

Quaranteam: McCallister's Madness – Part 4

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Part four - "An object lesson"

They had finally brought him a meal, if it could even be called that. The soda was a flat Coca-Cola, although he was only going by the logo on the can. The paper plate had held a sandwich of some sort, although that term was more than a little generous for the excuse of a concoction they had laid on the table before him. The bread was barely a step above hard tack, the 'meat' in the middle of it was from some creature he couldn't identify and McCallister desperately *hoped* the white sauce was mayonnaise or tartar sauce or some other *actual* condiment and not something else entirely. Just to be certain, he dabbed it with his finger, bringing a tiny speck of it to his lips before wincing as he tasted it, praying like hell it wasn't going to burn his flesh. Thankfully, it wasn't jism from some other man, but was, in fact, a sort of mustard-mayo blend.

Even after he'd finished the sandwich, however, he *still* wasn't sure what the meat was.

"There you go, Dr. McCallister," Elle said to him. "You've been fed, you've been allowed to relieve yourself. Now, carry on with your tale."

"Don't you think I've earned an encounter with whichever of my partners you brought with you, to reinforce my resistance to DuoHalo? The last thing you want to have happen is that I succumb to this virus I have spent so much of the last year in struggle against."

"After the final portion of your story, Doctor, then and only then will you be allowed to reinforce your resistance to the virus," Elle replied, taking the plate away from the table, tossing it into a trash can off to one side of the room within the shipping container. "I want to hear detailed talk about your time working for the Russians."

"I've already given you the broad strokes. What more do—"

"I want details about the Ivanoviches. I want to know what happened to your wife."

"Eve?" he scoffed. "I would imagine she's dead by now, or in the throes of utter madness. We've never really tested to see what happens if a woman is separated from her partner any longer than two weeks, because it seemed unnecessarily cruel, and Eve's been away from me for... well, I don't know how long it's been since you abducted me, but based on the last day I remember, that would put Eve somewhere between two and four weeks away from her last dose with me. Best case scenario? She's insane. Worst case? I suspect the need might have driven her to take her own life."

"You're incredibly callous in how you're talking about your wife, Dr. McCallister," Bee scoffed at him.

"She *chose* to leave me," he spat back. "I didn't make her leave. And she knew exactly what she was getting into when she departed. She knew what would become of her."

"Enough," Elle snarled. "Tell me about the Ivanoviches and about your wife's departure."

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Aleksi Ivanovich struck me as the perfect sort of puppet proxy for his wife, Karina, to have complete control over things. He was a good looking and well-spoken Russian man in his early 50s, and he made an excellent first impression, but the more time I spent with him, the more I realized he wasn't following the particulars of nearly anything being said around him, and was trusting his wife to make all the decisions for him, usually in a way that was so subtle, it was

easy for those around him to assume that *he* was making the decisions and *not* Karina.

Make no mistake about it; I admired Karina. She was a beautiful Russian woman in her early 40s, blonde and muscular but with an innate sense of winter about her. Those cold blue eyes of hers had watched many men and women die, and I suspected that just as often or not, it had been by her order, or, rather, by the direction of her husband under her order.

If Aleksii didn't follow anything, Karina followed *everything* and any time I was worried I might have been getting too technical or in danger of her not understanding, she would ask me to either slow down or stop and start again but in simpler terms or drawing more analogies. We wouldn't move on until she felt like she had a fundamental comprehension of whatever it was I was attempting to explain to them.

They had settled us in a converted college laboratory, with makeshift accommodations just next door. Despite the fact that my bedroom was a converted lecture hall, they did their best to make it as plush and decadent as possible. I had been given seven additional partners, in addition to Eve, Anya and Sofia, a combination of models and female soldiers, although I suspect one of them, Dasha, was a backup FSB officer, to help support Anya and Sofia, whose opinions had continued to change of me the longer they were imprinted to me.

I had known that there was a certain level of emotional mood stabilizers that would happen as part of the imprinting process, but I hadn't realized quite how impactful that would be, especially in terms of shifting one's loyalty. The women became much more trusting with me, willing to answer basically any question I had for them, as long as I was tactful and gentle in my approach to it, something I must confess took me longer to get a handle on than I would have liked. As the months passed, Anya and Sofia began to tell me more about the state of Russia, despite the fact that I wasn't being allowed to travel out and see it, and the picture they painted was grim.

It had turned out that Putin's control over the oligarchs of Russia had been tenuous at best, and once he'd died, as I said earlier, the whole thing went to shit. Everything turned into smaller, warring factions, and nobody wanted to agree with anyone over anything. Within a month or so, it was clear that the Ivanovich's faction was the only one that was keeping its men alive with any decent numbers, and once that fact started getting around, people began flocking over to their side quickly.

The damage, however, was already deep and severe. In their rush to try and solve for the virus, they had *spread* the virus fast and frantically across most of Russia, and somewhere between 57 and 60 million Russian men were dead, leaving only 8 to 10 million remaining, far faster than almost any other country, at least as far as the data provided to me said. I suspect another million or so was lost during the time between the Ivanovich solution being accepted and its eventual deployment across all of the country.

Russia had gone into total media blackout early on in the pandemic, cutting off all information pipelines, locking down all borders and severing all communication channels. They were in an utter panic and didn't want anyone aware of just how weak and vulnerable they truly were. A group of weekend warriors from Paris could've taken over the whole country in a few weeks, at least for a few months there.

When Karina realized I couldn't modify the serum to take away any of the side effects, they redirected me towards doing what I could to make the serum as portable as possible. One of the early problems with the... eeyuch... Quaranteam vaccine, if you must, was that it needed to be kept ridiculously cold, so transporting it everywhere was a problem. Had the weather been colder, Russia's harsh climates would've nullified this, but within a few weeks of tinkering, I had

developed a version of the serum that could withstand a day or so of non-refrigeration, and was easier to mass produce. With that in hand, Karina usurped her husband and began to take active control over the remaining Russian military-industrial complex. Under the guise of not wanting to put Aleksí at risk, Karina took full control of the generals and began dispatching her own orders, and they were more than a little ruthless.

Unlike reports of what was going on in my home country, where some sort of algorithm had been developed to pair people into compatible pods, Russia had no time for such niceties, and just began pairing women onto surviving men based on one thing and one thing only – likelihood to carry a child to term.

Russian men were told that until every woman they were associated with was pregnant, their duty to the country consisted of one thing and one thing only – fucking.

Based on that, the military was restaffed completely with women. The same for the police, the secret services and the diplomats. The only area where men were allowed to continue to function identically as they had before was in the field of medicine, simply because it was considered safe enough, and there had been a dearth of women in the medical profession in Russia. Thankfully, the doctors had taken the plague very seriously, and most of the hospitals had been staffed by men living in hermetically sealed bubbles once it was clear how toxic it was.

On the plus side, the efficiency of the Russian system was incredible, and I am certain that the remaining Russian men were immunized much faster than their American counterparts were, simply because when it came right down to it, the Russians wanted to get everything done more than they wanted everyone to be happy.

The size of our working lab increased, and no longer was I the only scientist engaging in the research. Eve was given her own division to work on, trying to find some form of reassignment trigger which would allow a woman to be transferred from one man to another, a concept I told her was biologically unsound and extremely unlikely, but Karina had insisted someone work on it, and so I'd given it to Eve, mostly as something just to keep her busy.

I must confess, once I had control over my wife, she held little draw to me anymore, so the only real time we spent with one another was when we were fucking to give her her dose, something she did as efficiently as possible.

In retrospect, I see now that I should have paid more attention to her, because in early November, she fled the facility in the middle of the night with the aide of a couple of Russian men, Sergei Petrov and Andrei Ivanov.

We didn't learn about Andrei until several days after the breakin, but I'd actually spent some time with Sergei, because he'd been sent to us by field doctors who didn't know what to make of him. The first time they had tried to imprint a woman onto him, when she'd gotten the first taste of his semen, which would normally provide a priming orgasm and would set the body into a sort of accelerated wanton need for a large dose of semen from the man to start the imprinting process, she hadn't been primed, but had instead gone feral.

You may not be familiar with this, but the longer a woman goes between doses from her partner, the more her logic and judgment are impaired. We referred to this base at New Eden as 'going feral' and it wasn't exclusively seen between doses, but also between priming and imprinting, although I had been very careful to keep those results quiet, so as to not alarm anyone at the base. I simply stressed that once a pairing had begun, it needed to be seen through to completion and imprinting as quickly as possible, and no one had really asked much about what would happen if it didn't.

In our one test subject on this matter back in New Eden, we'd given a woman a taste of

her partner's semen to start her priming, and then denied her the full dose, until about twelve hours later, when even my scientific sense of curiosity lost out to my dwindling sense of humanity. By that point, she was climbing the walls, threatening to harm herself if she wasn't put with her partner immediately. The look in her eyes made it clear she was serious, so we relented and brought her partner to her.

When Sergei arrived at our lab, I wondered if he was some sort of rogue offshoot, and was also incredibly worried that he might contract DuoHalo, so we did our best to keep him isolated, at first. Then it became clear – he had some sort of natural immunity towards the DuoHalo virus, and the exposure to the Quaranteam serum via his first failed partner had somehow mutated the serum itself. I was fascinated, infuriated, thankful and appalled all at once.

I was infuriated because had we even thought to test for this sort of thing before going with the Quaranteam serum, we would've had a natural antibody that could've been used to fight off the DuoHalo epidemic naturally and without complication. That, however, was also why I was thankful – it would have negated the world's need for the DuoHalo serum, and would've prevented my plan of making women need men for their very survival from reaching fruition. But the serum had forced his immunity into some kind of transformation, and so while he was immune to DuoHalo, it would also not be viable to use that immunity to develop new antibodies, as it would basically ensure those men wouldn't be able to be sexually intimate with *any* women.

What fascinated me, however, were the actions of that woman they'd been trying to imprint onto him. She'd gone feral and immediately began sexually assaulting the first available man that *wasn't* Sergei. She didn't, as we would've expected, make a beeline for Sergei to finish the imprinting process, but instead had looked for another nearby male, as if Sergei's jism was undesirable.

Once we had Sergei in our labs, we decided to try again, and brought another woman to imprint onto him, but sure enough, as soon as she got the first dab of his semen, she went into a frenzy similar to the one that had been described to us. We'd had another viable male handy, and despite trying to direct the woman back to Sergei, she refused, going so far as to hiss and bite at us any time we tried to maneuver her over to him.

I knew this was going to be a problem, so we cleared nearly everything else off the plate and started work on Sergei's sperm and exactly what the hell it was doing, a process made complicated by the relatively short shelf life of the substance.

Sperm is a remarkably complicated substance to work with, considering it begins drying out almost immediately after release, and the typical process of freezing it causes irreparable damage to the Quaranteam serum. It's part of the reason that women can't just get five or six loads from their man and then put them into storage for later consumption. Freezing the sperm causes the key ingredient needed to connect with the lock/key system to collapse. I wish I could take credit for this, insist it was part of some plan of mine to ensure women couldn't just turn men into dispensers, but all of this happened naturally and organically. Doses of male sperm couldn't be stored and consumed later. We'd tried it at New Eden and it hadn't worked there, and I really hadn't been given any compelling reason to try even harder to make it work here.

Considering what we *did* know about Sergei's sperm, we decided to set up a series of tests to see if it had effects on other different types of candidates. Our first test was to see if his sperm had any effect on men. Typically, male sperm is harmless to other men, even with the Quaranteam serum running through it, but it was clear that Sergei's sperm wasn't functioning like any other man's. We found that applying some of Sergei's sperm to a man's skin reacted the exact same way it did to any other man's – a mild burning, but nothing severe. Because of that, we

initially wrote off any effects it could have in men and did no further research, something that would later come back to haunt me, although I managed to keep it quiet from my handlers. Damn this truth serum. I would very much rather not be talking about any of this.

Once we had established that how it functioned with men to our satisfaction, and we knew how it worked on unimprinted women, Karina asked us to run a full battery and see how it functioned in all regards. The next test, of course, was the skin test on a woman already imprinted. To our utter shock, Sergei's sperm was non-toxic and not even a little bit corrosive, much to the woman's relief. That led to our next test, to see what happened when some of it was consumed. I think our hypothesis beforehand was that Sergei was now just an inert male, and he would have to be content with his level of DuoHalo resistance because we would never be able to imprint someone to him.

God, how fucking naive was I.

We took a portion of Sergei's sperm and attempted to rub it along the soft tissue of an imprinted woman's inner cheek. The effect was astonishing. Much like when it had been tried on a woman who hadn't been imprinted, she'd gone into a feral state, looking for the first available male, and thankfully, her partner had come in with her. She'd gotten a dose from her partner again, and that was when we saw something we'd never seen before – she'd starting saying “imprinting” over and over again, locked in a trancelike state, exactly how any woman is when she's imprinting for the first time.

When she was conscious the next day, I'm very glad we decided to check Sergei's sperm on her skin first, because we found she reacted the way she would to any other man's sperm – it started to burn her skin, so we quickly washed it off.

Based on what we'd learned from that, I asked Karina if there was any woman she wanted to reassign from one man to another, because I told her we might have that ability. We simply weren't sure. She told me that yes, her own sister had been paired to a rather oafish man and that she wanted to rectify that. If I had a solution, she would be extremely grateful. So we scheduled Karina's sister, Olga, to come and to bring the man she wanted to be imprinted onto. I told Karina we weren't entirely certain it would work, but Olga was apparently so dissatisfied with her current partner that she didn't care.

A touch of Sergei's sperm to the inside of Olga's cheek, and she went into the same state we'd seen before. I was nervous when she began disrobing the man she wanted to be her partner, wondering if it was going to cause her pain, but we saw Olga lap up some of the new man's precum without so much as a flinch. She swallowed a load from him not much later and fell into an imprinting trance.

That made Olga the first woman to be successfully transplanted from one man to another that hadn't involved the death of the original man.

The next day, Karina had a handful of women who needed reassignment, as she worked to consolidate her power base, giving women in key positions more favorable pairings in an effort to establish a new government structure the way she wanted it.

That continued for almost a week, although on the fourth day, we hit a snag. A woman we'd reassigned on the second day had come back, asking to be reassigned again, that she wasn't satisfied with her new partner. We went to give her some of Sergei's sperm on the inside of her mouth and it immediately began to burn through the skin. We were able to get a chemical wash onto it before any major damage was dealt, but we learned our lesson that day – Sergei's sperm wasn't going to be a complete get out of jail free card, but a one-way ticket past a bad assignment.

I also got an object lesson in the consequences for failing Karina that day, as the woman who couldn't be reassigned had still gotten her reassignment, and they'd executed her second partner in front of me, to ensure I could get her moved over to the third.

There was something unnerving about watching the man's life draining out right before my eyes, and I knew then and there that while I had no small influence here, by *no* means was I in charge of things.

A few days later, I awoke to a very frantic Dasha shaking my shoulder, rousing me from my slumber in the middle of the night, as there wasn't even a hint of daylight outside of our barred windows, a measure I'd been told was more for our security than to keep us in.

“Get up!” she told me in a desperate whisper. “Your wife is gone! And she took Sergei with him! You must get up!”

I slipped out of bed and headed next door into the lab, noticing that everything was on, all the computers giving off dim light in the cool night, a piece of paper resting on top of my keyboard, which I read quickly.

Adam,

I've left you, you prick.

Maybe I'll make it. Maybe I won't.

I don't really care about my own life at this point.

But I've taken Sergei and by the time you see this, I should be out of the country and completely out of your grasp. Sergei's sperm will let me be reassigned to someone else, far far away from you, you horrible bastard. You might have thought him a patriot, but Sergei has spent the last month with us hiding who he truly is – a gay man.

Sergei's boyfriend Andrei evaded getting paired up with any women over the past few months, and has also avoided contracting DuoHalo, and when he and Sergei were reunited, Sergei's sperm imprinted Andrei onto Sergei. They did this in secret two days ago, and Sergei came to me in confidence to tell me all of this. When he did, I knew we couldn't stay long, but I stayed long enough to run a few more tests.

Sergei's sperm allowed two unimprinted women to be imprinted upon each other, although it took a decent amount of vaginal fluid for the imprinting to take. It also allowed two other unimprinted men to be imprinted upon each other.

Once I knew that, I knew you would destroy him given the chance. If not you, then that monster Karina you've been working for, as she continued the 'no gays in Russia' barbarism her predecessors did, and for what? To try and hold onto some religious fundamentalists who are likely dead anyway?

Ever since Charity's death, we've been walking ghosts in each other's lives, and I can't do that any longer. If you ever truly loved me, not now obviously, but at some point, in our distant past, before all of this, if there was ever genuine love in your heart towards me, you will let me go and not pursue me. You will wait as long as possible to tell Karina about our disappearance, and we will never see each other again.

The point where our stories had converged ends here.

You have taken everything from me except my life.

At least allow me to have that a while longer.

–Eve

“What the hell do we do, Adam?” Dasha asked me, genuine fear in her voice. “They're

going to punish us for this. We're going to be held responsible!"

I picked up the piece of paper and brought it over to an ashtray before setting it down, lighting the corners of it to make it burn to cinders before our eyes. "We saw nothing, we heard nothing, we know nothing, Dasha," I told her. "We're going to go back to bed and in the morning when the guards find Sergei and Eve missing, we will pretend to be as shocked as everyone else."

"But Adam!"

"Dasha!" I said, grabbing her shoulders to shake her. "*We* didn't *help* her escape. We had *no* part in any of this, so as long as we say nothing, they can't hold us accountable for Eve's actions. But we must pretend like neither of us ever saw that note, alright?"

"...are you sure?"

"No, but what other choice do we have? This is what we're going to do, and how we're going to get through this. I give you my word," I said to her, wrapping my arms around her, "I will do everything I can to keep you safe, everything within my power."

"Will that be enough?" she sniffled.

"I hope so, my dear. I hope so."

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"There was clear evidence that they had used military credentials to get in and out of the laboratory, which was something neither I nor Eve had access to, and it wasn't the same sort of credentials that Dasha, Anya or Sofia would've used to breach the inner layer, so they knew it wasn't them either. As it turned out, Sergei's boyfriend Andrei still had fairly decent clearance, which was how he had been able to hide his and Sergei's relationship for so long in the first place. Using his credentials, he had made his way into the lab, gotten Sergei and Eve, and then fled with them before anyone was any the wiser."

"All without a drop of blood shed?" Elle asked him.

Adams sniffed, shaking his head. "Andrei killed two guards to ensure their exit wouldn't go noticed until the change in shift and did so well enough that the chaos probably bought them at least a few more hours. I heard all of this a few days later from Karina, who wanted to impress upon me her disappointment, although she did believe both myself and Dasha when we told her that we had nothing to do with it. Eve's imprinting was done with perhaps the earliest version of the serum, so I suspected Sergei's reassignment sperm wouldn't work for her, not that I had ever told her that. I didn't need her anyway. I had Dasha."

"Mmmm," Elle said with a nod. "And would you say of all your partners, you were closest with Dasha? Was she willing to keep your secret, even from her country?"

Adam nodded. "Whatever loyalty she had for Russia ran very deep, but the imprinting process took particularly deep hold in her, and I became her world. Thankfully, she is both very beautiful and very smart, so we found much in common between us. I..." McCallister stopped, looking down at the table before looking up again. "Whatever layers of armor I erected, whatever walls I constructed, Dasha always found a way to pass through them as though they were never really even there. She saw me for who I was, and did not ask me to change a thing." He inhaled an expectant breath and then let it out once more. "I've answered all your questions, so answer me this one – is Dasha the one partner of mine you brought with you?"

Elle considered him with a long stare for what felt like decades before speaking. "She is. She was traveling with you in your vehicle, and we knew we would need to bring at least one of

your partners with you to transport you safely on our voyage, so we gave her a choice, to take a reassignment tablet and to go and find a new partner or to come with you. She chose to come with you, so perhaps you have found someone to share in your monsterhood.”

“Of course she did. Regardless of what has happened, we have found love with each other. I... thank you for bringing her with you.”

“Mmm,” Elle said. “It seemed only fair that we offer you a kindness in exchange for the difficult task we're going to also saddle you with. We're going to pair you with another woman we picked up along the way in just a little bit, but we had to give her dose of the Quaranteam serum before we left to get you, so she's... a bit ripe, if you'll pardon the expression. But it seemed only fitting that you see what your serum does to a woman firsthand after ten days of not being imprinted.”

“God, she's going to be brutal.”

“That she is,” Elle chuckled. “But the experience will be good for you. And we will ensure she doesn't harm you.”

“Don't you need to hear the rest of the story?” Adam said, desperately trying to stall for time, so he wouldn't be taken down to that woman he'd heard raging inside of a container earlier.

“What's more to tell? Karina decided to relocate you to somewhere she considered safer, and while you were in transit, we ambushed the caravan and absconded with you and Dasha, and then made our way out of the country.”

“You haven't told me where we're going, or even who the hell you people are?”

“In due time, Doctor McCallister. After you've had your time with my friend.”

The guard, Bee, moved to unshackle him again, helping him back up to his feet, and they were almost to the door when he struggled to turn back and look at Elle as it dawned on him what he'd missed moments earlier.

“Wait wait wait... did you say 'reassignment tablet' earlier?”

Elle's smile widened deeply, looking extremely proud she'd caught the doctor completely off guard, as she nodded. “I did. You aren't the only one to have found someone with reassignment sperm, and we found a way to stabilize it. It still has the limitations of your friend Sergei's – it can only be used once before it becomes toxic – but it's portable and is good for 30 days before expiring. They're in a suspension gel, so that it'll be about an hour after it's ingested before the effects take hold. Of course, trying to get someone to throw it up will only expose the core medicine to air and make it useless. We let each of your partners in the convoy swallow one if they so choose before we left, so they won't be dying just because they won't come with you. We're not *monsters*, like you are.” She paused, letting all that sink in. “Did you *truly* think you Americans were the only clever ones still alive?”

For once in his life, Adam McCallister was completely speechless as he was dragged from the room, a million questions in his mind, and not a single one able to make its way to his lips.

To be concluded...