

Lionesses and Lions, Novel Pt2:
Biting the Hand that Frees You

by

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CHAPTER 1

Route 23A was once a well-traveled road, during the times when Potterberg was populated by people. People who had jobs at the mill, the mine, and the various establishments that gave the workers a hearty breakfast before heading off for a work day, and a stiff drink afterwards so that they could make sense of what they did during the day, and who they slept with at night. But Potterberg, just like the other small Western Pennsylvania towns around it, was disappearing as fast as independent radio stations on the airways and laboring jobs where a man was paid for how hard he worked rather than how many bosses he was liked by. Though only 30 miles from Pittsburg, Potterberg may as well have been a billion miles from anywhere. The only remnants left of the once multi-generational community now were old shacks that used to be stores, and plots of scrub-grass that used to be ranches. The only witnesses to the greatness that might have been and the accomplishments which really HAD been were the trees, weeds and weeds that now grew wild over property so low in value and high in toxin during that no one wanted to buy it.

But there was one resource that Potterberg did provide---a hiding place within the belly of the beast that had become America that no one knew about, or ever would. Such was the projection and hope of Leona Zimmerman, as she drove back 'home' on Route 23A to the farm that, at least by appearances sake, was as broken down as the pothole infested 'road'.

Her Black on Black sixty-nine rebuilt GTO motored down the dark, unlit 'hyway' as heartily as ever, having been reconditioned for adversity, speed and stealth by Carlos, who had worked with Leona at the University till she quit her job as a faculty member there so she could do some REAL work and some VALID educating of America, and maybe the world. The receptacle of that education was in the seat behind her. 'Electra' was her name, according to the label on the electric dog collar strapped onto her neck by her previous 'master', and the conditioned grey matter between her ears. But before she had become an obedient bitch, willing to bark, crawl or roll over and spread her legs for 'Master Hermann', she had been a 17 year old, blonde, blue-eyed Amish girl named Mirium, with dreams of marrying a dashing rancher from Montana, along with some solid prospects of getting hitched to the eldest son of one of the most prosperous farmers in her Mennite community in, thus far anyway, rural Pennsylvania. Neither of those aspirations materialized.

It was no easy task, finding Mirium after she disappeared following a visit to the Plantarium in Philadelphia, and an even harder one to get her out of Master Hermann's 'kennel'. 'Herr Hermann' was a master in breaking her down then turning into Electra, his most lucrative whore, and most favorite punching bag when he was frustrated about anything. It would be daylight before Herr Hermann and his band of neo-Nazi ex-Jews would notice that she was missing, Leona hoped as she looked down a long drag on her 17th cigarette in the attempt to stay awake, focused and hopeful. Hopeful that

somewhere in Electra's drug infected brain and brainwashed 'slave' mind, Mirium was still around. And that she would be resurrectable.

But for the moment, Mirium and Electra were sleeping within the body of an emaciated 23 year old girl whose teats enlarged by implants and hormones, whose multicolored hair that smelled of Hermann's urine and his buddy's love juices, whose limbs were covered by electrocution burns and whose mouth had been pieced by fishhooks in so many places that all she could say was a muffled 'yes, master' after of course being spoken to.

"I got the best surgeons on both sides of the Yellow Brick Road," Leona whispered to her slumbering passenger in Cree, softly, as to not awaken her from the drugs she used to sedate her so she would not scream upon her release and beg for Master Hermann to chain her back into her kennel. "Me, my graduate student Rachel, and some associates I still am in contact with from the VA can put together anything that metal, microbes or manufactured chemicals tears apart. And as for Master Hermann, I'll take care of him as soon as I take care of those wounds he inflicted on you. Put him in a kennel from which there is NO escape. My word on it, Mirium."

Miriam didn't answer.

"I promise, everything's gonna be okay from now on, Electra," Leona continued. "Just like Carlos, self-taught neo-Teslian Mexican inventor and engineer working as a janitor back when I had a respectable lab in not-so-respect-worthy university said. He promised me that he could fix any machinery I needed for my brain AND body research, or make what I needed from parts considered too old or out of fashion by the over-funded fucks who contributed fuck all to the world," Leona observed coming out of her parched throat and beyond-exhausted mouth.

This time she got a respond from Mirium. A sad, mournful smile of longing. Not optimism yet. But given the progress Leona was making with the other girls she had rescued at her farm buried within the woods, and who others had been secretly delivered to her, Mirium and Electra had a better than even chance of being delivered from the land of the living dead to realm of the living. "After we're through here, there's a place out West I know. A Reservation that no White fuck is allowed to walk on. And any Injun assholes who try to do anything dishonorable, or unkind, get scalped, filleted and burnt at the stake. You can count on Band Sheriff Bill Stevenson to see to that. While he lets his bosses think he's keeping a lid on crime, he's going after real criminals, like your Master and the fucks who pay him for doing all those horrible things to you." she continued. "As sure as the day follows night, and a six pack of beer at a good old boy Texas Superbowl party is gone faster than you can say 'first and ten', 'Master Paul' is going to get what's coming to him, and more. Faster than you can say..."

Leona gave up trying to be witty. Her mind was too weary and her body too hurting from the rescue that involved sneaking into the dog cage cage that was Marium room. Just hours before, she had clandestinely used the best of Carlos' electrical equipment to get the shock collar off Mirium's neck before it zapped her with an electric jolt. On the

way out the slave barracks, Leona utilized her knowledge of neurobiology to give Mirium a tranquilizer that would keep her heroin-addicted body quiet but not silenced so she could make a quick getaway.

That rescue had been done without Stevenson's help, as he was still working on getting other girls out of bondage in other places, while not letting his bosses know where those places were, of course. Leona allowed herself to ponder the special relationship she had with Stevenson, and the special history they shared.

Both were travelers of the Soul, who had undergone transitions of the boldest kind. Bill Stevenson had been Bobbie Stevens, a male spirit born into a female body. He now had body that was now in keeping with his real Spiritual gender, and a handsome lump of verile flesh at that. He was a catch for any women. But he chose a special woman, Leona, who had been Leon, a male mercenary and US Army Special Ops soldier who had been trained to kill and conditioned to be his employer's favorite instrument of Cruelty.

Leona's skill as a biological researcher, doctor and healer of the spirit came after she had accepted the female expression of 'God' within her, and it was rewarded. This very important and multi-factorial inner accomplishment was amplified by a marriage of mind, soul and body with Bill Stevenson while they did their 'day job' for the Great Spirit. That day job had involved teaming up to be the most powerful instrument against human trafficking in the Western Hemisphere. It was a Calling which started when the Rez Leona grew up in, as Leon, was taken over by Boris Petrovich. Boris had come to the Rez as a world class mobster and human trafficker, and had been Leona's best bud and mentor when she was Leon in the 'good old' days when they worked for the CIA, and other Industry-funded organizations that officially didn't exist.

Leon's transformation to Leona was now complete, biologically as well as mentally, courtesy of Leona's once-homophobic White mother, Emma, who had disowned Leon after he made the commitment to become Leona. Leona promised to pay Emma back every penny of the \$20,000 surgical bill, but both Emma insisted that she 'pay it forward' by saving as many girls from the horrors of the sex slave trade as possible. And to see that Leona, her re-found daughter, didn't screw anything up, Emma insisted on being part of Leona's rescue and rehabilitation operation which the well-meaning governments could not legally sanction, nor officially fund.

"You'll like my Mom," Leona assured Mirium. "She's still head heavy with the White Christian theology that she grew up with before she became a hippie earth mama, but my Red Power Dad infused enough seeds of Injun Spirituality into her which sprouted into an open heart. One that got a taste of sex slavery when she was kidnapped at the Rez to please 'older' clients who wanted 'more seasoned meat'. She still cooks with too much bland and not enough spice, and still thinks that brown rice is the perfect food for anybody and any condition, but she's a good scout."

Electra's torn and scarred lips turned up at the edges. Leona allowed herself to think that it was because she was reaching Mirium inside. Leona also allowed herself to think

that Rachel, who had been her most beloved and prized graduate student when she was a Professor, would come up with the right molecular miracle cure that would work for Mirium. And that Rachel would come one case closer to writing her thesis, entitled “New cures for learned helplessness.” It was an ambitious title, and the contents of the work would be too revolutionary for most Departmental Review boards back at Massachusetts University. But with Leona’s experience and Rachel’s enthusiasm, perhaps they could both come up with and distribute the Cure for being conditioned into being a sex slave. And to have it read by everyone.

At stake were at least 30 million captive souls who were still in ‘the trade’, along with a smaller number who had been liberated, in body anyway, from that most black, tortured and bleak of existences. A tortured existence which did not stop being painful beyond measure when their ‘Masters’ were arrested, or the mechanical leashes they put on their bitches were broken. But, “one well-intentioned stumble forward at a time, Mirium, Electra or whoever you are, or WANT to be,” Leona said to herself as she took a final look at her rescued ‘cargo’ in the back seat.

As the sky became darker and the road less defined, Leona focused her attention on the dark road and the twisted turn off that had no markers on it lined with camouflaged spikes that would tear apart the tires of any vehicle driven by any driver who was not given specific permission to enter her sanctuary, laboratory and home. It was a crude security system but one that worked in the event that the high-tech camera servailence system that the Carlos had rigged up for her didn’t, or it was inactivated with even higher tech equipment that Leona’s many enemies did have at their disposal and shared with NO one.

As the rising sun was attempting to bring some light what seemed to be an even more dark sky, Leona drove her rebuilt beater into the farm that bore as many names as the people who tried to call it something. It was a well-arbored facility, naturally-occurring and some transplanted trees covering anything that could be seen of it from the air, or those satellites that ANYONE could now access via Google Earth.

“We got another one,” Leona yelled out as she pulled up to the main building, a large, broken down barn with rotten and bent boards about to be blown into rubble on the outside, a far more sturdy structure on the inside.

Emma emerged from the solid, radar-proofed building within the building, dragging her tired feet with her. She threw a coat on top of an over-sized surgical smock, running her sweat-soaked and blood-stained fingers through her auburn hair, which had now regrown down over her shoulders, for the first time in 20 years. “You’re late, Leona,” she said with an admonishing tone, as she had said to her when she was Leon, her favorite and most protected son back at the Rez.

“This one was a bit more complicated than I thought it would be,” Leona said as she carried Mirium’s body out of the car, noting that it was lighter than she thought below her

clothing, no doubt the result of forced starvation or Mirium not even thinking she was worthy to eat, or some combination of the two.

“Is that blood I see?” Emma said, with an even more emotionally-charged tone.

Leona looked around her and indeed saw fresh blood oozing from under Mirium’s arm. She panicked, thinking that she didn’t do a thorough enough exam of her still-out-of-it patient as she whisked her away from her ‘owners’, an unavoidable mistake she had made before. But this time, the blood was coming from Leona’s own arm, and leg. She looked at the blood-soaked rips and holes in the black S and M leggings and jacket she had worn into the ‘Pleasure Dungeon’ so that she could pass as one of the clients who would get blissful rushes of pleasure by putting Mirium even into deeper hellish states of pain. Leona recalled how much she paid for the required designer leather outfit, against Emma’s recommendations. “I know, Mom. Clothing is valuable.”

“As is the person who is wearing it,” Emma said, putting a tourniquet above both wounds, noting yet again her ex-son-now-daughter’s eager willingness to court death. “You are very valuable, Leona,” she asserted.

“But right now, Mirium here is more valuable than any of us. Even though she thinks she’s not valuable at all,” Leona said as she carried her into the room that Emma had prepared for her. “Not after this Amish girl from Allentown was turned into a self-tortured plaything for three Arab diplomates and thirty-one Asian businessmen in DC who liked ‘white meat’ as a desert after they were through making deals with Congressmen to fuck over America, and their own people back home, financially. Made into a model ‘escort’ after Mirium, who considered homosexuality a sin against God and man, was forced to have hot and heavy sex with three dykes, as many times a night. Then forced to make her snatch bigger that it was with a vibrating prod that could turn it into a hole big enough for the biggest penis owned by the biggest dick in Washington. Went from a size 8 to size 4 leather cocktail dress courtesy of Master Paul’s dieting, drug and nutrition program. Dropped to as size two when she stopped eating on her own and had to be force fed so she would still be marketable.”

“And you know this from...” Emma inquired as she opened the door to the first room with clean sheets, clean water and food not containing addictive dope that Mirium had been in since had experienced since she became ‘Electra’.

“Some Intel I gathered,” Leona said, turning her head away from Emma’s penetrating stare, while she did a thorough medical exam of her newest patient. “Yeah, Intel I gathered from---“

“---The mouths of whoever gave you those wounds on YOUR already over-scarred, injured and hurting body. Gotten before you captured them and ‘persuaded’ them to talk!”

Leona remained silent. “The medications I gave them made them talk. That I slipped into their drinks when we were on a ‘date’ discussing terms for renting out slaves, or becoming one, for the right price,” she said, protecting Emma from the truths of the matter.

“If you say so,” Emma said with her mouth, but seeing something else with her eyes. Seeing clearly that, once again, Leona had extracted the information about Mirium and Master Paul from the latter’s best buds. Best buds who were tortured for the information they gave up after some kind of altercation with guns and knives that Leona wound up winning. Best buds who were disposed of, or perhaps sold into slavery to another master so they could see what it was like to be a slave. Highly illegal at the least. And toxic to Leona’s spiritual health, as someone who said she wanted to be a ‘good person’, whatever that was.

“Sometimes, one has to become a necessary evil,” Leona said by way of explanation as she completed the medical exam on her latest rescue, checked the room for sharp objects that Electra could use on herself to kill Mirium for good, and insured that windows to the outside could be seen through but not opened. “Yeah, sometimes one has to become a necessary evil,” Leona repeated, recalling memories of the ‘good old days’ as Leon.

“Or sometimes ‘one’ is just ‘evil’,” Emma replied with her eyes, seeing what Leona feared most, and needed to find a cure for. That line which we all can cross on our own or be pushed to by pushy people or circumstance. That line between earth and hell. That line that, once crossed, turns us into slaves who are overtaken by learned helplessness, or masters who are addicted to cruelty. Something that everyone, even those who had not even heard of the S and M world, would encounter in their lives at one time or another. Like mild mannered souls who were conscripted into the Army and go through Boot Camp, where they are broken down then built up again into soldiers who seek to follow orders, or get addicted to giving them, if promoted to such positions. Or teenagers who, due to normal biology, and natural explorations, particularly during these times, find out that it’s cool to be cruel. And ‘interesting’ to be dominated. Or the anatomy of most every scene in comedy or drama with edge or Life to it, in which there is always someone on top and always someone on the bottom, the positions changing from time to time to make it interesting. In a realm where, interestingly enough, art imitates life and vice versa.

Leona knew both sides of what happens when you cross that ‘line’ into being a master or a slave. A dominant or submissive. A ‘do unto others’ or ‘be done unto by others’ binomial dynamic which she experienced, and became, in war while in the legitimate military, the ‘we’re doing what we have to but can’t tell the public about for their own good’ military, and in ‘peacetime’ after her self-initiated discharge.

“So, what do we have?” another voice rang out, this one more optimistic, and young. Rachel walked into the door and saw Mirium, first noting the bruises around her neck. “Electric shock collar,” she said, with pathos, compassion and, so far, a clear and functional head. “Like the one that was put on me when I was taken,” she noted,

recalling the time she tried to help Leona free an entire compound of sex-slaves at the Rez, then wound up becoming one herself for a brief time before Leona and Stevenson liberated everyone, including Emma. But it was a long enough time for Rachel to feel what it was like to be broken, degraded, made to feel like less than nothing.

Leona stared into Rachel's eyes as she relived the events. Events that, thankfully, did not break Rachel's will to live, or convert her to someone embraced cruelty as her most primary passion. 'Imitating the aggressor to gain his favor', as the psych descriptors put it.

"This one isn't just another rat like you have in your lab," Leona reminded Rachel. "Those rodent models of 'learned helplessness'," Leona continued, regarding the rodents who were trained to know where a submerged platform was in a tank of deep water who normally would swim to it when tossed into the 'pool', thus saving themselves from drowning. And who were then put in mazes and zapped with an electric shock just before they figured out how to get out of the maze, or just before they were about to find their way to a reward of food, warmth, or a rat of the opposite gender who wanted to have sex with them. After being 'taught' that it was impossible to get anything they wanted, they stopped accessing anything they needed. So, when those rats were put into a water tank, with the submerged platform one stroke away from them, they preferred to painfully sink to the bottom to their painful deaths than exert one stroke to remain connected to life.

"I know," Rachel conceded. "But. as you told us when you were a paid lecturer back at Massachusetts U, 'what humanity fucked up, humanistic and passionate scientists can cure'," she continued. "Or at least figure out. Like Seligman and Maier, who showed that in dogs, like rodents, any attempt to escape uncomfortable electric shocks is met a really painful shock afterwards, so they stop trying to escape uncomfortable, stop eating and...hmmm."

Leona felt like replying, but didn't, this time. stopped talking. Her ever-active cranial vault come up with a new idea that needed to be processed before shared, or inflicted. An idea that could only come from someone who had not been pushed into the dirt for coming up with new ideas and implimenting them, as was Leona's experience in Academia, and otherwise. Rachel, Leona's prize student, had not yet been conditioned by life into thinking that coming up with and implimenting new ideas, and ideals, resulted in frustration, pain, agony, exhaustion, ridicule and ultimately some kind of heartache or betrayal. Rachel was still a fired up optimist with endless potential instead of a burnt out cynic who met her 'end' every time she tried to initiate a new beginning. Therefore, Leona listened to Rachel's newest hypothesis, and perhaps workable reality.

"I'm sure there are two portions of the brain, one that gets activated when learned helplessness gets hard wired in, and one that gets put into action when you get addicted to exerting cruelty. Or two endorphins, or two states of neurotransmitter and neuromodutor ratios. Like, say, a dopamine to seratonin ratio that's higher than 2 if the subject is pushed into learned helplessness, and less than 0.5 if the subject is addicted to being cruel.

Most of us linger in that 0.6 to 1.9 range, theoretically, till life pushes us, or we inadvertently wander, over that 'line'. Analogous to the already published but under-read finding that the ratio of nor-epinephrine to epinephrine from the adrenals is distinctively different in subjects who watch a hockey game vs. those who play it, and those who are victims to stress vs. those who embrace it. We just have to take that primary dynamic and move it from the peripheral nervous system to the CNS, considering slave and master as being diametric opposites. And if we can figure out the neurological centers that are off, or the biochemical abnormalities, accessible with spinal taps, brain scans and CSF fluid analysis, surgery IF necessary, then we can---

“---Reverse it all?” Leona interjected. “We can turn a slave back into a confident person who takes care of themselves and others? Or a sadistic fuck into a servant of humanity rather than vermin that has to be exterminated?”

“Yeah, WE,” Rachel insisted.

“In a lab that’s funded illegally, in this ‘university’ where you won’t get a doctorate that you can use on any resume?” Leona put forth to Rachel.

“WE can fix that too!” she said. “Get the data, publish it SOMEwhere, and be sure the whole world reads it. The world inside the ivy towers that grow mold inside their heads, and the world of the streets below where all of the shit happens.”

Leona smiled, warmly and with renewed optimism. Not too many years ago, before her brother Paul’s death, and the slave ring at the Rez she had to clean up in his wake, Leona was as idealistic as Rachel. “Intelligence plus Passionate Fire always yields Earth Shattering Results”, Leona had written on the blackboard in the University in which she was hired as fledgling scientist who had pushed her way through a Ph.D. program and into a research grant to investigate how one can repair nervous systems that had been schmucked to pieces by disease, trauma or chemicals. There were so many biological agents of harm (or officially, ‘neutralization’) which she had inflicted on people when she was a soldier fighting bad guys. Bad guys who, it turned out, were too often not as bad to the core as her ‘good guy’ bosses.

Time and time again, in every room she had converted into a lab, Leona put the ‘Intelligence plus Passion equals Impact’ on the board. A formula she had put in every lecture hall she entered, so that at least ONE student would get it. Finally, one of her students did. Leona took the loner-misfit who never fit in with the other science geeks her under her fire-infused wing. Now it was Rachel who was saving Leona from the abyss...and another form of learned helplessness. From learning that there would always be 30 million women and girls who lived as slaves, and at most, you could save at most 300 a year from their enslavement, and maybe restore life to 30 of those lost and damaged souls.

“I have a new approach, a new idea that the rats gave me,” Rachel said, handing over the reams of raw data she had obtained working around the clock for three days. “Brain

scans, CSF fluids, and receptor binding ratios. The statistics are solid, given the number of n values I was able to get from the rats I was able to breed. And I think it shows that---“

“---Some very promising prospects,” Leona interjected.

Rachel smiled, shaking the exhaustion out of her head.

“But in the meantime,” we have to work on this ‘n’ value requires a multidisciplinary approach,” Leona said regarding Mirium.

“Creative behavioral modification,” Emma interjected, taking off her green pants and blue surgical garb and slipping into a soft-brown sweater and pale grey jeans that lacked the harshness of lines on the medical garb and the association of blue and green with cops and soldiers, respectively. “One to one therapy, designed one to one, and done one to one, one on one,” the life-experienced 60 something Emma related to the still wet behind the ears and fire behind the exhausted eyes Rachel as she left.

“One-on-one that we can learn about populations from!” Rachel blasted Emma’s way through a hushed voice loud enough for Leona to hear, but not loud enough for the ‘n’ value called ‘Mirium’ to hear, so Leona hoped anyway.

Miriam woke up, speaking in a voice that still sounded possessed. “What the fuck is...Where the fucking hell am I? And that the fuck is...this?” she said in a puzzled voice, taking the food onto her finger, smelling, it and giving it a small taste.

“Food,” Rachel said with a calm voice, somehow still connecting to the heart inside her and the heartache inside of Mirium, though with the dominant side of her brain trying to assess what was going on inside Mirium’s amygdala, septum, or cerebral association cortex. “Whole grain bread and strawberry jam that has nothing to hurt you in it. Your favorite from when you were a girl, according to what your Amish father and brothers said. That you can eat anytime you want, Mirium,” offered in a soft ‘if you want to, we’re not pushing you to do anything’ voice she learned to imitate.

Leona saw Electra emerge with full force. She threw the whole-grained jam sandwich against the wall, then tried to spit out whatever was in her mouth. She then tried to rip off the finger that she dared to use to feed herself. Rachel was confused, then baffled. Feeling the need of the moment, she rushed over to Mirium and tried to restrain her. Leona watched from a distance, then spoke with a voice from a distant time on the Rez that had to be used during times of such necessity for others.

“Electra,” Leona said with compassionate affirmation, as she would to a hard-broke horse about to kick you in the groin after you got it home from the auction, or a dog who was afraid that the hand offering it medication was not the paw of yet another master who was trying to beat it. “Stop trying to tear off your fingers. Take a few licks of this jam

sandwich. Then take small bite and swallow them. It's good for you. And you must eat or you will die. You are not allowed to die. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mistress," Electra said with down-turned eyes and a bowed head, after which she took two nibbles of the sugar-infused bread that would begin to restore her blood glucose and start the process of building up proteins. Electra smiled, or perhaps it was Mirium who was doing the smiling, having remembered who she was from the times before her abduction back in Lancaster when jam sandwiches were her favorite desert, main course and appetizer.

"Now, take bigger bites," Leona continued, still more firm than passive. "Please," she continued.

Something in Electra complied with the request from 'Mistress', as she extended her teeth into the sandwich, swallowed the contents, finding it pleasing, then took hold of the sandwich in preparation to take a bite rather than a nibble.

"May I?" she asked Leona.

"Yes, thank you," Leona continued. "But slowly."

"I noticed that you introduced 'please' and 'thank you', and stopped addressing her by her slave name," Rachel whispered to Leona as Mirium and/or Electra ingested her first real meal in weeks slowly, so as to not drive her into fatal pancreatitis. "And you held off off addressing her by her real name before she became a slave."

"If you try to move more than one stride forward, you slip two steps backwards," Leona said.

"And if you fly three steps forward?" Rachel offered. "Or try to make them move forward to what they could be rather than back to who they used to be before they became slaves?" she continued, flashing onto a new discovery, yet again.

Leona smiles with pride. Rachel was as Teslian as you could get in a young researcher. Indeed, she found out that the joy of discovery is addictive. Maybe one day Rachel, working with or perhaps even over Leona, would discover what the opiod behind that addiction t discovery was, and use it to make kids seek the rush of innovation rather than the 'buzz' of being stoned on dope, or the rush of being a vicious, sadistic drug dealer.

But in the meantime, there were other n values in Leona's charge who were in need of treatment, or at least remedies. They didn't know who they were yet, but as Leona looked at progress reports for each of them that Emma handed to her on her way to the other rooms in the converted 'barn', she knew that it would still be a long road from liberation of their bodies to resurrection of their souls. Failure to bring them back to who they used to be, or show them to way to who they really wanted to be, would cost not only the lives of those 'n' values, but would result in their Masters, or friends of those

Masters, finding Leona, Emma and Rachel, doing far worse things to them than they did to their 'stolen' slaves.

There was Victoria, southern belle with skin as white as snow and jet black hair, from an upper class Republican political family in Atlanta, Georgia whose business investments depended on good relations with the Baptist Church and the Atlanta Falcon organization. As a teen in High School, the five foot four tall fireball got her buzzes by flirting with College guys and NFL players, and drinking them under the table. At one of those parties, she had met Diego Fuentes, from the new 'Latino league' who took a liking to her. They had shared some of his special tequilla with her at a local bar, far more colorful than the frathouse. By the time she reached the worm at the bottom of the bottle, Vicci found herself escorted out of the bar, into a car, then brought to another party where she was gang-raped and violently beaten by Diego's 'teammates' who drafted her into the minor leagues of the slave trade in Loreda, Texas, then Juarez, Mexico. To keep her stomach filled, she was fed a daily ration of tacos and rice in her cage, laced with 'Mexican black tar' gravy, the latter injected into her veins if she refused to eat. And just in case she tried to make a run for the border, or anywhere else, she would get a shock delivered to the collar fused around her neck. But, to be fair, or rather accurate, it was an attractive looking piece of jewelry, the purpose of which was only known to the Diego, and of course, Victoria herself.

Victoria's forward progress at the Leona's rehab center was put ten steps backwards one day when Emma had mistakenly served Mexican food for lunch, putting her into a full blown epileptic seizure. The location in the brain where that seizure originated from could not be identified, but, they were controllable by small doses of phenobarb, supplemented by healthy quantities of taurine. Acupuncture had to be carefully done with small needles when she was sleeping, as Vicyoria still could not handle being touched, particularly with hands that were bearing anything that looks like a needle.

Lakesha was born into a black skin to a family living in a mostly-white rural Nebraska town. Though most female African Americans worked plain Jane jobs in their own portion of town, Lakesha aspired to something bigger than that. By the time she was 21, she was the most valued and respected nurses in the local hospital, a job that gave her much satisfaction inside. But more importantly a paycheck that she could use to keep her three children clothed, fed, and with growing college funds for each of them so that they could be doctors rather than just orderlies, bedpan cleaners or nurses when they grew up. They were named Andre, Adrianna and Adam, as their father, Abram, was obsessed with the latter 'A'.

Abram was also obsessed with having his own mistress on the side, wacking around Lakesha when she respectfully asked where he was all night and giving none of his drug-dealing money to her, or his kids. In the divorce settlement, Lakesha got no real money but she left with her kids, her dignity and her freedom. Such didn't sit well with Abram, and as soon as he could, he called in a favor to one of his buds and had Lakesha snatched away after working an 18 hour shift on the way to her car in a dark parking lot. Lakesha's new Master was from the old neighborhood, and had chosen to acquire every

abusive habit that respectable 'White Americans' linked to 'Darkies' in the hood. If Lakesha refused to service one of Master's buds in his new Chicago stable, or service him, it incurred the whip, knife or cigarette burn on parts of the body which were never seen by other clients, but which hurt all night long afterwards in private. And when that didn't work, pictures were put in front of her. Recently-taken photos of Andre, Adrianna, or Adam with a red 'X' over their eyes or forehead. And a view of a knife handle or gun at Master's side that he stroked with a sadistic and affirmative grin. Leona's rescue of Lateshasa was risky, requiring rescue of her children as well. So far, the kids were alright, in Oklahoma. As long as they stayed away from shady people on the streets, or didn't reveal their real identity to a Cop who could be on the take from Masters whose network went to more places in American than satellite companies.

Yung was a Korean-American born to a U of C Berkeley classical literature professor. Like every other Asian girl not inclined to math or science, she became a classically trained violinist. Though born female, she considered herself male as well, expressing such an androgynous Ka, and a closet lesbian. Her musical explorations into fusion heavy metal were not discouraged by her parents, but not a source of pride either. Particularly when that music was far more independent than anything Bach or Beethoven wrote.

But, underneath it all, Yung was a giver rather than a taker. In matters of finance, relationships and even who gets to get the center stage when on stage with the band, Yung always looked after other people before she looked after herself. And her music showed it. A gig played with the wrong band, at the wrong rave, to the wrong audience member, got the highly independent Yung a job working for a highly dominant Master who used an intricate recipe to break her. Such included forced heterosexuality, Japanese rope bondage, being a subservient maid to Master in all ways imaginable, puppy training so she considered herself a dog, conditioning aimed at making her do no eye contact with anyone, then...an most interesting game once she was effectively house broken. Yung would be set out into the world, without a shock collar, with the job of luring, with her music and charms, new slaves for his stable. Once the 'prospects' were sufficiently confined and contained, it was Yung who was ordered to be merciless to them while Master watched. Then, after Yung had seen what she did, she beat herself up with a spiked billiclub, but was stopped just shy of exerting a beating that would be fatal, or a cut that would go into the artery that would assuage her guilt and shame forever.

Rescuing Yung from her Master in Portland, Oregon was easy. Posing as a slave buyers with Yung's parents money, Leona purchased Yung's freedom, and safe return back home to her parents. But within two days, Yung was a clear danger to herself and others, and didn't even recognize her 'parental units'. And then she texted her Master at the dungeon to ask if she could come 'home' again. Fortunately, the text was intercepted by Rachel's 'special outpatient' system before it went out. Leona took Yung into her Rehab center as a special patient, and case. As Rachel put it, Yung was 'bipolar over the line', possessed by both learned helplessness AND the thrill of being cruel, according to a clockwork that no shrink could predict. And none of Rachel's neurophysiological recording devises and blood tests could determine which side of cruelty line Yung was on

at any time. However, Rachel was getting close to understanding what made Yung tick, as well as finding out how to fix the broken clock. Such is what Rachel kept saying to Leona anyway.

Tatiana was born to dirt poor parents in Moldevia, in a village that was plagued by every curse imaginable by the Anton Chekov and every economic disaster possible in the self-cursed Socialist experiment which had once been the USSR. Her village, family and social conditions were ugly. But her face was beautiful, accentuated by bright green eyes and long, thick brown hair that flowed down a torso that was the envy of any Pagan goddess. Such was her opportunity, and a curse.

When accessing the internet at the village library at the one terminal that was working, Tatianna connected to Sal, a lonely American stock broker with kind brown eyes and a comb-over from Long Island looking to share his bed, money and life with someone after a bitter divorce. All seemed good with the deal, according to her own thinking, the Priest's advise as well as her own imaginings as to what would happen if she stayed in Moldevia to become like her mother, or worse. But after Taatianna arrived in America, Sal's estranged-wife came back from Barbados with a peace offering that he accepted. Needing a job to stay in the country so she would not be deported, Tatiana accepted a job as a phone sex operator, having been assured that all was okay, by another Priest, and a paycheck that she could send back to her mother to enable her to leave her father. One of the clients offered her a bonus if she met him after his shift was over. And as America was the land of opportunity, it would be un-American of Tatianna to not accept said offer. One opportunity led to another opportunity, but for the caller and not Tatianna. Tatianna soon found herself employed by 'Olympus International', a 'special catering' company fronted by a Greek Restaurateur and his very blonde wife specializing in corporate functions where the clients could do whatever they wanted with the food, dishes and 'waitresses'. "The American Way, I suppose," Tatianna explained as the 'why' of it all each time Lorena, Rachel or Emma would try to get more information about her captivity so they could help her, and liberate the other 'waitresses' in the restaurant chain, most of which were Albanian girls barely old enough to sprout breasts.

Mara came from Saudi Arabia, the third daughter to her father Omar's fourth wife. It was a textbook case that lost all uniqueness with regard to its personal aspects, and acquired new dimensions of agony with regard to its ever-increasing frequency. Mara's father had five wives but pleased himself with six women, one of them being Mara. "It is natural, and an expression of my love for you," Omar would smile into her confused or frightened face when he lifted up her veil and took down his pants. And after the first twenty times, she believed him, lifting the veil up and taking down his pants herself. Despite the anti-fertility drugs Mara was given, she got pregnant. It was a family disgrace that made maintaining family honor and the family fortune un-doable. With the willingness of her subservient mother, Mara was given away by the family who she loved, and thought loved her back. But her family was merciful. No death by burning or execution by hanging, as was done for the other women who committed adulterous acts, disgracing Allah and their families.

Through Jackson Smith, a friend Leona's who was still in the Military for the RIGHT reasons, Mara was found in a deserted brothel that fell into 'neutral' ground which was about to be turned into a battleground by warring Islamic factions bent on killing each other over who Mohamed left the keys of Mecca to back in the 7th century. Mara was alone, despondent, and as dead behind the eyes as she was scarred by cigarette burns and caustic fluids between her legs. "I can save her body, but you can save her soul. And maybe see that Prince Omar gets what's coming to him," Jackson wrote on the 'note' he put on the body he snuck into the cargo plane that landed at the Rez with as much explanation as he could surmise about her. The plane landed without incident, greeted by Stevenson. He escorted a very sedated Mora into his car, then just as he dropped her off to another plane that took her to the Pennsylvania 'farm', he got a call on his cell from Jackson. "Save the girl, then get the fucker. All of the fuckers," Jackson demanded with a death rattle in his voice at the other end of the phone. A gunshot ended the call, and any hope of getting more intel about Omar or the 'nunnery' to which he had sent his daughter. A 'nunnery' that no Church ever heard of, or claimed to know about anyway.

"So, we've got our paws full today, again," Rachel said to Leona as she looked over her mentor's shaking shoulders. "What do we do first?"

"We start...hmmm...wherever we're at, then we keep going," Leona replied. It was the only answer she could give at the time, given all of the data that was in, and what was not in. And who was going to come in, soon enough.

CHAPTER 2

Back in her youth in the thick forests of Western Colorado, Billie Stevenson could smell the way to semi-legal game, smokeable locoweed and moonshine whiskey better than any of her brothers, most particularly because at the time she had female nose, and head, and face and body. After Billie's transformation on the outside into the man she was on the inside, he still kept some of his female parts, which included a keen sense of smell. Such was put to the test when Bill Stevenson drove through Brooklyn after getting diverted off the wrong exit from the BQE in a Saudi's Mercedes Sedan he 'burrowed' from a friend of his at the UN, looking his destination in a dark neighborhood in which every parked car was stolen, rusted out, or very used. "Just smell your way through the trash until you can smell the garbage," he told himself as he noted the light ahead turning red, several men of very black complexion, dangerously open eyes and rags for clothing converged upon him from both sides.

Seeing as light-skinned First Nations Stevenson was dressed like a rich, uptown White tourist in a very non-White downtown ghetto, it made more sense to run the red light and get arrested by a Cop than to be greeted by the local neighborhood greeting committee,

but Bill's nose said that this was the place. He opened the sedan window and breathed in a whiff of Bedford-Styvesant 'air', taking note of two key ingredients in the multi-scented mist that lingered under the midnight fog. "Pepperoni, ginger 'chicken,'" according to the label on the sausages he sends out anyway," Stevenson said as he pointed in the direction from which that smell was coming. "South by Southwest," he continued, looking at a heavily gated but empty truck warehouse down the block, as half of the neighborhood greeting committee prepared to relieve him of his tires, and the other half his life. "PJ Himmel's place," he continued with a smile, handing his card to the head hobo, who upon closer examination, had better duds under his rags on than he did. "He's expecting me," Stevenson said. "Mister Himmel," he continued, noting that each of the Black Homeless Hobos was armed with better guns under their coats than he had in his shoulder holster.

"Expecting you as what, Whitey?" Hobo number one asked.

"A buyer from Atlantis Enterprises," Stevenson said, handing him his business card. "And I'm Injun brown, not White."

The hobo shone a light into Stevenson's face, then his jacket, noting that it was made of leather rather than cloth. And around his redskin neck was a Navaho necklace rather than an Armoni tie. "Suppose you are, Tonto. But we can see that ya'll get back safely to the Rez ifn ya give me the reins to that horse of yours," he continued, grabbing Stevenson's keys and turning off the engine.

"Master Paul wouldn't like that," Stevenson said. Before the Hobo could act, or react, Stevenson grabbed hold of the hobo's wrist with one hand, and pulled out a gun with the other, aiming it at his head. "Now, if you call him and tell him that I'm here to do business, I'll see that he knows you kept his neighborhood safe from Palefaces."

"Sure, no problem Mister Thundercloud," Hobo said, looking at the name on the card.

"Doctor Thundercloud," Stevenson asserted. "That's what they call you when you get a Ph.D. in cultural studies. Even if it's at a university you bought with money you earned buying and selling guard dogs like you, Leroy," Stevenson said in his best Godfather Part 4.5 voice.

"How'd you know my name was Leroy?" Hobo number one said as Hobo # 2 made the call.

"All of us are Tontos to you, and all of you are Leroy's to us," Stevenson smiled.

Stevenson shared the joke with every one of the welcoming committee, but he didn't share his real identity and of course how he knew Hobo 1 was 'Leroy', or Leroy's boss. And that he knew more about Master Paul better than 'trustee slave' Leroy did. Intel which Stevenson got from his network of sources as well as his most reliable, and valued source, Leona, after she had infiltrated the operation a month earlier.

Hobo number three, a new addition to the operation whose name and past Stevenson did not know, got a call on his throw away cell. "Mister Himmel," he said to his very superior supervisor. "We have a client here to see you, from---"

"---Atlantis Enterprises, and Meat Buyers," Stevenson interjected.

Before Stevenson could say 'Hiho Silver', a door hidden within the shadows of the warehouse opened. Emerging was a man with clean shaven upper lip and a beard covering the rest of his face, Amish-Menninite, clothing covering his torso, a straw hat on his head, and blood on his hands.

"Instruct our client to come in the South entrance," Stevenson heard from Leroy's phone with a hint of Pennsylvania Dutch accent and a whole lot of Godfather everywhere else. "And the rest of you come back to work here. We have another shipment coming in, and two going out."

Stevenson was pointed to the gate that opened up wide, then shit. Followed by another gate that opened up the innermost lot which shut even tighter. In the air was the distinctive smell of pepperoni ginger chicken, boxes of said product being loaded onto the back corner of truck with a Pennsylvania licence plate and "Jesus Loves you" bumper sticker. The rest of the truck was loaded with the newest farm buyable equipment.

Stevenson was directed by a man whose face was hidden by a visor, sunglasses and the night sky to park his car and proceed to the back door, which was only evident as a door after he got closer to it. The closer he got to the building, the more the 'chicken sausage' smelled of burning and burnt human flesh.

Emerging that door was another man with clean shaven upper lip and a beard covering the rest of his face, Amish clothing covering his torso, a straw hat, and blood on his hands. "Farm equipment going back home to your community back in Lancaster, Mister Himmel?" Stevenson asked 'Master Paul'.

"To them, I am still one of them," Master Paul said with an accent that still bore an Amish German diction and rythm. "They need someone in the English world to represent their interests."

"Despite what you did on your Respinich when you were 18, and what you did afterward?" Stevenson said. "Like exporting this 'chicken sausage'. Spicing it up so the buyers and the diners don't know what kind of meat it is. Or who it was." Another truck pulled in, unloading coffins which jiggled when they were moved inside the building from which the chicken sausage was shipped out.

"You know a lot about my business, Mister Thundercloud," Master Paul commented with an ominous tone.

“OUR business,” Stevenson said with pride, and a grin of self-satisfaction that he felt his Soul falling into.

“And our business is?” Master Paul asked.

“Selling White Meat ‘chicken’ to Dark skinned clients,” Stevenson said, looking at the packages of specially-spiced sausages. “White meat that’s more valuable alive than dead.”

“Dark skinned clients?” Himmel said, folding his stocky arms ‘Amish’ style as a posse of eight men with black hoods and robes brandishing weapons including automatic rifles, pistols, knives, whips, chains and blow torches surrounded Stevenson.

“Asians, Arabs, Africans,” Stevenson replied, hoping the Intel would be sufficient for his cover story. “Car manufacturers, Princes who want to be kinds, and Colonels who think they’re Generals. Who all pay top dollar for a privately-enjoyed meal of White Meat chicken. Assuming the chickens don’t develop legs and hitches a ride on Air Electra.”

Himmel seemed worried, more about what the Posse in black robes were about to find out than what Stevenson could.

“Relax, guys,” Stevenson said. “I’m just a Redskin trying to stick it to Whitey. For the money. And for personal family reasons. Like my great grandma, who was raped by Custer’s blond haired blue eyed Palefaces. My grandma, who was pleased by a White Priest in the Reservation School till she couldn’t get pleasure from anything. My Mother, who fell in love with a Church going White Mormon cowboy who beat the fear of the loving Christian God into her with a cat of nine tails every night. Till I wrapped it around his neck while I cut his balls off. All of those Palefaces have White Daughters. Time for me and my Redskin buds to rape some White Ass. Particularly Church Going White meat that we can cook, spice and slice up slow, after we milk the meat while it's still walking of all of its love juices. Disposed of with cooking utensils we all know about and wipe clean afterwards.”

Stevenson held his tongue from further descriptions, as he could see the posse of eight smiling with the kind of joy that any man, or woman, is capable of experiencing once they have tasted their first drop of someone else’s blood, or pleased themselves with another human being’s pain.

“You do know a lot about us, Master Thundercloud,” Master Paul said with an expressionless face as he coughed then regained his breath with what sounded like a wheeze, perhaps a rattle.

“And I want you to know everything about me, Master Paul,” Stevenson offered with a warm smile. “Or is it Mister Himmel?” Stevenson pulled out a wad of Benjamins, some real, most of them fake. “Me gottem lots of wompum. Want buy white slaves of

big chief in West. Like Ian Eaglefeathers. Jackson Tyron. And others who took over after Chief Boris Petrovitch was retired.”

Master Paul considered all the cards and references to other players Stevenson had thrown on the table. Stevenson did his best to not show his hand while the ex-Amish mobster sized him up. Finally, after ten tense seconds that felt like ten years, Mister Himmel dismissed his associates, or perhaps co-workers, or perhaps bosses. Hoods in the BDSM world so often hid who was master and who was slave, and so often one could be both at the same time.

“You and me should talk,” Master Paul Himmel said with the austerity and authority of an Amish Elder as he opened the door to his facility, appending his remark with another cough.

“No,” Stevenson said, noting even more armed staff inside. Their weapon was upgraded substantially relative to what Leona had described inside the night she liberated Electra during a tour of the facility guided by one of Paul’s hooded ‘assistants’ when Himmel was away on other business. Several other girls had been liberated that night by Leona, but they ran away into the streets or back into their cages as she made her getaway with Electra. Those self-recaptured girls lay in cages on the other side of the darkened room, soaked in their own excrements. “We go to a neutral location. So we are not distracted,” Stevenson said to Himmel. “White businessmen don’t talk shop on the factory floor, and we Injuns don’t do our horse-trading from a manure-covered coral.”

“Yes, indeed,” Himmel said as he removed his hat and grabbed an ‘English’ fedora and coat from a nearby coat-rack. He coughed up another bolus of phlegm, hiding the contents of such in his bandana. “Allergies,” he said by way of explanation. “This city air is not healthy, and the spices we use in preparing our chickens,” he said. “But, one does what one has to in order to earn a living, for ourselves and our loved ones, yes?”

“Yes indeed,” Stevenson said, contemplating what ‘loved ones’ Master Paul was talking about as they exited the building. “It would be better for my buyers if they meet you in a more professional setting, that I have prearranged at their request, Mister Himmel.”

“Indeed yes,” Master Paul replied, after which he led Stevenson out of the dark building into a well lit street, populated by people moving to and fro with no idea about what happened behind the walls of the chicken sausage factory. While en route to room Stevenson burrowed from one of his friends at the UN for the meeting, the half-breed Cop who was always on duty, even when fired from his job, contemplated what Master Paul meant by ‘loved ones’ he was working for. Were those ‘loved ones’ an Amish family back in Pennsylvania Dutch country? An ‘English’ wife and kids in Long Islandtte? Or maybe one of his slaves who he had ‘liberated’ into becoming his own personal property, or perhaps promoted to becoming a mistress to the messy and prosecutable business of kidnapping other innocents and turning them into slaves. But, as Master Paul pontificated after the usual chit chat about the evils of urban New York vs. rural Pennsylvania, “one does what one has to do.”

Such was the thought, and conviction, of Stevenson when he opened the door to the pitch black suite in the Imperial Hotel on East 64th street, a posh facility overlooking the River, on the 51st floor. A very private penthouse which had been furnished for negotiations between Masters. Or more accurately, One Master who was super-dominant, and the other who found himself demoted to a slave the moment the lights when on.

“What are you doing?” Himmel pushed out of his parched throat as Stevenson threw a metal dog collar around his neck, the one that he had placed upon Mirium, converting her into becoming Electra.

“It still works, I think,” Stevenson said as he pressed the remote in his pocket and delivered twice the electric shock it had delivered into Mirium’s neck, burning a ring around her neck and putting her body into convulsions.

Himmel experienced 5 seconds of what Mirium, Himmel’s ‘niece’, had felt 5 times an hour, and even more when she wasn’t being ‘Electra’.

“What do you want?” Himmel said after the first convulsion ended.

“For you to stop shitting in your pants, you worthless piece of shit,” Stevenson said, noting that the always clean and obsessively tidy Master was wearing a pair of trousers caked with manure. “And for you to tell me who your business associates are,” Stevenson continued as he hogtied the still very heterosexual and still officially Amish preacher down on the ground and inserted the ‘big Richard’ penis that had been inserted into Mirium’s vagina up Himmel’s anal cavity. “And for you to tell me everything you know about there operations, or me big Chief will do this.”

Stevenson moved the prod up and down, the same way it was used on Mirium. “Or this,” Stevenson said as he retrieved from his briefcase a cat of nine tails and proceeded to whip Himmel’s back while he was being invaded by ‘Big Chiefs’ penis up the back door. “Or this,” Stevenson continued as he used more of the toys that Master Paul had used to convert living, free-thinking human beings into slaves for fun and profit. To be fair, Stevenson did allow ‘slave Paul’ to confess his sins before each punishment was exerted. And he did get some information.

Stevenson cataloged in his head what Paul coughed up about his contacts and connections, as well as putting them all on audio tape. His buddy at the NYPD, Sergei Reminkov, son of a Russian mobster who wanted to undo the harm his ‘immigrant parents’ did upon arrival in America, would of course edit out the parts where Paul was tortured for the information. At best it would lead to Master Paul’s conviction along with shutting down his operation and the others. Something Leona was unable to do on her tour of the Big Crab Apple a week earlier due to circumstances beyond her control.

A nephew of an aunt and uncle who had been sold into the sex-slave trade during WWII, Sergei was willing and eager to sic an army of Moonlighting Cops or mobsters who owed

him favors on Master Paul and his sick, twisted buds unofficially. The 'fun' part for Leona, the necessary one for Stevenson.

But, as in all plans laid by mice, men and those aspiring to be more than themselves, something went wrong. Stevenson self-observed that he was enjoying beating the living daylights out of Master Paul, and was feeling more like Master Stevenson than Sheriff Stevenson. Further, the shocks, cuts, beatings, and burns were bringing his prisoner closer to death than to revealing more information about his fellow criminals.

Himmel coughed out more phlegm, then some blood, then a chunk of his lung. Then, as Stevenson pulled himself back, Himmel emitted a sardonic laugh and victorious grin, his words overshadowed by a death rattle. "I'm dying," he said. "You made it go faster, but I'm dying. And I thank you for that. Stomach cancer, stage 3. Now...four."

"I'll get you to a hospital," Stevenson barked out, lifting Himmel off the ground, helping him to a chair.

"No. You won't," Himmel replied, requesting that Stevenson move him toward the window. "Because I'll tell you everything here. So I can die in Grace."

"Grace, after you---!"

"---I'm a Catholic now," Himmel said.

"Because your Italian Mob mistress wanted you to be one so she could legally marry you?" Stevenson shot back.

"Yes," the ex-Amish man of many faces and identities said. "But also because...well," he continued as he looked up to the sky. "God forgives you if you confess your sins at the time of dying. Even Hitler, who I read was Catholic, confessed his sins at the time of dying."

"Hitler committed suicide, which is a sin," Stevenson pointed out.

"I want to confess my sins," Himmel said. "But only if I can say them to God, up in heaven," he continued as he looked at the sky above the Brooklyn Bridge.

"Just as long as you tell me everything I need to know first," Stevenson replied as he helped Himmel hobble over to the open window, opening the curtains to it.

"Hmmm," Master and perhaps soon to be reincarnated as a Nun Paul said as he grabbed hold of the curtains. His muttering started to sound like someone else, from somewhere else. "The flowers on these curtains, look a lot like the sheets you use at Leona's holiday farm. Blue and yellow." He grabbed hold of a glass on the table next to the window. "And these glasses. You should get these instead of the white cups with the

logo from her alma mater with the lion and the eagle that you give the girls Swiss Miss chocolate in or Lipton tea at the farm when they're..."

Stevenson's jaw dropped, dismayed and terrified, at Himmel's ominously accurate description of what Leona's rehab center looked like, and what went on there behind very locked and, so he thought until now anyway, private doors.

"I heard some complaints about the oatmeal cookies too. Too many raisins and not enough walnuts," Himmel smirked. "From one of the nuts who got out or was released before she was ready to go, two, maybe eight weeks ago, I recall."

"You're a fucking liar!" Stevenson grunted back.

"No," Himmel said as the color left his face and his eyes turned blank. "I'm an angel tonight. An angel telling you that you and Leona have more enemies than you can imagine. And not all of them out here."

"So, then, where are they?"

"There, I think," Himmel muttered through an other-worldly voice that was not his own, pointing to the Eastern sky, then the polluted air passing as sky to South, West and North beyond the hotel walls. "As I fly like now Mighty Aphrodite, as I sing my way to salvation with the overtures from..."

Himmel hummed operas that Stevenson didn't know, but recognized from somewhere. He reached for his tape recorder, pressing the on button. A call came in on Himmel's cell, marked Urgent, the call display reading unavailable number. "Mr. Himmel is busy now. Who is this so he can call you back?" Stevenson politely to the caller who didn't identify him or herself after three more very polite office-like requests. "Who is this!!!" he demanded of the caller.

"Me saying goodbye and good luck, to you. Which is all I can say, because if I tell you more, well, I still have family who," Stevenson heard from Himmel just before he pushed the window open and forced his cancerous and justifiably-tortured body out the window. It landed with a thud in the abyss below. Just as it did, the caller hung up. Within twenty seconds, an army of thugs found their way to the building where Stevenson thought he was secure, aided by two police cars.

CHAPTER 3

Leona looked at the blue and yellow flowered sheets laid on the last bed available in the treatment facility that she did not name and forbid others to do so as well. Then she smelled another one of Emma's infamous oatmeal cookies. It lay on the night-table next to Mirium's bed while she was out meeting the other girls in the facility, a customary 'welcome to the way back home' greeting that seemed to help every girl on her first day

in the facility. The cake-sized cookie still had ten raisins to ever nut, that nut being a walnut despite everyone's insistence that Emma should use peanuts instead. But whatever the cookie contained, it was laid on a plate that said 'Welcome' in ten different languages and twenty very warm earth tone colored floral designs. Each plate was painted personally by Emma, and in the two years during which the facility was operative, she had gone through ten boxes of dishes. While gazing at the sheets Mirium had tried to cut into pieces and swallow upon her arrival, Leona allowed herself to envision Mirium at the graduation ceremony after her treatment was done, receiving the cookie plate as a reminder of how far she had come. But the watch on Leona's wrist kept ticking, made to move faster and louder by the words Master Paul said before his self-induced execution regarding an unnamed informer who was graduated as a liberated ally.

Leona looked at the ledger containing the slave and real names of the girls she and her group of burnt out idealists had liberated in the last two months. Prior to Bill Stevenson's return from Paul Himmel's suicide, she considered them all victories. Now they were all potential liabilities.

"So, you really believe Master Paul when he told you that one of the girls who we liberated went back to working for one of his buds, and has it in for all of us?" Leona inquired of Stevenson as he rewound the tape recording of the 'confession' at the hotel room, putting it into a metal box secured with two locks, one of which was covered with a specially-formulated potion of curare and ricin, so that whoever tried to pick it with the wrong key would die painfully while his body was paralyzed. "You're sure that Himmel meant what he said?" Leona asked. "And he wasn't bullshitting us?"

"He said it on his deathbed," Stevenson he replied.

"So then why didn't the shithead tell us who the fucking mole was?" Leona demanded. "Who is someone else's still-owned daughter, or converted-into-evil grand-daughter?"

"He valued his own daughters, and granddaughters," Bill said, showing Leona a photograph that stayed inside the room after Himmel jumped out the window, by intent or perhaps accident. "Something I grabbed from him as I tried to prevent him from taking a ten story plunge to his death."

"And you answered his phone when it rang, because..." Leona pressed.

"I was angry, and stupid," Bill confessed, harder on himself than anyone else would be on him, including Leona.

"Like I was, and still am, for believing that the thirty girls we liberated in the last two months wouldn't revert back to being...liabilities to us," Leona growled, fading into a lost world of her own between her ears.

“Look!” Stevenson said, gently putting his arms around Leona’s shoulders and trying to make her look into his eyes rather than into the world of self-doubt behind her own.

“According to every physiological, meta-physiological and common sense indicator ALL of us had, those girls were ready to go back home. And we ALL voted on it. We’re not gods.”

“But maybe we have to be,” Leona contemplated. She looked into Stevenson’s eyes, telling him with as much kindness as she could to get his hands off her shoulders, and that she was a big girl now, not in need of a man, or anyone else. “And speaking of gods, or goddesses, what was that Greek deity that Paul Himmel mentioned before he fucked off and plummeted himself into the Underworld?”

“Aphodite,” Bill related as he looked at himself in the reflection on the glass in closed and now locked window. “I don’t remember any ‘Aprhodite’ who was discharged from here in the last two months,” he said as he looked through the brief notes Leona made in the ledger regarding the last two months of patients, and the copious observations Rachel put on paper as part of her privately-obtained but hopefully earth-shattering thesis project.

“Perhaps ‘Mighty Aprhodite’ is a metaphor, or a reference to something or someone in the Woody Allen movie by the same title,” Rachel suggested as she came in to set up the very hidden cameras that would videotape Mirium in her room, so that Leona’s reconditioning treatments regimes could be maximized, along with of course ‘Mama Emma’s’ tailor made nutritional program which was part New Age Legend but enough practical, old-wives’ fact to keep going. “And aside from those opera tunes Master Paul sang that I you recorded, along with the cryptic descriptors of his co-workers you got on tape, what else did the Grade 3 dominant say before he expired? The plan was for us to interrogate him, and do it here, in this laboratory. So I could study him.”

“Paul Himmel was a fuckhead bastard, not an ‘n’ value for you to study the neurological substrate of cruelty on!” Leona grunted back at her most prized and only scientific protegee. “And he died, he didn’t expire,” she continued. “And for God, Buddha and the Great Spirit’s sake, humanize or spice up your language before YOU become an n-value yourself! Before YOU become as dead between the ears and in the heart as the scientists we BOTH left behind at Massachusetts University who are stuck in an never ending circle of linearity and dull out disease. Which sometimes can be cured by scientists becoming artists in the creative world, or vectors of evil to fight evil in the real world,” Leona continued, checking the hidden hand revolvers strapped to her thighs and the dart gun in shoulder holster pre-loaded with ten syringes of specialized inactivating agents. “And, Doctor Rachel, I noticed that in your lab, which I paid for, that the new violin, and/or fiddle is still unopened. An instrument that I KNOW that you know how to play. I assigned you the job of playing and enjoying music as part of your required education here!”

“All of that is very...interesting,” Rachel replied, feeling her voice becoming more more Vulcan-like, but not seeming to be concerned about that, feeling very detached from base

human emotions, fired up between her ears but not caring much about how sloppily she was dressed or how rank she smelled below the neck. “Yes, what you said is very interesting.”

“Interesting!” Leona grunted. “It was supposed to be SOUL opening! And all you can say about it, with technical words voiced without contractions, is that it is ‘interesting!’”

Rachel looked at her mentor, and friend, as if she was studying Leona rather than listening to her.

Leona took a deep breath, then recollected her rage-infused perspectives. “Okay, I get it,” she said to Rachel with one hand gently on the genius-in-training's shoulders, the other about to go into a clenched fist about to punch some sense into the over-self-educated nitwit's skull. “Doctor Rachel, the goddess of science is diverting you for a while. But what the fuck about what I said, and meant, is merely ‘very interesting?’” Leona asked, ready for any answer.

“That I should adjust my speech patterns, for ‘God, Buddha and the Great Spirit’s’ sake,” Rachel discoursed back to Leona. “Which you said as a matter of conviction rather than a metaphor relating a sense of psychological urgency.”

But today, of all days, Leona was not in the mood for ‘discourse’. She answered the closest thing she ever could call a ‘daughter’ with a defiant stare.

“Alright,” Rachel replied, surmising her meaning and perhaps intentions. “I will endeavor to humanize and adjust my manner of speech for the patients so as to maximize communication and understanding.”

“And?” Bill added, as Rachel’s father, one who knew more about her and cared for her more than her biological father back in Boston, or the man who she called “Daddy” when she was a bright, yet defiant, little girl back in Providence.

“I’ll keep my experiments with these patients, observational...” Rachel pledged in legalese. “Unless of course data we all agree on allows me to do otherwise.”

“I need your word on that, Rachel,” Leona said. “And that you will not use the treatments that seem to work on your learned helpless rodents on these girls, until you know ALL of the side effects?”

“And do I have your word that I can study any Grade 3 dominants either of you run into, so I can understand, as the vernacular goes, what ‘makes these mother-fucking-assholes tick?’” Rachel pressed, intentionally realizing that she had not. “The disease we are fighting is binomial. Being a masochistic slave and being a sadistic master are, as the vernacular goes, two sides of the same coin. A humanistic hypothesis that my observational biochemical and neurological data says is correct, at least with regard to patient 23A, and a few other n values who---”

“---Her name is Yung, Doctor Mengela!” Bill reminded Rachel.

“Who was trained to be a helpless slave, and a vicious Master, in service of HER master,” Leona answered, lowering her eyes and turning her head away to the undefined black sky outside the window.

Rachel noted and appreciated Leona’s connection with that remark. Indeed, Doctor Rachel felt a responsibility to figure out what really happened to Leona when she was Leon, enduring all manner of degradation as a prisoner of war in war zones that officially did not exist. And over-extracting ‘justice’ when she was liberated by comrades who enjoyed the thrill of the kill more than any character imaginable by a writer, or scientist. Writers and scientists who had never been in a war.

“We treat one disease at a time, Rachel,” Leona said, examining her weaponry again, looking at her watch, then inside her tortured soul with primal fear and primal rage, not knowing if she would fight or flight this time. “Eliminating the shitheads who make life shit for 30 million slaves in the world, is what me and Bill do. Meanwhile, you and Emma, here---“

“---Unless there’s a widespread vaccine to prevent learned helplessness, and there are, as the vernacular says, shithead, manipulative sadistic bastards out there, there will always be those afflicted with learned helplessness,” Rachel pointed out. “Just like unless we can stop people with small minds and big egos in high places from making biological weapons and fucking up this planet, we’re constantly going to be spending most of our precious life time on this potentially-magnificent earth devising antidotes and treatments for said debilitating agents.”

“Interesting,” Leona said, her hard face breaking into a warm smile, staring into memories that seemed to play themselves out in the air in front of her once-again-collected eyes.

“Accurate,” Rachel replied, puzzled as to Leona’s real meaning.

“No, 'interesting',” Leona smiled, this time looking straight into Rachel’s eyes, gaining entry somehow into her Soul. “Interesting that you said ‘fucking up’ this planet instead of ‘creating a non-productive dynamic’ or some other descriptor that has so many words to mentally process that you forget and don’t connect to what your real meaning is.”

“And by that, you also mean...” Rachel replied, sensing in Leona’s inflection of speech and her body language that there was some other mandate she wanted, or need to convey.

Leona hugged Rachel. It felt odd to Rachel. Sustaining, and well meaning, and welcomed, but...odd. Allowing her body to adjust to perceived expectations, Rachel hugged Leona back, with equal strength, placing her hands in the same location in Leona’s back that her mentor had placed her hands upon on hers.

Perceived social protocol as well as past memories of the time before becoming a scientist told Rachel that it was time to say nothing. And to try to perceive something outside of her null hypotheses about learned helplessness, sadistic cruelty, and perhaps herself.

“I gotta do what I gotta do out there,” Leona said to Rachel after releasing the hug first. “While you do what you gotta do here,” she concluded with a smile that still hid a whole lot of secrets behind it. “Wir sind alles in diese Ding zusammen,” she delivered as her final statement just before the beeper on her watch went off, then marched out the door with renewed determination that seemed to, for now anyway, put a lid on the various fears that haunted her daily, and nightly.

Within two seconds of the GTO starting up again from outside, Leona honked the metallic steed’s horn. “Wir sind alles in diese zusammen!” she yelled out.

“Yeah, we’re all in this together,” Bill Stevenson said with a tired, but still optimistic smile.

“I didn’t know you spoke German,” Rachel replied, shocked that he understood Leona’s parting words.

“I don’t sprechen-me Deutch, but I understand a more universal language,” he continued, gathering his weaponry and ammunition, imagining the impact they would have on their predesignated victims.

“Which is...?” Rachel asked, seeing something that reeked of ‘Master Paul’ and the other Masters in Stevenson.

“Look after the fort while we’re gone,” he said. “It shouldn’t be long. But if you run into any trouble...” he continued, throwing Rachel one of the guns. “You can, use it on the bad guys. If you can’t, use it on yourself.”

Rachel had never held a gun before. Yes, she had had a taste of being a slave when abducted back at the Rez where Leona had busted Chief Boris’ operation wide open. The only indignation Rachel had experienced was a dog collar placed around her neck, and ropes tied to her hands and feet. And when liberated from such by Leona, Rachel’s sneaking her new ‘slave sisters’ out of the compound was just...procedural, according to her own self-observation. Now, as she held onto the gun, nothing would be observational again. No, it was time to stop observing and start acting. Any action that she could do now, she had to do, and was more than ever determined TO do.

CHAPTER 4

Stevenson's two private planes had developed engine problems due to being overused for rescue missions in the last two months, and the only available loaners required over-explanation and verification regarding who was using them and where they were going. If the radar detection unit could be hammered back into obedience and the back roads were relative cop-free, it made more sense for Leona to take on her road-seasoned GTO from Potterburg to Albuquerque. But due to ticking of the time clock and early snows in the Plains states, it was faster to fly.

Leona lost no time hopping a SouthWest flight from Pittsburg, paid for from the very-stretched operating budget money she had extorted, stole or burrowed from the slave Masters she had inactivated, or pretended to work for.

Her persona this time was Sandra Taylor-Epstein, forty-five year old art dealer Torontonian with an oversized 'Jewish nose', perfectly-styled face-covering blonde bob and the most expensive 'back to the earth' NeoHippie outfit obtainable. Sandra's siblings were the very-behind-the-scenes movers and shakers behind every Right Wing Corporation on Yonge Street and 'hip and cool' television show on CBC. The fate of the girls Leona had rescued, the girls she would rescue, and the ones still 'in residence' at the farm depended on 'Sandra' getting to the Sante Fe New World Art Gallery ASAP, pronto, stat. Unfortunately, the pilot had other ideas, particularly when the weather over Oklahoma got choppy and the line-up to re-route the plane through Dallas got long. But, 'Captain Ron' did authorize the in-flight crew to give everyone a complimentary soft drink, TWO packs of peanuts or cookies, and a discount on renting movie viewing computers. 'Barb', the senior flight attendant with a big smile, bigger hair, and even bigger boobs that probably kept her in the air longer than her age would have allowed otherwise, passed around a card which provided viewers with any one of five movies, for free.

It was ironic that of the four passengers around Leona, all were male, all had regulation Southern good-ole boy bubba bellies, and all were watching the same movie. And most probably none of them had any idea about the reality behind the story in the critically-acclaimed Bruce Willis action film. But Leona did understand what was really behind the story of 'Tears of the Sun', in which Willis and a handful of well-paid but highly outnumbered mercenaries were charged with evacuating a village of innocent African villagers from three hundred bloodthirsty soldiers who would kill their own mother for the thrill of it.

As 'Leon', Leona had seen far worse than any of the atrocities done by the bad guys to the good guys, or the innocents caught between them. And as 'Leon', a soldier farmed out from the US Army for far less salary than Willis was getting per day and without any of the workman's compensation protections from 'accidents' related to chemical exposure or physical mutilation of flesh, she had been faced with a constant situation of kill or be killed during her highly classified missions that didn't officially exist. Most of the killing was inactivating bad guys. Some of it involved inactivating those you thought were bad guys. And some of it was inactivating guys you trusted as good guys who were working for the bad guys. The reasons for their turning on you became

incidental to getting information from them about the bad guys, to save as many innocent guys as you could.

Some of Leona's buddies back in the 'good old days' when she earned a living with a gun and Bowie knife rather than a stethoscope and microscope, really got into the thrill of the kill. As did she, to be fair. You had to numb yourself from the act of taking another life or inflicting pain upon another while they are still alive somehow. The easiest was to dehumanize the enemy, of course, or demonize them, something that the "my countrymen's lives matter than any foreign countrymen" indoctrination in Boot Camp in the Armed Services or Pledges of Allegiance to the Flag in grade school were very good at instilling. Then there was black, gallows humor, making jokes about how much splatter you can make when popping a hole into the pumpkin atop your enemy's outstretched neck. Leona had 'inactivated' so many people while performing what started out to be her service as a 'necessary evil' for humanity, that she lost count when awake. Of course during her sleep, or lack of it, all 236 faces were clearly evident. But, she didn't cross 'the line' from Painful Purgatory to Hell. Not yet anyway.

That 'line' had been crossed by her best bud and sometimes Mentor, Boris Petrovitch, who was now inactivated by her own hand, thankfully, after he tried to reconnect with her at the Rez which she called home at which he had set up one of the most vicious international human trafficking and slave rings imaginable. But there were others, still unaccounted for, such as Herman 'Roadkill' LaPlume, a Belgian mercenary who followed in the blood-soaked footsteps of his father and grandfather, and Billy Bob Forest, fourth-generation KKK member who loved hunting for 'dark meat' in as many exotic places as he could. All three would salute the occasion of taking another life with their third leg getting hard, and sometimes sprouting 'thick vanilla syrup'.

Leona observed her fellow passengers on the plane watching the action-packed blood-and-guts flick, noting how one of them had his hands in his enlarging left pants pocket. The bubba belly good ole boy's eyes looked 'sick', and possessed. "Maybe those ocular portholes and the sicko mind should have been scanned at security rather than the toothpaste tubes and water bottles in his carry-on," she thought to herself. "And maybe Rachel's theory about a prerequisite to being a sadistic BDSM master or vicious sex-slave trader is testosterone that alters one of the limbic system neurotransmitter circuits or their neurochemical receptors has more meat than imagination to it," she continued to ponder, as her eyes were caught hostage by a reflection of her very feminine face in the mirror of the lap top case of the passenger next to her. "At least I didn't get a woody when I did what I had to do, and then what I think I enjoyed doing, at the time, sort of," she said to herself, hoping that no one around her could hear how loud she was thinking. Particularly as her logic was extending into a very dangerous territory. "But, what about women?" she considered, as she looked around the plane, sensing which one of her fellow female passengers were bitchy by choice or bitchy because they had to live or work with bastards. "Ever since I became a woman, I learned to use my head rather than my brawn, as my brain has grown and the muscles in my arms went into my breasts," she mused as she looked down upon her chest. "But, when I rescued Mirium, and I took out the two guards in the hallway, and the third guarding the

‘dormitory’ when his buds were out on a ‘beer and broad’ break at the strip joint down the street,” she pondered. “Did I get an orgasm?” she asked herself. “And when I cut the balls off four of the Masters who I took out last month at other ‘stables’, then cut their throats, I did remember enjoying it. The female Master in Seattle the month before and that French Canadian ‘Godmother’ didn’t fare out much better after I introduced them the business end of my Bowie knife.”

Passenger ‘Sandra’ checked the placement of her wig in the mirror embedded into the seat in front of her, this time seeing ‘Leona’, or perhaps ‘Leon’, under the short blonde wig, caked on Paleface white make up and over-priced ‘Taylor-Epstein’ shaded sunglasses. “At the time, I was a necessary evil,” Leona self-observed herself muttering, as a soft whisper, but still giving voice to it. Maybe it was a statement, maybe a question, maybe just wishful retrospective thinking.

But the reality of it all as it pertained to her present reality came back to Leona as the ‘there’s a rat in our midst’ clip from ‘Tears of the Sun’ came up on two of the screens around her, the sound one of them audible, as the macho Bubba-Buddha Belly who was watching the film had fallen asleep, the earbuds within 2 feet of Leona’s hyper-sensitive ears.

It was the scene where Willis finds the mole who was informing the African Death Squads where they were via a transmitter he was hiding. Willis had taken said mole under his wing and rescued him from death squad bullets several times, some of those bullets landing in his flesh. Much like the mystery ‘Judas bitch’ who Leona had liberated from the slave trade then rehabilitated at her farm, at great risk to her own life and the lives of graduate student Rachel, re-connected to mother, and possible love-mate but certainly respect-mate Stevenson. And of course, the other girls in the facility that had liberated 164 girls from physical bondage. Leona thought about that slave girl, or more accurately, that mole, who perhaps had turned back into a slave after her release, working for her master, or perhaps had faked being a liberated slave while in treatment.

When trying to find a mole, following the money trail had led to three suspects at the top of the list. The chain of commerce that went from Master to shell corporation, to small business number one, to perhaps small business man number two, then finally to slave, in the form of check if all of the links in the chain wanted to write ‘betrayal’ money off on their taxes, or cash if they didn’t want to be caught. Or ‘perks’ and ‘professional promotions’ which could only be bought with large sums of money. Such put Pauline Bauer, an aspiring neo-abstract-impressionist painter, on the top of the list, the most important piece of data on her obtainable just by googling her name. Leona looked at a copy of her file on her tablet, twenty cyberpages of intel about her background and as many pages of biological information regarding her biochemical and neurophysiological recovery from learned helplessness. But perhaps only three paragraphs of that was true, or accurate. The trick was finding which of those paragraphs were.

As the plane made yet another circle around the Denver airport, Leona went to the still-occupied restroom, leaned against the wall outside of it. Seeing that no people, or

cameras, were looking, she opened up the attachment to the file on her computer. She perused once again the data collected by cyber-whiz Rachel and passed on to cyber-impatient Leona. She focused on pictures of Pauline's art was going today, and for whom she was really doing it.

"Interesting 'painting'?" a frail woman with her white hair hair tighted in a tight bun around her wrinkled face and no doubt a full bladder said to Leona as she snuck into the isle next to her. "In my time, they called that finger-painting when you were a child or spray painting the garage wall when you're drunk. And the price for that painting now is," she said as she adjusted her bifocals and moved in closer to view the screen. "Forty thousand dollars!"

"Fifty," Leona replied. "Which is what I'll have to offer to get what I want from this artist."

"And this artist is?" inquired schoolteacher-librarian whose wedding finger was empty now, and probably always had been.

How Leona yearned to tell this woman what she really thought about the painting. That it really was shitty art, done by an untalented artist who needed to be told she was talented so her self-esteem would not go even further down into the toilet. Painting was the only thing that had kept Pauline balanced at the rehab farm after she had been rescued. Staff and fellow patients alike always tried there best to say good things to say about the splotches of paint thrown onto canvas that lacked any sense of style, definition or color balance was hard to do. Leona also did her best to keep Pauline encouraged, but not to get her hopes up. "You're talented in ways that others aren't talented," Leona said with each painting Pauline would produce once she stopped using her hands to beat herself black and blue. "You are inventing a new genre, and if this generation of humans doesn't get it, the next ones will. Just like VanGough." Each compliment of course had to be fabricated de novo, and said with a subtext that seemed complimentary. And to be fair, maybe Pauline's art was ahead of any of the perceptions of the art critics, or her non-paying 'patrons' at the rehab farm.

Thankfully, Pauline didn't cut her ear off like Vincent did, and didn't take an early self-induced exit from life like he did. But the blonde, very white, blue eyed South African had a far more torturous life in bondage than Vincent did. Pauline's demons were real men, who broke her down by having her be a 'pony' with bits in her mouth. The details about her abduction remained unclear, but the needle marks on her arm and the tox screen done upon her semi-voluntary admission to the farm indicated that she was turned into a heroine addict. To pay for her fixes, the White Afrikaner, brought up to accept that her race and family pedigree of Dutch pioneers dating back to the 1600s, serviced Black African clients, most of them diplomats living in New York or DC. Her bondage had lasted 6 years, her owners having fled the country with no forwarding address a few days before Leona and Stevenson busted open the operation.

Pauline had been a model patient, her recovery moving forward a step ahead of Leona's schedule, even though the biochemical data from her blood, HUMANELY done spinal taps and brain scans didn't fit Rachel's hypotheses regarding learned helplessness and recovery from such.

But what didn't fit the hypothesis that Leona was most concerned about was why and how Pauline was now selling paintings at the most prestigious art show in the SouthWest, and that her 'art' was the toast of the town where she failed as an art student in three different schools. Her art was not only crude, it was racist. But, there was one element to it that was historically familiar. Though the school teacher-librarian lady still waiting to use the airplane restroom didn't understand anything about Pauline's real background, and would not believe the facts even if they were presented to her, she did see something in the paintings that Leona didn't.

"This looks like, sort of, paintings by a 19th century artist who flunked out of art school and got disrespected by every Jewish art critic in Vienna," she noted.

"And if Adolf would have been admitted to art school, or someone bought his paintings, he would not have taken up a career in politics?" Leona replied, with an ironic smile.

"The biggest historical question of the 20th century," Library lady noted. "Just like in the 18th century, if George Washington had not been denied a commission in the British Army in 1763 after the French and Indian War because he was a Colonial, he would not have formed his own Continental Army in 1776."

"Yeah, egos. For better or worse," Leona replied regarding what she knew about the world. But it seemed that this Library Lady knew more about people than Leona did, and how their art reflected who they really are, and could become.

Taking a chance, Leona showed her another page of Pauline's paintings. "What do these paintings say to you about the person who did them?" Leona asked the woman.

Library Lady looked at the pictures long and hard, stroking the loose straggled hairs on her double chin in the manner of an seasoned professor who writes books rather than a librarian who merely loans them out. A professor who Leona hoped that she might be able to become one day, once there were no more Pauline's to have to rescue, or inactivate.

"I think that she is...hmmm," the woman said, appending her next thought to an intense silence.

Leona eagerly awaited word as to what the woman saw in the paintings. Indeed, what if an art critic who was more concerned about artists than popularity of the art say if he or she had looked at Adolf Hitler's art back in the first decade of the 20th century? And what about this artist here who could be just as dangerous in the 21st century.

But before the old and people-wise Library Lady who was listened to by so few people could say anything, 'Captain Ron' interjected. "Please take your seats and buckle your seatbelt. We've been given clearance to land in Denver," he announced with a happy tone over a speaker that evoked crackles in anyone who could hear it.

'Barb' the stewardess escorted the Library Lady back to her seat, while the air filled up with jubilant applause from everyone on board, particularly those who had lost hope of making their connections at the other end. Everyone except Leona, who now knew that her 'reunion' with former patient Pauline would be far more complicated than the 'good bye' hug she shared with her six long weeks ago as Pauline drove out of the rehab farm, taking with her a confident smile, and every secret about the rehab farm's operation, staff and patients.

CHAPTER 5

Upon arrival at the Denver airport, Leona could not find Library Lady, but she did thankfully find a seat on the next flight to Albuquerque, where she and her checked in luggage arrived intact, sort of. As the bag she checked in at Pittsburg came down the ramp, the zipper she had locked closed was partially opened. But thankfully the metal boxes inside the 'Love is all you need' hippie-dippie stickers on the suitcase was intact, as were the contents. "Hmm," she thought regarding the curiosity of the baggage handlers. "I probably disappointed them when they picked the lock and didn't find any dope in there," she muttered to herself as she peaked into the metal boxes through as small an opening as possible at the baggage claim area. "My three co-workers are all comfy and cozy," she said regarding the firearms Carlos had amped up, wrapped in Tibetan prayer shawls. "We're gonna have an interesting cultural evening," she smiled at them.

Sandra proceeded to the rent-a-car booths, and was told by the Hertz people who she reserved a car from that the vehicle she had requested developed engine problems from the last owner, and that if she could wait three, maybe six, hours, she would get a free upgrade. Leona took the complimentary meal tickets and coupons for various messages at the airport with a smile, then marched over to the other car rental companies. Everyone else was sold out as well, the result of pre-Thanksgiving weather-related plane cancellations and countless travelers electing to drive to LA, Dallas or Phoenix rather than wait for another flight. Ironically, Alamo was the only vendor that had any ponies that were available.

"I got an old Mare that'll get ya to Sante Fe, but if ya trot or hand gallop her gently, steada letting her full out, she'll run sound for ya." said the cowboy-turned-clerk, whose tie fit as well on his down-home-no-bullshit soul as Leona's leisure-seeking Yuppie-elite persona fit on hers. "A reconditioned Mustang with fresh Goodyears on all fours hoofs, that hasn't left anyone walking yet, Ms. Taylor-Epstein."

“Sandra,” Leona replied with a ‘let’s talk turkey instead of birdshit’ smile to a man who most probably had no home to go home to, or someone at home who he wished would leave. “And, I’ll take it, if you take this instead of that,” she said regarding the cash in her hand and the credit card that she had been having problems with ever since leaving Pittsburgh. “Taking care of my kids got more expensive than ever this month, but I can cover the deductible,” Leona said. “I know you need a valid credit card in case something happens to this Old Mare, Hank,” she continued, daring to call him by the name on his ID tag, one which of course disallowed him the dignity of a Surname appended to it.

‘Cowboy Hank’ looked at the cash, then the credit card which had been perhaps overused for supplies for the girls back at the rehab farm, or hacked into by one of Leona’s many enemies, some of which had badges rather than just being in business with those who had badges. “I don’t see a problem here,” he said, whizzing through Leona’s credit card without her seeing what he was doing, then handing the card back to her. “Yup, no problem with the card, and keep the cash. Pay us when you get back. You have trustworthy eyes and I’m guessin’, an overworked brain box behind it that’s workin’ overtime helpin’ out others.”

“Thanks, Hank,” Leona said, really meaning it.

“Just tryin’ to earn my keep while I’m still in the saddle,” Hank replied. “You have yerself a great day, and life if I don’t see ya when you get back,” he smiled back at her, handing her the keys to the car.

“You too,” Leona said as she took the keys, wanting to say far more to Hank. Such as ‘Have a nice life, as you deserve it’ . Or ‘you’ll live a hell of a lot longer than I probably will.’ Or ‘Yeah, it’d be good for me to have someone like you in my life.’ Or ‘If you ever want to move your and your horses to the Wild Wild East, there’s a place for both of you on my spread in Potterburg, as I can use someone who values people more than profit, and horses are the best therapy for people who have been fucked up by other people.’ Of course, if such things were said it would have to eventually involve saying things like, ‘that scar between my legs is where my penis used to be,’ ‘be sure to bring your guns and your horses, because you’ll need both of them if anyone finds out what I’m really doing on that hobby farm I bought’. And of course, ‘we both know that no good deed goes unpunished.’

But as Leona went out to the repeatedly resurrected vintage Mustang, sitting alone there in the lot, that there was a very good chance that it would not survive the kind of ride she was taking it on. And that Hank would maybe get shit from his bosses for renting it to her. But, time was of the essence, and the opening ceremony for the Sante Fe New World Art Museum was two hours from now, and that even to be ten minutes fashionably late, the old mechanical Mare would have to be spurred on at a flat out gallop.

CHAPTER 6

The Sante Fe Art Gallery gala was fabulous. Fabulous food, fabulous clothing on the specially-invited guests and even some fabulous paintings. Amongst the paintings that were not so fabulous, were those bearing the Pauline Bauer signature on them. The most simplistic, commercial and soul-less of them had 'sold' signs on them, with purchase prices of \$20k or more. Maybe the payout was for real, or maybe it was a scam so that that real buyers would pay \$50k to have them in their collection.

But as measured by the black and white money-connected material world, rather than the multi-hued Spirit-connected realm of Real Art, Pauline had 'made it'. Her work was being shown at one of the most prestigious art galleries in America. Leona, an ex-alchie and always-potentially-addictable soul, pretended to sip the champagne that was obligatory for each of the honored guests. But she had to be Sandra Taylor-Epstein tonight, whose persona had been plastered and backdated on the internet on numerous websites as a cover for her background by Rachel, who by virtue of her being a whiz with technological science and most importantly being under 25, had no trouble inventing a real credible history.

Yes, Leona had to be Sandra tonight. For the fellow art critics, who looked down on the waiters and waitresses with upturned noses. For the other buyers, who Leona recognized as being in businesses other than art, some of which included buying waiters and waitresses for life-long gigs in Restaurants that didn't serve any food. And for Pauline, who was not around.

"She went for a stroll," said one of the art critics with a dollar store name tag slapped onto his tweed jacket that said 'Lance' to Leona as she was glancing at "Jackson's Hole in Winter". A Pauline Bauer oil on hard canvas that was on the surface a sort of portrayal of a snowy mountain scene, but when analyzed through more open eyes was a likeness of a vaginal porthole that had been opened by something very rough and painful. "Real artists do have an aversion for applause, you know," the art critic continued said with an English accent that was as fake as the hairpiece on his head. "Real artists only value compliments delivered by their closest friends, you know."

"Yes, I know," Leona replied, looking with one eye around the room behind 'Lance' while letting Lance think that she was staring glowingly only at him.

"And you are?" Lance inquired.

"A good friend of Pauline's," Leona replied with a Torontonion elitist smile. "I hope, maybe, unless I can't be such anymore," she muttered to herself between her ears, preparing to do whatever she had to in order to extract information from her. And if necessary, to end the conversation with bullets delivered from the firearms hidden in her size D bra and within her metallic-plated panties. Said pieces of explosive lead sent into Pauline's traitorous mouth, hands, head or clitoris.

“Follow the money trail,” Leona thought to herself regarding the ‘hows’ and ‘whos’ of where Pauline was. And who she was working for, either as a slave or as a collaborator who maybe never was a slave to begin with. Pauline’s history came from heresay more than fact, and her whole enslavement could have been faked. Fabricated by her, her Master or even her very well off parents back in South Africa, who were noticeably not at their favorite black sheep daughter’s first REAL art show. “Yeah, follow the money trail,” Leona considered. “Or the trail of blood,” entered into her ever-firing mind perhaps before or maybe after her eyes spotted several splotches of red wine on the floor, leading to the exit door, which led to an isolated parking spot in the back of the gallery.

After seeing that all the doors in the main gallery were open, and confirming that Pauline was not behind any of them, Leona snuck out main door and took a look at who had arrived, or left, from the back door. The tracks left by a single vehicle were fresh, the tires leaving an imprint in the mud that could be followed by a blind man with a walking stick. Leona lost no time in turning on the motor of her now sort of functional Mustang, which thankfully had a very functional muffler.

The final destination was a custom-made log cottage home. Very new, and far bigger than Pauline could have ever afforded on her own. However, her name was on the mailbox. A trail of painted rocks led to the front door, and there were several cars in the front driveway, and two vans. From behind the closed curtains, there seemed to be a good time going on. TOO good a time, for Leona’s liking. One of the voices inside sounded a bit like Pauline’s, singing extremely artistically.

One set of footprints led to a side door that was barely visible until you got to it. The door was not locked, which made Leona’s job of entering much easier, but her fear of what was inside harder. As she drew up her guns, mounting the silencers on them, a million scenarios entered Leona’s mind, and questions to go with it. All of them would be answered once she opened the door leading down into what appeared to be a basement.

Once inside, the worse scenario of all hit Leona straight between the eyes as she encountered the first face that flashed out to her in the dark. It was Pauline, her hands covered with blood, a smile plastered on her face. Her half-opened eyes were possessed, the mind behind it in a zombified state. On one side of that mind was a missing ear. Connecting her to her painting station was a dog collar around her neck. Air still coming across it. From a naked and freshly branded chest below, to a mouth into which a sharp pony bit was inserted that would made her lips bleed anytime she tried to say anything. Next to Pauline, a beautiful portrait of herself done by an artist far more talented than Pauline ever was. The title of the painting read ‘My final painting. Me as Me’, signed with a P done in dark black paint, the rest of the name in bright red blood. With a pricetag of \$100,000.

One look into Pauline's zomified eyes said it all. Her final painting was to be the the best seller in the gallery. Her final statement before she would meet her demise. That demise was clearly outlined in a post-dated article in the local newspaper next to Pauline.

The front page said that she committed suicide. The article below it revealed that Pauline had an entire house filled with paintings that were now a hundred times more valuable than when she was alive, the profits from the sales to go to Charity.

From the floor above, Leona heard a recording of Pauline singing ‘Seems like Old Times,’ now accompanied by live male voices, and some female ones, on their way from being buzzed to being hammered. The present Pauline sighed with dark, ironic ‘laugh,’ then sobbing that wouldn’t stop.

“Hey down there! We’re trying to discuss business up here,” a voice from above growled. “Or I’ll come down there and I’ll carve another clit into you, you stupid bitch.”

Leona put her hand over Pauline’s mouth. “I’ll get you out of here,” she promised, looking at the door through which she entered. “But not the way we both came in,” she continued as she heard the outside door close shut, then heard the sound of two by fours being hammered into the frame of the door. Then she heard the footsteps of two men with heavy boots who were checking their weapons. “Hey, don’t worry about them,” she assured Pauline. “I brought some friends to help us out.”

Leona showed Pauline her firearms. “They’ll do the talking, and you’ll do the listening, okay?” she whispered.

With whatever strength Pauline still had in her neck she nodded a ‘yes’.

With the specially-designed laser wire cutting knife in her purse designed by Carlos, Leona burnt the chains off the dog collar holding Pauline to her painting post, then carefully inactivated the remote control electrocuting device on it collar. “Now, I need you to tell me any and all routes out of here, other than astral projecting through these walls.”

With a trembling hand that, miraculously, still had most of its fingers intact, Pauline pointed to a staircase leading to a door upstairs.

“I was afraid of that,” Leona said. “But, hey. No pain, no gain. You artists know that better than anyone else.”

Pauline answered ‘yes’ with her eyes.

“Now,” Leona said as she pulled a body suit out of Sandra Taylor-Epstein’s oversized handbag. “I need to put this on,” she instructed Pauline regarding the bullet-proof body suit that Carlos designed for her. “It needs to cover ALL of you,” Leona said as Pauline fought furiously against her head being zipped up over the bloody crown of her rashly shorn scalp. “Okay, we can work with that,” Leona conceded, hoping that the goons up top, 16 of them by rough account, would be aiming at her at least partially-protected torso, arms and legs rather than her head, as she was perhaps still valuable property.

“You stay low, and run when I tell you to,” Leona said as she adjusted the ‘iron undershirt’ surplus asset vest under Sandra’s high-end hippie-dippie blouse that had been shot at and into so many times in the last year that it was more dent than shield. “You understand what I am saying?”

Pauline answered ‘yes’ again with a zombie-like nod. Unlike some of the extractees in the past, Pauline still had two intact feet, but those feet could barely keep her standing. Leona’s now 100% female body retained the body strength she had when she was Leon. For this extraction, Leona would have to strap Pauline over her shoulders, using one arm to keep her balanced and the other to spray red-hot pieces of flesh piercing metal at anyone who stood in her way. Plan B was to leave Pauline in a safe place, then come to extract her after all the ‘doormen’ at the exit port were sent to their graves or into a deep slumber, but it felt too risky and it required inactivation of everyone. Plan C---wounding one of these goons so that three of their buds would stay behind to save him wouldn’t work, as every one of those goons were no doubt out for no one but themselves. But Leona did come with some chemical help, electing to do it all on one fire-blasting trip.

Leona kicked open the door to the floor upstairs and threw in one of Carlos’ infamous but always effective ‘magic dust piniata’ that released a mixture of gas that blinded the open eye with soot and closed the airways just enough to make you think you were dying. “Put this on,” she said to Pauline as she slipped the good mask from her bag on her, and the torn up one on herself.

The reddish fog in the living room did indeed made it look like it was transformed into hell, and Leona lost no time in sending two of the ‘businessmen’ in it to that underground community after they pulled their guns and tried to fire them at her and Pauline. The rest of the lowlifes in their ‘Church going’ business suits lay on the ground, confounded and confused.

“Job one, taken care of,” Leona thought to herself as she carried Pauline down a long hallway at a full run, taking out one guard on the right with a bullet to the head, and the one on the left with two rounds to the heart.

“Job two, taken care of,” she said to herself as she made it outside, her car in plain sight. But also in plain sight were five goons, two on her left flank, two on her right, and one on the roof.

“Job three, about to be taken care of,” Leona said to herself as she rolled onto the ground, rolling Pauline in her protective suit and mask into a ditch built into the garden. Then Leona rolled on top of her, firing two rounds into the goon on the roof, three into each of the hired hands to her right, then one helping each of freshly-baked flying lead into the mouths of the two thugs for hire on her right.

As for the guests inside, Leona did consider collateral damage. Not all of the members of the party were there voluntarily. But identifying who was slave, who was master, and who was being lured into being one or the other would take time. Too much time. Getting Pauline out as quickly as possible before anyone could identify her rescuer was the prime objective now.

Leona threw Pauline into the back seat of the Mustang she had rented from the kind, honest and honorable Cowboy at the Alamo counter, then shot holes into the tires of every vehicle in sight. She then floored it past the house, through main gate, and then into the black of night, absorbing a barrage of bullets that wounded the Old Mare on both of her flanks, but still left her with four good legs and shock absorbers in her all radial hoofs.

“Yes, it is a good day to LIVE,” Leona said to herself in English, then Cree, as she reached the main highway, seeing no trace of unfriendly mobsters on her tail nor any ‘special assignment’ Cops who were on their payroll. “Yes a good day to...” she continued as she looked in the rear view mirror, looking into Pauline’s eyes, the pupils in them now fixed, and not dilating, even when the brights from the truckers in the opposing lane shone into them. Her skin was ghost white, no breath coming through her nose or mouth. A quick feel of her pulses revealed no blood coursing through her body. But there was one thing that DID work, as evidenced by her upturned lips. “At least she died knowing someone gave a shit about her, and thinking that she was worth something,” Leona thought to herself with some degree of satisfaction. “Whoever the hell she really was,” she continued, feeling the frustration of the bigger problem at hand regarding what unauthorized personnel knew about her freelance and often illegal extraction/rehabilitation operation. And who they were working for.

CHAPTER 7

“So, it didn’t go so well there, Leona,” Rachel said on her earbud phone as she looked over the data yet again she had obtained from her rodents over the last week, and the two legged n values from the last 4 months. “Are you coming back with the body?”

“I’d like to, but her family in South Africa wants to bury her,” Leona answered. “And show her paintings at the funeral, with an open casket.”

“Tell them that she died in a fire,” Rachel said, her third eye spotting something in the readouts and graphs that the ones on either side of her nose had somehow missed. “Send them some ashes that you said were all that was left.”

“So you can investigate what’s left of her brain, Rach?”

“Data shouldn’t be wasted,” Rachel replied. “No matter how you got it. Like the medical experiments done on prisoners in WWII in 1945 that resulting in life-SAVING breakthroughs in 1947 for patients and people world-wide.”

“And profits for pharmaceutical companies that got a hold of the medical experiment data before the American or Russian government did,” Leona pointed out.

“I know,” Rachel pointed out. “But I’m so close!”

“To what?” Leona asked. “I AM listening.”

By the tone of Leona’s voice, Rachel knew that she really was listening. And Rachel being Rachel, she lost no time to talk. “Brain changes that happen when crossing the line into learned helplessness DO involve the Nucleus Accumbans, and serotonin levels. And I’ll even buy the published research that says that type 1A, 2A and 3 serotonin receptors are desirable in reversing it, and that activation of 2C receptors makes it worse. But it’s not a serotonin, GABA, or cholinergic story. It’s a tale about dopamine, which is activated by serotonin afferents, in which dopamine type 2 and 3 receptors are the protagonists and type 1 receptors are the no-goodnicks. The key is to create more type 2 and 3 receptors, and decrease the number or activity of type 1 receptors. And associated with this is, as I smell it, the glutamate to glutamine inter-conversion pathway as overseen by our underestimated gatekeeper, glutamine synthetase, which is made in GLIAL cells, particularly reactive astrocytes, those spectator cells around neurons that are the puppet strings that trick us into thinking it’s the marionettes who are making all of the decisions.”

“Very interesting,” Leona said.

“The science and the pharmacology if of it, yeah, Professor Z, but----”

“---I was talking about the metaphors you’ve been using,” Leona interjected. “Mixed, and not organically connected. But it shows that you’ve been using your left, artistic brain, like I assigned you to do. And you’ve been reading something other than published scientific research papers and your own notes, though I will admit the latter often makes more sense than the former.”

“Which requires more investigation, and making the work less observational?” Rachel pressed.

“If by that you mean that you should continue investigating ways to convert one receptor to another using post-translational protein modification factors, or examining receptor ratios after using those experimental drugs I smuggled out of Moscow like Noopept. Or *Plantago asiatica*, *scrophularis* and *liex pubescens*, herbs that Emma dug up from her old Last World Catalog Back to the Earth books on our patients instead of your rats. And the answer to if you can, or should, use any of them yet on MY girls right now is still ‘no’,” Leona asserted.

Rachel remained silent, feeling the silence in the lab pounding into her ears like never before.

“So I’m to ascertain by your silence that you’re being a careful investigator?” Leona continued. “And that I’m not going to have to put YOU in a maze and throw away the key when I come back there before we review our most recent data?”

“I’m...doing my assigned work,” Rachel replied, picking up a book fresh off the printer connected to her super-hyped lap top. “You told me to expand my reading into the arts so I would be a more effective scientist, so, that’s what I did.”

“And the author of this week’s book?” Leona asked. “Katzanskis? Steinbeck? Chekov? Hemingway?”

“No,” Rachel replied as the final pages of the readout slid into her hands. “Someone from THIS century, and who shares our point of view, genderwise.”

“Rach!” Leona shot back. “You aren’t considering becoming a man, are you? Just because me and Stevenson had to undergo sexual reassignment to become complete, and be who we really are, you’re all woman. A pain in the ass for any bastard who may try to make you his ‘little woman’, but there aren’t any Y chromosomes in your genes, or between the ears, or in your body, which is more beautiful and worth taking care of than you think!”

“I know,” Rachel said, running her non-polished and untrimmed fingernails through her scraggly but still luxurious long brown hair. “This author I’m reading would agree with you, and me.”

“An author who agrees with you AND me!” Leona replied. “She’s gotta be a special soul. Twisted. Tormented. But, special.”

“She was, and maybe still is,” Rachel said as she viewed the scientific data regarding the author in question. “Remember Joline Rousseaux? She wrote this piece of Lesbian fiction that’s maybe more fact than fiction. ‘Elly’s Garden’, published from the French into English, and a whole lot of other languages, including some bootleg copies in Arabic. It’s gone viral on Amazon. And even at a dollar a copy, she’s gotta be a millionaire now.”

Leona’s jaw dropped, shock and realization hitting both of her eyes as well as the cerebral hemispheres behind them.

“I know, Professor Z, I can hear you gasp, ‘How the hell does a barely literate French Nigerian who’s a devoted Catholic write a best selling erotic novel only a month after she was released from here, behaviorally cured of learned helplessness after it was inflicted on her by her sadistic fuck of a Master in---“

“---I have three questions,” Leona interjected. “One, who’s the publisher of this book?”

“Atlantian Press,” Rachel replied, reading the fine print on the first page of the kindle version of the book, then went back to her cyber-notes on her reserve, very viral protected, cable-connected tabletop. “Which is part of a money trail connecting Algerian sex slavers, to a tire manufacturer in Turkey, to a pizza delivery store in Brussels, to a real-estate holding company in Montreal, to Joline herself. Question two?”

“I assume you didn’t find this book by googling ‘humanistic and humor-evoking left brain literature for head heavy scientists who are in danger of contracting irreversible dull out virus’,” Leona shot back. “So how did you find this book, written by one of our most model patients, who, according to the texts she sent to me, was living a ‘happily, uneventful normal life’?” she continued, suspicious about something.

“Something I got on my Facebook account when I went on line looking for a literature book I had to read to keep my ‘science isn’t everything’ Mom happy,” Rachel replied.

“Facebook, where everyone knows who you are, and you don’t know who they are?” Leona said. “Pop culture fluff for fluff brains.”

“You said I had to do some ‘fun reading’, and pop culture’s all about fun and no substance, right, Science Mom?” Rachael shot back.

“Yeah, I did say that, didn’t I, ‘Daughter Fearest’,” Leona replied.

“And you said that if I’m doing Life right, work and play should be the same thing, right?”

“Yeah. I did say that, and meant it.”

“So, after I read Jolie’s hot and heavy Lesbian novel, which, by coincidence, was written with words were more literary than anything that came out of her mouth, or that she wrote in the confidential daily journal that we told her to write,” Rachel said.

“And which we had read for her own good. A necessary...transgression,” Leona noted. “And should I ask if you focused on Jolie before or after you ‘accidentally’ ran into her novel?”

“I took another look at her blood work, brain scans, receptor ratios and CSF taps---which she ALLOWED me to do. All of it was collected a month ago just before she left, for my own curiosity. It didn’t make sense, biologically, given with the rest of the data from the forty-three other liberated girls who were released over the last 5 months who, according to our follow up on them, made successful recoveries from learned helplessness. Should I continue?” Rachel said.

“Like you expect me to say ‘no’?” Leona sneered.

“Jolie arrived here after you rescued her with typical learned helplessness blood, brain scan and neurotransmitter level profiles. She snapped back up to well ABOVE healthy normal levels when she was released. Not a victim anymore, biochemically. According to my rodent data, and the samples we unofficially, and I know very illegally got, from the sample pools of now-dead slave masters, which make me conclude that...”

“She’s on her way to the dark side again,” Leona concluded. “Or was always there, able to fake normality when she had to with some biological tricks.”

“And knowing everything we did to bring her out of bondage,” Rachel replied. “Along with the where’s and who’s of our laboratory.”

“Our Sanctuary!” Leona insisted. “And where the hell is Stevenson! He hasn’t called in, and I’ve left 5 messages for him to get back to me ASAP!” Leona screamed, self-observing that it was bad form and bad practice for the captain of a ship to let even her first mate to see the fear inside of her.

“I don’t know?” Rachel replied. “The text I got from him said he was with you.”

“Well, he isn’t,” Leona said. “And I have to...”

The rest of the message from Leona’s phone was garbled, then it turned silent. Rachel tried to call back, but there was no response. She tried to reach Stevenson, but got no response from him either.

“Something wrong?” one of the two ‘n values’ asked Rachel as she looked through the open door to her lab.

“Eh...nothing at all,” Rachel replied to Mirium, who was not Electra anymore. Behind Mirium were the rest of her soon to be liberated sisters, their vulnerable faces lit up by the same fire.

“Blow out the candles, almost-Doctor Rachel” Latisha smiled on behalf of the rest of the congregation. “We all baked this cake, and Emma said it was your birthday.”

The girls who had been given some drugs that Rachel had ‘forgotten’ to tell Leona about sang Happy Birthday to Rachel. The young scientist smiled back at the singing sextet and blew out the candles, then glanced at the smoke they emitted afterwards. Hoping and praying that smoke would not be all that was left of the Rescue Farm in the event that she was the only ‘necessary evil’ left between those girls and their former Masters, or new ones in Leona's absence.

CHAPTER 8

“Do you have anything to declare?” the Canadian Customs Clerk just north of Plattsburg, New York asked Stevenson.

“That I’m glad to be going home to a civilized country,” Stevenson replied in his best Canadian diction, being sure that it lacked any of the expressive upward and assertive downward inflections intrinsic to American English, and of course that the consonants were all pronounced clearly. With of course the exception of the second ‘t’ in Toronto, his home town, according to the passport bearing his real picture but not his real name.

The Customs Clerk punched in some numbers, then stared at the computer screen for three seconds longer than normal. Maybe it was just one of those things customs people did as part of standard operating procedure, like not smiling and certainly not joking with anyone passing in front of their windows, Bill thought. In a facility where, if they felt like it, any entry-level immigration officer could hold you indefinitely despite anything any judge would say North or South of the 49th Parallel.

While the Customs Clerk’s always hidden computer screen displayed a maple leaf, video games or perhaps information that didn’t match the past record that was implanted on Stevenson’s newly forged passport, the Redskin Cop whose appearance this time was far more red than White looked around him at the other passengers who were on the bus. Most of them got on the human-packed sardine can in New York City and were on their way to Montreal, a city which had the fire and flare of the Big Crab Apple but without its racial confrontations, overpriced hotel rooms or parking problems. They seemed like normal citizens on their way to normal recreational activities according to their body language, clothing and the anxiety they felt when pushed into a small room on a packed line with a whole bunch of ‘thou shalt not’ commandments in brightly lettered signs in English and French.

But there was one wall that only Stevenson looked at, his stare still drawn to it while the Customs Clerk adjusted his computer, explaining the delay as ‘technical errors in new computers’. The dates on the pictures of the missing girls and boys went back ten years. No doubt the happy faces in the photos were most likely not happy anymore. If indeed they still were connected to living, breathing bodies.

There was so much that Stevenson wanted to say to the wet around the ears Immigration Officer who, by the uneven tan around his neck, seemed to be new to a regulation paramilitary buzz cut, a uniform that wasn’t from a food chain, and a bang bang on his side that was loaded with real bullets. A firearm that he most likely would never use. Particularly if he faced any of the shitheads and assholes who had abducted and/or killed the kids whose photographs overloaded the ‘Missing’ board.

Stevenson wondered why “Missing’ boards were always around in Canadian Immigration checkpoints and at most every bus station in Canada, but seldom on the American side of the border. Just like he wondered what would happen if the skantily-clothed teenaged girls from ‘Longg Isslanttdee’ who had never seen Canada before wandered into the wrong Montreal neighborhoods. Though the reputation of that city was that it was a

centre, spelt with a 're', for culture, art and gourmet food affordable even on a peasant's budget, Stevenson knew all too well that the Quebec chapters of the Hell's Angels were masters of both cruelty and deception, making the Sons of Anarchy and most of the real-life Anglophone chapters in Ontario and New York seem like Mormon Missionary Ministries.

Most HA's in Montreal were boozers, dopers or, quite literally, motherfuckers, given the fact that they stayed longest with women who had born children with them, or someone else. But those on top, who took it all on as a business, were not. Such was 'Oden', a Ph.D. in physics who decided that he was more interested in the mechanics of motorcycles than the movements of the stars, planets and subatomic particles who lost one of his eyes in a barfight in which he protected three 'waitresses' at his chapter's bar from being raped by five bikers from another chapter.

Oden was fine with everything the HA's did, but when it came to buying and selling women, that's where he drew the line. Some said it was because he was an honorable man trying to do the Right thing. Some said it was because he was a practical one who understood the 'what goes around comes around' maxim by which the universe is ultimately run. And some said that he was just a smart businessman, who knew that there was more money to be had moving non-biological contraband than living flesh. In any case, Oden was a good man to have as a friend. A dangerous one if you had him as an enemy.

"The value of goods you have in your bags?" the Customs Clerk asked Stevenson.

"A hundred and twenty dollars," Stevenson replied, looking downward, in that 'cap in paw' way one is supposed to present oneself to border guards.

"Alcohol, tobacco or firearms?" the next inquiry.

"No," Stevenson said, musing to himself that these Canuks cared about WHAT you were bringing into their pristine country far more than WHO was getting across your work station, or who was locked up in the back of your van that was parked outside.

"Fruits, vegetables, meat, or dairy products?" the next question, asked with the utmost assertion and seriousness.

"No," Stevenson said, recalling that 'milk solids' were part of the ingredient list in the candybars he had in his pocket.

"Illegal drugs?"

"Absolutely not," Stevenson replied, looking straight into the Clerk's 'macho' face to affirm his strong stand against anything that alters one's mind or spirit for recreational thrills, or psychological comfort. Then again, maybe dope dealers would answer the question the same way.

The Clerk looked at Stevenson's documentation, then at him, then the clock. Then he gave back the papers to Stevenson, looking away from him and sternly at the next 'guilty until proven innocent' American citizen who wanted to visit his friendly neighbors to the North, or fellow Canuk who wanted to just get back home to a country that was smart enough to not overpopulate itself and compassionate enough to retain Universal Health Care.

Once off the bus in Montreal, Stevenson was greeted by Oden, whose muscled up torso was covered with biker leather, his hairy head sporting a Santa Hat. "Merry Christmas" he said with a warm smile, as he pulled forward a large, giftwrapped package tied to a two wheeled luggage dolly.

"The elves are making toys a lot lighter than they used to," Stevenson stated, feeling the weight of the gift, knowing fully well that to question Oden's work with regard to the quantity of arms and special explosive was not good for business, or the prospect of living to see another day.

"You were a good boy this year, and Santa gave you everything you wanted on your list," Oden said as they walked towards the exit door past the Salvation Army stand, where the biker-Santa dropped a fifty into the donation pot.

"And what about WHO I wanted under the tree," Stevenson asked.

"If this bitch is doing what I think she is, she's gonna be impaled on my tree," Oden gave him an unsealed Christmas Card.

Stevenson looked inside the card, absorbing the words in as many ways as he was able to.

"The last place my club members saw here," Santa Oden continued. "A literary club that does more than WRITE twisted stories. They make them," he continued. "And once the demons get inside of you, they know how to hide really well till it's safe to come out and fuck up people who are trying to do the right thing. Like you and that trans Injun lady. As a hundred percent man, I can't see what you see in 'her', but that's your business. My business is to see that Jolie doesn't fuck up any other girl's lives, or fuck you over after you rescue her from the dungeon."

Stevenson was always honest about everything with Oden, but there were some things that his allies, and friends, would never understand, and, to be accurate, didn't have to. Like his past as being a woman. And the special bond he had with Leona. For that matter, Stevenson didn't understand much about the 'relationship' with Leona himself. Though they talked about body parts they had gained and lost, they never felt each other's bodies under the sheets or even saw each other naked. There was always too much taking care of others that had to be dealt with first.

Oden walked Stevenson over to his 'sled', a super-souped up van, in front of which were four reindeer, Full Chapter members whose legs wrapped around the saddles of their choppers, the backs of the bikes containing carefully secured and tastefully-wrapped 'gifts for kids'. "And Leona is where?" Stevenson asked Santa.

"At a very heavily guarded moat in front of the dungeon, according to schedule," Oden said, mounting his bike, then leading the entourage forward.

CHAPTER 9

Leona watched Stevenson's van pull into a thicket of woods just as it was getting dark under a full moon. Santa's leather-clad Biker elves unloaded the wrapped gifts from their hogs. Santa Oden gave him a handshake and a hearty 'man hug'. Then Old Saint Nick slithered into the woods with his buds, instructing his buds to keep their eyes on their bikes, and not Stevenson's 'woman'.

"I got everything I think we need," Stevenson said to Leona after opening up the gift-wrapped toys, all very functional and delivered to order. "You?"

"Everything I KNOW we need," Leona said, taking off her two thousand dollar Niemann Marcus trench coat, revealing a black leather skin-tight dress under it, Henna tattoos praising Satan on her arms and shoulders. "You'll need this," she said, handing Stevenson a red monk's with a hood. "And this," she continued, handing him a copy of Joline's new book. "It's officially a book reading and book signing party," she said, pointing Stevenson's attention to the Cops outside the main door of the Mansion. Meanwhile, limos pulled into the Mansion driveway, not two hundred yards beyond the woods, their well-dressed passengers escorted out of their cars by even better dressed butlers and maids.

"It sure does look like a gala for the Metropolitan Opera in there," Stevenson commented regarding the uptown 'going to the Concert Hall' attire of the guests. "Brilliant!" he continued as Leona gave him black tuxedo-like jacket and tie to go with his black trousers, then a coat to go over it.

"So, let's see what Santa gave us for Christmas," Leona said as she opened the first two toys. "Hmmm a SEAL tomahawk. Razer-sharp edge that can split a pubic hair, with a shank strong enough to cut through a metal chain or the asshole's neck who's using that chain to keep a once-free girl, or woman, 'obedient'. One for you, one for me. Two super-mini thunderblasts to blind anyone who stands in our way. Concealable mini-grenades and super-microsized automatic pistols that rival anything Carlos built so well but refused to market."

"And bigger toys for the elves," Stevenson said regarding the rest of the illegal-to-own in Canada or the US firearms that the bikers labeled 'ours to use for this party'. "And what

if Jolie has something to say about us getting her out of the Santa workshop inside that mansion?" he inquired of his very hot looking date as he put the blood monk's robe over his tux. "The one who takes things AWAY from you if you've been a good girl, boy or 'whatever' in between?"

"I'll have a very few words to say to, then at her," Leona grunted. "About how bad a girl she's really been. Or maybe always was," she said. Then, Leona stopped, in mid contemplation. "How did all of this start?" she asked Stevenson.

"With Jolie?" Stevenson said. "A French Algerian born to Catholic parents who operated a grocery store in Nancy, France who wanted to marry her off to a doctor was rich, dedicated and honest. But, Jolie wanted to become a bride of Christ instead. She became a Novice at a Nunnery in Calais and was send to town to buy wine and crackers that would be blessed by the priest at the ceremony where she was going to be initiated as a Sister. But she never made it back for the ceremony. A slaver who knew there was a prime market for virgin meat grabbed her just before Halloween. There was a special market that year for special virgin meat by devotees of the boss DOWNstairs."

"You mean, Satan," Leona said. "Who doesn't exist, in reality, you know."

"Maybe so, maybe not," Stevenson replied, feeling the 'evil' from the robe penetrating through the cloth into his skin. "But she was forced to be raped by a Dominatrix 'Mother Superior' who wore a devil mask and sang Satanic verses, then forced Jolie to sing the verses with her."

"Unless she wanted to be whipped with another ten lashes with a cat of nine tails, or have someone else whipped twenty times," Leona noted. "Or so she told us."

"Then she serviced women who had a fetish for wearing penises," Stevenson continued. "Which is verified."

"I know," Leona conceded. "After which cats were eviscerated without anesthesia, and eaten, raw, while they were still screaming in pain. Since eating someone else's fear makes you have none at all."

"And eating another person's flesh, gives you power over their soul," Stevenson noted. "Which those deluded souls inside that mansion believe."

"They're called assholes, shitheads, cunts, and pricks," Leona grunted. "Or another name for one of them is...Jolie."

"We don't know that yet," Stevenson said.

"We will soon enough," Leona replied with a vengeful grunt. Feeling the anger rush through her veins. The urge to see that justice is done. The need to neutralize Jolie

any way possible, ideally with as much pain as possible, so that the traitorous cunt would know the agony of being betrayed, and betraying others.

Yes, it was a 'Tears of the Sun' moment that extractors and liberators were allowed to be carried away with. And, as necessary part of the cycle to get the job done, required to 'enjoy' somehow. But as Leona was visualizing how she would neutralize the cunts, assholes, pricks and bastards inside who were about to torture another innocent animal and sacrifice another virgin human, she noticed something about her own 'virginity'. An orgasm followed by seepage of cum from her vaginal hole. The female counterpart of a 'woody' that pricks like Boris Petrovitch and other sadistic fuckhead male bastards sprouted between their legs each time they embarked on a kill.

Was Leona addicted to exerting cruelty on others just like the Masters and Mobsters she was so good at eliminating were? Maybe Emma was right when she warned son-turned-daughter that she could become an 'evil' rather than merely an 'necessary evil'. Either way, it didn't much matter, on this night anyway. Extracting Jolie out of the Mansion, as either an informant or a victim, would most probably cost Leona her life this time. It was a projection, yes, but, this night anyway, a hope. Or perhaps a redemption of sorts, as Leona had defied God for being an underachiever so many times that she perhaps had made too many deals with the devil. And the devil, real or imagined, was waiting inside the Mansion for her.

The butler at the invitation-only party seemed civil, and civilized. As did the general banter between the guests in the hallway as they surrendered their citizen coats, revealing very non-citizen outfits underneath, each paired with each other.

"So, who am I again?" Bill Stevenson, in his white on white Southern preacher suit, asked Leona in her skin-tight black leather 'demoness' dress. "The submissive again? Slave obeying the Master, or Mistress?"

"You can be a dominant," she said with promising heart. "When I give you permission to do so of course," she continued with an 'interesting' smile. One that Bill recalled from his own experiences with the BDSM world, in which shifting of power and design of such was out mutual consent. A world he investigated on his own in the course of his duty as a cop, and need to explore his inner potentials as a man who was once a woman.

Stevenson recalled how liberating it was to let someone else tell him what to do, tell him what to feel, and remove the burden of ever-present responsibility and never-ending vigilance. How that soft voice from the Masters, and Mistresses, behind him drove fear into him initially while he was tied up, most particularly when they were silent. But how free it was to trust them. And to take care of him, like a stern mother or all knowing father who had his best interest at heart, and mind. Of course, that was when the limits of what the Masters and Mistresses could do was honored.

Bill's last experience as a submissive was more like enslavement, in which moderate hitting became hard beating. The whips used on his back acquiring metal spikes. The

'make me eat whatever food you think I should have out of the refrigerator' degenerated into accessing fecal material from the toilet. Had it not been for Bill's ability to break out of the cuffs he was shackled with, he perhaps would have never escaped the last dungeon, or Mistress. He did forgive 'Lady Vladimira' for her transgressions, and after letting her de-toxify from the whiskey and cocaine she had imbibed, against the rules of the BDSM Group, he dropped all charges against her. But Lady Vladimira became addicted to the power, or perhaps was possessed by something else. Perhaps something that was more powerful than any man or woman born of flesh.

"You look scared," Leona said to Bill.

"I am..." replied, hoping that none of the people around him who were adopting outfits from the Underworld would hear him. "...scared."

"Of dying?" she mused. "We're all destined to go to the Light in the end anyway. It's not such a bad place."

"Unless we get diverted into another place," Bill replied, seeing several men and women around him who looked like the spitting image of Satan himself, or herself. "The elevator downstairs."

"They're just evil spirits, small s," Leona said. "As beatable as the assholes who are still in their bodies. And as for the big bad devil who signs all of their paychecks and keeps them gamefully employed as minions of evil, I say to them---

"---be gone, in the name of Jesus, or Buddha, or someone a lot more powerful than ourselves," Bill interjected, aiming his voice at entities he seemed to be able to see floating around the room, coming in through the windows, the mouths of the solid-citizen guests, and from the back door of a scantily clad female gladiator as he let out a bolus of flatulent cloud of undigested beans into the face of a man dressed as a Nun. "Yes, you tell them to be gone!" he said again, as he discretely rubbed the cross concealed in his pocket.

"You may want to point that magic over there," Leona said to him as she rubbed some sweetgrass between her breasts. "To the warm spaces over towards the free bar that somehow got cold. And to the smell of rotting flesh being barbequed by sulfer and brimstone brickettes coming from---

"---the underground dungeon?" Leona interjected, bringing Bill and her attention back to the world you could see more easily than you could feel. "On the other side of the door that looks like it leads to a broom closet."

Said door opened up, and another butler invited the guests to proceed down the stairs. The butler was clad in a traditional imitation Old English tux, with slicked back perfectly combed hair, spit-shined Oxfords on his feet. The kind of faceless entity who was well paid to be anonymous, and unnoticed, keeping his head down when the guests passed, the

protocol for the uppity guests of course being to not consider a servant's face worthy of wasting three seconds of their valuable time looking at. But when Leona and Bill passed him, they did take a look at his face, through the corners of their now very alerted eyes.

"It's Jolie," Leona said to herself, hoping that that terrifying thought did not come out in words that could be heard by the other guests, and the now well armed guards in a variety of Satanic. "She's dressed according to the main character in her best-selling book. If indeed it was her book," she thought as she did a quick inventory of the micro-sized weaponry hidden under her demoness outfit, and embedded inside her snatch. "But she's possessed by something now. The kick of being a trained sadist, or a subservient submissive. In any case, it's more important to find who wrote that best seller she wrote, or put into her head the ability to be so literary, and popular, even if it is the devil himself. Or maybe herself?"

Stevenson was thinking the same thing, or so Leona hoped. She found herself doubting a lot more than if Satan did exist, and if there was a clitoris or penis between the legs. Could she really pull off another miracle rescue? Sure, she evaded being killed in twenty-four liberation missions to date. But each time, the bullets got closer to her vital organs. Two of them, shratnel pieces she named 'twetle dee' and 'twedel dumb', had found safe havens in her neck, aching for an invitation to enter the spinal cord. Each of those metallic visitors to the temple she called her body reminded her of their presence with a thud that felt more like a jolt.

Trying to get them removed by even the best neurosurgeons Leona knew from the science days would be very risky, and most certainly involve said 'straight arrows' making official police reports that would find their way to Cops who were in bed with the criminals she was now dedicated to neutralize and/or eliminate. "But," she thought as she tried to let hope replace fear, "Rachel has a brilliant head, and her surgical skills when putting implants into rat brains are very, very good. Maybe when they get to 'excellent', and the survival rates for said rodents go up from 89 to 97 percent, I would consider letting Rachel operate on me." Of course, such would involve Rachel getting another year of education in Leona's very unofficial research lab. And, even as the most lobotomized rat knew, Leona had to survive this rescue operation and find the shithead slave Master who had reclaimed Jolie as his, or her property, and was working on shutting down the Rehab Center for good.

Meanwhile, back in the world outside of Leona's abyss, every one of the guests was given a red robe with a hood to put on as a prelude to the ceremony that would lead to the all you can smoke, toke, drink and fornicate festival, with an Ancient Roman theme. The ceremony at the altar did involve rotting flesh. The hunk of meat in the center of it all could have been from a large cat, small dog or perhaps small child, and it was being roasted over a pit of brickettes which smelled of sulfur. "Prepare ye to eat of the flesh of the innocents, so ye can become alive again," the 'Priestess' half-sung as a repeating incantation. "So we may sacrifice to that which is Greater than ourselves and receive its Protection." But to what Deity was she trying to get approval? And was this homegrown Alberta woman trying to put on an educated English accent the real Priestess

or just another drone? Or perhaps a slave whose body and mind were completely owned by her master? Or...

"..Amateurs playing at being Satanists," Leona whispered to Stevenson as the other guests in front of them proceeded to imbibe slices of the roasted meat which were dipped into what looked like real blood. "Or ex-Catholics thinking that they're honoring the Pagan Jesus," she continued.

"Armed as well as any Christian crusaders I've read about," Stevenson replied, noting the bulges under the robes of the 'monks' who seemed taller than everyone else. "And maybe any of the mercenaries with Christian first names that you ever met. Ask me, we've walked into something we can't get out of. At least the way we planned it."

"So, what's your new plan?" Leona asked as she noted the first worshipers who had just received the 'body and blood' of the deity being caressed by a High Priestess. Her cat-claw long-nailed fingers 'cleansed' their chest, arms, legs, then the junction between the latter, passing them on to the next chamber with a kiss on the forehead, then a smack on the ass. "If we don't make our move now, towards the nearest exit, or move against those chanting 'monks', it'll be our legs, arms and transplanted reproductive parts on the barbeque pit for sure."

"Way ahead of you, Doctor Leona," Stevenson whispered, discretely plugging his ears with a compressed piece of styrofoam he still had in his pocket. "That third brain between us is on full alert."

"Which we better ram into full throttle in say, seven, Officer Bill," Leona said doing the same, as she was advanced up the line for purification by the pair of defective and dangerous manifestations of human imperfection behind her.

"Five," Stevenson said with outstretched fingers visible, he hoped, only to his 'date'.

On the unsaid count of one, Bill flashed her thunderstick at the Monks, blinding their eyes with light, and evoking an ear piercing shrill that caused everyone else in the room to hear nothing but pain between their ears. Leona threw three stun grenades into each as many corners of the dungeon, their explosion throwing up red smoke and for those bold enough to stand up to face it, small bits of shratnel that didn't penetrate the skin but made it feel like your skin was on fire.

Bill shot one tranquilizer dart into the Priestess's chest arm, causing her to fall, roll over out of his robes. Stevenson wrapped 'her' up in a body suit, then made a run for door upstairs through which they came. Leona followed, shooting stun bullets at whoever dared to follow.

Meanwhile, at the top of the door, the butler, who was once Jolie, blocked their exit, brandishing a sawed off shotgun, aimed at Bill. "The ceremony is not over, Sir," she said with zombified eyes. "You may leave after the ceremony is---"

Before Stevenson could say ‘why the fuck did you shoot my favorite and most beloved liberated slave’, Leona fired a dart into Jolie’s arm. As she knew how to aim it at the vein rather than the muscle, it inactivated her within 2 seconds. “Time for us to leave, Grasshopper,” Leona said in a calm Zen voice as ‘Master Quan’ from the old Kung Fu Show to Bill as she flung Jolie over her left shoulder and fired real bullets into now very real assailants working their way up the stairs.

As for the exit door on ground level, Stevenson blasted those at that entrance with the thunderstick, followed by a barrage of gunfire, with real bullets this time. They fell like ducks at a shooting gallery, perhaps because their legs got shot up, or perhaps more vital parts of them were inactivated permanently. But at the moment, Bill didn’t seem to care. He’d worry about collateral damage later. Or so Leona hoped as they both made their way with their drugged cargo, to a van driven by “Biker Santa” which vanished unto the night.

“Ironic, isn’t it?” a pumped up Leona commented to still terrified Bill as they were driven to Biker Santa’s very private workshop while his leather-clad reindeer fired rounds into any potential moving vehicle that could follow them. “Yeah, it’s ironic...” Leona said as she puffed a satisfied drag from a cigarette.

“...that you’re coming in your panties and I almost pissed in my pants,” Bill replied.

“No,” Leona said, looking at her watch. “We just abducted one of ours and one of theirs from a hostile camp in 27 seconds. In the same way that they abduct our people from the street, or anywhere else.”

“A lot faster than in 27 seconds, in my experience anyway,” Bill replied.

“Yeah,” Leona commented, brought back to the reality of the current situation, and the unspoken tragedies of her previous situations. “In mine too.”

CHAPTER 10

“So, she knows nothing, and is saying less,” Emma said to Leona as she watched Rachel inject yet another dose of ‘truth serum’ into Jolie’s veins through the one way glass at the Rehab Center’s interrogation room. “But why do you still have her arms and legs tied to the chair?”

“For her own protection,” Leona replied, pointing Emma to the very recent slashes on her wrists, then watched Jolie’s possessed eyes, ocular portholes that seemed to follow her own, even behind the one way mirror. “And of course, yours.”

“What about your protection?” Emma pointed out to the renegade, crusader daughter who used to be her obedient, fun-loving son. “And Rachel’s. She’s alone in there with her, you know, Leon, I mean, Leona.”

“Yeah, I know, Emma, I mean, Mom,” Leona shot back as a reminder of their current relationship as it has to be redefined after Leon’s final demise and Leona’s full manifestation. “After I extracted Jolie from her Master, Rachel doctored her back to health, and found a way into her head.”

“After I advised her to find a way into her heart first, Leona,” Emma reminded her daughter as a daughter. “Remember?”

“Yeah, I do,” Leona replied, accepted a hug of approval from the woman who finally accepted Leona as a woman only after she had rescued her from Slave Masters back on the Rez. A Reservation where Emma’s husband, and Leona’s father, sacrificed himself so that they could live, and that Chief Boris, the head of that Slave Ring, would die.

“So, this means I can go in there and bring Jolie some cookies, Leona?” Emma asked, pulling out a bag of freshly baked pastry, which Leona sniffed.

“Oatmeal raisin with bran flakes and Maui Wowi, Mom?” Leona replied.

“Port Alberni Alfalfa,” Emma asserted. “Grown legally now in Portland.”

“If only getting everyone stoned on weed would put all of us arm in arm with each other rather than at each other’s throats,” Leona lamented. “What Jolie has become, and why, isn’t as simple as that.”

“Maybe,” Emma conceded. “But giving your recaptured patients, as well as captured bad guys, weed to make them talk. You haven’t tried it yet, have you?”

”No, I haven’t, but---”

“---Look, Leon, Leona or whoever you are in transition of becoming now!” the ex-hippie Mom who never raised her voice blasted out. “You’re running out of time, and WE’RE in need of answers! That WE includes me, Rachel, Bill, the girls who are in here for healing. And the untold larger number of girls out there who will be in need of healing if we can’t find the assholes who ‘Master Paul’ are one clue away from finding this place and putting us all in electric dog collars that we’ll never get out of! Verstehen Sie, Dumpkopf!!!”

“Yeah, I know,” Leona replied. She unlocked the door to the interrogation room, allowing Emma to enter into the chamber with her weed laced cookies. At first Jolie refused to eat them. To assure their patient and/or prisoner of their safety, Emma took a bite, then requested Rachel to do so. After release of her right arm, Jolie trusted the baked goods and the baker. She found the cookies to her liking, as did Rachel, who

quickly developed more of an appetite than she thought she had. Then instead of Q and A, something resembling a conversation emerged between the three women.

Leona listened, trying to figure out which side of the fence delineating good and evil Jolie was on. Statements that were more true than false seemed to be coming out of her head and into her mind, but they didn't relate much to the case at hand. Even when Leona brought Rachel's attention to the list of questions she had sent in with Emma. But there was one benefit to this interrogation that had thus far provided no real answers. Rachel was having fun. Laughing. Being silly. So was Jolie. And even Emma seemed to loosen up. In the meantime, Leona focused on seeing that the voice recorder had enough tape in it to capture anything meaningful to the case at hand. And then on the detainee in the next room, who was definitely more of a prisoner than a patient.

"She's not going to tell you anything about me, or anyone else, you know," the very sober and very non-stoned Priestess from the Dungeon boasted to Leona. "And these chains you have on my feet and hands will be chopped away very soon, and used to hang you by the neck, or the balls," she proclaimed to Stevenson and Leona. She took another sip of orange juice on the table. "Good OJ. With, no doubt, some elements in it that have more than oranges. But there is one question I'd like to ask you before whatever is in this makes me answer SOME of your questions."

"I'm all ears," Bill said, with a warm smile flopping the enlarged elephant-sized reverse megaphones on both sides of his head, while Leona stared at the woman without any emotion except determination.

"How did you get me out of Canada?" the extracted Priestess from the Canuk Satanic Ball asked. "I mean, whenever I cross the border into the States, they search through everything. And the way you Yanks spend more time building fences than solving problems that make those fences necessary, it's no wonder that getting into your country is harder than getting an Big Black Alchy Dick into a sober Mormon woman, or a ---"

"---Wait a minute!" Leona interjected. "How did you know we took you to America? You were drugged all the way in here, and I know you saw and heard nothing till I personally reversed you from---"

"---A secretly formulated drug that you thought only YOU have?" the Canadian Priestess laughed. "I know more about you and your people than you know will ever know about me and my people."

"An old trick that works in plot-lines in B movies, and sometimes in B-rated drug-running operations," Stevenson pointed out.

"Or the truth, which will die with me," she replied.

“Not on our watch,” Leona claimed. “We have your arms and legs chained. And unless you can bite your way through the chains to your radial artery, you’re going to tell us what we need to know.”

“About me, or Jolie?” she said.

“Jolie first,” Leona interjected, against Bill’s wishes, and the faculty of clear reasoning.

“Sure,” the Priestess said. “I had Jolie in bed, once. She had me in bed twice. It was a special experience that was special for both of us.” She closed her eyes, lost in the imaginations of carnal lust of the first magnitude. “When she felt my legs, I felt her breasts, and we felt each other’s tongues. Then licked each other on the arms, neck, then chest, then worked our way down, down, down, to the flower. To lick the nectar of the flower, singing with Lord Jim Morrison on the CD player, ‘This is the End’”.

Bill endured with disgust, and Leona looked on with curiosity, as the demonic Priestess with no name, except for ‘Salvation’ to her subjects, sang ‘This is the End’ again and again, rocking back and forth in her chair, pumping her breasts up, then seeming to move the muscles around her clit in rhythm with the song. Getting more seductive within herself with each beat, then emanating a final beat in which she went into full self-induced orgasm. Suddenly her eyes opened, and her heart stopped, and she fell motionless on the back of the chair. Falling onto the floor between her legs was blood, with specks of glass in it. And on the glass, the whiff of arsenic, picked up immediately by Leona’s estrogen-supported nose.

“Fuck! She did an Agnes McFee on us!” Leona screamed out while Bill and her tried to revive her back to life. “Serial killer who snuffed 55 gold miners in Old West British Columbia then avoided the noose by sneaking arsenic in her snatch. Why the fuck didn’t I see that coming?!”

“Because we didn’t see this coming either,” Bill said, noting a beeping on the Priestess’s thus-far silent cell phone. “Someone calling here, just in the nick of time?” he proposed.

“Or her calling out, giving them our location,” Leona found herself realizing.

CHAPTER 12

Though Leona upgraded the sensing devices around the perimeter of the Rehab Center, nothing except a horny male groundhog pursuing a stray cat in heat came onto the property from the ground. As for the air, the stars still hid behind the dark fog that lingered over Potterburg no matter how much the wind tried to blow in clear sky.

As for the Canuk Priestess with no name, she did have an identity. As she never got a Moscow manicure, Bill was able to get fingerprints from her dead hands and got them

assessed by Norman King, a Winnipeg Cop who dated Bill when he was Billie and still claimed that though it was the shortest relationship he ever had, it was the one he would go to the Happy Hunting Grounds thinking about most.

The mystery Demoness was none other than Janet Smith, a Churchgoing housewife from a small Alberta town with a name even duller than hers, who got a bad case of empty nest syndrome when her kids left for REAL lives in Calgary and Vancouver. After finding out that her hubby was both unfaithful and boring, she took him to the cleaners in the courts, allowing her to experiment with recreational medications, men and morality systems. The combination got her convicted of some misdemeanors, and acquitted of several felonies. With every arrest, Janet-turned-Dominira made more contacts, eventually rising up in the BDSM, Satanic Cult and human trafficking worlds. There was talk of even giving her a tv show of her own for specialty channels viewable by discriminating gentlemen and exploratory ladies. But that deal went South when she contracted a contagious, progressive disease for which there was no cure.

The nature of that disease was not in her files, as it was suspected that it was caused by being around US and Canadian Army biotoxins that officially didn't exist. In any case, when Leona and Bill encountered her, she had a month to live, which was the reason why she kept a special suicide package inside her vaginal chamber. According to Norman, Janet was a 'disposable pawn' who didn't even know there was a chess game going on. With regard to the reasons for her death, Norman and Bill decided that it would officially be a car accident, so that Janet's hopefully still beloved son and daughter living normal lives in burb-land in Calgary could collect on her life insurance policy.

As for the taped interview of Jolie, the only thing of interest was the very stoned (thanks to Emma's herbal-infused brownies) trio of Emma, Rachel and Jolie singing 'Alice's Restaurant'. With lyrics that Emma recalled from her hippie days with Leona's Red Power father at the Rez, embellished later by a French and English versions of the song by Jolie and Rachel with toilet humor in it that would make 'Bridesmaid' look like a G-rated Disney film. And when the singing was over, Jolie remembered nothing of the song, and even less about the events that happened to her after she left the Rehab Center.

"So," Bill Stevenson said to Leona when he took her on a forced hour of fishing at the pond at the Rehab Center so she could experience quiet, and perhaps even patience. "Maybe Master Paul's telling me that one of our graduates is a mole is something he just made up. Either to make himself feel important, or just to fuck us up. Actually, to fuck me up. After what we did to his cousin's operations, the last thing he wants me, or YOU, to do is to go on thinking that there's no one looking over our shoulder, waiting to shove a knife in our back. Ridicule us from the grave."

"Or pull us into it with him, when we're not looking," Leona said as she looked over Bill's left shoulder, focusing on something with her eye, grabbing hold of the knife under her shirt.

“What? Where!!!” Bill said, pulling out his gun, pointing it in the direction of Leona’s stare, hiding his terror under a clenched tooth growl.

“So,” she smiled back. “You don’t believe that Master Paul’s claim that one of our graduates is on the warpath against her healer-teachers is a myth any more than I do.”

“No, I don’t,” he grumbled, collecting himself. “And it would be nice, and considerate, if you just asked me instead of scaring me half to fucking death.”

“Haven’t you heard? Fear is our friend, Bill,” Leona replied, extending her firm hand to his shaking shoulder.

“And just because everyone is out to get you is no reason to be paranoid, yeah, I know,” he concluded, pulling away from Leona before she could show him how deeply she really did feel about him. “Time for us to leave, Weedchopper,” he said as he pulled in his fishing rod and cut the hooks off the line.

“Not yet, I’m not finished being patient,” Leona replied, keeping her line in the water.

“Or coming here for what I promised you’d get,” Bill said, noting that Leona, for the first time in all of their fishing trip-talks, actually had something on the hook.

“He feels big,” she said, having not experienced what it was like to actually catch a fish. “What do I do?”

“Visualize cooking him up in a frying pan with corn oil and oregano,” Bill said.

“What if he’s a she?” Leona asked, doing her best to bend move with the fish, but not on her terms.

“Then visualize her in a sautee pot with butter and lemon,” he said. “Just don’t let it go.”

Leona seemed to enjoy the give and take with dinner at the other end of the line. For a few magical moments, she allowed herself to enjoy life. Something she requested that her patients do, and that Rachel ‘experiment’ with. It was part of being a full woman. Nay, part of being a fulfilled humanoid. Giving up control of everything to the Everything in all things, which happened when the fish threw Leona off balance, plummeting her into the water, still holding onto the pole. And armed with a new weapon against the fish, and the frustrations of life above the surface of the water. Soaking wet from head to toe, she was, yes, laughing! Laughing was one of those things that Leona required all of the extracted slaves to do as an indication that they had been liberated. And if they were able to make others laugh, they were not only liberated but they had become liberators.

Bill smiled vicariously as he watched Leona and the fish have their war of wits and wills. Each seemed to be playing with the other, in a winner take all event. He found himself letting go himself, then got thrown off balance by a plane flying overhead.

Before the plane could be identified as friend or foe, Leona threw the fishing rod into the water and pulled out the assault rifle she had left on the bank of the creek. Bill took out his spy glasses and looked at the craft Leona had in her sites.

“A delivery plane,” he said, not quite identifying it.

“That’s not delivering anything I ordered,” she continued, cocking the hammer on a Carlos-special anti-aircraft rifle, preparing to force the plane into a premature landing.

“But something that I think we need, from a good friend,” Bill said, giving the binoculars to Leona.

“Your Montreal biker buds do deliveries by the air now?” she said after seeing the gang colors for Oden's chapter on the wings, then a parachute floating from the plane as it made a quick U turn and headed North again. “Is it something we want, or need?” she asked.

“If we’re doing our jobs right, and effectively, what we want and need should be the same thing,” he said. “But I can tell you what isn’t in the early Christmas package.”

Leona looked with regret at the fish in the pond that had escaped the hook, for now. “A frying pan with butter, lemon and oregano is your final destiny,” she said, smiling at the fish, wishing it a good, long life. One that she was sure would be longer than hers, according to even the most optimistic of predictors.

CHAPTER 13

“Early Christmas presents, we get these for what?” Tatiana said as the girls in the Rehab Center went through the portion of the Biker Santa delivery that Leona, Bill, Rachel and now Emma said was appropriate for them.

“To look hot again?” Latesha said regarding the very feminine, and very expensive clothing laid before them, feeling for the moment more comfortable and safe in the second hand blue jeans and lumberjack shirts Leona picked up from the men’s department at the Salvation Army in Potterburg. “You want me to look hot?”

“To feel beautiful,” Rachel said with a warm smile. As Mirium, Mara, Victoria and even the oft-times androgenous Yung allowed their fingers to sense the softness and

smooth texture of the variety of tasteful ladies' ware which let them imagine themselves as a lady rather than a 'babe', or a 'chic'.

"To BE beautiful, on the inside and the outside," Leona added, coached on to do so by Emma, behind her.

"What does HE say about it?" Mirium said, looking to Bill, perhaps falling back into letting the Mennonite man on the farm decide what kind of woman she should be, according to tradition. Or perhaps it was a matter of trusting a man rather than merely obeying him. Or, Leona pondered, it was because Mirium was connecting to the part of Bill that was still a woman. "I want to know what Bill says about this outfit before I put it on," she said regarding the business suit with the knee length pencil flaired skirt that said 'angelic', and the 'totally eighties but coming back forever' shoulder pads that said 'empowered'.

"It makes you look smart," Bill smiled back as he looked at his watch, and excused himself to take care of a routine yet still necessary matter.

"Which you ALL are already," Leona added. "And which YOU'LL know and the whole world will know after you use these," she continued, presenting each of them with an individually wrapped package.

"What this be?" Lakesha said regarding the slab of cyber-wear with her name engraved on it. "Somethin' I play video games on?"

"A kindle," Mara said regarding her 'video game' slab. "For reading books."

"What books?" Victoria said regarding her video slab. "I always hated reading."

"You'll start liking it when you read what's on your kindle," Rachel said. "And like it even more when you start writing your own books."

"Which you can do on those lap top computers under them," Leona added.

"And we supposed to write? Who gives shit about what we read and write? Outside of here, anyway," Tatiania said, relating with her shaking voice her terror of going back out into the world. Either to her home back in the old country, or with the refugee status in this new one which Leona was able to arrange with a mixture of finesse, reason and blackmail. "Who care about how smart we are outside of here?" she blasted out.

"Your new teachers, who I think you'll enjoy learning from," Rachel said with a big smile. "Bachelors at first. Then the Masters."

All of the girls dropped their lap tops, Kindles and the packages under them. They were terrified, looking to each other now for whatever support or trust they could get. Leona rolled her eyes, noting that once again Rachel's consciousness was still in the library

rather than in the world those books were writing about. “What almost-doctor Rachel means, is that you’re all enrolled with full scholarships in colleges where you’ll get a Bachelor’s degree. Then, with some push and pull from some people I know, and Rachel may know too one day, a Master’s degree. Maybe even a Doctorate!”

“What if I don’t wanna be a doctor?” Lakesha said.

Before Rachel came out with what the difference between a doctor and a Doctorate is, Leona put her hand in front of the smart, but not yet wise, graduate student’s mouth. “A doctor gets an MD.”

“From a medical school, which stands for,---“ Rachel said.

“---Me Doctor, M.D.” Leona added.

The girls laughed. Leona looked at Rachel, who seemed to have learned, yet again, that humor is a better package for information transfer than plain data, even if it is statistically verified.

“And a Doctorate is...”

“A Ph.D.,” Mara said in her heavy Arabic accent. “Doctor of Philosophy.”

“Then it should be a D. Ph,” Lakesha said. “Reading it from left to right.” She turned to more often than not silent Mara, curious about something. “How is it that you know a Ph.D. is a Doctorate of Philosophy, girl?”

“Because in Arabic we read from right to left,” Mara replied.

The rest of the girls shared some gentle laughter. Humor that was based in sharing a joke rather than someone being the butt of one. Rare in the worlds they had been enslaved in, and for that matter, rare in the ‘free and civilized’ world they are about to go into soon. And as for Mara, Leona tagged on another mark on her report card. Mara posed her remark regarding Arabic being read from right to left as a statement, not a question. Something she had not done with regard to a tenth of her ‘statements’ since her arrival at the Center 4 months ago after her extraction from Masters who often wouldn’t let her talk at all.

Yes, Mara’s refusal to put a question mark at the end of each statement reflected a renewed belief in herself, as well as a refusal for the Saudi-raised 17 year old to talk like American 17 year olds, who littered their speech with ‘like’ and ‘ya knows’, ending each sentence with a question mark. Serving masters who they didn’t even know they were being enslaved by.

Yes, it had been a good year for the girls, and a productive one for the center. The girls dream-talked about what kind of Bachelors and Doctorates they wanted to get, through

scholarships ‘negotiated’ with the Suits by Bill’s biker buds, Bill, and Leona. Some of them even talked about having husbands, and kids of their own. Leona felt rewarded. These girls will carry on the flame of love, freedom and compassion. And without being a burn out like she had become. Hey, maybe one of these girls, probably with the help of Rachel, could come up with the cure for Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and the other ailments that troubled Leona’s mind during the day, and infiltrated her nightmares most of the night.

“A PBS special about this place, Leona?” Emma suggested. “You’ve done more for these kids, and so many more,” she continued. “Something which I’m sure Leon couldn’t have done.”

Leona smiled. An even better Christmas gift that no biker, Santa or generous Greek god could have dropped from the sky. Her Mom, the one who fought most against her becoming a woman biologically, now not only accepted that transition as valid. But she saw it as something to be valued. Leona felt a mother-daughter-who-used-to-be-son hug coming on. But just as Leona turned around to Emma for that longed for embrace, Bill came back from his appointed rounds.

“This was in the mailbox in town,” he said.

“Which still belongs to no one who lives here,” she commented as she looked at it. “Addressed to—“

“Rachel, this time,” Bill said.

“Who doesn’t officially live or work here,” Leona said.

“Tell that to the person with this return address,” he said. “1308 West 57th Street, NYC.”

“Which puts the sender’s address in middle of the Hudson River!”

CHAPTER 14

“It’s probably a joke,” Rachel said as she inserted a pipette into a rat’s brain regarding the package Leona held in her shaking left hand, her mentor’s left clenched in a fist. “By the handwriting, and the underwater location he kept fantasizing about, it’s probably from a very EX-boyfriend who---“

“---Knows where you are!” Leona screamed out. “How!”

“‘Why’ is the question,” Rachel said as she carefully lowered the pipette into the brain of the rodent which was trained to be a sadistic prick, postulating this time that the extract inside that pipette would turn him into a saint, or at least an ‘average Joe’ rodent . “Why would Egmont, named after a Beethoven opera he never saw and hated when he did, want to get me back into being ‘fun’ again. Mindless, stupid, non-purposeless ‘fun’. As wasteful as...hmmm...” she hesitated, trying to get her mind to formulate a pun that would have social impact and elicit the visceral response called ‘humor’.

“How did you find him!?” Leona screeched. “And why is he contacting you here!?”

“I don’t know. Maybe if you open the package, we’ll both find out?” Rachel replied, calmly, and logically.

Leona took in a deep breath and opened the package, while Rachel let loose with the bolus of CIE-3, ‘Compassion inducing extract 3’, which she hoped would be more effective than extract 1, and less toxic than extract 2.

“It’s a bunch of books,” Leona said.

“About?”

“Two hundred pages each,” Leona shot back, forcing Rachel to look at them.

“‘How to’ books about being hip, cool, or ‘whatever’,” she said regarding the humorous instructional books about being such. “I used to find them funny. I studied them on line recently, got back to him on e mail about my findings.”

“And these?” Leona said regarding the music CDs enclosed.

“Country Crap, Hip Hop Hoak and Heavy Metal that sinks down into the depths of mediocrity if you’re smart enough to turn down the volume,” she said. “We used to rock our heads and tap our feet to those things, a lifetime ago. “When done in a social context amongs other people, some call it dancing.”

“And these?” Leona continued, showing Rachel a package of DVDs.

“Cheech and Chong, Kumar and INSERT NAME go to White Castle, The Hangover,” she said with a condescending eye-roll, yet with a trace of having had good memories of watching them. “Dogma,” she continued. “Intelligent humor, more misunderstood than appreciated between the lines.”

“And this?” Leona said, her anger turning into shock when she read the title of the DVD on the bottom of the file. “Woman on Fire!”

“Story about Marie Curie. Wonder woman and discoverer of radium and other things that go glow in the night,” Rachel read, while letting the Compassion extract aimed at

dopamine and serotonin receptors filter through 'Harrold the Horrible's' rodent brain. "Featuring Kevin Bacon, pretentious scum that he is in real life, as the kindly and generous Pierre Curie. Ex-Nazi Jackson Tyler as Einstein, probably cast as such because he looks so hot in a mustache. And as Marie Curie, Polish physicist-poet-political activist feminist..." she continued, unable to read the name.

"Katelina Nordenstrom," Leona said, her eyes being more open, and better able to read small print, than Rachel. "Who graduated from our program with honors after we snatched her from her slave master in LA"

"Whose acting abilities in the drama and comedy exercises you made them do were as bad as...hmmm----"

"The most soul-dead scientists and technicians when I left the university, Rachel," Leona said. "Afflicted with more inhibitory neurons between the ears than excitatory ones. Afflicted with dull out disease that made robots at a science geek fair look like..."

"...creatures with more vitality, and humanity, under their armor than I have between my ears, or maybe inside my heart," Rachel realized, and gave voice to.

The alarm next to Rachel went off. She quickly went back to work on Harrold the Horrible, stopping the flow of Compassion extract at the appropriate time into the rodent's brain. Wishing she would have instead spent her time formulating Vitality extract to use on Dulled Out rodents, or, as she now realized, herself.

CHAPTER 15

"So, you want any more popcorn?" Bill asked Leona.

"Another cup of coffee," Leona replied as "Woman On Fire" finally reached the 100 minute mark on the small screen tv, with merely another 30 minutes of agony to go. While Bill poured her another cup of super-concentrated black java, she yawned, trying to keep her eyes open and her ears alert for anything in Katelina's performance that would give away what she was really thinking, and doing.

"She's trying to do a good job," Rachel pointed out regarding Katelina's portrayal of Marie Curie. "And she is believable when she talks about physics, instead of her relationship with the married French biologist, and the time Albert Einstein tried to get her into the sac."

"Yeah," Leona noted. "That is interesting," she said, incubating a thought. "Along with why this display of bad acting by Katrina and insincere overacting by hammier than usual Kevin Bacon got five film festival awards, and came in as one of the top ten box office money makers for 3 weeks in a row."

“Paid off judges and accountants who are creative with numbers,” Bill noted. “Like Canadian publishers buying up 2500 copies of the books they put into the stores so they can claim it’s a best seller.”

“I thought Canada was an independent country, with socialized medicine, university tuition that people can afford, high schools that taught history the way it really happened, and muggers who said please before they robbed you blind in a dark alley,” Rachel said.

“You didn’t know that Canada is now officially the 51st State in these United States?” Leona sighed.

“No, I didn’t,” Rachel replied.

“That’s okay,” Bill said. “Most Canadians don’t know their country was sold to the highest bidder by the real bastards in charge either.”

“And who are those bastards?” Rachel asked, looking to Leona and Bill for an honest reply, as they were both pondering the ever changing subtleties of that question. “I know, ‘when I get older’” she spat out as she turned the volume on the tv down, as yet another scene of arrogant, pseudo-liberal Kevin Bacon pretending to be the intelligent and sincere ghost of Pierre Curie, coming back from the dead to advise his beloved wife Marie. “But I am grateful for ONE THING in this counter-productive, cool to be cruel, defective and self-sabotaged world we’re all stuck in,” she said. “The one thing that makes this evening at the movies redeemable, and which will spare whoever has to watch this movie after we’re dead a lifetime of agony.”

“And that one thing is what, Doctor Rachel?” Leona inquired, addressing Rachel by the title she was working so hard to get, and so rightly deserved.

“At least whoever the executive producer of this film REALLY is didn’t put Keera Sedgwick into the lead as Marie Curie,” Rachel said regarding the pushy bitch who made it cool to be manipulative and cruel as the lead on ‘The Closer’. “Hollywood gossip said that Miss Keera, adored and worshiped ‘Queen of Cool to be Cruel and Manipulate, was pissed off because she didn’t get to be in this film with ‘Kev’. But I can’t figure out why her fans, who she treated like shit whenever she can, love her so much.”

“Act like an asshole, get treated like a saint, Rach,” Bill replied. “Second golden rule.”

“The first being that he who has the money makes the rules,” Leona continued with a casual smile as Rachel’s private tutorial continued.

”And he, or she, who had the money to put Katelina into this film, with enough pull to keep Keera Sedgwick out of it, is, I would suggest, someone we have to find, before they find us,” Rachel pointed out with the utmost sense of urgency. She quickly fast forwarded the film to the credits, taking down all of the names of everyone who listed

themselves as a producer, or who was thanked by the producers for making the film possible. “One of these idiots who allowed this movie to happen has to be the asshole Slave and Trafficking Master who gave Katelina the starring role, in exchange for her working for him, or HER, again,” she grunted as she wrote down the names with such intensity that there were more holes made in her writing pad than ink. “Maybe you guys recognize these names from the travels you take that you don’t let me go on,” she grunted as she dictated the long list. “Or at least you could type them into your own computer and put them through those data bases with access codes you said you’d share with me ‘when I’m older’.”

As Rachel went down the list, Bill and Leona looked at each other knowing that the only way Rachel would ever get older is if she never got hold of that data base. And if Rachel remembered what it was like to be taken as a sex slave by Chief Boris at the Rez, and kept as a captive for a terrifying two hours that felt like two years. Rachel had a bright brain, but not a clever one. Her mathematics could link a biochemical reaction to a neurotransmitter release, to a receptor, to a membrane change on another cell, to an internal event in that other cell that made it wake up, go to sleep, or turn around its agenda entirely. But Rachel was never clever enough in the kind of mathematics the Masters of human manipulation and cruelty used. The kind in which if you were person A, and you wanted to do something to person B, you went through persons C, D,E,F, and G, or perhaps person D, F,G, and C.

“So, what’s our plan?” Rachel said. “Where do we start?” she continued, refusing to take no for an answer this time.

“The question is who we start with, I think,” Bill offered.

“Someone who Katelina hasn’t seen, and who she or her real Boss would never suspect,” Leona continued, sharing the same brain with the partner-against-crime who was not afraid to commit criminal acts in the Cause of REAL justice.

“What about me?” Rachel suggested, putting up her long hair into a cutsie Maryln Monroe bob, taking on a different voice. “I can sound like anyone you want or need me to be,” she continued in a hushed ‘Happy Birthday Mister President’ whisper. “A girly girl, or maybe,” she went on with a baritone voice and swaggering gait. “A manly girl.”

Bill and Leona smiled, recalling how they had to, out of necessity, change the nature of their voice to match the bodies they were getting used to as they underwent their gender transitions.

“So,” Rachel said, altering her voice between male and female. “What do I say to Katelina when I finally get her into a room, maybe after a hot date. Sneak some truth serum into drink and some love under the sheets into her life. No way she’ll hold back anything from me then. So, what do you say?”

Rachel waited for an answer from her two bosses, and protectors, and it finally came. “Your handler will tell you what to do when you get there,” Bill said.

“And my handler is which one of your trusted buds?” Rachel asked.

“A good friend of YOURS, who knows you very well,” Leona said.

“And knows us better than we know ourselves,” Bill continued, taking hold of a weapon specially designed and built by Carlos, whose official position was an immigrant janitor cleaning up the floors at the Massachusetts University, but who ‘Professor Leona’ was smart and kind enough to share her laboratory with. The instrument of directable destruction and workable diversion was a three pound chunk of multi-functioning metal that could inactivate anyone born of woman, or anything generated from a top secret assembly line.

“Carlos?” Rachel said, aghast, regarding the ‘fix it’ Master whose funeral she had attended with Leona and Bill in a very private ceremony just a month ago. “I thought he dead!”

“Which is why he’s still alive,” Leona said.

CHAPTER 16

“So, who really was this Katelina Nordenstrom,” Carlos asked Rachel as he drank a cup of imitation Columbian coffee at the five-star hotel in Lost Angeles paid for with cash. “Besides having been a six foot tall daughter of a five foot four Norwiegan diplomat, who defied Papa’s warnings about doing modeling work in Japan to pay for her education on her own, so she could study what she wanted to rather than what the family needed her to study so they could hold onto their semi-legally obtained fortune and professional reputation. What, or rather ‘who’ happened to her in Japan?”

“One of three possibilities,” Rachel replied as she adjusted a very different kind of wardrobe and new voice required for Katelina’s arrival. “All rich fuckers who couldn’t afford to take on another mistress, or wife. All of it resulting in pregnancy that put her out of work as a ‘model’ for nine months.”

“And a daughter who Katelina’s Japanese ‘Godfather’ employer took under his own wing, keeping her fed, clothed and sheltered,” Carlos continued, reading the data file on one of the Rehab Centre’s star liberated graduates containing progress notes by Leona’s hand, medical data by Rachel’s pen,, and red marks left behind by Emma when she corrected both of the aforementioned spelling. “A daughter, Erica, who was kept alive and well as long as her mother didn’t visit her more than a day a month. And minded her Master the other twenty-nine days of the month.”

“The last time I heard, Bill said he extracted Erica and returned her to her Mom,” Rachel said as she considered the dare to take another look in the mirror. “Unless that was another lie you grown-ups were keeping from me so I could grow up safe, secure and alive, small a anyway.” She raised her head and looked at the person in the mirror, trying to find herself in that unrecognizable image. “You’re sure my hair is going to grow back!” she said, slipping away from the male voice she had stayed in character thus far that day.

“Though we DO know and have given lots of people head-shaves that go below the scalp, Emma didn’t do that on you,” he replied regarding the hairless skin atop the entire top of Rachel’s head made all the more shiny by the rim of trimmed, slightly-greyled, hair encircling her ears and the top of her neck. “You closed your eyes and gave us Carte Blanche to do whatever we needed to do to make you unrecognizable to Katelina, and desirable to her as a lover, given the history of her having a fetish for old farts who look like her follically-challenged father, Russell.”

“Yeah, I did,” Rachel answered as Russell. “But...I hardly recognize myself.”

“Then tell me about yourself, so you can, Russ,” Bill said as he put the profile of Katelina down, adjusted the collar on his overpriced jacket and mismatching tie. Then picked up the ‘Producer Package’ as his new persona, Juan Gonzales, up and coming movie producer from Columbia who was an expert at transporting anything and anyone across international lines who, according to Hollywood Review, was looking to invest \$70 million dollars into his next film, building the package starting with the right stars in front of camera. “So, Russell,” Carlos said in Hollywoodeze, looking over Rachel’s first set of head shots, as ‘sent’ to him, and the to world, from ‘Atlantian Talent Agency’, the most recent fabrication of Leona’s companies that existed in cyberspace so prominently that no one bothered to check out its physical address. “Why do you want to be an actor?”

“To please my departed father,” Rachel said as Russ, crossing herself with no shortage of Catholic guilt. “To honor my country,” she continued, gazing up at a Guatemalan flag above the night-table. “And to serve my God,” she continued, looking up at the sky, and finding herself, actually believing for a moment in a divine Presence Whose existence that neurological or scientifically-framed metaphysical studies could never prove.

“And?” Carlos continued, as Juan.

“To work with the greatest actress in the world! Katelina Nordenstrom!”

“And?” ‘Juan’ continued.

Rachel gave Carlos a ‘hey, let’s get real here’ eye-roll. He replied with a no-nonsense ‘we have to work with the reality at hand here, if there is going to be any reality for any of us’ stare.

“And?” ‘Juan’ asked.

“I want to take care of Katelina Nordenstrom even after the cameras stop rolling. When I look into her eyes, I see us having children together. And me being the father of her children. ALL of her children!” Rachel ranted on, after which she took a deep breath, having seen something in herself that was a whole lot scarier than anything her rodents were made to fear in the lab.

“It’s called stepping into someone else’s life and experiencing life from their perspective, Rachel,” he noted as Rachel tried to find her way back to who she was under the Terri Bradshaw makeover. “Inside all of us is everyone else. People who are good. People who are bad. People who are old or young. Rich or poor. Powerful or helpless. Male or female. The trick we have to learn is to be ourselves while feeling and experiencing others.”

“And you read this between the lines in the Mechanics and Engineering Textbooks you read?” Rachel challenged.

“Between the lines,” Carlos replied, allowing himself to be himself, the Uncle of all Uncles. The Elder of Elders. The Wise man who mentored the educated. The poorest and lowest on the totem pole who everyone else on the totem pole depended on, and not just to keep the wires from breaking or the wood from falling apart.

Rachel, whose previously thick three-foot long auburn mane was what people identified her most with, dared to feel the top of her hairless head again, feeling one of those magical ‘mentor’ moments coming on. And recalling her attempts to mentor others. Like when her younger brother noticed a bald spot on his head at the ripe old age of 22. “No grass grows on busy streets,” she had told him, after which she quoted as much as she could remember about follicle-challenged Socrates, who challenged everyone, including himself, to be better than himself. Or herself.

Rachel could feel Carlos about to come up with a credo, saying or observation that would stay with her for life, to be appended to the ten that he had already said to her when she was working officially in Leona’s University lab as a graduate student, then in the Lab of real life as a Life Student. She noted that the number of Leona’s ‘immortal’ lines was no more than eight. But just as Carlos was about to allow Wisdom to come out of his self-educated mouth and ever-open, yet tired, eyes, they both heard a knock on the door.

“I know I’m early,” the intruder said in an elusive accent which contained the learnedness of Londoneze with the boldness of Scandinavia, and the openness of ‘Ameri-kin English’.

“But better to be early than late, yes?”

“Si,” Carlos said as Juan. “Yes indeed,” she continued, pointing Rachel to the door.

Rachel opened the door before looking into the peep hole, which she realized just as her eyes fell upon the face of the individual on the other side.

“Katelina Nordenstrom?” Rachel asked, as Russell.

“I am afraid so,” she replied, looking down at the floor, more apologetic than proud. The kind of look that perspective slaves demonstrate to perspective Masters when said Masters are out on the prowl looking for new bitches for their carnal kennels. “May I come in, please?” she continued, looking at Rachel’s chest, which Rachel hoped would be bound tight enough to not show her C-cup breasts.

“Yes, of course!” Carlos said in “Juanese”. “Come in, please!” he said loudly, offering Katelina a drink.

“No, thank you. Maybe you have some water?” she said, sitting down on the one of the chairs provided for her. The one that was lowest to the ground.

Carlos motioned for Russell to fetch his love wench a glass of water, then non-discretely pulled out a bag of cocaine, a joint and an assortment of pills from his pouch as he retrieved from the bottom of the two hundred dollar briefcase for production notes and scripts. Both Carlos and Rachel noted that Katelina pulled away from the mind-altering drugs that, according to her history, she had enjoyed on many, many occasions. And when Carlos pulled out a condom by mistake, Katelina fell back into her chair, pushed her elbows together, and looked to see if the door was still open.

As Russell, Rachel put the drugs back into Juan’s briefcase, and gathered the script material together. Just as Katelina was about to get up and leave, Rachel handed her the script material. “The Real reason why we called you here,” he said to her. “And the ONLY reason,” he assured her. “Right?” he said to his ‘boss’.

“Yes, of course,” Carlos said, as Juan. “You passed the first test.”

“And if I stay to take more tests, and pass the final exam?” she challenged.

“I like her,” Carlos said to Rachel. “I like her a lot,” he continued. “And I like both of you for my movie, which will give you, Katelina Nordenstrom, a salary of...”

Carlos wrote out a figure on his business card while the over-applauded but introspective actress with self esteem somewhere below the toilet looked with fascination and curiosity at Rachel. Katelina took the card in hand and glanced at the number.

“And this money comes with what else?” she inquired, caught between fear and desire.

“Him,” Juan replied, pointing to Rachel. “Russell Gonzales, my nephew.”

“Who doesn’t look very Guatemalan,” Katelina replied. “But...”

“Handsome, none the less?” he said. “Distinguished? Authoritative and kind? Intelligent and caring?” he continued, purposely listing all of the traits that Katelina said drew her to her own father, who never lived to see her liberated from the Sex Slavery ring due to the sudden onset of cancer he contracted while working with Leona to get her out, and ‘chemo treatments’ that killed him rather than cured him. “And, yes, I do sense that you remind each other of other people,” he continued as he noted the two potential lovers staring into each other’s eyes, and souls. “It is called chemistry. Which I need for this movie. A movie that the world needs,” he proclaimed as he got up, pointing Katlina and Rachel’s attention to the script synopsis.

“Yes, I know,” Katelina said. “I read this, and the script many times. A brilliant script. Many insights. Much intelligence. And much caring. Who wrote the script anyway?”

“My non-Guatemalan nephew,” Carlos said, pointing to Rachel, who, who pretended to be modest about a script she didn’t write, but wished she could have.

Maybe, one day, Rachel pondered, she could have written such a brilliant and loving story. If she was forced to connect to other parts of herself. Under the tutelage of Leona. The advise of Bill. The mentorship of Carlos. And, perhaps, the loving affections of Katelina, who, for the moment was still a suspect who could very well, according to hard evidence anyway, be working for a Master who wanted to find Leona and shut down her rescue and rehabilitation center forever. Kill everyone who ran it. And recapture into slavery anyone still in it, or who had graduated from it. While ‘Russell’ was making propositions and proposals with Katelina, Rachel tried to think how to find and inactivate the Puppeteer Master who was behind this act of liberation and decency.

“I’m hungry, what about you kids?” Carlos said as he picked up the phone and looked up the number for room service.

Both he and Rachel contemplated the next part of the plan. Put elixir in Katelina’s food that would loosen her tongue, and discipline over her romantic urges. Rachel, as a clothed Russ with a fake penile prosthesis, would interrogate Katelina under the sheets after she had been appropriately drugged and satisfied. Carlos would check out Katelina’s answers using Rachel’s lap top and the list of contacts Bill and Leona had struggled so hard to get, and keep.

If Katelina was a slave working for a Master, she would be extracted, re-liberated and rehabilitated. If Katelina had become a Master herself, she would be imprisoned in the special underground ward of the Rehab Center where more aggressive interrogation would take place, followed by her being used as a ‘test rodent’ for drugs and surgeries that Rachel claimed, on the basis of her rodent data anyway, could turn an asshole into a caring person. A functional idiot if the surgery went wrong, but then again, assholes who ran the slave world were more expendable than rodents, and provided far more danger to humanity than any rat carrying any kind of bubonic plague.

Yes, all plans were in line while Carlos read out the menu, each item making Katelina's mouth savor as he elaborated on the top level spices and sauces, which used elegant verbiage from five European languages that reminded the Norwegian model-slave-turned actress of home. All until Katelina got a call on her cell phone.

She looked at the number, caught between at least two conflicting agendas, concerned with matters of life and death rather than professional success or failure.

"Something wrong?" Carlos asked.

"Did I do anything inappropriate?" Rachel inquired, as a very caring Russ.

Katelina closed her phone without letting her hosts see what was on it. She put her bag over her shoulder and grabbed her coat. "We talk, eat, or whatever, here later. But in meantime, I have to take care of something."

"Something I can help with?" Russ asked. "Have heart, want to use it."

"Or I can help with?" Carlos added. "He who has the money makes the rules, and I DO have the money."

Katelina pondered the idea, many thoughts working things out between them behind her shifting eyes. Finally, the intra-cerebral gods decided on course of action.

"Yes," she said with a tight and non-revealing smile. "We all go. Maybe better that way."

Before Rachel could scientifically read her eye motions and facial movements, or Carlos could see what was rumbling in her gut, Katelina turned around and headed towards the door. Russell opened it for her, of course, being the gentleman that Rachel now found that she was, but the 'Lady' got even tighter lipped about everything, looking straight ahead. Carlos brought up the rear, being sure that he had all of the weaponry in his coat that he came in with. And that on the way in, Katelina didn't take anything from that garment by 'mistake'. One item was missing. The 3 pound 'Carlos 3A', the most conceivable and powerful weapon in his arsenal. If it would be used was a certainty. How and why it would be used was a question that Carlos had to agonize about himself. Most particularly as he saw Katelina take Russell's hand into hers, inviting him to insert her arm protectively under his.

CHAPTER 17

The food at the prestigious 'Hollywood Bowl' smelled great, was well prepared, and presented itself with allure on the plate. As did the topless waitresses who served it, most of the diners being gentlemen who could afford to pay \$150 for a dressed up hamburger and compliant or interesting ladies to eat them with as they watched the 'exotic dancers' on stage.

“It’s all consensual,” Katelina commented to her gentlemen hosts, Russell and Carlos. “Legally anyway,” she continued with an angry grunt as a vacant-eyed waitress with a tasteful, jewel covered collar around her neck passed by the table, a hangman’s noose burn under the Master brand designer necklace, slash marks on her wrists, burns integrated within the tattoos on her legs.

As Rachel saw it from behind her Russell designer dark sunglasses, Katelina’s shades protected her from being recognized, and at the same time made her look more businesslike. Appropriately so, as half of the clients seemed to be ‘still on duty’ producers with deep pockets and the other half self indulgent celebs at work making fools of themselves with third legs sprouting up between their pants pockets. One of them, not suprisingly, looked like ‘committed to stopping human trafficking at any cost’ Kevin Bacon himself, being encouraged to recreate with the food servers by a companion who looked like a young version of his wife Keera Sedgwick. Then again, to ‘commoners’ who bought and watched, rather than were overpaid to make movies, all celebs looked alike, perhaps.

“Why did you bring us here?” Carlos inquired of Katelina, seeing that Rachel was too preoccupied to talk, and that if she did, she would probably spill the beans, as her experience in the field as an undercover operative was still in the ‘theoretical’ stages. “I have enough money to make our film already,” the struggling-to-pay-the-rent self-made inventor/engineer said, wondering what it would be like to have that statement be true.

“Research,” Katelina said. “For what happens behind the camera, and the story in front of it.” Her eyes peurused the girls, and women, who were being ‘employed’ for zero dollars a week by the real bosses hiding in the shadows, finally focusing on two of them. “And to recruit two actresses who are on your film if I’m going to be.”

“The redhead and the blonde?” Carlos noted of a dancers flipping off the last item of her clothing and a waitress who delivered a platter of chicken wings to a table of carnivores with lifeless eyes fixed on the floor.

“Appropriate,” Katelina replied with an indignant sigh. “You gentlemen always identify ladies by the color of their hair instead of the brain under it.”

“Or the eyes that are windows to their soul,” Rachel interjected, looking straight into Katelina’s ocular portholes.

She looked back, seeing maybe more than Rachel wanted her to. “I’m sure I know you. You look very, very familiar,” she said.

“Men all look familiar to women, and woman all look familiar to men,” Carlos interjected, desperately and cleverly trying to keep his and Rachel’s real identities secret, particularly in this room of well armed bouncers and Slave Masters who he recognized from undercover operations in New York, Chicago and Vegas, even in the dim light.

“There is a Spanish word for it,” he said, followed by a phrase that Rachel did not recognize, or could translate.

“Chemistry of the soul,” Katelina said. “Or more accurately, the Heart Soul,” she continued, gulping down a generous swig of her drink, and then two shot she colorfully took from a tray being carried around by a platinum-haired waitress. “And sometimes, the Soul has to do what the brain says no to do, and the soul is still afraid to do,” she continued in what to Rachel sounded like colorful Spanish, and to Carlos was accurately pronounced words only a highly cultured reader of his Native language would ever know. “Und manchmal, man kann, zu tragen der Seele, aufgeben,” she continued.

“And sometimes you can surrender to laziness of Soul,” Rachel translated into English.

“Laziness that makes us not do what we must, when we must,” Katelina said, as the delivery of Commitment finally burst up from the Fire in the Belly through a troubled and tortured Soul. The kind of fire that Rachel noted that Leona had just before she was about to do something where SOMEone got burned, or worse. “The mathematics of it all,” Katelina said as she ceremoniously pulled a pen out a monogrammed pen with gold print reading ‘Massachusetts Institute of Technology’, someone’s name on the other side of it. With it she frenetically wrote out, with a sense of urgency and importance, something that looked like a diagram of the room, with mathematical formulas over each of the vectors that pointed to selected parts of it. “Mathematics, the universal language,” she said in English, then German, then Spanish, then what sounded like Russian, then in two Asian languages that neither Carlos nor Rachel recognized. And then finally in, by the smile on her lips, sounded like her native Norwegian.

Katelina gave the formula-covered napkin to Rachel. “I don’t know who, or what you really are,” she said to her in German, knowing Carlos didn’t understand that tongue. “But it is appropriate that you have this.”

“Why?” Rachel inquired in the tongue of her Prussian and Bavarian ancestors.

“The real explanation for why I was brought into the ‘biz’,” she said, in English to Rachel. “Someone, who would never come to a place like this, or even know about it, got the idea to cast someone with my...secret background in real life as an actress playing a woman with that background, and calling.”

“You Katelina Nordenstrom, Ph.D.” Carlos noted, reading the other side of the MIT pen. “Playing Marie Curie. Which explains a lot.”

“Yes, the bad reviews from the good reviewers,” she said. “Which are justified, since if you become too good at this,” she said referring to the formulations on the napkin. “You become less good at this,” she continued, pointing to her heart. “And the humorous and colorful artistic expressions of such.”

“What about Tesla?” Rachel challenged, realizing that she was a victim of dull out virus herself. “He was colorful artistically and effective scientifically. And Chekov, a doctor who wrote so well. And Einstein, who played the violin.”

“Chekov wrote about colorful characters, but he never played them on stage. And as for Albert Einstein, UNLIKE the actor in the film whose Mozart was soul-moving, and whose Beethoven put fire into your bell, Einstein’s music was more formulaic than freeform. Even though the old dog did say, loosely translated into the matter at paw here with us, ‘Without science, spirituality is blind. And without spirituality, science is lame.’ And as for old Nicholi Tesla, humanistic and innovative inventor well ahead of his and our time, whose soul really was poetic, maybe he did write poems which were as revolutionary as the inventions he gave us. And most probably they’re buried somewhere in a vault still under the control of the real bosses in Washington and Moscow like the other earth shattering inventions of his which we won’t find out about until it’s too late to use them for CONstructive purposes,” she said. “Like maybe weather machines that are fucking up our planet right now.”

“And what you describe here, mathematically?” Carlos interjected regarding the formulas on the napkin. “And how you’re going to put those mathematical formulas into practice with that non-patented invention of MINE that you mistakenly put into your handbag,” he continued, Katelina was reaching for.

“Along with one of my own,” she smiled, showing him another weapon of mass destruction and diversion.

“There’s too many of them here,” Rachel said to Katelina, in her own voice, and from her own heart.

“Rachel,” Katelina said, extending her non-shooting hand to Rachel’s shaking one. “You untied the knots they put into my brain with the medications you devised, and the advise you gave me. It was you who said that freedom and self respect don’t go away if you use them, and give those requirements for Life, big L, to others.”

“I quoted that from someone else. Formulated it, actually,” Rachel replied. “Theorized it, maybe.”

“Time for all of us to put theory into practice,” Katelina, said, as the most successful and now dangerous graduate of the Rehab program. “For the sake of the ‘blonde’ and ‘redhead’,” she said with compassion and Sisterhood regarding the two Sex Slaves who she apparently had the most history with. “And anyone else who lets some asshole change the color of their hair, or allows anyone to fuck up the brain under it.” She pulled out Carlos’ tailor made weapon, offering it over to Rachel. “You probably know how to use this better than I do,” she said.

“Yeah, I probably do,” Rachel said, holding the weapon she observed Carlos build, and advised him on regarding the biological bullets it could project and the brain-altering lights it emitted. “But, I’ve never neutralized a human before.”

“Pretend they’re rodents in the lab,” Carlos said. “Dangerous, expendable rodents who are carrying a deadly disease,” he continued, sensing that this was Katelina’s first trial by real combat fire as well.

“Anything you can tell me about what to do once things get ‘kinetic’?” the theoretical physics whiz who never fired a weapon of destruction at anyone before. But whose extraction plan, written in the language of mathematics, was sound, workable and even sane.

“To quote a line that is accurate, and colorful, ‘There’s nothing I can’t tell you that you won’t learn yourself after the next 5 seconds,’” Carlos told her.

“Three,” Katelina replied, somehow finding enough fire in her gut to untie the knots of fear that had disconnected her gut from her brain.

On the silent count of three, after Katelina, Rachel and Carlos sneaked protective cotton plugs in their ears, all hell broke loose, but with the demons on the run this time. Katelina blinded three heavily armed bouncers with a light ray gun, then aimed at the two bosses behind them. Klaus Tummkinov and Chang Lin, by name, two B-movie producers who Carlos recognized as two of the top twenty A-level human traffickers in Russia and China. She fired out a ‘you will never to what you did to me or anyone else’ declaration to them in their native languages, began to squeeze the trigger, then...froze. It gave Tummkinov and Lin enough time to pull the two girlfriends she came to rescue up from the floor and use them as human shields. Carlos disarmed both of the moguls with as many shots, their blood splattering all over the property they had used to protect themselves.

Carlos then continued to fire a barrage of well-aimed drug-containing bullets that inactivated any standing human body between him, the blonde and the redhead, and the escape door while the high pitched siren from his ‘diffuser’ inflicted enough pain in those who had no protective cotton in their ears to keep their brains and hands busy trying to stop the paralyzing buzz. “Protect my flank!” he shouted out to Rachel as the corridor to the escape route narrowed from a path you could drive a truck through to a path no wider than a goat trail. But Rachel froze as well. “Fire anything you have at whatever you see, Goddamn it!” he screamed out, again. “Starting with the fuckheads coming out of the kitchen!” he continued, noting that the infamous ‘gang of five’, all clad in the same leather jackets bearing a dragon and eagle decal with headphones around their ears, one of them being one of the Masters-in-training who got away in the raid on Master Paul’s operation in New York. “Kill them or they’ll kill you, me and the rest of us,” he said.

Rachel’s brain said that Carlos was right. The gang of five pulled out their weapons, aiming them directly her. Able to process everything around her with her brain but

unable to do anything about it with her rigid, trembling hands, he felt like a sitting duck. And the gang of five smiled as they advanced with their sawed off shotguns and pistols, preparing to shoot her out of the water. There was nothing to stop them from doing so, until she felt a thud on her chest, a very human and bloody body falling into her arms. It was Katelina, having been shot up by Timmulovo and Lin. "Something I had to do, a final act of..." she said by way of explanation, the rest of her words silenced by bullets penetrating into her head, chest and arm.

Maybe it was the taste of blood in her mouth, or the feel of a dying body on her chest, or the death rattle entering her ears with Katelina's last breaths, but something happened to Rachel. She observed herself quickly grabbing hold of Katelina's weapon with her left hand, regaining control of her own with her right, and firing away at the gang of five, the Sino-Russian duo, and anyone else who came her way. As bodies fell to the ground in front of her, she ran over to the blonde and redhead. "What are your names?" she asked them as she mowed down two other waves of assailants, feeling not only proficient in what she was doing, but enjoying it. Even getting an orgasm between her legs. "Tell me your names, goddamn it!" she demanded of the girls, whose only thought was to huddle on the ground and cover their heads.

"Tasha!" the blonde shouted out with a loud shrill voice.

"Naomi?" the redhead somehow allowed to come out in a hushed voice through shaking teeth.

"I'm Rachel," the former studier of life now-turned-destroyer of such said. "And this is Carlos," she continued as her mentor-in-education, and now comrade-in-arms, ran over to her, throwing one of the girls over his back, securing the smaller one behind Rachel's back.

"We go out this way," he said regarding the kitchen door as more bouncers turned into assault soldiers. "A car is waiting for us," he continued. "On the count of...now."

With that, Rachel and Carlos somehow made it through the kitchen, out the back door and into open space, where they heard sirens. Then noticed no one coming after them. Then three police cars zooming in, followed by an ambulance. Paramedics from the ambulance emerged and took the girls into their truck, and speed away, their flashers on, their sirens silent. An officer with more brass than blue on his uniform then came up to Rachel and Carlos. "We heard there was a disturbance here," he said as his men slowly emerged from their vehicles, confidently and with no sense of urgency, drawing their weapons.

"Yeah," Carlos said, confused. "Glad you came. And with enough men to take care of what happened in there," he said, calmly.

“And what’s been happening in there for way too long!” Rachel blasted out with Missionary Zeal. “There’s gonna be a whole lot of arrests that happen today because of you guys,” she continued.

“Starting with you,” the Chief said, motioning for his men to take Rachel and Carlos into custody, with very tight cuffs, and in separate cars.

CHAPTER 18

The closest thing in Rachel’s life to being incarcerated by the Cops was stories her father told her about being arrested for sit-ins during the ‘give peace a chance’ protests of the 60s. They were well publicized events, of course, making being arrested not only a badge of honor, but something you put on your unofficial finding a mate resume that you worked on during your extra-curricular studies in college and grad school. The only time you’d have to do, even if you had a redneck judge from Alabama who celebrated Saturday night with the good ole boys at a cross burning, was a weekend in the slammer. “No good deed goes unpunished,” Rachel’s dad said regarding his time in the slammer. “And without getting punished for doing good deeds, nothing or no one good ever happens to you,” he would continue on those ‘story telling’ family nights as he put his arm around his once-protest-babe wife, with Bob Dylan protest songs playing on the vintage turntable in the living room.

But this good deed seemed to go nowhere. And this holding cell was cold, dark, and lonely. The walls seemed to close in on Rachel each time she looked at them and tried to imagine a way out. “But, hey, no,” she observed herself thinking, recalling the fast action movie that happened in the strip joint, this time reviewing it in agonizing slow motion. “Remember how weird it was to shoot your first bad guy. Then how easy it was to kill the next two. Then how much fun it was to blow the other guys away, not caring if they were good guys or bad guys?” Her eyes caught hold of another resident in the cell. A cockroach that somehow got through the cracks in the concrete, whose compound eyes spotted a small family of ants that had settled into a home with walls made of human blood from the last resident in this ‘hotel’, dining on crumbs that said resident maybe didn’t want to eat, couldn’t eat, or didn’t have time to eat before she was taken somewhere else. The roach looked at the smaller insects, thought about something, then decided to dine on those smaller insects rather than merely kick them out of their dining room. The roach seemed satisfied with the meal.

“Yeah,” Rachel said as he looked eye to eye at the roach. “I’m too big for you to be eating, but if I had you back in the lab, I’d study you. Figure out why you seemed to enjoy killing, just like I did. But there is one question I do have to ask you. Did you get an orgasm as you demolished those ants like I did when I sent those bad guys to their just reward, and the maybe-not-bad guys to an early reward?”

The roach seemed to be listening. She smiled at it, then pulled the thin blanket over her cold, goose-bumped exposed arms. “You’re a brave cockroach, coming out in the light instead of waiting for the dark. Or maybe you’re a stupid one. Or a defective one. In any case, welcome to my world, or should I say, please welcome me to yours?”

The roach didn’t answer, but the Silence did. “I’m okay with this,” Rachel said to the cell walls, and the demons within them that were materializing in her head. “I should stay in here. I’ve become too dangerous for myself, and others, to be out there.”

“Except for one thing,” a very real voice said from small window in the overlit cell from the dark hallway outside if it. “You have become a necessary evil,” he continued in a very male, and authoritative voice.

“That’s Leona’s line,” Rachel said to the visitor, whose eyes looked to be that of a Native Elder, whose hair was that of a soldier, and whose uniform said he was a Cop. “And who are you, to say that to me?” she asked.

“Norman King,” he answered. “A good friend of your Uncle’s.”

“I don’t have an uncle,” Rachel said. “My Mom and Dad, who BOTH were whisked off the Grim Reaper to the other side of the Rainbow and are probably getting stoned in the Strawberry Fields with Saint Pete Seeger while he cajols them into singing Woody Guthrie tunes, didn’t have any siblings. I’m the only family I got left now.”

“I’m talking about this Uncle,” the visitor said, pulling out a picture of Bill Stevenson, as Billie.

While Rachel looked at the picture of Bill Stevenson before he had undergone his transformation from being a woman, a picture that only insiders in her world ever knew about, Rachel observed something about Norman. Though he looked like a Cop, he carried himself off like a criminal, as he looked around him to see that no one else was coming.

“What about Carlos?” Rachel pressed.

“On his way home already,” he said. “Which is where I’m taking you.”

“How, and why?” Rachel inquired.

“Because sometimes there are more criminals who wear badges than those who don’t,” he replied. “A situation that you, me, Carlos and your Uncle Bill are going to put a stop to once and for all,” he continued.

The strange half-breed Indian Cop with the common name opened the door to Rachel’s cell, and threw her a bag of clothing. “Put them on, fast!” he said.

“Wow,” she said as she rummaged through the wardrobe, all of it very female, her fingers rummaging through a long, auburn wig. “Hair just like my own,” she said, feeling a faint stubble growing atop her head.

“Your handlers saved it for you,” he said. “And your sisters weaved it into a wig. Mirium, Lakesha, Tatianna, Yung, Victoria and Mara. They’re waiting for you. But there is one question I have to ask you before we get you out of here.”

“Like, that I maybe want to start my new life as a, like, ya know, blonde?” Rachel said as she put the wig on with mocking valley girl talk.

“They took your prints, but did they take your clothes off, Russel?” he asked.

“No, they didn’t,” Rachel replied, flashing on something that she found strange.

“Good,” Norman said. “At least I know that there are SOME contacts here who I can still trust. Now, get dressed, Fiona,” he continued, throwing her a package of fake ID.

Rachel slipped into being Fiona ASAP, wondering if she should trust Norman. She turned to the Roach to ask him, but he was gone, scurrying away through the crack he came in from giving her no clue as to what to do next.

CHAPTER 18

“So, you really think we don’t have anything to worry about, Bill?” Leona said to her still legal partner-against-crime as he flipped over another lump of flattened batter that smelled more like potato sewage than potato pancakes.

“Only how you’re gonna react to the best bannock you’ve ever tasted,” Bill said with a wide and pride smile as he continued to concoct the special dinner for Leona at the range of Leona’s trailer at the Rehab Center which contained a bedroom in which she always slept alone, to protect any visitors from being cut to pieces when she had nightmares, and to protect them from the even more harmful effects of having a romantic relationship with her. “You like green onions in your bannock?” Bill asked as he picked up a handful of small sprouts from her pantry.

“Those are brussel sprouts,” she said with a kind smile. “And as I recall, bannuck is supposed to rise up from the pan instead of flattening down into it.”

“Oh, yeah,” Bill said as he observed the lumps of dough he had put onto the skillet flatten out, realizing that he put baking soda rather than baking powder into them. “But, there’s still nothing to worry about,” he said as he moved on to the two pots on the stove, stirring them to see that nothing had gone wrong with them. “Beef stew still smells like beef stew,” he said affirming that nothing went rotten or turned into ash inside the entree. “And the Green Giant surprise,” he continued as he sniffed the multi-vegetable

concoction of legumes planted by patients Lakesha, raised by Mirium and harvested just at the right time by Mara while their fellow 'patients' chose to do their 'nature' therapy at the Rehab Center minding the chickens, pigs and sheep. "Yeah, the garden surprise combo that's..." Bill continued as he dared to taste what smelled different than how it started.

"Something to worry about?" Leona pressed as Bill quickly put whatever he could into the vegetable disaster to make the dish eatable, starting with small amounts of soy sauce, moving down the spice rack, then finally ending with generous amounts of catsup. "I thought you had everything under control," Leona said, folding her arms and refusing to let go till she got a clear, honest and real answer.

"I do have everything under control," Bill continued as he did his best to prevent the potato hotcakes from turning into rock hard potato cookies. "And there is nothing to worry about. You finally accepted an offer to have someone else cook a meal for you, and experience the gentle pleasure and cerebral passion of dining," he continued as he lit another candle, placing it on the table in between the place-mats he so proudly he had arranged on the table which had formerly been used for strategy sessions only. "Yeah," he said, having somehow converted the food he had prepared into something that smelled and tasted good to him, and by inference, delicious-enough for Leona. "There is nothing to worry about," he continued as he put a towel over his left arm and an arch in his back in the manner of a waiter proud of his craft and station.

"I was talking about the Compound here," Leona said. "I'm still worried. A feeling in my gut that something isn't right here."

"That's just hunger," Bill said, as he turned off the burners and placed the contents of the food into their appropriate dishes. "Or the rumblings you had over that lunch you wolfed down this afternoon, straight out of the scraped down aluminum coated pot. Your stomach telling you that the food YOU make for yourself, and eat by yourself, is as toxic to your GI tract as Pop Country Music is to a mind that wants to raise itself out of the down-home-mediocre gutter."

"I'm serious," Leona blasted out.

"So am I," Bill said as he placed the food on Leona's table, placing it on her plate with a very manly artistry that contained within it feminine finesse. "Norman King got Rachel and Carlos out of the Lost Angeles Police Department jail, and files. They're both at the Rehab Center giving this last batch of girls their last lesson in how to be their own persons. Emma is baking cakes for each of them for their 'welcome back to the world as it is' party."

"And the perimeter?" Leona said. "I'm worried about what happened this afternoon. The alarm that went off."

“One of the chickens decided to go on a walkabout, or maybe got loose when Emma left the gate to their pen open again, or maybe gave it a few too many of her weed-flavored oatmeal cookies,” Bill said. “Superbird got stunned, toasted, then when it hit the ground, away from the electrical fence, a coyote decided it needed some lunch. I checked it out myself. The electric fence is secured.”

“And the spikes and stun mines on the approach paths?” Leona asked, her nose drawn to the food put on the plates Emma gave her which only now were being put into use. “The motion detectors for airborne and ground assault?”

“In perfect working condition,” he replied.

“And Underground?” she pressed.

“Escape tunnels still working, and functional”, Bill asserted. To silence her further inquiries, he placed a bean-covered, tomato-flavored carrot into her mouth. “No one can get into here except us. And all of our contacts say none of the sex-slaves you saved, liberated, and resurrected present a danger to us, or other sex-slaves we WILL save, liberate and resurrect in the future.”

“But Master Paul,” Leona said, having swallowed the carrot quickly so that she could have her mouth free to work rather than enjoy gustatory delights. “The Mennonite human trafficker who confessed clues to you about the informer at the time of his dying, said---“

“---What he wanted to in order to make us paranoid,” Bill said, having put a big spoonful of beef stew into Leona’s mouth. “He was screwing with our heads. Inventing stories. All that crap about the opera music he sang, and that opera he said we should be most worried about, ‘Mighty Aprodite’. It was all crap, according to Norman. Paul Himmel, if you remember, was a Satan worshiper, and to dye having led the good guys into a wild goose-chase at the time of dying was probably Paul’s way of pleasing the Devil and insuring himself a place in hell as someone who cooks at the barbeque instead of being on the spit.”

Leona finally finished swallowing the stew. Bill observed a strange look on her face. Like she was worried about something she had never worried about before.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. “You look, pale. And worried. Like something’s gonna happen to you that you can’t stop and have been avoiding your whole life. Is it the food?”

“Yeah,” she said, tasting everything on the table. “It’s...hmmm.”

“The best I can do,” Bill replied, apologetically. He picked up the phone, thumbing through the book. “Okay, I’ll call in for some processed chemical crap. What brand of processed petroleum suits your fancy? Fried cheeze balls from Potters Pizza? Crow

and/or pigeon wings from Chicken Palace? Canine, feline and/or cockroach chop suey from the China Gardens? Or, the new place, Roadkill Café that features---

“---Nothing that I want, or need,” Leona said, as she pulled the phone of his hand, placing hers tenderly on his neck. Her smile was warm, inviting and finally, open.

”But...what about all of this food?” Bill said, fearing to go into the door he had worked so hard to open.

“Yeah, you have a point there,” she said as she put her finger into each of the items Bill had so carefully prepares, tasting them in small bites. Then bigger ones. Then picking them up with her fists, coating her chest with them, then his chest.

“I think it’s time we eat off of these plates,” she said regarding their food-covered chests. “And...see where it goes?”

Leona seemed as scared of what was about to happen as Bill was, but just as a third brain always emerges between two thinking minds, the angel of courage moved in to replace the demons of fear. Their tight lips turned upward at the edges. Their eyes softened. And finally, their lips met. Each felt the warmth of the other. Then experienced a Fire between them as they ripped off their clothing and felt each other’s bodies till there was one body only. One agenda. One experience of Passion that connected them in ways neither of them imagined possible. The rest of what happened that night could not be described with words, as none were spoken between them, and none were ever to be written down afterwards. Indeed, they both had nothing to worry about, forever. Until our magical hours later, when---a deafening sound converted a dream into a nightmare.

CHAPTER 19

“What the fuck happened here,” Leona screeched out, the alarm blasting into her ears. “When we were fucking!” she continued while looking at the scanners on the outer perimeter of the Centre in the 40 year old shack converted into a state beyond the art security detection and defense system. The screens revealed infiltration of at least 50 intruders, this time with two rather than four legs. “How did they get through the electrocution devises we set up that could fry a horse into hamburger in three seconds flat?”

“By cutting off the power to the stove,” Bill said as he noticed three of the main wires in the defense voltage system cut apart and sealed onto themselves. “But our uninvited guests are moving in slowly.”

“And avoiding the land mines we still have in the second perimeter,” Leona noted, as the progress of the intruders escalated from a cautious crawl to an assertive walk. “As if they had a map of where the electrifying and laser landmines are. Information we shared with no one except...”

“...The girls we have in the Rehab Center NOW,” Bill dared to give voice to, reading Leona’s darkest and most terrifying thought.

“But that’s impossible,” Leona replied.

“So is the company we have out there finding each other, then finding us,” Bill answered as he zoomed in on the infrared photographic images of the leader of the first group of intruders, thugs whose wardrobe looked like it was straight out of a Hatfield and McCoys flick but whose weapons were definitely 21st century automatic state of the art. “That there is Master Paul’s second in command. He calls himself Thomas Miller now. Mennonite almost-preacher who got away from me when we raided his boss’ human trafficking operation in New York. He shaved off his beard and grew a mustache, but those eyes, I’d recognize anywhere.”

Bill moved the surveillance camera lens over to the leader of the second group of uninvited evening guests, whose group was clad in black leather jackets. “Jiri Klendinik” Leona said. “Albanian sex-slave merchandise mover who took over his brother Luka’s spot after he was neutralized, by Chief Boris Petrovitch, my old mentor and enemy in slime.”

“After you cleverly tricked Boris into think that Luka was gay, then a weak and dangerous link in his international operation,” Bill noted, allowing himself the luxury of a fond smile. “After which we both got Boris off the Rez, and off the planet.”

“Only after my Red Power father, who was working for Chief Boris, shot an arrow into that KGB mobster’s chest just before my old friend was going to put a bullet into my head,” Leona said, recalling the painful side of those events. “But it brought you, me, Rachel and even Emma together,” she continued. “And connected us to your Biker Buds in Montreal, and Norman King, aside from you, the only Cop who I know who isn’t on the take in some form or another.”

“Until now,” Bill uttered from a dropped jaw, and shocked eyes. He pointed at the screen and saw Norman’s face, leading a band of heavy armed Cops from at least five different jurisdictions through the most heavily mined maze in the second perimeter, entering now into the third.

“What else does he know?” Leona asked calmly, as the three teams split up in a flanking maneuver, about to surround the central compound. “Besides where the mines were on the perimeter. Or maybe how to come into here and inactivate our defensive weapon grid by entering the escape tunnels from the outside.”

“Impossible,” Bill replied. “Those tunnels can’t be entered from the outside. If anyone or anything on two of four legs comes IN more than four strides, the fifth one is their last. Something I didn’t tell anyone, other than you, so you could tell the girls about it if we ever had to use it. And that system is still intact. As we, two coyotes,

five rabbits and that gofer who got into Emma's weed plants can attest to. But there is one thing I'm really curious about."

"Why our guests are holding their positions?" Leona replied, noting the abrupt lack of movement of the enemy. "And why they haven't attacked from the air?"

"And why the troops are having a smoke break, while their leaders are having a powwow," he said. "Without Norman King. Who is..."

"...Extractable?" Leona suggested, noting that something about Norman King's face seemed more aloof than expected from a man of his position. "If you can figure out a way to come up the mid portion of the tunnel exit he's close to, and figure out a way to bring him, and you, back into the Compound in less than ten blown up pieces." Leona threw Bill her stun gun which could deliver both electrical current and fast acting paralytic drugs. "The electric zapper is low on current, and the pharmacological bullets have only been tested on rats."

"Rat," Bill growled, imagining a plan more sadistic for his old, once trusted friend Norman than anything Leona envisioned for anyone of her prey. "Appropriate term for that----"

"----Prisoner, who we need alive," Leona said, short circuiting Bill's giving voice to his angry expletives. She gently caressed his arm, connecting his rage to functional reason. Then she kissed his lips, connecting the volcanic fire in his gut to the muscle between his ears. "We need YOU alive too," she said with more sincerity and fear than any other time she could remember.

"While you keep the girls, alive," Bill replied, handing Leona the M4 Aries series rifle with a magnifying scope. "If any of the ex-slaves get into the hands of those bastards out there, we know what's going to happen to them. And if you, Rachel or Emma get captured..."

"...I know," Leona said as her fingers then head connected to the weapon that maybe still had magic powers in her shaking hands. "A fate a lot worse than slavery." It was a fate hard to imagine, but one which now looked like it would be very, very real.

CHAPTER 20

The moon did its part to help Leona in her time of need by staying on the other side of the earth, leaving it to the stars to provide whatever natural light they could to the earth below. But in five very short hours, the dark sky that had given her enough cover to slither from the defense utility barn to the main dormitory would give way to dawn. The rising of the sun to most was a beautiful event which signified a new day with new possibilities, heralded in by the chirping of birds in a symphonic rhapsody that still was more complex and engaging than any music invented by the brains of men, or women.

But for Leona, dawn was always terrifying, perhaps because of the past lifetimes she has spent as soldier engaging in battles at first light, or a prisoner who was shot, hung or impaled at that traditional time of day. All of those past lifetime memories, or imaginations of such, went through her head when she locked the door behind her in the dormitory 'common space' room, and dared to face those who had finally trusted her enough to call it home.

"You're probably wondering why I woke you up from your dreams or interrupted your nightmares," she said to the ex-slave girls who were about to be set out into the world to experience and transform it as free women.

"Another literary lesson about Pluto the Geek that ya'll think will make me smarter, but a lot lonelier in a world filled with stupid people?" Victoria shot back with a defiant Georgia drawl through a yawn.

"Is Plato the Greek," Tatiana said, her diction and grammar regressing into Slavic Moldavian due to having visited her home there in sound slumber minutes ago. "Not Pluto the Geek."

"Victoria knows that," Lakesha interjected. "That Cracker bitch is just tryin' ta be colorful, know what I'm sayin'?"

"She do get dat," Yung added, imitating Ebonics as best as she could through her Asian mouth.

"But what none of us get, Leona," Mirium said through the biggest yawn of all, having just gotten used to addressing her Savior by her first name. "Is why you woke us up in the middle of the night, and then just stand there for 3 minutes now, not saying anything."

"Except with your eyes," Mara noted, as fully awake as Leona was, most probably due to her continued exhaustion by day and inability to sleep at night. "Maybe we can help you fix it?" the incurable night-owl asked Leona, extending her hand to her shoulder.

Leona looked at her watch, then the floor, her stare pulled into the depths of the underworld. Then she looked up at the girls, all of whom were looking at her as sisters rather than daughters. Each of them offered what they could with their eyes, smiles and hugs. They looked to Victoria as their elected rep to voice what they all had in mind.

"We know that we have to get out of here tonight," Victoria said. "Rachel told us."

"And did she say how?" Leona said, shocked and angered at her absent and blabber-mouthed student.

Yung pointed to a loose board on the floor. Tatiana loosened it. Mirium lifted up the metal plate under it. The group looked to Mara, who lowered her head, said a prayer to Allah, then handed Leona her copy of the Koran that she always kept with her. "You

take this with you, into that tunnel,” she said as Leona looked into the escape tunnel. “It will protect you.”

“And if that doesn’t these will,” Tatiana said, handing Leona the a revolver with her name engraved on its handle.

“And this peashooter,” Victoria added, putting her six-bullet ‘ace in the hole’ into Leona’s belt. The other girls did the same.

“And this,” Rachel added as she emerged into the room, entrusting her laboratory notes to Leona. “More important that this, and you get out of here than we do.”

“Mother’s orders, Leona,” formerly ‘all you need is love’ Emma said as she entered the room carting a large sac loaded with firearms.

“If one of us is going, we’re all going,” Leona said, putting aside for the moment how entrusted secrets were revealed to people they weren’t supposed to go to. “I’m not leaving you here. We’re all getting out of here!” she announced. “Start over again someplace else. But if we do, we, and I will need more than just those backpacks you conveniently pre-packed and the PJs on your back.” She thought a moment about what she already had set in motion, intel or perhaps the persona of one Norman King, once-trusted-friend and now-traitor, or perhaps something in between at this point. “We may have another way out of here.”

“Not anymore,” Bill said as he crawled his way up the escape tunnel, soaked with blood, one leg moving and the other looking like it was about to fall off. “The escape tunnels were exploded shut. All of them.”

Rachel and Emma helped Bill up onto the floor. Tatiana cut open his blood-soaked pants. Victoria ripped off a layer of her getaway PJs and used it as a tourniquet. Yung grabbed a first aid kit and poured iodine over the exposed muscle and bone. Mirium held Bill’s hand as he screamed in agony when the disinfectants hit what had been intact flesh. Mara watched it all in horror, frozen.

“So, where’s Norman?” Leona asked Bill, as she and Rachel examined his wound, working together to stitch up what they could. “The fuckhead traitor who brought those assholes in here.”

“Dead,” Bill replied, feeling the pain of failure far more deeply than the agonies of the flesh.

Leona looked accusingly at Rachel.

“I calculated the dose of inactivating agent myself,” Rachel blasted back at her mentor. “There’s no way that those paralytic darts of mine would have killed him!”

“They didn’t,” Bill said, looking at his bloody hands.

“So you cut his throat?” Leona blasted at Bill. “You were supposed to get him here alive, so he could give us Intel. And how we could get of here. And ‘why’ he---“

Bill silenced Leona with a picture of a teen-aged girl. A beautiful girl with a dog collar drawn around her neck connected to a leash and an electric outlet. A beautiful girl with the most desperate and helpless of eyes. “Norman’s daughter,” Bill said. “The one that’s still alive. As for what they did to his other daughter, he started to tell me, then the bullets started flying. He put himself in front of them. Most of them anyway,” he continued, pointing to a chunk of metal embedded near the bone in his thigh, half an inch from the femoral artery, edging its sharp edge even closer to that conduit of life-requiring blood. “And he said that...” he continued, bringing Leona close to his ear, pushing away everyone else, whispering something into it before he slipped into unconsciousness. “Trust no one. Especially those you feel closest to right now. And that he’ll be seeing Master Paul soon, in heaven, not hell.”

They were the last words Leona wanted to hear, but needed to. Words that she could share with no one.

CHAPTER 21

Bill survived the surgery done by Rachel’s hands and directed by Leona’s head, but it would be three hours till he would wake up. And in two hours, the rising sun would allow easy access for the assault teams outside to break their way inside. By the way they were hovering around the innermost compound, and arming themselves with weapons of siege rather than destruction, they were looking to take prisoners rather than lives. But one thing seemed certain now. Someone on the inside was working with someone on the outside. Especially someone who Leona felt close to now, according to Bill, who never lied to her. And as for Carlos, he was still not answering the phone calls and texts Leona had sent out to him, either because he was not in the land of the living or he had joined the realm of the betrayers, perhaps alongside of Norman, perhaps for the same reasons.

As the hour ticked to 4:20 AM, Leona looked around the now barricaded room at the faces of those who she now felt very close to, and for different reasons. Rachel had been the closest thing she had as a daughter. Emma was finally the mother that Leona wanted, and needed. And the girls were all her sisters, each willing to take a bullet for her, or so they said anyway. Then again, Leona had heard and believes such words of dedication and trust from her father, Tom, as well, back at the Rez when she was up against ‘Chief Boris’ Petrovich, the powerful mob boss who turned the entire Rez against itself, and who had been Leona’s most trusted friend when she was Leon, a mercenary who got duped into fighting for the wrong side in a War that she thought was being fought for human freedom rather than corporate profit.

Her father Tom had been the only one who supported Leona when she claimed that her brother Paul was killed by Chief Boris when he found out too much about the slave trading operation the Russian mobster had set up on the Rez. Tom was the only real Red Power Indian left on the Rez, who wasn't intimidated by or bought by Boris. And it was Tom who was Chief Boris' most trusted undercover agent in taking over the Rez, and in doing the necessary deed of having Leona's brother Paul killed, Paul also being an inside man for Boris. And even though Tom took a bullet for Leona so that she could do in Boris, Tom still had betrayed Leona.

Yes, Leona had a special talent for attaching herself to people who would betray her, for reasons she found out often too late. And her most trustable allies wound up dead. One of them was Granny, certifiably crazy elder on the Rez who was the only one to openly stand up to Boris. Hopefully Bill would not join Granny in the happy hunting grounds. In his service, and hopefully not in his memory, Leona dedicated herself now to finding out who the mole was in her operation. Someone who now she knew was someone who was NEVER her friend, ally, or comrade. Someone who was always one of 'them' rather than one of 'us'. And the only 'us' who was left who she was sure of was...the scared soul she saw on the other side of the warped and blood covered mirror in the inner sanctum of the dormitory room, now re-dubbed 'The Alamo.'

"We should do something, Leona," Emma said, recognizing her once-son-now-daughter with the utmost respect for her situation, and finally-complete and just now consecrated new gender. "And in the meantime, who gets what?" she continued, opening up a Santa Christmas bag, giving Leona only a look at the handguns inside. "Five bullets for the bad guys if they get in, the last for themselves if there are more than five bad guys who get through for each of them?" she asked regarding the plan that Leona had only given voice to in theoretical conversations when engaged in philosophical 'what if' discussions to date.

Leona looked at the loaded weapons, the girls who she was going to arm with them, then at Emma, who now looked more like a guerilla fighter mama than a cookie-baking Mom with a sawed off shotgun strapped around her shoulders and a 38 revolver tucked under her belt. As for Rachel, her weapon of choice was still biological, as she coated the bullets in her Carlos Model 46D semi-automatic handgun with an extra dose of ricin, strychnine and curare, contained in liposomes that would make a shot into any part of an attacker's body painful, paralytic and very deadly. With the stubble that had now sprouted over the crown of her recently shaved head, Rachel seemed more like a Raymond, complete with a testosterone rage behind her eyes and a 'hard on' in her clitoris which indicated all too clearly that she had become someone who enjoys killing rather than one who does it by necessity. Maybe curable with one of the drugs Rachel had designed to turn sadistic rats into merely assertive rodents, assuming of course that there would a Rachel or a Raymond still alive tomorrow to treat.

But as for today, tonight, Leona discretely unloaded the bullets from the guns she was about to give the girls and replaced one chamber in each with a new round from the bottom of her pocket, putting the ones that she had removed into Bill's 38 revolver, then

placing it in his still alive but not yet consciously-controlled hand. “What are you doing?” Emma asked Leona.

“Weapons check, and adjustment, Mom,” Leona explained. “Which I have to do on yours as well.” She held out her outstretched palm, not accepting ‘no’ for an answer.

“What about Rachel?” Emma inquired with a fearful tone as Leona did a weapons check and adjustment on her revolver and sawed off shotgun. “I’m worried.”

“Because you think Rachel’s scared?” Leona asked.

“Because she doesn’t look scared at all,” Emma replied as Leona handed back her weapons. “And all of the rescued girls do, but for different reasons.”

“I’ll do a weapons check and adjustment for Rachel, while you distribute these revolvers to the girls,” Leona said as she sneaked the revolvers into the Santa bag for Elf Emma to give to the good, or perhaps not so good, little girls as an early Christmas gift.

“What’s wrong?” Emma asked, with the concern of a mother and a comrade. “You can talk to me about anything, girlfriend.”

“Some things, I can’t talk to you,” Leona replied, looking downward. “Or anyone else,” she continued as she allowed herself the luxury of a stare at Bill’s breathing but not awake body. “Not yet,” she concluded. Then she thought of something else. “Ha!” she laughed. “In here, everyone who is still standing is female. Out there, everyone is male. Maybe this is about the battle of the sexes.”

“Or the battle about abuse of sex,” Emma replied, in all seriousness as she left Leona to her own thoughts, fears and now doubting everything and everyone’s soul.

“Everyone is a suspect now,” Leona thought to herself, but dared not give voice to, particularly when she noticed the distant shadows of the intruders morph into humanoid form in the monitor, having passed through the electric fence that could fry even petrified wood into ashes. Leona discretely looked behind the box delivering the juice to the electrical marked ‘persona non gratis, unless fried first’ and noticed the two main wires had been cut. But thank Whatever or Whoever was in control of the Universe, or responsible for creating it, there were still two walls left between the invading army of scum and the lives Leona was dedicated to protecting. One was a steel door that could be blown open with enough firepower. The other was the kind of wall was very human, and unconquerable.

“Anyone here ever heard of Masada?” Leona said to the congregation of women awaiting execution, or worse, at the hands of the men about to enter their realm.

Tatiana nodded ‘yes’, with affirmation, pride and fear. “Yes,” she said in English, then in Hebrew, the language of her ancestors. “Rather than to be taken prisoners and put

into slavery by the Romans, Jewish rebels killed themselves,” she said recalling her Semitic Slavic roots that went all the way back to ‘good old days’ of being invaded by Cossack Christians from the East and Polish Catholics from the West. “Hmmm,” she smiled in that special way only Slavic peoples do when they know the game is lost, but they know that as long as they fight till the end, they will die with their dignity intact. “Maybe I reincarnate as a Greek goddess. Beautiful.”

“And musical,” Yung added, envisioning her musical talents atop some new Mount Olympus in a world and perhaps planet far, far away from the ineffective ball of molten lava called ‘earth’.

“And free,” Latisha said, recalling the memory of slavery in her Afro-American roots that had been re-established for ‘special black candy’ like herself by the new Masters, many of whom were Cops.

“And valued, by even bastards with bubba bellies and bitches with bubble brains,” Victoria spouted out in an accent which was more Georgian than she ever gave voice to, at least to Leona.

“And mighty,” slurred out of Mara’s lips. “Like Mighty Aphrodite!” she continued, this time with affirmation in her voice, and a plan of some sort.

Leona didn’t know what that plan was, but it seemed to be more than a day dream about what was on the other side of the life and death line. And there was something in the words that clanged out something to follow up on as well.

“Mighty Aphrodite,” Leona said. “Interesting,” she went on, with her eyes.

“A Woody Allen movie that he made twenty years ago,” Rachel whispered to Leona. “Do you think it means something?” she continued as she snuck over to Leona, pretending to give her a map that she made look important.

“I think it will,” Leona said as the plan brewing in her head materialized, working with a third brain between herself and Rachel that had become stronger, smarter and now even more intuitive. “Open the door and let the Romans in,” she whispered to Rachel as the girls, and Emma, prayed to whatever God they seemed to believe in, or wanted to be real.

“Huh?” Rachel said.

“Yes, the Romans,” Leona replied, writing something on a piece of paper and giving it to Rachel, while looking with the other eye to see who was watching her and not looking to their Creator.

Rachel excused herself from the room, saying she needed a ‘final piss break, for old time sake’, while Emma looked nervously at Leona.

“Something going on between you two I should know about?” Emma asked. “Tell me what’s going on, Leona. For God’s sake, please tell me!”

“I won’t and can’t, for God’s sake, and yours,” Leona replied, looking at her watch. “But, to make this work, be yourself. Which I know takes a lifetime of practice, but if we finally get it right, we...” The warrior prince-turned-princess broke out into mad laughter. That ‘I don’t give a fuck anymore about anything anymore’ laugh that scared the shit out of Emma. But not as much as what happened a terrifying 4 seconds later. An intruder from what seemed as nowhere clad from head to toe in protective squat gear, armed to the teeth, pointed a weapon three times larger than any of the armaments in the room, with thirty times more attitude. He fired a round of warning shots, one of which blew Leona’s weapon out of her hands before she could fire it at anything.

“Everyone! Weapons down!” he grunted. All of the girls obeyed, as did Emma. But Leona stuck to her guns, aiming such back at the uninvited guest.

“And if I don’t put down my weapon, shithead!” Leona said.

“Your choice, not mine,” the intruder said. He shot Leona, causing her to fall to the ground, laying lifelessly on the ground next to Bill, who still was barely alive.

“So,” he grunted to the five girls still standing, and Emma. “Which of you girls wants to come back home for milk and cookies? Alive is better, dead is ok too. Painfully wounded would be more fun for us.”

Emma pushed herself into the business end of the weapon, grabbing hold of it. “You girls, get out of here. He shoots me, you shoot him.”

“Master wouldn’t like that,” Mora said, picking up the gun Leona had given her from the ground and pointing it at the rest of the girls just as they were about to reclaim their weaponry. “Master Paul is finally going to take me back to Daddy?” she said to the intruder in a voice that Emma had never heard. First in English, then in Arabic.

“Yes, he is,” the intruder said. “After you prove your loyalty to Master Paul and your father. And the rest of us. Just like we planned it all along.”

Mora turned to the girls, pointing her gun at them. “I’m sorry,” she said with a head full of ‘distance’ that infused confusion, then terror into all of her former ‘classmates’ in Liberation School. “I have to do what I have to do. For Daddy, and me, and...hmm...you.”

“So you’re the mole!” Emma screamed out lashing out at the intruder, but stopped from doing so by Mora’s fist, knocking her into the wall then onto the floor. “Who killed my daughter! Who will be avenged by me in the afterlife, and Rachel in this life, when she gets back here with---“

“—Nothing that can stop me, or my buddies outside!” the masked intruder grunted. He turned to Mora. “You played your part well, Mora. Now you can finally tell the rest of the plan to these losers and dreamers. Before the rest of the family comes in to take you back home, and these pieces of property back to their masters.”

“Property,” Mora said, with a gallows humor chuckle. “An interesting word that...well. Makes me rethink my part in all of this.” With that she turned her gun away from the girls and onto the intruder. “A girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do,” she said, after which she fired one round between his hidden eyes. She then turned around to the girls, and Emma, and smiled. “Gotta keep the morality books balanced too,” she continued. “If you hadn’t been my friends, I wouldn’t have to do this.” And with that, she aimed the gun at her own temples and fired away.

“My God!” Emma said, trying desperately to shake Mora back to life as she fell to the ground, shaking like a dried up autumn leave in a vicious winter wind.

“My plan,” the intruder interjected, with a voice far more female than male, and a body which was of that gender. Rachel stripped away the SWAT suit behind which she was hiding, and looked towards Leona. “My plan and hers.”

“To see which one of us was one of them,” Leona said as she woke up from her slumber and pulled out a bag of fake blood from her bloody chest. “Fake blood that I put into my pocket, to match the fake bullets I put into your guns,” she said to the girls, as well as Emma. “And she’ll wake up from the anxiety attack she’s having soon enough,” Leona said regarding Mora, who had just realized that the only damage she had done to her body were some powder burns on her temples, and that though her mind was in the realm of the dead her body was very much in the realm of the living.

“What we do with this bitch?” Tatiana asked Leona as the rest of the girls held Mora down, some out of pity for her, some because they wanted to tear her apart limb by limb themselves.

“Find out who she knew, and what she knows,” Leona said.

“After we take care of who she led here,” Bill said as he opened his eyes, as if awakening from the dead.

“How long were you playing dead!?” Leona blasted at him.

“Long enough to let your plan work itself out, and maybe one that I think would work to keep us all alive,” he replied. “Sometimes being dead, or close to it, gives you good ideas as to how to stay Alive. And why.”

CHAPTER 22

It's always darkest before dawn, and the sky outside the 'bunker' was pitch black, at least according to the cameras that were still operating. Views of the attack force were visible from the East and South, but not from the North and West. Hopefully, the armada of gangsters, human trafficking goons and very off-duty Cops didn't know that. But there was one question that Leona needed to know most of all. When Mora had woken up to the person she was before her Saudi father had stolen her virginity she finally answered that question.

"I don't know how many came here, but I know that the people who sent them will send as many as they need to so that you, and everyone you work with are dead, or put in dog collars and chains," she said to Leona. "You, Rachel, Stevenson and even Emma are on their most wanted posters now. I'm on your side now."

"And why should we believe you?" Rachel blasted at Mora, feeling more betrayed than anyone else because it was Mora who had converted her scientific curiosity about how to liberate an enslaved brain into human concern for a tortured soul. "You were going to betray us, for...what? Money? Fame? Or was it 'love' you still have for Daddy!?"

"The life of my CHILD!" she screamed out. "MY daughter who grew up in MY womb, and I still love. Who still doesn't know who her real father is!"

"And if you kept your mouth shut and played along with Daddy and his buds' plans, your daughter would be alive," Lakesha sighed, relating to her own experience with her 'ex'. "I heard that one before. They send you pictures, recycle some tape recording of her they got in the past, and tell you that she'll be reunited with you some day if you're a good girl."

"While that daughter is gone girl," Tatiana added, noting other girls' stories in the stable in which she ate her own shit, feeling the pain of those stories as if they were her own now. "Gone to other Daddy's, Masters, or dumpsters. Or maybe into chicken stew that Master Paul sells with his Amish friends to make---"

"---Enough!" Mora screeched out, holding her ears. "I know! We have to stop them. All eight of us!"

"Or maybe...nine?" Emma said, having just gotten a text, the wifi signal to the bunker finally becoming functional. "Carlos is back!"

"Back with who?" Bill asked as she read on. "With how much man, or woman, power?"

"Weapon power," she read on. "Which he'll unleash on their asses, before you can say" she said as she looked at her watch. "...Mary had a little lamb, her fleece was white as..."

The Eastern camera picked up a flair of fire in the sky that brightened the horizon, and sent laser beams into the backs of the invasion force. Leona smiled with delight as she saw the Army of wannabe Viking slavers turn into shaking leaves, holding their ears while they could, until their arms went into grand mal seizures. She had to share it with the inventor of the device. “Rachel! Look and see what your sound frequency generator is doing to these guinea pigs! A biological model of grand mal seizures!”

“That Carlos should keep going till ALL their brain cells are fried to a crisp,” Rachel said, preparing a text message to him.

“Or maybe just toasted golden on the outside?” Leona said. “We’ll need some of them alive. For the real Cops to arrest, and...if you want, to put into cages and experiment on further, Rach. With ANY drugs you want.”

“Yeah..that’d be interesting, and nice,” she smirked.

As for the Southern flank, Carlos’ stealth helicopter released nerve gas in two sweeps over them. He tried to do a third to inactivate the remaining 10 percent of that group, but his engines were out. He made a crash landing, according to the cameras and the ‘I’m alright!’ text he sent when he hit the ground.

As for the North and West flanks, it was anyone’s guess. Defending the bunker from inside would have been disastrous, as artillery shells came tumbling down above it, the walls to the outside crumbling faster than a ‘safe’ plan could be devised. Then, silence. A text came in from their leader to Rachel’s phone. “Change of command here. Still more of us than you. Surrender and you live, or can join us. One time offer.”

“From Ivan Griosksi,” Bill noted reading it. “Man of his word, even to his enemies.”

“Well,” Leona said to her Army of fellow Liberators and Liberatees as she cocked the hammer on her assault weapon. “Who wants to die on their feet rather than on their knees?”

All of the girls said ‘yes’ to the proposition. Bill looked at Leona with Pride at the decision their adopted daughters had made, both individually and collectively. Each picked up their weapons, after which Leona gave them REAL bullets to put into them. “So, we are ready?” she asked them as the sun came up, giving every one of the girls a good look at the advancing Army of infantry approaching over open ground, as if they feared nothing in front of them. “Time for all of us to...become, hmmm...to become---”

“---a verb,” Rachel suggested. “Any one any of you like,” she smiled to the misfits who had now become a congregation.

“On ten then?” Leona said.

As the countdown started, each of the girls stated the number in their own language. At the count of one, they bolted out of their hiding place and fired away. No one heard saw anything much after that, but heard a lot..and when the smoke finally cleared----

CHAPTER 23

“So,” a raven from a branch above heard from soft human voice that emerged amidst a field of wild wheat now covered with bodies and blood. “Who’s left?”

“Me?” the avian observer heard from Tatianna, then Lakesha, then Yung, then Victoria, but not Mora. “Me too,” it heard from Rachel, “I think,” she appended, having never experienced being shot. “Moi aussi,” the bird heard from Bill Stevenson. “And you Emma?” he continued. “Yeah...thank God.”

“And thank..her,” Bill said looking at Leona, whose eyes were still open, and whose mouth was still breathing. But only barely.

One of the enemy raised his bloody arm up, asking for mercy. Bill answered it with a bullet between his legs, then one into his head. Carlos limped in from the trees, a tourniquet around his left arm. Bill looked at then smelled what was below it.

“I know,” Carlos said, resolved for the worse. “But better to have to intact cerebral hemispheres between your ears than two intact arms on your shoulders, right?”

“Not if I can help it,” Rachel said, rushing over to exam in the wound. “Anything torn apart by metal, a thinking brain can put together with...” The words got stuck in her throat. “I’m gonna save this arm, and you!” she promised Carlos, defying the gods and the laws of biology.

“After she saves me, I suppose,” Leona smirked through a mouth emitting blood and death-rattle. “She doesn’t know she can’t do it, so that means she probably can.”

“Fuck probably!” Rachel screamed back at Leona as she slit open her jacket to get a closer look at the wounds under it. “And fuck you if you let her die!” she blasted up the sky, and the Deity that she knew was there, somewhere, she hoped anyway.

As for the raven and the rest of its avian friends, they had a hearty lunch on the carrion of dead slavers lying in the field. Those that were merely ‘neurologically inactivated’ rather than dead, were taken away by Cops that Bill Stevenson knew from his days in Winnipeg, the proceedings watched over by his biker buds from Montreal. Yes, they would talk, reveal some names, get a few more girls liberated. And yes, more assholes would replace them in the sex slave and human trafficking trade. But in a war to liberate the 30 million enslaved human souls in the world, one has to do it a thousand, a hundred or even one at a time. For now, it was enough.

