I sort of hid in the back where I knew you wouldn’t be able to see me well enough to recognize me. But... but I was so in awe of seeing you in your element, performing songs you’d written in front of an audience that you built out of nowhere.”

“Then why did you split from me way back when and tell me to get a day job?”

“No! That’s not... I didn’t *mean it* like *that*,” she said, fumbling even harder to keep the waterworks in check. “I just wanted you to have a backup plan to make sure you weren’t going homeless or without food. And I was terrible in how I said it, but I was young and *scared*, Kevin. And I screwed up, and then I doubled *down* on screwing up, by running away from you and hiding, doing everything I could not to hear you talk and explain your side of the story, because I’m pretty sure you’d have convinced me how wrong and silly I was being, and I... I just couldn’t take another instance of me being wrong at that point in my life. I had... I had to be *right* about *something*, and I just chose the wrong one to take a stand on, because I found that the thing I was *most wrong* about and pretended that if I just thought I was right *really hard* that it would *make* it right. But that’s stupid children’s logic.”

“And you’re back here now because...?”

“Because I was hoping to get a second chance,” she said, clinging to his hand like if he pulled it away, she might never get it back again. “I want to try and put things right between us. I loved you then, Kevin, and I still love you now. I tried to tell myself that you were bad for me, that getting involved with an artist would only result in heartbreak and a path of drugs and early death.”

“Jesus, Ruby, I’m not fucking Kurt Cobain,” he grumbled, letting her hold onto his hand, even if it

was making him a little worried. “I never was. I was never into drugs. Even when I had bandmates who turned into junkies, I steered clear of all that shit, because I could see what a trap it was. And even when I was at my lowest point, I never once thought about suicide. I wouldn’t stand for being that cliché. I’d have been more likely to rob a bank in broad daylight or do something far more visible than have a quiet death in some rundown corner somewhere. But even that? One way or another, Ruby, I’m a survivor. I *had* backup plans, but you just thought they weren’t stable, even when I’d already done the groundwork for establishing them if things went south. I could’ve been a songwriter for other people. Hell, I’m doing that some now, but I could’ve gone full time with it. And I was never above waiting tables and serving drinks to drunk businessmen and the hookers bilking them.”

“I thought I wanted a safe bet, Kevin, a sure thing,” she said, the tears starting to break through. “Then a couple years ago, I realized there’s no such thing as a *sure thing*, and that we should be precious with every bit of time we get.”

“What happened?”

“Stone died,” she said. “Heart attack. Congenital defect. Age 27. Left behind his wife and his newborn baby, only two months old.”

Kevin flinched at that, letting out a deep sigh. Her younger brother, Stone, had been Ruby’s rock in more ways than just name. He’d always been the wiser and smarter of the two siblings, despite his youth. He’d also been a calming influence on Ruby, her compass towards optimism and hope. He imagined the loss of him would’ve left her in a very dark place. “I’m very sorry to hear that, Ruby,” he said quietly. “I’m sure that was... extremely hard on you.”

“I cried for weeks straight,” she said, her fingers trying to push to interlace with his. He eventually stopped fighting it and let her fold her fingertips into his. “But I had just found your album a few months earlier, and so I kept listening to it, specifically ‘Battered Like The Mountain,’ and that song, it spoke to me. I don’t know what you were thinking about when you wrote it, but the lyrics were so relevant to me then and there. *Whatever evils block my way/I shall endure/Battered like the mountain/My heart burns pure/Though I may falter/I will never fall/Battered like the mountain/I’ll survive it all.*’ That song became my mantra, my oath I would recite every morning when I got up and every night before I laid my head down to sleep. He was the one who gave me the album. Stone. He remembered that we’d dated, and knew I’d sort of lost my way a bit, but he wanted me to know that you’d gotten past whatever stupid young girl shit I’d put into your head, and you’d turned all that emotion into creativity. He wanted me to understand that if you could do it, so could I. I didn’t have to be weighed down by the mistakes I’d made when I was young and foolish. So, I wanted to honor all the good things he put into my life by trying to fix what we had and get a second chance. Is... is that foolish of me?”

“You’ve talked a lot about what *you* want and what *you* need, Ruby, but you haven’t done a great job of selling me on what’s in this second chance for *me* if I give it to you,” Kevin said. One of the things his marriage with Fatima had been very good for was his ability to make sure his own interests were looked after. His wife had a strong personality, and she’d made it a point to cultivate a spark in him to fight back when he would be unhappy with something, to voice his opinions and not let himself get walked all over, a problem he’d had a lot when he was younger.

She nodded, stroking the back of his hand with her other hand, still unwilling to break contact with his skin. “Yes. Yes, that’s absolutely fair. I want to be a good partner to you, supportive without doing so blindly. I want to be the kind of woman who makes you smile when you see her, rather than the kind that makes you frown. I want to help you savor the sunshine as much as the rain, and I want to love you with every inch of my body and my heart.”

“And you know—”

“About your wife, about your other partners and about the magic, yes,” she said, her head nodding so fast he was almost afraid it would roll off. “I do. And I don’t care. I don’t have to be your everything, Kevin, but I want to do everything in my power to matter to you, like you do to me.”

“Jealousy used to be one of your defining features, Ruby, so how do I know—”

“You can bring in all of your partners in here and I will do what I can to convince you and them that I’ll do whatever it takes to be a team,” she said. “The last thing I want is for my hesitance with them to be taken as hesitance with you.”

“You’re not auditioning to be my *wife*, Ruby,” Kevin said to her. “That job is already taken.”

“I know,” Ruby said, her thumb stroking his wrist. “Fatima’s a remarkable woman. I’d be more than happy to be her doctor, and her partner, just like all your other partners, but I would, of course, always defer to her. Is a second chance so much to ask for?”

“It’s more than just a second chance you’re asking for, Ruby,” Kevin said to her. “This is the *final* spot, which means I can’t just give it away lightly.”

“I understand that, Kevin, and I’m willing to sit here all night and talk to you, tell you whatever you need to know,” she told him, her voice faltering just a little. “I want to put things right between us, Kevin, and I want to give you the support you should’ve always had. I don’t regret what I said back then, but I definitely regret *how* I said it, because it wasn’t meant to be mean – it was meant to help you see the bigger picture, and to just have something to fall back on, should things go south.”

It was a lot to take in, and Kevin still wasn’t sure what to make of any of it. Sure, he and Ruby had been quite the hot pair when they’d been together, but they’d also run like ice more than a few times, and when they fought, it tended to be the sort of knockdown drag out problem that resulted in him getting shouted at a lot.

Of course, that was what felt like lifetimes ago.

And she promised him that she’d changed.

Kevin was a *big* believer in second chances, and maybe it was time to forgive but not forget.

“Alright, Ruby, I’ll tell you what I’m going to do...”

“Does that mean you’re not turning me away?”

“I’m deferring my decision,” he said. “I want to believe you, I very much do, but at this point, actions are going to speak a lot louder than words. I’m going to give a month’s trial run here in the house, and if you pass, then I’ll give you the last spot in the house. But, if at any point during that month you make me feel like shit, like you did in the old days—”

The smile that bloomed on Ruby’s face could’ve powered a major metropolitan area for a year, it was so bright. “I won’t! I won’t say we won’t ever fight, because you need someone to push back at you from time to time, but I’ll do it respectfully, and I’ll make sure you can understand where I’m coming from, and if it you still disagree at the end, well, I’ll defer to you, unless I think it’s something of such dire importance that I need to continue to make my case,” she said, bringing his hand up to her lips, kissing it repeatedly. “I was so worried you were going to take one look at my face and throw me out on my ass.”

“Well, it’s still a good face, and it’s always been too nice an ass for that,” Kevin joked, which made Ruby blush and smile, squeezing his hand once more.

“They’re both yours, if you want them,” she said, licking her lips a little. “Can I kiss you now?”

“Of co—” He didn’t even finish the second word before her lips were locked against his, and those tears that had been threatening an appearance for the better part of an hour finally arrived, tears of joy, however, and not the tears of regret she’d been worried they might be.

“Thankyouthankyouthankyou,” she said frantically in between kisses, holding onto him like he was a phantasm who might disappear if she looked away. She had crawled into his lap and was snuggling up against him, and in that moment, Kevin felt all the memories of the tough times melting away and the memories of all the good times bubbling back up to the surface.

Her body against his was comfortable, familiar, as she leaned into him, her hands starting to explore his body, reconnecting with the parts of him that she’d known long before now, as her fingertips peeled his shirt up and over his head and gasped a little, to his amusement. “It’s a bit more ink than you’re probably remembering.”

“I like it,” she said to him. “It makes you look dangerous. Sells the rockstar mystique a bit more.” Before either of them knew it, they had stripped each other of their clothes, and were a tangle of limbs, his hands cupping the breasts that had only grown larger in the intervening years, even if they were a touch saggy, hers stroking his cock that she’d clearly missed.

At some point, she slipped off his lap and down to her knees, and he found her sloppily running her tongue along his shaft before she started bobbing her head up and down with the enthusiasm of someone much younger, as if she was trying to make up for lost time. She had the skill of an older woman and there was something about her still desperate to prove she wasn’t just talk. It wasn’t the insane ferocity of youth like Megan or Ashley, but there was a definite connection, and she hadn’t forgotten all the finer points of what she’d learned during their relationship in terms of silent cues.

They weren’t building something new; they were simply repairing something lost.

She had come close to getting him off a few times, but had skillfully backed him away from that edge, enjoying keeping him worked up without letting him hit that big payday. The third time she’d done it, he realized he must’ve made some noise of annoyance, because she slipped back up into his lap and guided his cock inside of her slit, a groan of great relief escaping her chest, as she seemed to orgasm just from his entering her, her eyes still damp from the tears of earlier, as she leaned in and kissed him again as hard as she could. “You’re a very good man, Kevin Bishop,” she whispered to him. “Most men would’ve turned me away, letting their pride get the best of them.”

“I refuse to be anybody but me, Ruby,” he said to her, kissing her in between her posing motions, lifting herself up only to drop back down onto his lap, like he was a prize stallion, and she was riding in the Olympics. It wasn’t as though Ruby’s technique was all that different from his other partners, but it had the added benefit of legacy, of history, of previously established connection.

For the next few hours, they collided and separated in half a dozen different ways. Somewhere in the middle of it, Fatima slipped into the room and joined them, followed no more than ten minutes later by Natalie, both of whom were eager to lend a hand, a pair of lips or whatever. Elizabeth also snuck in and somehow got a picture of Ruby’s orgasmic face without either of them noticing.

Towards the end, when Kevin was feeling as spent as he had within years, Fatima had saddled up alongside of him, snuggling in while Ruby was passed out, draped over his calves, her arms still wrapped around his legs, unwilling to move away from him until she felt like her position was secured, even if she didn’t have an official pendant.

Yet.

“I’m glad you didn’t turn her away, my love,” Fatima said to him. “I didn’t think you would, but you’ve dodged left a few times when we expected you to step right, if you know what I mean. She seems like a good person in need of redemption, and it warms my heart seeing you give it to her.”

“Well, it’s not settled officially yet, simply because I want her to have time prove she won’t get jealous of the others...”

“The look on her face when she was suckling on your balls when you were hilt-deep inside of me said everything I think you needed to know, dear,” Fatima replied with a smirk. “She’s here for the long haul and the right reasons. You’ll be sliding the pendant around her neck before you know it.”

“And then that’ll be it...”

“It?”

“The end of my gift from Morgana,” Kevin said. “It’s a little bittersweet, seeing the end of it. If it actually is the ending...”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

Kevin laughed throatily, laying back in his bed. “Magicians are never to be trusted.”

It was a motto that would still serve Kevin well in the future.

But, for the moment being, he was happy, content and focused on the present and not the future.

***NEXT: Epilogue!***

## Epilogue – Volvo Driving Soccer Mom

“*That ain’t my soul,/That ain’t your goal/That love you stole/It ain’t my soul!*” Kevin sang into the microphone at the front of the Viper Room to an invite-only crowd that was gathered for the first Truth Knife show in years, gathered to rock in the New Year’s together. It certainly wasn’t how Kevin had imagined their comeback, but when Alice Karteaux says she’s holding a New Year’s Eve party and wants you to provide the live music, your odds of saying no are practically nil.

The room was filled with five hundred or so people who were all invited – no tickets were sold – and as such, many of them weren’t as familiar with Kevin’s work as he would’ve liked, but they were still an eager audience, mostly being polite and welcoming. Security only had to give one drunken asshole the boot for trying repeatedly to get on stage. Not a bad night at all.

Kerry was working her magic on the drums, and Kevin had gotten a handful of people to play as stand-ins for bass, rhythm guitar and occasionally keyboards, people familiar enough with the Truth Knife catalog to be able to pick it up and keep in line with what Kev and Kerry were laying down. They’d gotten on stage at around 9 pm and wrapped up their set around 11:20, spending just a handful of minutes in the green room, getting cleaned up before coming and joining the rest of the party, where they were welcomed like conquering heroes.

Fatima was now visibly pregnant enough that they were telling people about it, and the doctor had told them it would be a son just a few days ago, but they weren’t telling anyone about *that* just yet, because it felt nice to have it to themselves for a little bit longer.

His entire gang of partners was at the party, and they were all more than a little juiced up, with the exceptions of Fatima and Miriam, who were both dry as a bone, as the latter was on duty and the former was with child. “You did great, boss,” Miriam told him with a laugh, while Ruby and Fatima were out on the dance floor.

“Shame most of them couldn’t tell the new stuff from the classics,” Ashley said to him, as she hugged him tightly. “But they seemed to love it all the same nonetheless, so that’s all that matters.”

“I saw Alice up on a table at one point, and nobody told her to get down,” Megan giggled, a bright orange bracelet on her wrist indicating she was under 21 and couldn’t get alcohol.

“It’s *her* party, Megan,” Kevin said with a laugh. “I think she’s entitled to do what she wants.”

“She really is quite an extraordinary woman,” Elizabeth said. “I’m a little sad that she wasn’t interested in the idea of joining our family.”

“She made it very clear that she’s a one-man kind of woman,” Natalie said. “She agrees that Kevin’s a great guy, but she doesn’t want to have to compete with anyone for his affection. She’s already competing all the time in Hollywood that she wants her relationship to come naturally and without too much conflict.” Everyone sort of turned to look at her and she smiled back at them. “What? I talked to her over at the bar for a while. She’s got a few drinks in her, so she’s *super* chatty right now. And she’s been talking you up to all her friends.”

“You didn’t tell her we’re full up?” Kevin asked, cocking his head to one side.

“Well, you’re only technically full up for partners for Morgana’s gift,” Elizabeth said with a grin. “You want to have a bit of fun on the side, everybody’s signed off on it, as long as you’re being smart.”

“And let’s not forget Merlin’s addendum is bound to show up sooner or later,” Ashley said. “That crafty old wizard’s certainly not going to let you get away without some kind of mischief. Jade’s got a +1 tattoo on her, so I imagine he’s going to get you another few at the very least.”

“Not to mention whatever sorts of side game nonsense the two baked into it, just to make my life more ‘entertaining’ for them to watch,” Kevin sighed, wiping lingering sweat from his forehead. “I know they’re not doing it to be mean, but sometimes it feels like they forget I’m an actual person.”

Jade, who was just *barely* old enough to be drinking, seemed to be pacing herself well. She was out in the middle of the dance floor before she suddenly stopped and started walking straight over towards Kevin, her eyes fixated on him.

“You okay, Jade?” Natalie asked.

That was the point where Kevin noticed Jade's eyes weren't their normal shade but were instead politely glowing a light golden. And when she spoke, her voice had a much different tone and cadence to it, even if it was still delivered with Jade's voice. "Ah, Kevin my dear boy," Jade's voice said with Merlin's words. "I wondered how long it would take before this would trigger. As per our conversation earlier, I have... softened up my graft onto my beloved's gift, and as such, this will give you a bit of warning about what's going on, and how the game itself is played."

"Merlin being upfront about something?" Elizabeth murmured as her eyes narrowed. "I'm more suspicious now than I would be if he'd said nothing."

"My beloved made it quite clear to me if you don't have a fair chance, then it's not really a 'gift,' so much as it is an 'inconvenience,' and while I would love to spend the next several decades bickering that minor distinction with her, she's threatened to withhold sexual favors from me until I relent, and, well, even I have my limits," Jade's message from Merlin continued.

"Ah, there's the catch," Natalie giggled.

"As such, you're going to be able to add an additional 6 more members to your family, but, in accordance with my beloved's wishes, you're going to have a chance to 'try before you buy,' much like you've had with the option of her partners. You don't have to marry any of them – don't be silly, I wouldn't want to interfere with your incredible marriage, or to offend your wife – but they will be play partners, much like all the others that Morgana has gifted into your life. And, in accordance with your career, their occurrences shall all be musically dictated. On holidays, when a song describing a particular type of woman is playing in your vicinity, just when the midnight hour is struck, that sort of woman will come to you, present herself, and you will *need* to engage with her, at least the once. After that, if you find she's not to your liking, you can send her on her merry way, and no one will be hurt, neither you nor her. If she *is* to your liking, well, simply say the phrase 'Accipio hoc donum' and you will have one more notch in your belt. You'll even see a golden glowing tattoo on her skin to go along with the one left on Jade. Once you've hit +7, my graft onto Morgana's gift shall be complete. But I think you'll find this holiday modification slows the pace down some and allows room to breathe. One thing I did regret about my initial graft was that it simply felt too rushed, too hurried. I suppose in my need to compete with Morgana's magic, I was too hasty in my initial read. That has always been one of her strengths over me – her ability to think, plot and plan. It is something I am working on to better myself and maybe this will be a good start. Regardless, you're going to have your first option appear within the next couple of hours. The synchronicity's already been engaged, the players are already making their way to the stage and soon your delight shall be upon you. Have fun, Kevin Bishop, and know that I'll be watching, so break a leg!"

With that, Jade shook her head, the golden flecks cast off like dust from her eyes, before she turned to look at Elizabeth. "What the fuck? How did I get over here? I was on the dance floor just a minute ago, and now I'm here?"

"Don't worry, Jade," Kevin said to her. "Merlin just hijacked your mind for a bit to send a message about how his addition to Morgana's gift would work."

Jade scowled a little. "That ain't cool. Can I kick the shit out of him if I ever meet him?"

"As much as I would love to let you do that, Jade, I don't think it'd be a fair fight, what with him being a wizard with several thousand years under his belt," Kevin said, placing a hand on Jade's shoulder as she leaned in for a pouty hug.

"I still wanna try."

"I know you do, baby, but I gotta protect you," he said, kissing her forehead. "Besides, things are about to get crazy around here and I need you to help be on lookout."

"Lookout for what?"

"TEN! NINE!" People in the audience were already starting to shout during the countdown, and that was cluttering up the room so basically all conversation would have to wait until it was done, but in the background, just in the breaths in-between the countdown, he could hear whatever song the DJ

was playing. It was something familiar, but all Kevin could hear with the clatter was some chorus going, ‘Na na! Na na! Na na! Na na!’ and that wasn’t enough for him to recognize the song.

Not yet anyway.

“THREE! TWO! ONE! HAPPY NEW YEAR!”

The room exploded into cheers, and Fatima rushed over to him, pressing her lips against his, celebrating the New Year together, welcoming in 2019 together. When they broke from the kiss, Kevin turned to Elizabeth, leaned to whisper in her ear so she could hear him, and said, ‘Go find out what song the DJ was just playing, will you?’

Elizabeth mouthed back the words ‘on it,’ to him and then was off and on her way over towards the DJ booth, just barely missing Alice, who was wandering over, with her friend and regular director Emily Rouchard in tow, as well as a small, diminutive blonde woman who was mostly hidden between the other two.

“Kevin!” Alice laughed, clearly drunk off her tits, her nose a bright red in the way that Kevin didn’t think people could actually *get* that drunk. “My favororite compuposer! You were fuckin’ awesome, dude! Up there onna stage all—” She began to make random noises while making air guitar gestures with her hands, as she leaned her head back and started to headbang until Emily reached over to steady her from falling over. “WhoOOooaaaAAhhh...” Alice started laughing hysterically. “I am *much* more intomsic...intoxnic... much more *drunk* than I thought I wuz... oshit. I’mgonnapuke...”

Before Kevin could even say hello to her, Alice sprinted off, each step less stable or balanced than the previous one, Emily cackling so hard she nearly doubled over with laughter. “Oh my god, that was fucking hilarious,” Emily said with a grin, trying to stand back up, clearly a bit into her cups herself, though nowhere nearly as badly. “I knew she’d drunk more than she should’ve, but I’ve never seen Alice run off to puke before, even at the crazy ass wrap party we had! You did put on a great show, though, Kev. I hope the new album blows people out of the fucking water and if you want to, you can go back on tour again.”

Kevin laughed, rolling his eyes. “I have zero desire to go back on tour again, Emily, so maybe a couple of shows at the Hollywood Bowl, maybe a stint at Madison Square Garden for a week or so, but there’s no way you’re getting me to play the Broke Shack in B.F. Kansas ever again.”

“Yeah, I get that,” Emily said. “Oh hey, I promised our accountant I’d introduce you to her. She drove in from the O.C. for this. Her oldest son’s only 13, but apparently, he’s a big fan, and while she didn’t want to let him into this den of depravity, she promised she’d get him an autograph to make up for it. Kevin Bishop, I’d like you to meet Maryanne Fijakowksi.”

Out from behind her stepped a tiny little blonde woman who had to be approaching forty, her dyed hair up in a professional bun atop of her head. She couldn’t be more than 5’ tall, with a deep red button up blouse on and a black leather skirt that came down to her knees, modest and daring at the same time, with thick chunky black glasses over her face. If anything, she seemed somewhere between an uptight librarian and a PTA mother, with just a hint of sexual rebellion streaking through.

Which was what helped Kevin make the connection.

“Hi, I’m Maryanne,” she said, extending her hand with a warm smile.

‘But you weren’t always, were you?’ Kevin thought to himself. ‘Holy shit, I can’t believe you’re you, and you’re *here*.’ Which, of course, clued him into the song he’d heard earlier, and suddenly, Merlin’s game became completely clear to him.

It was one he could certainly respect.

“Kevin Bishop,” he said, shaking her hand in return. In that moment, he could see her eyes spot the look in his, as if recognizing that he’d recognized her, and her grip on his hand tightened just a little bit, as if trying to pressure him into keeping quiet, which of course he was going to do. “Nice to meet you. So, your oldest is a fan of mine?”

“Ah, yes,” she said nervously, holding onto his hand for a little longer than he’d expected. He wondered if she’d seen the look on his face a lot, the one that says, ‘Goddamn, I think I’ve seen you

*fuck* before.’ “Max, the older of my two boys. He just turned 13 so I didn’t feel right letting him come to this kind of place, but he’s a big fan of your band.”

“I’m not even sure how he’d have *heard* of us,” Kevin said with a laugh as she finally let go of his hand. She reached into a large purse she had with her, pulling out a CD copy of the Truth Souls album sleeve with a black Sharpie resting on top of it.

“One of his teachers apparently got him into it, but he said he’s also been hearing some of those older songs on the radio,” she said, nervously glancing back and forth before looking at him once more. “Apparently since your movie scores have been doing so well, people are rediscovering your old band, and you’re getting a second-wave audience.”

Kevin chuckled softly, as he took the Sharpie and uncapped it, signing his name onto the CD booklet’s face. “Yeah, well, you know what they say – everything in the past comes around again,” he said, but flinched a tiny amount as the words came out of his mouth, realizing how they could be misinterpreted. “Say, my drummer Kerry’s around here somewhere. Maybe we should go find her and get her to sign as well.”

“That would be great,” Maryanne said to him, as Elizabeth approached him.

“The song was—” Elizabeth said, as he raised a hand to stop her.

“I figured it out,” he said to her, giving her a little wink. “I got this. I’ll be back in a bit.”

He and Maryanne started to walk away from the group, Maryanne sliding her arm around his, as he noticed she didn’t have a wedding ring on her left-hand ring finger. “You know, don’t you?”

“I mean, to a certain slice of a certain generation, you’re pretty recognizable,” he said to her. “I’m surprised nobody here spotted you yet.”

“Different hair color, glasses, smaller tits and over a dozen years of age on my face makes for pretty good camouflage,” she said, in a sort of hushed whisper. “Besides, I live in Orange County, where everyone is far too uptight to say anything, even if they do recognize me. Most of the time, though, it’s more of, ‘Is that? No, couldn’t be. What would she be doing here?’ and the thought is dismissed as quickly as it appeared. This place has the memory of a goldfish anyway, and I haven’t been part of conversations in over a decade.”

“You were *quite* the talked about figure when you were, though, weren’t you?”

Maryanne Fijakowski was, to Kev’s mind, *much* better known as Stacy Blue. When it came to the legend of Stacy Blue, it was hard to determine facts from fiction. The story was that she’d gotten into porn on her eighteenth birthday, although rumors claimed she’d started earlier than that, although *if* that was true (which Kevin highly doubted it was) all those films had been destroyed, a la Traci Lords. Supposedly she’d done a few months in prison in her early 20s for possession of cocaine, but once she’d gotten out, she’d cleaned up her act and gotten off drugs. From then on, she’d gone mostly on the straight and narrow. She’d starred in hundreds of adult features and done a stint as a stripper on the circuit, to supplement her income.

She’d been incredibly well-known for several years, on DVD and VHS covers across the country. He was pretty sure she’d done spreads in Penthouse and Hustler. There wasn’t an adult specialty store across the country that didn’t feature her face prominently. There was even a Fleshlight modeled after her vagina. It sold quite well, not that Kevin had bought one.

Then, as the case seemed to be with a lot of porn stars, she just disappeared. No announcement of retirement, no talk of doing other things, no farewell movie – one day she was working, the next she was gone, leaving behind a career in porn that spanned about eight years, from ’97 to ’05.

“I used to be a real wild child,” she admitted, as Kevin led her over towards the bar where Kerry was drinking with her girlfriend, whispering into his ear so he could hear her over the loud din of the crowd. “What do I have to do to keep you quiet about it?”

“Nothing,” Kevin said.

“Nothing? Nothing costs nothing these days,” Maryanne said to him. “You aren’t even going to ask me to blow you in the green room or something?”

“You have every right to keep your old life in the past, if that’s where you want it,” Kevin said. “Hey Kerry! I need to get an autograph from you. This lady’s son is a fan of the band, wants to get an autograph from us old timers.”

“Sure thing,” Kerry said. “What’s his name?”

“Max,” Maryanne said.

“To Max, Love Kerry,” his drummer signed before looking up at the woman. Kevin was amused to see absolutely no recognition on Kerry’s face, even though he’d seen Kerry watching a video with Stacy *starring in it* at their rehearsal space one day while waiting for the rest of the band to show up a few years back. Maybe the suburban camouflage was just too good, or maybe enough time had passed that Kerry just couldn’t make the connection. And so, Kerry continued without a clue in the world as to who was really standing in front of her. “Too young to come see us live?”

“I figure 13’s just a little too young for his first concert.”

“I was seeing the Cure live for the first time at around that age,” Kevin said, as Kerry handed him the sleeve and the Sharpie back. He turned and handed it to Maryanne. “If you want to let him come to a future show of ours, lemme know, and I can have you two put on the guest list. I wouldn’t want him going alone at that age, but it’s a good place to start exploring live music.”

“Sure, that might be fun,” Maryanne said, glancing around the room. “Is there someplace quieter we could talk about it?”

“Yeah, there’s a couple of side rooms. Alice has the whole club booked, so I’m sure we can find one that isn’t crowded to talk in.”

The two of them maneuvered through the crowd, and no matter which way Kevin looked, there were only looks of unrecognition when it came to Maryanne, although a number of people wanted him to stop, sign autographs or take selfies, and so it took them nearly four minutes to get out of the main area and into one of the back rooms at the Viper Room, a small little lounge that looked like it normally didn’t have more than four or five people in it.

“Look, I promise not to—” Kevin started before Maryanne pressed him up against the wall, practically pinning him there, her lips mashing fiercely at his, her tongue barging its way into his mouth like a drunken Karen on full tirade mode. Her hands were grabbing at his wrists, pulling his hands up and over his head, much like she almost wanted total control of him for a moment.

“You ever fuck a porn star, Kevin?” she panted hungrily in his face when the kiss broke. “I never got to fuck a rock star. It was maybe the one cliché I never got to live out. Wanna cross something off our lists together?”

“How wild are you talking about in your past?” Kevin heard himself ask.

“Oh, I’m clean and fine, but back then? I got gangbanged by the defensive line of the football team on prom night,” she said with a giggle. “I was the center of a bukkake line for twenty men for one flick. And the leader of a reverse gangbang towards the end of my porn career, with fifteen girls all obeying my orders to make one guy cum so much he couldn’t stand up when we were done with him. But that was back when I was working in the industry. Now—”

“Now you’re a Volvo driving soccer mom,” Kevin laughed.

“Well, Audi, but yeah, close enough,” she said with a slight giggle. “But other than that, you’re right. Just like that Everclear song, I guess.”

“With blond, bland middle-class Republican lives?”

“To a point,” she said with a smirk. “I’m a never Trumper. That’s why I got a divorce from my husband. Taxes? Sure. Smaller government? You got it. But saying you can grab ’em by the pussy?” She shook her head with a sigh. “That’s too far. But Bill insisted it was either vote for the guy who didn’t have any respect for me as a human being or my rights, and so I told him to kick rocks and get the fuck out of my house.”

“That’s the only reason?” Kevin asked with a suspicious grin.

“Well...” she admitted. “That and I caught him banging the neighbor’s wife. Knew that bitch

Keegan couldn't be trusted, but she came around poaching my man anyway. So I let her have him, and I took half his shit, kept the kids and kicked him out of the house. Keegan divorced her husband so she and Bill could get married but give it another five to ten years and he'll be sniffing around for more new pussy instead of her old and dried up cooch. He didn't even marry her. They're just 'exclusive,' whatever the fuck that's supposed to mean."

"Am I just something you're doing to get back at Bill?" Kevin asked her, as he felt her peeling up his long shirt, baring his heavily tattooed chest for her. "Or was there something more specific you wanted out of this?"

"Fuck him. He's not worth a second thought. This is for me. I want a taste of my old wild life again," she said, her eye contact intense, practically optically fucking me before she got down to the real thing. "I wanna feel like I used to, like anything's possible, like no one will tell me no on anything... and I never got a chance to fuck a rock star, to truly get my kicks off with someone I know everyone in the room was eye banging before I got there."

"Rock star might be a bit much."

"Well, I'm not really a porn star anymore either, but we can both pretend a little," she said, turning to face away from Kevin, rubbing her ass through the skirt against his crotch as she started to do a wiggle and shimmy downward, some of her old stripper moves clearly coming back to her. "Tell me you don't think I'm hot." She grabbed his hands and moved them to rest on her hips, more towards the front, so when she slid down again, they drifted up to her tits through the white top, and her nipples are as hard as bullets through the top. "Don't tell me because I had my tits undone you're suddenly gone off me..."

"Hell no," Kevin said, his thumbs flicking those nipples to make her whimper and moan, her butt pressing harder against him when he did. "I never understood why you got those basketballs strapped to your chest anyway. You didn't need them, and you went way too big. What you have now is natural, sexy, perfect."

She purred back at him, nuzzling her face in his neck. "Good boy. Even if you don't believe it, and for the record I think you do, you know the right things to tell a girl you're trying to get to fuck you..." She unbuttoned her crimson blouse and Kevin could see a lacey scarlet bra clinging to her breasts, the indentations of her nipples like tiny flags. During her heyday, she'd gotten breast implants a few sizes too big for her frame, in an attempt to expand her demographic. "Don't you move. It's time for you to see what a fucking professional is capable of."

Half a second later, she'd dropped to her knees and was running her hands up along the inside of Kevin's thighs, making his cock throb and twitch even more eagerly, impatiently, as if she was enjoying prolonging his wait. But eventually, her hand brushed against his shaft through his jeans, and within mere seconds, she'd shucked his jeans and boxers down to his knees and immediately started going to town on his cock.

Her opening move was to lock eyes with him and slowly push her face further and further down onto his cock until her nose was pressed against his skin, the entirety of his shaft in her mouth or throat, her eyes looking up at him with a challenging, amused confidence, as if to say, 'we can be here all day.' After about twenty seconds or so, with her point proven, she started thrusting her face back and forth onto his shaft, from tip to base, each dive calculated and coordinated with a squeeze of his balls or a grab of his ass, and he had to admit, Maryanne had him wrapped around her finger, as he could tell when he was starting to rush towards an orgasm and she would intentionally back down, sliding her mouth off his shaft, letting him see the spit and precum all blending together to make a filthy mess as she laughed up at him playfully. "Best blowjob you've ever had?"

"By a mile," he breathlessly admitted, his hand stroking her face.

"Good," she said, sliding off her knees, standing back up again, as she pulled the tie out of her blonde hair and let it ripple down like a waterfall around her shoulders, mostly golden blonde, except right at the roots, where the dark black was showing. She also hiked up her skirt and pushed her black

panties down to her ankles, stepping out of them, exposing that the dark stockings went up to mid-thigh and stopped there, held up by a garter belt. He could see a bit of black bush above her pussy as well, although certainly immaculately maintained. “Cause I want you to fuck my brains out like you fucking mean it... Every guy’s fantasized about fucking a porn star, but you’re gonna do it... and I’m not gonna give you the beginner course... oh no...rock stars get the expert level challenge...”

Kevin wasn’t entirely sure he knew what that meant, but it was clear she was going to do all the coordination for him, as she moved to rub one leg up and along his side. Moments later, she leapt up and wrapped her legs around his waist.

“Pin me against the wall,” she whispered into his ear as quietly as she could, like she was trying to plant the idea in his head without running the moment or breaking the illusion.

He shifted and turned to slam her back against the wall with a gasp escaping her lips, and for half a second, he thought he’d gone too far or shoved her too hard, only to see a wild giggle escaping from her lips as she gave him an encouraging nod. “That what you want?” he said, trying to put as much bass into his voice as he could, uncomfortable as it felt. “For me to fuck you through this goddamn wall?”

“Fuck *YES*,” she moaned, reaching down to grab his cock, helping him get it lined up, because while this sort of thing might’ve been old hat for her, it was tricky positioning for him, who wasn’t used to thinking about camera angles or even what the appearance was like. But as he felt his cock press up inside of her cunt, he couldn’t believe this was a woman who’d taken cock for a living for nearly a decade, or that she’d given birth to two kids, as she was tight as a virgin around his shaft, his body almost giving him a surprise release at the intensity of the clamping around him. “Good, isn’t it? C’mon, you dirty fucker, that’s *your* pussy now, fucking own it, drill it, carve your fucking name into it, motherfucker... hammer me right through this fucking wall... make me let everyone in this fucking club know how good you’re fucking me...fuck me like I’m your good little porno slut...”

With all of his partners, Kevin had experienced all kinds of sex, but this was an entirely next level experience, her body in complete control of their tempo, despite his position in the driver’s seat, his body doing what it could to hold her pinned against the wall, but the tiny kicks of her heels set the tempo, and no matter how rough he thought he was being, she was pushing for more of it, howling and moaning, her lips mashing on and off against his, her head constantly nodding in encouragement.

“That’s it... c’mon... fuck me... fuck me good... fuck me hard... **HARDER**... fuck you feel fucking good in my tight little pussy... **FASTER**, rock star... beat up that cunt... plow my fucking guts open... fuck me like you fucking **MEAN IT**...”

The way she was goading him, he almost felt like she was trying to get him to grow more rough, and so when he took one of his hands and placed it on her throat, giving it just a small squeeze, she started nodding even more feverishly, licking her lips, her eyes widening and he could swear he could see a hint of pride in them, like she was ecstatic that she was still capable of bringing out this side of men over a dozen years after her retirement.

“Fuck yeah... fuck me fuck me fuck me... harder... deeper... shove it in there, you beautiful bastard... fuck my belly open...you gonna do it? I know you wanna do it, you fucker... and I wanna feel it... fuck I want it so fucking bad... I wanna feel you creampie me... God, it’s been so fucking long... do it, motherfucker... nut in that fucking hole and make it yours... fucking fill me... gimme that hot fucking cream... it’s fucking mine... I earned it... nut me... cum in me! Fuck fuck **FUCK I’M FUCKING CUMMING!**”

Kevin wondered which was louder, Maryanne’s screams or the sound of the blaring techno from the DJ, but he didn’t have long to think about it, as he felt her walls crashing in around him, a velvet sticky hug that refused to loosen its grip, until finally, he could do nothing other than give her what she asked for, as his body gave up the ghost, tensing up and then gushing forward an utter siege of cum, an entire river erupting from him like a dam breaking and giving way to an unstoppable flood, as she giggled and cried when he did, tears of joy and ecstasy flowing down her cheeks.

It was at least a minute or so before either of them could say anything, both still panting for breath,

his body mostly pinning hers against the wall by leaning into her, a constant rainfall of his cum and her juices leaking down onto the floor below them.

“Holy shit, I think you painted the bottoms of my lungs with that geyser, cowboy,” she giggled into his ear, nibbling at it. “Not that I’m complaining. It felt so fucking good getting stuffed like a Thanksgiving turkey... and don’t worry... I had my tubes tied after Brandon, my second kid... And I haven’t fucked anybody since Bill and I got divorced a couple of years ago. And I’m not looking for someone to be a father to my kids or whatever. But I wouldn’t mind if you wanted to make this a semi-regular thing... You could even come around and give Max a few lessons. He said you made him want to learn to play the guitar.”

“Accipio hoc donum,” Kevin muttered as quietly as he could beneath his breath.

“What was that?” she asked.

“Nothing, don’t worry about it. As for making this a recurring thing... I can get behind that, but there’s a few things we’ll need to talk about first,” he said, lowering Maryanne to the floor, seeing the tiny golden +2 tattoo already glowing on her ass. “I need to tell you a bit about a guy named Merlin and his on-again, off-again girlfriend Morgana...”

For the next couple hours, Kevin introduced Maryanne to everyone, and walked her through what her new life was going to be like, and to Kevin’s complete lack of surprise, Maryanne reacted not with fear at magic, but with excitement and eagerness.

Now that Kevin knew what sort of things would trigger Merlin’s graft, he knew what to be on the lookout for, and so he could be on guard to see them coming. There were only five more of those remaining and then, he figured, his life would settle down and fall into a more regular pattern for him to live by.

The only real loose thread that bothered him was how Ashley’s extra pendant had come with almost no real chaos or problems, more of a simple need for adaptation and the next morning, the pendant was simply there. In a couple years’ time, when Kevin and his entire family were basically in lockdown in the house during a worldwide pandemic, his curiosity would get to him one night, and he would wander into Elizabeth’s office in the wee hours of the morning, when no one else was awake, and examine the box the pendants had come in for the first time in his life. Before then, Elizabeth had handled the box, but since all the pendants had been taken from it, it had lain idle in her office, unremarkable and forgotten.

And under cover of darkness, alone and only half awake, Kevin opened the box and examined the empty tray that the pendants had rested upon... only to find that it lifted out of the box to reveal hidden depths. Beneath it, a second tray rested, with six untouched pendants and a single empty slot. There was also a note resting atop of them, written in Morgana’s handwriting, which read, “For a rainy day.”

But that story, dear readers, will have to remain for another time...

*fin (for now)*

*(Author’s note: Morgana’s Gift was originally, when I conceived it, going to be exactly 9 parts long – an intro, a chapter with a song title with a day of the week for each of the seven days, and an outro. It was also, however, the story that readers clamped onto the most, beyond the obvious QT-shaped space in the room. As such, I decided to expand it and play about a bit. I knew Morgana’s natural opposite would be Merlin, and as such, I set out to introduce my interpretation of one of the most well-known fictional characters in history, and I set out to make him familiar but different. Mostly, I wanted him to be the kind of asshole friend that everyone can’t help but have one of in their circle of friends. But once I introduced Merlin, I knew Morgana wouldn’t leave things alone. And from there, the Modern Mythos universe was born. As should be obvious from the end of this story, I wanted the conclusion here to*

*draw two things into sharp relief – one, the Modern Mythos universe and the QT universe are separate spaces, and never the two shall cross, because COVID will be the only pandemic MM-stories will see in 2020, and the other – that I respect the love and affection people have for Kevin and his family, and that this isn't goodbye to them, but 'see you later.' At some point down the road, I'll be back and tell Merlin's Graft, which will detail the other five play partners Merlin's going to give to Kevin, and what those other six pendants might be used for. But for now, we bring things to a close on the Bishops, and we'll be back again to see them sooner or later. Thanks again for everyone who's loved this story. It's been loads of fun to write, and the fact that everyone's been okay with all the swerves and twists is why I love my audience. I hope this feels like a good finale for now. I always knew there would be a second layer to the box, and that I'd reveal it at the end. One last peek behind the curtain – when I launched the Patreon in 2021, I decided I wanted to try and see if I could take all the writing cliches I hated and make them work for me. So I've been sneaking them in over the last few years – the unreliable narrator (CARP), the flashforward cold open (Neon Stonehenge) and here, the 'that's another story' finish. It's good to have you here. The next story is just around the corner.)*