

ANIMARIUM

Parts I-IV, The Complete Ascent &
Descent

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ANIMARIUM

A blog series by Melissa Starr



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Part One

Everything you know is a lie

HER NAME WAS SUSAN

The third world war was not the last war, it was just the last one anyone really made a big deal about because it shaped Earth as it is known in the year 3300. Now, the only culture Earth knows is one of brutality and violence. There are few areas where life

exists as it once did many millennia ago, and the ghost of civilization still roams freely. Continents are a sort of forgotten concept as most of them were obliterated or forever altered, and the word itself (along with many other cultural staples) became painful and served as nothing but a reminder of a time when peace was a faint possibility.

A little girl was rumored to have been the real cause of the third world war, because she delivered the wrong message. History says that in 2035, an important political figure was planning to stage a crime to impact a rival's campaign against them. The little girl was the child of the politician's housekeeper and overheard some of the plot. It has been said that this little girl heard the rival's name and repeated part of what she heard to the rival politician's daughter, who was her classmate. Once that happened, the politician's daughter told her father, who raised a big stink in the local news about what had happened.

The spurned politician's story caught the interest of the national news stations, and fairly quickly, most of the country had heard about the little girl who told on her father's plot to eliminate the competition. Many people had strong opinions that this could have been a conspiracy, and felt the little girl was trying to relay a darker message by telling her classmate what she overheard. Reporters swarmed the politician's home and tried to speak with him on many occasions, but failed, as he continually refused to answer questions or even entertain any light discussions. One one occasion, the politician threw what initially looked and smelled strongly like human feces in a crowd of reporters gathered outside his home, but it turned out it was simply a stained pair of boxer briefs with poop streaks that didn't quite come out in the wash.

As the story avalanched its way into international news with dark stories of American politicians and plots involving children, the Russians became involved by broadcasting the story on their news stations, complete with their own propaganda. It was the opinion of most Russians that the Americans had devolved so far that it was necessary to conduct espionage using children. The Russians tried very hard to elevate themselves with this slant, making Americans appear to be much weaker and susceptible to attack. Soon, North Korea even joined forces with Russia, being that they felt slighted by the frequent change in leadership and its resulting favor from the American government.

LET'S PAUSE REALLY FAST.

Pretend you are an international liaison working with American Intelligence. What path would you choose for yourself at this point? (Password protected blogs - enter pathone for Path One, pathtwo for Path Two, and paththree for Path Three).

Path one: Do nothing. These are perilous times and it is imperative to remain cool headed. If you try to intervene in any way and you are discovered, things could go very badly. (1.1, page 11)

Path two: Attempt to influence Russian media by spying on the main international news station in Russia in 2035 - Russian World News Network. Apply for an entry level job there. (2.1, page 29)

Path three: Put out a hit on the politician whose little girl told on him. Locate the girl and isolate her somewhere she can be monitored closely. (3.1, page 44)

1.1 PATH ONE JIM CARTWRIGHT

You've chosen to do nothing.

Since you are not taking action at this point, you will remain in the vicinity of your home, which is currently located in Bossier City, LA. You are a 29-year-old male who has just recently broken up with his girlfriend of 2 years, at least that's your cover. Your name is Jim Cartwright and you have been working with American Intelligence since they recruited you six years ago from the USAF.

This night was balmy with minimal relief from a light breeze coming from the east on this summer night in June. As you drove along the Long-Allen Texas Street bridge toward Sam's Town for an assignment, a song came on 98.1 FM, KTAL Classic Rock. You turn it up as the traffic slows down to a crawl.

Inching along US Route 79 headed west, your phone emits a small tone, indicating you've received a text message. It reads:

ROOM 184

You deduce this is the room you are to visit when you arrive at Sam's Town. Traffic starts to ease up a bit and move more quickly across the bridge, so you pick up the pace and continue toward the hotel, making it about 25 minutes after you received the text message.

It was 9:04PM when you arrived at Sam's Town, and the front desk clerk provided you with a key card for room 184. You make your way there, unlock the door, and step inside.

On the desk, there is a sealed envelope with your name on it nearly illegible handwriting. You open the envelope and inside it is a postcard from New Orleans. Turning the card over, you see the following message:

"Polyamory Palace

Come find it."

Putting the postcard down, you decide you're too tired to drive home. What do you do at this point?

JIM CARTWRIGHT PATH ONE – Stay at Sam's Town in room 184. You're tired and you want to relax a bit and maybe have a drink at the casino.

JIM CARTWRIGHT PATH TWO – Stay at Sam's Town but rent another room. This one might be bugged.

Will post blogs for both paths next Sunday.

1.1 Jim Cartwright - "Room 184"

Updated: Aug 15

>>>PATH ONE ...<<< Password is pathone

You look at your phone to check the time; it's 9:34PM and you decide to just stay in room 184 since it's easier, you're tired, and you need to relax after the day you've had. You decide to take a shower before heading down to Sam's Town Casino.

You take a long look at yourself in the mirror after undressing, as the shower water heats up in the Roman tub, fog starting to form around your image. Your thick, shoulder-length brown hair matted from sweat and wind; your tired, deep brown eyes staring back at you with a hollow stare. You still grapple with anxious thoughts of the consequences of the decision you made this morning. It was necessary and even though it wasn't what you wanted to do, you had to do it and you did. Your eyes don't betray your inner conflict, you think, as you watch the fog turn your mirror image into a blur.

Getting in the hot shower, you let the scalding hot water pelt your pale skin. At 6'2" and 185 pounds of solid, chiseled muscle, your body aches from the exertion of the day. As you feel yourself starting to relax, you look down at your chest, wincing at the sight of the deep scratch marks and bruising.

As you finish cleaning up, you hear a small thudding sound that sounds like it came from the next room over. You ignore it and go back to grooming yourself, drying off, brushing your hair and teeth, and shaving your five-o-clock shadow. You open the bathroom door to let some of the steam out.

"Polyamory Palace," you mutter to yourself as you shave your face. It sounded like a brothel, you thought. What in the world could be down there? What horrors would you be subjected to this time? You would need to plan your trip to New Orleans the next morning before checking out. You wipe the shaving cream off your face and coat it with aftershave, gritting your teeth at the pain. Your phone alerts you that a text message has arrived. You pick it up to see that it reads:

"I'm at the bar."

You check the number and it is an area code from Fair Lawn, NJ. Was this for real? In any case, that's where you're headed in a few minutes, so you'll see what's what then. You decide to try to find a place called "Polyamory Palace" in Shreveport by performing a quick Google search. No results. You would have to think a little more creatively to find this place. Or, maybe this mysterious New Jersey person would be able to provide some insight.

Putting on your Levi's and a black Nike golf polo shirt, you hear the thudding in the next room again but this time it's much

louder, and it's followed by what sounds like a whimper. You think they must be having rough sex in the next room and chuckle softly to yourself. You put on your Nike Air Max 90 Exeter Edition shoes and grab your wallet, car keys and room key. As you open the hotel door, you hear an unmistakable sound come from the room next door. It was a gunshot.

What do you do now?

JIM CARTWRIGHT PATH ONE - Get to the bar as fast as you can. You don't know what's going on next door and you don't want to.

JIM CARTWRIGHT PATH TWO - Hide in room 184 and wait to see what happens next.

Blogs for both paths will be posted

1.1 Jim Cartwright - "Sam's Town"

>>>"Room 184"<<<

Your heart stopping for a moment as you process exactly what you heard, your fight or flight instinct kicks in and the latter dictates what action you've chosen. As you make your way hastily down the hall toward the elevator, you hear the door open and a man say something foreign then slam the door loudly. Panicked, you hear his footsteps making their way toward you quickly. You look around to see if you can find somewhere to hide.

Do you want to hide in Room 184 after all? Last chance.

OR

... to move forward.

1.2 "SAM'S TOWN"

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

>>>Work your way back & get caught up by clicking here<<<

The hotel hallway seemed to stretch on for eternity, and you felt like a mere hot dog within. There was clearly nowhere to hide, and you immediately began to regret leaving room 184. Why oh why did you listen to your fear? This was unlike you, and you were mentally berating yourself for it. After the day you had yesterday, everything else in your life...maybe you just felt like you didn't want to run the risk of anything else going wrong.

Way to go, Jim. Real clever.

As you slow your pace down to a reasonable stride so when the foreign gunman sees you there he isn't alarmed by you, you silently start praying to whatever deity exists that may hear you long enough to know you didn't mean to hurt her, and you didn't want things to end the way they did. The only reason it happened that way is because it was part of the mission. You never wanted it to end like that. It was the single worst thing to ever happen to you in your entire life and not a day goes by that you don't think about it. Not a day. You aren't the type to really feel any sort of remorse for doing what you have to do, you're a survivor and you are able to focus on the bigger picture, not getting bogged down in the details.

But her...

That was something you really struggled with. Sure, you could find reasons to justify it, to really excuse yourself. You could lie

to yourself so much that you start to believe it, so you can cope and move forward with your life – er, existence. But you can't do that because if you do, it almost makes you lose touch with a part of yourself you didn't even realize you had until you met her. If you wrote her off like a bad debt, you would almost be writing yourself off, too.

Sure, she was not an ideal sort of stereotypical type of woman, but was any woman? Was any person an exact match of a stereotype? Of course not, and anyone who tried to be was usually targeted or they were the ones doing the targeting. It was complicated, but she was simple – she was the type of woman who didn't really care about what other people thought about her and her actions demonstrated that quite clearly. It wasn't with any sort of nefarious intent, you decided, though, after getting to know her through her habits, her trash, and sometimes her personal email account when you were able to get in. It made it so much easier when the time came to actually talk to her to find things to say that would hold her interest.

Her eyes, how they would light up when she would get excited about something she was talking about. The way she twirled her hair and how her lips pursed when she was listening to you. The way she looked all over your face when you talked as though she was trying to memorize you. It almost made you blush again just imagining what it was like.

You turn the corner as you hear the gunman's footsteps growing closer and faster. Your heart starts pounding and you realize you aren't ready to die. You hope that isn't what is going to happen.

Click to move forward.

1.3 HELLO, JIM

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

Previous post

The footsteps keep getting closer, and it seems like they are picking up the pace, matching your own panicked heartbeat. The last moments of your life would have been thinking about her and how you could have done something differently. You'd heard that once your life leaves your body, your bowels and bladder empty. What a sight and smell to behold, you smirk to yourself.

Then, nothing. No man, no more footsteps. Just silence.

But wait!

A voice? It sounded like someone said something. You weren't sure. What you did know is that you heard what sounded like sirens in the distance which meant the police were coming. If the police were coming, you didn't want to be anywhere near the scene of a crime.

You're on your way to the bar to meet Fair Lawn, NJ.

CLICK FOR LATEST BLOG

1.4 "SAM'S TOWN, PART 2"

Posted on August 22, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Crossing the bridge from the hotel to the riverboat where you'd find the casino and the bar, you run your fingers through your hair and marvel at your seemingly good luck. You saw police

officers in the hotel lobby talking to the front desk clerks, and you didn't notice that one of them stared at you, following your every move as you passed by, memorizing every detail.

Arriving at the bar, you have a look around while the bartender serves another guest. It was a slow night, and you didn't see anyone there who didn't seem to be with someone else.

Looking back at your phone, you re-read the text, and yes, your eyes didn't deceive you, your text indicates someone is at the bar. You check the number again, and decide to order a drink while you wait a few minutes before trying to call the number from Fair Lawn, NJ.

The bartender acknowledges you with a nod, heading your way. He's tall, probably about 6'5" and heavy set. His thick brown hair parted to the left side, his bulging hazel eyes gazing at you with a sort of knowing look making you feel comfortable immediately. He introduces himself as Paul, and you shake his hand.

"I'm Jon," you lie, ordering a Crown Royal, neat. Paul prepares it for you and serves you as another man comes up on your right, smelling of Vanilla car air freshener and dank weed. You glance at him and observe that he is about your height, dark greasy hair and a goatee, with thick glasses. He looks at you and smiles widely, extending his hand.

"Eric," he introduces himself to you as you shake his hand firmly. "Eric Small, I sell Volvos at Holmes," he continues, in his odd, hybrid accent.

"I'm Jon," you continue to lie, "nice to meet you Mr. Small."

"Please, call me Eric," he insists, sitting down next to you, ordering a 7 & 7. He takes out his wallet and tips the bartender generously. "I love coming up here after a long day," he declares, taking off his black blazer before folding it in half and lying it down on the bar between the both of you. "I moved here from New Jersey about 15 years ago and I started coming up

here after work sometimes, just have the one drink and a steak, medium rare, then head home for the night.”

“New Jersey?” You ask, looking at Eric attentively. He doesn’t seem to be trying to alert you to anything, and he isn’t acting like he’s on any sort of official mission, but maybe that’s the decoy. “What part?”

Eric takes a sip of his drink, sets down the glass, then pulls out a Marlboro red from his jacket pocket, pausing briefly and looking directly into your eyes, expressionless. “Fair Lawn,” he says, a sort of forced smile spreading across his face, his eyes still fixed.

You feel an odd sensation in your spine. You avert your eyes and see the bartender looking over your shoulder at the group of police officers who have just entered the bar and are headed directly your way.

You look at one of the police officers who is headed straight toward you. She is about 5’4” with her platinum blonde hair pulled back in a bun and her large doe eyes staring straight at you, a look of intense hatred on her face. Your spine twitches again and you avert your gaze. “Excuse me gentlemen,” she starts in her thick Louisiana drawl. “I’m Detective Cartwright from Shreveport Homicide,” she says, flashing her badge and looking directly at you.

You start to sweat, avoiding her gaze but acknowledging her presence with a nod. “Hello, Detective Cartwright, how can we be of assistance to you this evening, ma’am?” Eric says next to you, his mouth clicking dryly when he speaks.

Detective Cartwright continues by saying there was a shooting in the hotel and asks if anyone saw anything that might be of interest. Reaching for her contact cards, she hands you one first, searching your face for anything that might give away how she seems to know you’re feeling right now.

You look at her quickly and shake your head, “Sorry, ma’am, that’s terrible to hear, I didn’t see anything but I will call you if I hear anything,” you proclaim with a tone of voice you hope she perceives as honesty.

Eric and Paul say the same basic things to her, and she looks at you one last time with a look of determination, her intent so thick in the air you could feel it wrapping around you like a massive boa constrictor, squeezing the air out of your throat and slowly ending you as it prepares to dine on your flesh.

... ..

JIM CARTWRIGHT PATH TWO:

1.5 JIM CARTWRIGHT – “RENT ANOTHER ROOM”

Posted on August 8, 2021 by Melissa

>>>PATH ONE ...<<< Password is pathone

You think you should rent another room, this one seems the obvious choice for anyone who might want to find you, and the room itself could have hidden cameras. You check your bank balance on your phone and you see that you don’t have enough to rent another room. You check your credit card balance and find the same.

... TO PROCEED

1.6 Jim Cartwright - "Room 184"

Updated: Aug 15

>>>PATH ONE ...<<< Password is pathone

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JIM CARTWRIGHT PATH TWO - Hide in room 184 and wait to see what happens next.

Blogs for both paths will be posted

1.7 Room 184, part 2

>>>"Room 184"<<<

Falling to the floor instinctually, you make your way as close to the source of the sound as you can, pressing your ear against the wall to try to hear something, anything, to clue you in to what might be going on next door.

You hear a man yelling something that sounded Russian, then the door opened and slammed loudly. You hear him quickly making haste down the hall, and still you strain to catch any sound that might be coming from the next room. You wrack your brain trying to think if it was room 185 or 183, thinking you might be able to alert hotel staff and call for help. You are unarmed, your guns are all at home locked in your safe at your loft in Bossier City. How you wished you were there right now instead of on the floor of this hotel room, bearing witness to, for all you know, a murder in the next room over.

Then, a faint sound from the next room. You couldn't quite make out whether it was a voice or possibly someone hitting something like furniture, or maybe a death rattle. Regardless, it was a sign that the room wasn't completely empty. Why wasn't someone coming up there? It seemed like at least five minutes

had passed since you heard the gunshot. There were lots of people at the hotel, you definitely weren't the only one to hear it.

Were you?

"Help!" a weak voice yelped.

You jumped to your feet and ran toward your hotel room door, grabbing the key. You go to the next room over and pound on it loudly.

"Hello?" You shout frantically. "Is anyone in there? Are you okay?"

Police rush up behind you and push you to the floor, immediately handcuffing you. You try to explain you are staying in the next room but no one is paying attention. Some of the police officers go into room 185 and the door flies open to reveal blood all over the walls and a woman lying on the ground covered in blood, her black eyes half open, staring right at you.

"Not him!" she says, trying to shout. "Not him, it's not him!"

The police talk to her as the EMTs rush in the door, prepping her to be taken to CHRISTUS Bossier Emergency room. You see one of the officers gesture at you and the black-eyed, blood covered woman nod in confirmation. The officer instructs his partner to release you. He takes the cuffs off and you immediately get up and massage your wrists, forever in this woman's debt.

As the EMTs load the injured, but alive, woman into the back of the ambulance, she reaches out and grabs your arm.

"Come to the hospital, ask for Zara Thibodeaux. Say you're family," she urged, her eyes widening. "I have to talk to you."

You remember the text message you got about the bar and the mysterious person from Fair Lawn, NJ. You start to shake your head but Zara stops you.

"It was me," she said. "I sent the text. Just go to the hospital."

You nod and agree to meet her at the hospital. She is taken away in the ambulance, leaving you in complete disbelief at what just happened.

... ..

1.8 "Zara"

>>>..., ... NOW OR BE IMPALED IN THE EYE WITH A DIRTY DILDO EVERY DAY UNTIL YOU DIE!<<<

She was so small, even at 5'8" she seemed just so frail. Maybe it was the hospital bed, the beeping machines giving you an anxiety attack as you stood near Zara's bedside as she asked you to do, waiting for her to wake up. You weren't too sure about asking hospital staff specific questions pertaining to her condition, but you were very curious as to what happened and why she was so intent on speaking with you.

A nurse came into the room and gently tapped your arm. Looking into her soft green eyes, she had a friendly face, and asked you politely to wait outside for a bit as she was going to give Zara a sponge bath. She'd be awake for your visit after that. You smiled and nodded, then exited the room, stopping at the vending machine for some Hot Cheetos before going into the waiting room where they were featuring reruns of "Magnum PI."

... ..

2.1 PATH TWO CASSIE HOLBRIGHT:

You've chosen to attempt to influence the Russian media. You will be traveling to Moscow, to apply for an entry level job working at Russian World News Network.

Your name is Cassie Holbright, a 37-year-old widow who is currently living in Phoenix, AZ. You have been single since your husband, Mark, died of cancer 6 months ago. You haven't dated, and have just thrown yourself into your career. You were recruited from the USMC by American Intelligence last year, and have always felt like it ruined your life, yet you continued to serve because of your strong desire to make a difference in the world.

Stepping out of the Lyft at Sky Harbor after giving the driver a generous cash tip, you headed toward the John S. McCain III, Terminal 3 to catch outbound Delta flight 1533 headed for a layover at JFK, then on to Moscow after changing flights.

•

After what seemed like eons, you finally lift off and fly away from Arizona toward New York. It would be about 2 days before you would be settled in Moscow, and another day or two after that before you would be able to apply at Russian World News Network. You are attempting to get into character. Your assumed name will be Iva Petrov, and you will need to practice your Russian accent.

As the plane soars beyond Arizona, over New Mexico and approaches Texas, you doze lazily in and out until you feel a slight nudge on your arm. Opening your eyes and taking your earbuds out, you look to your right and see a small boy smiling at you. He looks about 7 or 8, and he suppresses a giggle as he tells you that you were snoring and you now have dried drool on your chin.

Embarrassed, you immediately start wiping frantically at your chin, feeling the encrusted, dried saliva, and having to peel it off like dried Elmer's glue. The little boy just laughs more loudly, attracting the attention of his dad, who immediately raises the hairs on the back of your neck when you look into his fixed grey eyes staring intently at you.

How do you proceed?

CASSIE HOLBRIGHT PATH ONE – Swallow your fear and strike up a conversation with this man. There is something compelling about him, albeit horrifying.

CASSIE HOLBRIGHT PATH TWO – Smile politely at the scary man and try to go back to sleep. You want nothing to do with him as he terrifies you.

Will post blogs for both paths next Sunday.

CASSIE HOLBRIGHT PATH ONE:

2.1 Cassie Holbright - "страх"

Updated: Aug 15

>>>PATH TWO ...<<< Password is pathtwo

You gulp audibly, and stare into the most intimidating pair of grey eyes you have ever seen in your life. Your pale blue eyes widen, and you nervously fix your light brown hair as you smile widely at this horrifying man, his face expressionless. He doesn't blink.

"Hello, what's your name?" You ask him nervously.

He finally blinks and a strange smile creeps across his face. In a thick Russian accent he responds, "Cassie, I am Sergei, but you can refer to me as капитан or Captain," he responds flatly. "You are now Iva Petrov, tasked with finding job at RWNN, and I am going to tell you exactly what you need to say and do. Your every move and every word will be monitored by me and my team. Understand?"

You freeze. No one prepared you for this Russian escort, and you aren't sure if he is with AI or Russian Intelligence. You look down at the little boy who was once happily smiling and laughing at you and see that his expression has now turned to one of fascination as he just stares at you.

Sergei continues, "Do not worry yourself with him," he pats the boy's head. "He is Boris, my son. He will not be involved in this mission, he is travelling to see his мать."

You are speechless and frozen in fear. You feel your heart pounding, and you start to sweat. "Forgive me, Captain, I was not made aware of your role in my mission. I have to ask you, do you have credentials you can show me? I'm sure you can understand why I'm asking, and I apologize if I have caused any offense by doing so, I am simply protecting the integrity of the mission."

Sergei's eyes narrow in disapproval at you. You are completely frozen in fear now. His lips purse as he shakes his head, looking you in the eyes the entire time.

"You don't understand, Iva," Sergei whispered slowly. "You don't ask questions, I ask questions. You are Iva Petrov now. Iva Petrov. Not Cassie Holbright. Iva Petrov." He grabs your arm and squeezes hard, inching closer to your face so that you can smell his breath. "And Iva Petrov belong to me," he hissed.

How do you handle this?

CASSIE HOLBRIGHT PATH ONE - Nod quietly and ignore the pain in your arm. Decide to comply with this man's every request.

CASSIE HOLBRIGHT PATH TWO - Scream loudly for help. This man's role was not included in the mission's briefing, and you

are not going to trust him.

Will post blogs for both paths

2.1 "Согласие"

Updated: 7 days ago

>>>click for ...<<<

Your arm feels like it's being squeezed into dust by a vise grip. It doesn't matter right now. You need to live and move forward with your mission. You nod your head in agreement at Sergei and clench your jaw. He sees in your eyes you are not being true to your instincts, and it makes him smile wickedly. You blink and feel a pull at the base of your spine.

"Wait for 24 hours," Sergei says to you, almost explaining how long it would take to recover from the odd tingling pain sensation coming from your lower back. It felt like someone was gripping you there, squeezing and trying to remove something, but you thought it was just the abysmally uncomfortable accommodations in economy class.

You turn toward the front of the plane and notice several passengers ordering meals. You decide to eat to make it look like you are not screaming internally. Your entire being is shaking and you are doing all you can do not to let it show. You know Sergei is completely aware that you are frozen in fear and only complying with him for your own survival; you feel this is the best chance for you to make it out of this situation in one piece and you're no stranger to harrowing situations. He may know you are afraid, but you can use your body as a weapon, you think to yourself. You're a very attractive woman, and you know you can manipulate him that way.

"I'm gay," Sergei proclaims out of the blue. You turn to look at him, an expression of shock on your face, and notice his eyes are no longer fixated on yours but on your shoulder. You look down at it and don't see anything that may attract interest so you look back at him, searching. He is now looking at your forehead.

You touch your forehead and there's nothing there, so you look back at him again.

He's crossing his eyes.

Exasperated, you ask him what he's talking about. He turns and faces forward. You sigh and turn back toward the front of the plane until you feel a familiar tapping on your arm.

It's Boris again. He's smiling at you, holding out a big green booger on his other hand (the one that's not touching you) and displaying it proudly.

... ..

CASSIE HOLBRIGHT PATH TWO

2.2 CASSIE HOLBRIGHT – “GO TO SLEEP”

Posted on August 8, 2021 by Melissa

>>>PATH TWO ...<<< Password is pathtwo

You're so scared of this man you can't muster up the courage to speak with him. You're also incredibly tired and not looking forward to the long flight ahead. You just want to sleep the time away.

But you can't. The little boy won't leave you alone. He keeps poking you and trying to talk to you.

CLICK TO PROCEED

2.1 Cassie Holbright - "страх"

Updated: Aug 15

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You gulp audibly, and stare into the most intimidating pair of grey eyes you have ever seen in your life. Your pale blue eyes widen, and you nervously fix your light brown hair as you smile widely at this horrifying man, his face expressionless. He doesn't blink.

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Will post blogs for both paths

2.3 Cassie Holbright - If You Scream, It's Just a Dream

>>>стрax<<<

Sergei's grip on your arm gets tighter and you observe his other hand reach into his pocket. Boris, between the two of you grabs your hand and whispers, "if you scream, it's just a dream," as though he could read your mind and knew exactly what you intended to do.

Ignoring Boris' warning, you open your mouth to scream and as you do, you feel the needle slide into your arm. You look down and see Boris mouthing the words, "I'm sorry."

Boris then pulls the needle out of your arm and you lose consciousness.

Regret this decision? Go back and opt for path one here.

OR

... to move forward.

2.3 "IF YOU SCREAM, IT'S JUST A DREAM"

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

>>>... to read the previous posts<<<

He just wouldn't listen to you. He kept repeating himself whenever you would try to talk, and would talk over you to the point where you just didn't see any reason to continue the conversation. You were fed up with trying to explain your side of the story and having it fall on deaf ears. He always assumed the worst and it just wasn't true.

"I'm leaving, I don't want to argue," you said as you picked up your car keys and put on your sunglasses.

Mark shook his head. "Always running away from your problems, aren't you, Cassie?"

You ignore him and walk out the door, slamming it behind you. Stepping into your car, you turn on the engine and drive away aimlessly. A few minutes later, your phone starts ringing. You already know it's Mark without checking it. It happens every time.

Mark was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer one year prior and it was miraculous he had lived as long as he had. Your lifestyle changed drastically, but he was perfectly healthy otherwise, and always kept up on his treatments. He was in line for a lung transplant, but you were still discussing how you wanted to proceed with that, and whether or not you wanted to take the risk. Mark wanted children, but you weren't in any rush. Starting a family would be nice, but it was more important to make sure he was healthy enough to do so also. A family needed to be whole, you felt. You didn't want to bring children into a lifestyle that would impact their entire lives; seeing their father going through cancer treatments and knowing that at any time, he might not be there. You didn't want your children to live with that worry, and you didn't know how you would handle it if he wasn't there to help you raise children anyway. The thought of that terrified you.

Looking down at your gas gauge, you see that you are teetering on the edge of empty. You wished you'd bought that new electric car when you had the extra money, but you didn't and now you were stuck with this heap. You decided to drive past the only gas station within 5 miles. About 2 miles down the road, you feel the engine start sputtering. You pull off to the side and are able to park at a strip mall. You take your phone out of your purse and see five missed calls from Mark.

You turn his notifications on silent, feeling immediately guilty but relieved. It was so hard on you to deal with his cancer treatments, his mood swings, your job, his jealousy, and your insecurity. It had started to drive you into the arms of a coworker, something you regretted deeply but felt was a necessary cathartic release of pent up emotion and a visceral need to be treated like a woman.

Paul did that for you. Mark didn't know, of course, and he could never know. No one could. Who would forgive a woman for cheating on a dying man? You could hardly forgive yourself, but you had to have some type of release. Everyone always seemed to want something from you and you never really had time to yourself. If not for Paul, you'd feel like you were drowning. Did it make it worse that you felt like you were falling in love with Paul or better? You always justified it to yourself by saying it was better because at least you have feelings for the person you're cheating with and it's not just random sex.

It eased your guilt some at the time.

Your eyes flutter open and your vision is blurred. You hear faint sounds that sound like voices but you can't tell if you're really hearing it or if it's in your head.

Then you feel a needle in your left arm that immediately gives you enough of an adrenaline rush to move your head to look down.

You see Boris again, mouthing the words, "I'm sorry."

Click to proceed

2.4 HELLO, CASSIE

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

Previous post

You fade in and out of consciousness, unaware of where you are, what time or day it is, who is there with you, what is being done to you, and all the horror that goes along with it.

Periodically, you catch broken words and phrases, and feel the sting of the needle when Boris comes to visit. You just lay there, waiting for whatever comes next.

You think about your days with Mark, and Paul. You miss Paul most of all. He was the one you wanted to be with after everything, but never could because of the circumstances of your life. You cut it off with him when Mark died because you

could no longer handle the guilt. You missed him so very much it pained you but you never betrayed Mark after he died. It was how you punished yourself.

You were always too hard on yourself.

... FOR THE LATEST BLOG

2.5 "LOVE BIRDIE"

Posted on August 22, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Your braid seemed to be caught in your seatbelt but it wasn't really a big deal at that moment. You had just left your husband's funeral where you choked back your overwhelming sense of relief that Mark didn't have to suffer anymore, but let everyone see your despair. It was the oddest oxymoron-ish blend of emotions you'd ever experienced. On the one hand, you missed your husband desperately, and had incredible difficulty believing he wouldn't be around any longer. Sure, you had your bad times, a lot more toward the end than you did in the beginning, but you'd known each other for so long, and had become so closely intertwined that you truly felt the separation anxiety at its onset and it was starting to cripple you.

But on the other hand, spending time with Paul was the only thing that mattered. All you wanted was him, and you couldn't bear the thought of never seeing him again, but you had to break it off. You were unable to continue seeing him without feeling like you were somehow at fault for Mark's death, even though you had nothing to do with it. Paul didn't take the news well, and begged you to think it over. His voice resounded in your head over and over, driving you to uncontrollably sob on the drive home. You were pulled over losing your mind in your car, banging on the steering wheel in hysterics, and now your pretty brown braid was caught up and you had to dry your tears

to work it out without just chopping it off and driving your car head on into a bus like you wanted to.

You remembered the last time you and Paul made love. The way his amber-colored brown eyes glittered right before he would kiss you; his hand tracing the contours of your face, your cheekbones, jaw, chin, the outline of your full lips. He never said he loved you, he didn't have to. You never said it either, but you felt like you should have. You wondered if you'd ever get the chance to see him again so that you could say it. Or if he would get over you and move on, like you felt he deserved to do. You were an emotional wreck, and as much as you wanted to be with Paul, you knew you couldn't sustain a healthy relationship for a while.

Finally working your braid free, you check the mirror and see your mascara running, your blue eyes darkening as they do when you get emotional. You do your best to wipe away the mascara smears, but feel like they actually make you look kind of hot, so you don't wipe them completely away. You get back on the road and make your way home to the place you once shared with Mark.

Locking the front door behind you as you step inside, you marvel at how quiet it seems. How empty. Sighing, you make your way to the refrigerator and pull out a bottle of water. Walking over to the couch, you plop down and turn on the television to see what looked like a home video of Paul, lying naked on a bed. You see the side view of him, but his unmistakable port au wine stain birthmark on his left hip is something you've seen a lot. Your eyes widen and your jaw drops as you inch closer to the edge of your seat and watch.

Paul appears to be saying something, but you can't quite make it out. You turn up the television volume, still struggling to hear what he is saying. Searching your remote control, you try to find the closed captioning button. Locating the button, you push it and wait a few seconds to see if it picks anything up.

It doesn't. The sounds are definitely coming from Paul, though, you know his voice. He's not moving on the bed, he's just lying there on his back, his left side toward the camera. You can see he is naked, though, his body is completely visible. You try to see if you can make out any movement on his face lining up with the inaudible words you know you hear him speaking, but the quality of the video isn't really that great, so you can't quite make out the details of his face.

All of a sudden, the screen goes black and you just see black static on the screen, but Paul's voice is still in the background. You continue to stare at the screen, glued to your seat on the couch, waiting to see what else would happen.

For a few moments, the screen just showed black static, and Paul's inaudible monologue droned on in the background. You pulled out your cell phone, contemplating calling him to see if he was playing some sort of prank, or maybe this was some ploy to get you to come back to him. You resist the urge to call, and decide you've had enough of this day. You reach for the remote to turn the TV off to go to bed, but then the screen changes.

It's an empty white room and the camera is zoomed in on one corner, as indicated by the upper left corner of an open window. In the corner, you see small leaves slowly swaying on a tree outside, and it looks to be daylight. You hear what sounds like rhythmic thudding starting quietly in the background, then Paul's monologue again, still inaudible. The thudding grows louder, like it is coming closer. Paul continues to speak unclearly, the leaves in the window continue to lightly sway as though being tickled by a light spring breeze flirting with the camera.

Then, the camera zooms out slowly, the thudding growing louder and Paul's voice growing quieter. As the camera zooms out, you see the open window and you recognize the tree as an orange tree. The camera zooms out further and you see what

looks like a twin sized bed frame standing vertically, but it's not a bed, it's some odd sort of other contraption you notice as the camera starts to zoom out more slowly. You start to see hands tied at the wrists on the metal bed looking contraption. Then you see what looks like Paul's dirty blonde hair, then you recognize Paul's face as the camera continues to zoom out.

Paul is tied up to this metal contraption, completely naked, tied at his wrists and ankles in an X shape. His mouth is moving but you don't hear his voice any more. His eyes are fixed on something and he looks like he has been drugged. His eyes don't blink he just stares ahead as the thudding gets so loud you start to feel it.

Objects start hurtling toward Paul in time with the beat. As they hit his flesh, you hear him grunt and see him bleeding. The objects look like badminton birdies flying toward him and sticking to him like goatheads. You're horrified at what you're seeing but you can't look away. The objects keep coming and sticking in him, his blood oozing from the wounds they make as they penetrate his olive skin.

"Do you want him to die, Cassie?" You hear Sergei whisper in your ear. "Do you want to see him die?"

... ..

3.1 PATH THREE RUBEN SALAZAR:

You have chosen to put a hit out on the errant politician and kidnap his daughter. You will travel from your home in Pahrump, NV, to the nation's capitol.

You are a 56-year-old father of 10 named Ruben Salazar. Your wife is Esmeralda, and you both have raised your 10 children under the guise that you are legal immigrants. Your assumed names are Ralph and Rita Rodriguez, and you get by making mystery meat tamales laced with small amounts of crack and selling them to the townspeople. No one realizes you lace them with crack to get them addicted, they just love the taste of them.

Life has become dull in the high Nevada desert, and most of your kids have moved on, making something of themselves. You and Esmeralda are just there keeping each other company, and conversation has grown very dull after 3 decades of marriage.

American Intelligence recruited you when you were arrested by ICE. You had information about a major drug cartel and agreed to work with AI to eradicate that problem. You're not afraid to do the dirty work to make sure you're never deported. If you were found in Mexico, you would not have a pleasant death.

You climb into your 2015 Chevy Silverado, roll the windows down, blow a kiss to Esmeralda, and drive off into the dust, traveling east to Las Vegas from Pahrump, where you will catch a nonstop flight from McCarran Airport to BWI.

About an hour after you left the trailer park in Pahrump, you arrive on the strip at Las Vegas. You immediately get excited by the flashing lights and half naked women all over the place. Your truck sputters catching the attention of some of the tourists you're mentally undressing, and they laugh at you, pointing directly at you.

“Gross, look at that guy!” shrieks the one female you were most aroused by.

You’re immediately angry. You shout back, “Vete a la mierda perra fea!”

You decide to continue on to Circus Circus to check into your hotel room. Your flight is very early the next morning. You really want to go exploring the strip, though. You need some female validation more desperately now than you did earlier.

What do you do?

RUBEN SALAZAR PATH ONE – Check in at Circus Circus and rent an adult movie. It’s not worth risking missing your flight for some strange.

RUBEN SALAZAR PATH TWO – Check in at Circus Circus, shower, and put on your best outfit. You’re going to the strip club!

Will post blogs for both paths next Sunday.

RUBEN SALAZAR PATH ONE:

3.1 Ruben Salazar - "Debbie Does Dallas"

Updated: Aug 15

>>>PATH THREE ...<<< Password is paththree

You check in to your hotel room at Circus Circus and step inside to see a dead cockroach on the nightstand. Feeling defeated and tired, you just want to relax and see some tits. You turn on the television and flip through the guide to find the pay-per-view movies. There were lesbian porn movies available that aroused your interest immediately, but your love of 70s bush and white girl banana titties led you to rent the 1978 cult classic, "Debbie Does Dallas."

You settle back on the bed, which you are sure is riddled with bedbugs, cum stains, and worse, and pull it out, letting out a small satisfied sigh as you get started on your evening routine.

After an hour of trying, you just can't do it. It's right there, right at the very tip, but it doesn't come out. You need some physical action. This isn't enough, and you're in Las Vegas for crying out loud. There's pussy everywhere, why are you sitting in your disgusting hotel room jerking off when you could be at a strip club? You can pull an all-nighter and catch your flight.

You turn off the movie, and put Ruben Jr. away. Sifting through your suitcase, you find your best pair of black Dickie's overalls and a red flannel button up shirt. Fresh boxers also, and clean socks. You're a lady killer tonight, the hookers are sure to love you, especially with your off brand Drakkar Noir cologne.

Before you turn on the shower, you check your wallet. You've got \$400, so you should be able to find some halfway decent snatch for that. You turn on the shower and the water runs brown and smells like raw sewage.

What now?

RUBEN SALAZAR PATH ONE - Fuck it, you don't need to shower for \$400 pussy. Just change your clothes and go out to the strip.

RUBEN SALAZAR PATH TWO - Just go to sleep, this entire day has been one major disappointment and you need to catch your flight tomorrow.

Will posts blogs for both paths next Sunday.

3.2 "Diamond"

>>>Last week - start here!<<<

You order an Uber on your phone and get changed to go to the strip club. You've decided on the Spearmint Rhino, as you've heard it's among the finest in Las Vegas, so you're about to see what the finest can offer outside the club as well.

Your driver, Pete, arrives and smells like he hasn't seen a shower since 1965. You get in the car regardless, because your sense of smell isn't what it used to be anyway, and it might actually be you that stinks, given that you've been driving and your hotel room has water that looks like the world's worst case of diarrhea. Moving toward the strip club, you strike up a conversation with Pete about Las Vegas and the best places to go to get willing women for low cost. Pete was full of suggestions and said that there was a particular girl at the Spearmint Rhino who would be there that night that Ruben should ask for. Pete said her name was Diamond. You felt your cock twitch when you imagined big fake titties with pierced nipples, glitter, herpes scars and dollar store perfume.

When you arrived at the club, you tipped Pete \$50 and thanked him for hooking you up with Diamond. You walked in, paid the cover, and asked for her. According to the bouncer, she was due next on stage, so you took a seat close to the stage after pulling out another \$200 from the ATM.

Wyclef Jean's "Perfect Gentlemen" came on and out came Diamond, looking like a flat titted white trash princess straight out of the trailer park. You are in heaven when she starts to spin around on the pole like she was born to do it, her flat titties bouncing from side to side hypnotizing you. You looked up at her and mouthed, "Diamond?" She smiled and nodded, kneeling down with her g-string strap extended in a gesture to request a tip. You pulled out \$100 and tapped her shoulder, whispering that you were interested in having her for the night and would she want to meet up. She nodded and said \$200 for the night.

It was your lucky night. And it was about time, you'd had a really shitty day so far.

Diamond's stage set was up and she joined you at your table. You asked her if she was ready to go, and she said she wanted to wait until the next girl did her set. She agreed to give you a lap dance as the next girl, Peaches, took the stage. You asked Diamond if Peaches could join you and Diamond agreed. Peaches had much more up top and you were more attracted to her. You felt like you had won the lottery and asked Diamond if she knew how much Peaches would charge. Diamond looked at you and stuck her lip out, pouting, accusing you of liking Peaches better.

You shook your head and lied, saying you didn't like her better you were just curious. Diamond smiled. She said she would find out, but probably the same price.

You are convinced you are dreaming until you see the tall Mexican man come into the club and immediately recognize him as one of the cartel associates.

... ..

3.3 "El Vaquero"

>>>..., ...!<<<

He walks in and you suddenly feel lightheaded, remembering the last time you saw him and what happened that day. He walks up to the stage where Peaches is finishing her set and she kneels down to greet him, kissing his cheek and whispering something in his ear. The fact that you just lost your sweet BOGO deal Diamond was setting up for you didn't matter now that El Vaquero was within shouting distance.

His real name was Fernando Zapata, or so you were told. He was a lieutenant in the Villarreal cartel of Torreón. You never had any sort of issues with him before, but you were certain he would have an issue with you now after what you did.

Diamond tells you she's going to talk to Peaches and you say you have decided you don't want Peaches to join you after all, you want to have an intimate night alone with her. Diamond's eyes light up and she smiles widely. You make your way out of the club, going the back way so hopefully El Vaquero doesn't see you.

... ..

RUBEN SALAZAR PATH TWO:

3.4 RUBEN SALAZAR – “GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS”

Posted on August 8, 2021 by Melissa

>>>PATH THREE ...<<< Password is paththree

Your need to get laid led you to opt to go to the strip club, but your strong need to immediately ejaculate dictates your actions.

CLICK TO MOVE FORWARD

3.1 Ruben Salazar - "Debbie Does Dallas"

Updated: Aug 15

>>>PATH THREE ...<<< Password is paththree

You check in to your hotel room at Circus Circus and step inside to see a dead cockroach on the nightstand. Feeling defeated and tired, you just want to relax and see some tits. You turn on the television and flip through the guide to find the pay-per-view movies. There were lesbian porn movies available that

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RUBEN SALAZAR PATH TWO - Just go to sleep, this entire day has been one major disappointment and you need to catch your flight tomorrow.

Will posts blogs for both paths next Sunday.

3.5 Ruben Salazar - "Siesta"

>>>"Debbie Does Dallas"<<<

Giving up trying to obtain any sexual release for the night, you have opted to stay in your subpar hotel room at Circus Circus and do your best to get some sleep before catching your early flight. Settling into your bed, you doze off into a deep sleep.

A little while later, your eyes flutter open as you feel your colon alerting you to the urgent need to evacuate your bowels. You

get out of bed and realize you've overslept. It's 7:42AM and your flight took off at 6:03AM.

Want to go back and go the strip club after all? ...!

OR

Click to proceed.

3.5 “SIESTA”

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

>>>Click to get caught up<<<

Your dread builds as you realize you have no way to get to BWI now. You are stuck in Las Vegas and you have to try to contact someone at AI to let them know what happened. You frantically search your bag for the card you got when you were first recruited at ICE. You kept it all this time because you felt like it was your get out of jail free card, and in essence, it was.

Locating the card, you find the phone number but one number is scratched off. You locate your phone and dial every possible combination, finally reaching someone on the other end. Speaking in Spanish, you identify yourself and wait for further instruction.

Silence on the other end for a few seconds has you farting nervously, your bowels aching with the need to release a gargantuan pile of crap. At long last, the voice on the other end instructs you to drive your beat up Chevy Silverado to El Paso and meet at a Flying J truck stop in 4 days. Then the call disconnects.

You sigh in relief. At least you were still able to continue with the mission, but you are still as sexually frustrated today as you were last night. The one positive is at least you still have \$400 in cash. You check your credit and debit card balances in your

phone apps and find that you have plenty of money. You decide instead of driving your truck, to arrange for long term parking at McCarran Airport and rent a car one way from McCarran to El Paso airports. You'd stop at the Flying J on the way.

Your room is rented for the next two weeks, so you have no need to check out, you simply clean up your own mess and leave a nasty note on the nightstand for the cleaning crew right next to the dead cockroach carcass.

Ordering an Uber, you set your phone down to get ready. Showering was out of the question, you'd have to find another hotel room on the way to get cleaned up. You finish your toilet business, and double flush out of habit. Washing your hands and brushing your teeth, you look at your reflection and you still see that dashing handsome Hispanic stallion hiding there under the salt and pepper hair and tired light brown eyes. You're going to make an effort on your appearance on the way to El Paso, and try your best to make a good impression on the ladies this time.

You also need to make sure no one in El Paso recognizes you being that it is very close to Mexico, and you know there are people connected to the cartel you ratted out that are all over El Paso and southwestern Texas. You would need to be very careful, especially since you refrained from bringing your 9mm because you thought you were going to be flying. You'll need a weapon. Thinking hard, you remember you have a friend in Albuquerque who sells stolen items, and you distinctly remember him mentioning that he has guns from time to time. You'd have to drive down to El Paso from there if you were going to make it to the Flying J on time.

Your phone alerts you that your Uber has arrived. You gather your belongings, lock up the hotel room, and open the car door to see Rosa, your Uber driver.

“Ruben?” Rosa confirms with a wide, toothy smile. You’re immediately smitten.

“Si,” you confirm, smiling back and climbing inside.

Click to move forward

3.6 HELLO, RUBEN

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

>>>Previous post<<<

You and Rosa hit it off quite well in the Uber ride from Circus Circus to the Enterprise Rent-A-Car at the Las Vegas McCarran Airport. She gave you her phone number, and you promised to call her when you returned. You said you were visiting family in Oklahoma City. You’d have to remember to come back with some believable stories. Rosa looked like she’d love to satisfy you while you stayed at Circus Circus.

The front desk clerk at Enterprise smiled a toothy fake grin and said hello in an overly nice voice that reeked of no work-life balance. You smiled back and said you were there to pick up a car for a one way to El Paso. The clerk checked his inventory system and confirmed one car available for a one way drop off, it was a white 4-door 2035 Chevy Impala with leather interior and a moonroof. You’d pay through the nose for it, but you agreed.

Within an hour you were on your way to Albuquerque to see your friend about a gun.

... FOR THE LATEST BLOG

3.7 “LA MALDICIÓN DE LA BRUJA”

Posted on August 22, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Cruising along US-93S headed toward Kingman, you fart comfortably as you crank up the air in the Impala, feeling like you’ve accomplished something today, though what that actually is remains a mystery. However, you’ve secured a place to stay in Albuquerque and spoken with your friend Omar who has agreed to meet with you to find what you are looking for. That in itself feels like an accomplishment, though you have strayed so far from your original mission and have even failed to follow directions on this sub-mission, nothing is really going as originally planned, so it’s a false sense of satisfaction you’re actually experiencing. It’s okay though, whatever works for you.

Esmeralda sent a photo earlier of your garden at home that you both had been working on in the weeks prior to being called for this mission. It was a small patch of tomatoes you were trying to grow on your property and you’d both had so much fun

together when you planted it. Your son, Hector, joined you that day, something he rarely does as he's mentally challenged due to a car accident you and Esmeralda were involved in when she was pregnant with him. Hector remained at home with you, along with his little sister, Layla. Hector was 22, Layla 17. Layla would be going to college soon, and was probably the brightest and most ambitious of all of your 10 children. Fiercely protective of Hector, she wanted him to come live with her when she went to UNLV after she graduated from high school. It seemed like a great option for Hector, because he loved his little sister, she was his best friend. Layla would have a hard time with Hector's emotional needs and college without Esmeralda's help, though, you thought. You were considering a move for the family, but hadn't brought it up just yet as Layla had another year of high school left, so there was some time to get the details worked out.

Nearing the onramp for I-40 E at Kingman, AZ, you see police lights up ahead. Your natural reaction is fear, but you stifle your urge to turn the car around and tuck tail driving back home to Pahrump. Continuing down the road, you notice what looks to be a horrific car accident, and see fire trucks as well as ambulances, with their lights flashing. Police were directing traffic, and it had slowed down significantly as the road narrowed and eventually traffic was directed to the right shoulder.

As you passed by, you started to make out the details of the accident. It looked like it had been a head-on collision between a Hyundai Accent and a Toyota Tundra, or vehicles of similar sizes. It was a small compact car that had been absolutely obliterated by the large 4x4, and the ambulance was nearest to the compact car. You just knew whoever was in that car was either dead or gravely injured. Next to the truck, a woman with long, grey hair stood with her hand covering her mouth, looking down at the ground in front of the compact car.

As you got closer to the scene, it became obvious that this grey-haired woman drove the truck. She was talking to officers and looking back at the ground; what she kept looking at wasn't obvious to you yet. You kept inching closer until eventually you saw what appeared to be a severed leg with an ankle sock on, foot snugly inside a pair of Crocs. Your buttohole clenches involuntarily at the sight, not one you haven't seen but one you weren't expecting. Inching closer, you see more blood, and the legless victim's intestines splayed across the pavement in an oblong shape, curving and draping over the lower half of a body that was missing a leg and a torso. You feel your stomach start to turn as the smell hits you, it's one of iron, dirt and shit, and not unfamiliar either. As you finally pass the last visual obstacle, you see the torso of the compact car driver who you suppose wasn't wearing their seatbelt.

Their gender is unclear, as their face appears to have been completely sliced off by the broken glass in the windshield or maybe it slid off on the pavement as the person was ejected violently from their seat. At some point, the body connected with the vehicles and when the driver of the truck tried to reverse, she pulled the person apart. The person's torso had arms, but it appeared that some of the fingers were likely missing. Their spine was showing at the base of the torso, where the separation from their hips occurred. The setting sunlight hit the base of the person's spine for a moment and you saw what looked like a green glittering light emit from the bone protruding from the ripped flesh. Then it was gone.

Involuntarily looking up you meet the gaze of the grey haired woman who is staring at you now, with the creepiest smile on her face you have ever seen in your life. You are at least 20 feet away from her but you know you hear her raspy voice whisper in your ear:

“Cuenta las horas y encuentra el mal de ojo.”

Within milliseconds, as though you never even looked at the grey haired woman at all after seeing the green light in the spine of her victim's torso, it was back to the moment before you made eye contact with her, but she was looking down and crying this time. Sobbing uncontrollably and trying to talk to the officers. One of the officers notices you staring and motions for you to be on your way, an irritated expression on his face.

You drive forward and merge on to I-40 E. You start to feel the need to shit uncontrollably and puke your guts out at the same time. You ignore it and continue to drive, unable to blink or swallow from your fright.

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The Prodigy – Smack my bitch up from ArtOfficial Agency CPH on Vimeo.

ANIMARIUM PART II – THE ASCENT

Jim

"Kouri - The Chase"

>>>..., ...!<<<

Cartoon music plays softly and the sound of a baby cooing slowly stirs you, and you awaken from a deep sleep. Your neck is bent wrong, and it aches something awful, but more than that, you wonder how much time has passed. Looking down at

your lap, you see a note there. You pick it up and momentarily set it aside on the empty seat next to you. You pull out your phone and see that it is now 5:03 AM, and you must have just passed out waiting for Zara to finish her sponge bath.

Putting your phone back in your pocket, you pick up the note and head to the restrooms. As you take care of business, you pull out the note to read what it says.

Folding it up and putting it back in your pocket, more perplexed than before, you finish up in the bathroom and go back to room 184 to research this swinger's club and gather your things to check out. If you left in the next couple of hours, you'd make it down to New Orleans in time for lunch.

You find a place called Colette, which has locations in New Orleans, Dallas, Houston, and Austin. This has to be the place. You check the map on Colette's website, and find that there is a Hilton Garden Inn located across the street. This must be the club Zara was talking about; the mysterious Polyamory Palace. Weird, you think, not sure why you have to go to a swinger's club, but intrigued all the same.

After you finish cleaning up, you leave room 184 with your things and look toward room 185 where you first met Zara. It's taped off but there are officers inside the room and you can hear some of what they are saying. You think you hear one mention how they couldn't believe someone could live through that, but you still have no idea what happened or where Zara was shot. You have so many unanswered questions and you really want to hurry up and talk to Zara to figure out what all of this means.

Walking down the hall toward the elevator, you notice a security camera you hadn't seen before. You feel a small sense of relief because whoever shot Zara last night had to be caught on camera. The police would find him, you were sure.

... ..

"Avek Rekonesans (Gratefully)"

Updated: 2 days ago

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo credit: Kevin O'Mara,
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinomara/14209629987/>

"Live life so that the fear of death can never enter your heart. Harass no man about his religion, respect him in his beliefs, and demand that he respect yours. Love life and perfect life. Beautify all things in your life. Seek to make your life long and in service to others. Show respect to all men, but grovel to none. When you wake in the morning give thanks to the Creator for your life and strength. Give thanks for your meals and enjoy living. If you see no reason for giving gratitude, the fault lies with yourself." - Tecumseh, Shawnee Leader

Approaching LA-490 as you travel south on I-49 from Bossier City to New Orleans, you look down at your gas gauge and notice your fuel level is dangerously low, so you decide to stop at RJ Expressmart where you find gas prices to be extraordinarily high at \$10.07 per gallon. You grumble about this silently as you dig in your pocket for some cash. Finding \$100, you go inside to pay for your fuel and buy some snacks.

The cashier had a patch over his eye and one tooth but was quite expeditious and you were in and out of there within minutes. You fill up your gas tank, and open the bag of Funyuns you purchased inside along with an Orange Carrot SoBe. Your tank is full so you put the nozzle back on the pump and close your gas tank. Looking down, you notice your rear driver's side tire, located under the gas tank, is now flat. It wasn't when you

pulled in. You must have run over something on the way down and it ran out of air when you went inside.

You push your car to an open spot and return to the cashier to ask for permission to either change your tire in the parking lot or to use a phone as yours doesn't have any signal. The cashier agrees to allow you to change your tire there, so you return to your car and retrieve the spare tire, jack, and Craftsman V20 cordless impact wrench from your trunk.

As you remove the tire, you notice a big slash mark you didn't see before. Though slightly crooked, it appeared clean enough to have been caused by a knife or other blade of some kind. You run your fingers over it as though you can get a feel for the specific cause of the gash, but instead, your thoughts return to the girl and the scratches that were now healing on your chest. As you remember her, you feel the hair stand up on the back of your neck as you sense someone is observing you. You look around trying to find the source of the stare, and you see someone in the distance, behind a tree, looking directly at you. Within seconds after making eye contact, they disappear behind the tree.

Suddenly you hear a horn honking in the distance and you turn your head toward the sound, which is coming from the freeway. You see a Dodge Challenger traveling the wrong way on LA-490 barrelling toward an Acura Integra. You blink and the Integra has swerved and lost control, flipping toward the passenger side and doing a barrel roll as the Challenger continues down LA-490 going the wrong way.

As the Integra slides to a complete stop, finally landing on the driver's side upside down, you see the figure again, the one that was staring at you earlier, standing next to the wreckage. You are unable to determine their features, but they are the size of a child, although they didn't emanate a youthful aura, but one of malevolence. You felt your gaze connect and an odd sensation in your lower spine. You look away quickly, wincing at what you are perceiving as pain. You look back and the figure is gone, but you see someone trying to crawl out of the Integra.

It appears to be a man with short hair, he is trying to make noises but no sound is coming out as he crawls as fast as he can on the hot pavement, away from the vehicle. While he pulls himself away, you notice he just looks odd. There is something most definitely not normal about him and it takes your brain a moment to process exactly what your eyes see.

The driver of the Integra grunts and pulls himself away from his car, leaving his entrails behind him in a sort of painting of the pavement effect; his blood decorating the asphalt and sparkling in the sunlight. You feel yourself start to gag as you manage to muster up the strength to go over and try and help the man.

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"Polyamory Palace"

Updated: 2 days ago

>>>..., ...!<<<

Though he couldn't speak, the injured man did insist on writing a note for you on the back of your fuel receipt. It had his name, Ivan Semenov, and the words:

THE REBELS DID THIS

You clutched the note as you watched Ivan being air-evacuated from the intersection, and wonder who or what "the rebels" meant, and Ivan couldn't really talk because he was so severely injured from the accident. You were relieved to find that you were wrong about him being cut in half, it was just his bloodied legs that were shredded by a combination of metal, glass, and asphalt as Ivan struggled to crawl his way to safety.

Folding the note up and putting it in your pocket, you decide to talk to the gas station clerk to see if he knows anything about this Ivan. The clerk didn't seem to know the name, so you ask him if there are any events or attractions going on in the area that might have attracted some transients, leaving out that you found it strange a Russian was in Louisiana. The clerk said that there was nothing really of interest going on in the area, aside from a local church function. You thank him and get back to changing your tire.

You were still also mulling over the odd sensation in your spine. It was only when you looked at that small, odd, alien-looking...thing. You hesitate to refer to it as a person because you weren't sure if it really was. Conspiracy theories have never really been your thing, but you did believe in other life forms out there. You just didn't really know in what capacity because you hadn't ever experienced anything like that, nor had you known anyone you trusted who had. In any case, you would talk to Zara about it when you got to Colette's.

You finish changing your tire and continue down the highway toward New Orleans. You make it to the Hilton, but remember

you don't have any money on your debit or credit cards for a room. You decide to call your friend Dan back in El Paso to ask if you can borrow some money. He always calls you for favors, so it's his turn to help you out. You reach him and he agrees, sending \$1,000 to your PayPal. You transfer it to your credit card and rent a room. You decide to go up to get cleaned up before going to Colette's.

Once out of the shower, you shave, and put the same clothes back on. You rinse your mouth out with the hotel room mouthwash and walk across the street to Colette's.

The air was balmy and stuck to you as the sun was high in the sky. You could smell something delicious in the air, BBQ or something, and your stomach grumbles. You fight the urge to go find some food and walk across the street to satisfy your gnawing curiosity about why you were supposed to go to this place and what Zara needed to talk to you about.

You talk with the bouncer, mentioning that you knew Zara. He let you come inside and you find a dimly lit club with couches, a bar, a stage, a pool table, and a few people just hanging out, laughing and talking. Not at all what you expected, not that you were really sure what to expect, but your initial impression of a swinger's club was that it would contain a lot more naked people than what you currently saw, which was...you search again...yep, zero naked people. Are you even in the right place?

You walk up to the bar and the bartender introduces himself as Paul. He has friendly bulging eyes that make you feel like you've met him before. You order a 7 & 7, surprising yourself because that was Ella's favorite drink, not yours.

Ella was a lot like Zara, you thought, but much smaller. You and Ella had been close as teenagers and experienced a lot together. She was your first love, you didn't know it at the time, but you realized it later. She was the first for a lot of things for you, and you wished you could see her again. That old familiar pang in your chest comes, when you remember that you can't ever see her again, and you could have done something to change that.

Feeling a small tap on your arm, you turn to see the bouncer with a note for you. You thank him and look at it. You stop yourself from rolling your eyes, it was from Zara again. Why did you feel like you were chasing a ghost? If she needed to talk to you, why did she keep running further away? The note said she would be by your hotel room to visit you after dinner time. You check your phone. It's 4:15 PM. Dinner was usually about 7 or so, so you decide to go get some of that BBQ you were smelling earlier.

... ..

"Gran Manti (Haitian Creole) - Great Lie"

>>>..., ...!<<<

"The Young and the Restless" was playing on the TV when you heard a soft knocking at your hotel room door. You looked at your phone and saw that it was 9:04PM. You were only expecting one person.

You opened the door and there she stood, waist-length, bright red hair, black eyes, soft, full pink lips, a perfect pearly white smile, and ghostly pale white skin.

"May I?" Zara asked.

You nodded, hoping your boner wasn't starting to show.

She was a little curvier than you originally thought. Standing about 5'8" tall, she had an hourglass figure that her skin-tight, sky-blue dress complimented nicely. Nothing left to the imagination, she was very well-endowed and was quite obviously not wearing a bra. You were really trying to be a gentleman but she was making it quite hard, no pun intended.

"So, Jim, before we get started, I have to say, I'm very flattered but I'm not interested," Zara says with a smile. "I'm here on business only and what I have to say to you can't leave this room."

"What are you talking about?" You ask, humiliated, putting your hand in your pocket to try and create the illusion that you don't actually have a boner, it's something long, cylindrical and beefy shaped located in the vicinity.

She sits down on your bed. Looking in your eyes, you feel your spine twitch but you don't look away - you can't. You're stuck there, and while you remain stuck, Zara peels her dress off from the bottom up, pulling it over her head and putting it on the bed. Then she stands up and lets you look at her.

You're not shy, but you're hesitant to do anything. Besides, what did she mean earlier anyway? Fuck she's hot.

"I'm not interested in you, Jim," Zara says, completely naked in front of you, pert, pale pink nipples hardened in the air-conditioned hotel room.

What the fuck is happening?

"So, why are you naked if you aren't interested?" You ask, silently hoping for a change of heart.

Zara rolls her eyes and turns away. WOW her ass is unreal. She puts her dress back on.

"To get it out of the way," she says, sitting back on the bed and crossing her legs. "You love someone else anyway, and no, I'm not her, so let's just get to the point, the reason we're here."

You're able to move again, so you...adjust. "Okay, well, yeah I mean that makes sense to do, like right now, after..." you trail off, searching Zara's face. Nothing. "Yeah," you sit at the desk.

"Do you know why you're here?"

"Huh?"

"Here, in New Orleans," Zara says. "Why you're here."

You're confused. Didn't she know already? "I got a text message - "

"Stop, that's not what I mean," she laughed. "Yes, you're here because you got a text message saying to go to Sam's Town, then you got a note saying to go to Polyamory Palace, then you met me after I was shot, now you're here, and Polyamory Palace doesn't exist." She looks at your forehead. "Don't you wonder why?"

This is ridiculous. "What the hell do you mean? I'm here because I was recruited by AI when I was in the Army, is that the answer you're looking for?" Fuck, your balls hurt.

Zara stood up. "Settle down," she holds her hands up out at you, smiling. "I'm not trying to upset you, Jim. I'm grateful you saved my life, and I'm so glad you're here instead of where you could be if you wouldn't have shown up," she says, looking at the wall.

You feel bad for yelling at her. You sit back down. So does she. You wish she'd take off her dress again.

Blinking a couple of times, Zara continues. "I led you here, Jim, it was me the whole time, not AI."

"What?"

"I'm not with American Intelligence," she says.

You're stunned. "You're not?"

She shakes her head emphatically. "AI isn't real, Jim. It's make-believe. It's a group of rich people who select prime candidates for experiments in warfare, and you didn't partake, so I decided to select you as my candidate." She smiles widely.

You scoff. "AI is fucking real, I was recruited by them personally, I should know."

Zara lowers her eyes. "Dan recruited you, right? Dan from El Paso?" "How do you even know this if you aren't with AI? Why should I even trust you?" You are starting to feel very defensive against this woman until she stares you in the eyes again and you're locked there, motionless except to breathe and blink.

And your heart of course, which was pounding.

For the next several hours, with you standing there unable to do anything but listen, and exist, Zara explained to you how the whole mission you were called for was a lie, and the others who were called for the mission would soon find out what they were up against. The group you have come to know as American Intelligence, or AI, is comprised of four main points of contact, and several foot soldiers, in five different countries. Zara hesitates to tell you more, as she is certain you will not remember, and you need to continue to prove your loyalty before she trusts you with this sensitive information that could get you both killed.

Zara explains that she is trying to assassinate one man from the AI group called The Captain, and she needs your help. Such horror she conveyed as she spoke, her eyes lighting up, her breasts bouncing. She mentioned the reason she was able to immobilize you is that she was subjected to an experimental treatment conducted by one of the AI bosses, and is now capable of what used to be considered supernatural powers. She stops, as she is sure, though you can't respond, you think she is crazy.

You don't know what to think.

... ..

“AI – The Colonists & The Rebels”

Zara eventually released her psychic hold on you and you were again able to do more than just stand there, breathe, and drool like a chump. You felt your body relax and you almost lost your balance, but you caught yourself. Sitting back down at the desk, you look at Zara, wide-eyed.

“What was that all about?” You ask, incredulous. “Was that really necessary?”

“Yes, Jim, it was absolutely necessary,” Zara insists. “I know your history,” she continues, giving you a look of disapproval.

You don't like not pleasing her. Even though she was the biggest cock-tease you'd met in a while, you respected and cared for her, oddly. It was difficult not to, you met her at probably the most vulnerable time in her life, she was beautiful, well-spoken –

“I can read your mind, Jim,” Zara reminds you. “Look, let's just be clear, we're tuned into one another, so just say what's on

your mind, and if you scare me or make me feel like I'm in any danger, I'll just freeze you again."

"So now that you've completely distorted my sense of reality, can you tell me more about what the fuck you are talking about? AI isn't real, my friend Dan actually works for AI," you shake your head, "which isn't actually real, so is my friend Dan really my friend?" You look at her, growing exasperated. "Is Dan even really Dan?"

"Stop. Yes, Dan is your friend, no AI isn't real. AI is like the curtain, and behind it are the four main bosses, if you will."

"Bosses?"

"Yes," Zara continues. "There is The Captain, who oversees Russia and Australia. Then, there is The Rebel, who oversees England, but also works with The Scout, who oversees the United States." She smiles. "Then there's me, who oversees South Korea, but I never go there, the weather doesn't agree with me."

You start laughing. "You're fucking nuts," you start to look for your car keys.

"What are you doing? You can't leave, you have to help me."

"This is insane, you're just rattling off nonsense. You have me chase you all over the state, then when we finally hook up, you take your clothes off just to tell me you're not interested, then you tell me you're AI but AI isn't real," you look at her, trying not to think about what her tits look like.

She smiles. "I could freeze you again and make you listen to me for hours," she threatens.

"Do whatever you need to do, but you haven't convinced me you're not crazy," you grin, heading for the door.

"Don't you want to see the map?" Zara shouts.

“Send it to me,” you shout back as you walk out the hotel room door, not sure where you are going or if you are even going to be able to walk in a few minutes.

... ..

“No One Here Gets Out Alive”

Posted by animariumblogascent October 2, 2021 Posted in fiction, novel

>>>..., ...!<<<

Zara catches up with you after letting you drive all the way back to Shreveport. She explains it a little more articulately to you, as it seems she is no longer intimidated by you since you left. You still don't trust her, but you like her. So you let her explain what she says AI really is.

From what she says, it sounds like it is partly a group of ex-government employees or rogue government workers that still have connections to the American government. The bosses don't make sense to you, though, but Zara explains they are positioned in areas that were originally planned to work together toward establishing a new world order sort of thing. Somewhere along the way, things went sour and Russia broke off from the United States, taking Australia with them by force. You still don't understand how you could have fallen for something like this, it doesn't seem like she's telling the truth, until she describes the recruitment process, and it starts to make sense.

While AI would look for people in their prime physical condition, they would also look for those who had what they coined defects, and yours was that you had mental issues – you were diagnosed as bi-polar manic depressive with borderline personality disorder in the service, and that led to your recruit,

as your physical condition was phenomenal, but your defect was your mental illnesses. Dan was someone you met when you were discharged from the Air Force. He told you he was a recruiter for AI, and Zara explains that you were in his general region, which is why he recruited you. He is “The Scout,” she says, because he finds the subjects worthy of AI’s experiments. He also has other purposes, but she hesitates to tell you more about what he does.

You ask her what you are supposed to do now that you know all of this information. She says she needs you to help her assassinate “The Captain,” because he is trying to basically destroy the planet as we know it, and populate other planets with his human experiments. She says she has tried many times to kill him, but he always has other foot soldiers who get to her first. That’s who she was shot by. She pulls back her hair, revealing it is a wig, to show you a large scar on the back of her head that looked nearly healed. It was where she was shot.

Still not believing anything of what she is telling you, you’re curious to see where this leads. You ask her how you are supposed to find this “Captain” and what she wants you to do. She tells you he is currently in Russia, and his name is Sergei Laskin. She says you have to get to your place and get packed so you can head out on the next flight.

You invite her to your place to stay the night – no funny business. She accepts.

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“An Old Soul”

**Posted by animariumblogascent October 10, 2021 Posted
in fiction, novel**

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Capricorn women have a fresh beauty of their own. You’ll rarely find one who’s not unusually unattractive. Yet they are timid and unsure about their appearance, and you may find them needing constant reassurance that they’re pretty. Although Capricorn females hate dishonesty in all forms, they’re not above lying about their ages. They usually get away with it, too, thanks to the odd Saturn aging twist. They look like little old ladies as children, then bloom suddenly into women who look like young girls when they’re past the prime of life.” – Linda Goodman, “The Capricorn Woman,” from “Love Signs” 1978, quote retrieved from:

<https://zodiacreads.com/zodiacsigns/capricorn/the-capricorn-woman-linda-goodman/>

Midsummer of 1298 in Gascony, a bastard child was born to the servant of a nobleman who fathered her behind his wife’s back. The child was cared for in secret, until the nobleman’s wife died of mysterious illness three years later. Afterward, the servant was freed by her master, the nobleman, who then took her as his wife.

His name was Jean Pierre, hers, Ektavia. At three, the baby still didn’t have a name. Ektavia feared growing too attached to her because she was born out of wedlock, and Ektavia thought by refraining from giving her bastard baby a name, she wouldn’t give the baby a soul, and thus, the child would not be an emotional burden. Ektavia would simply care for the baby as though she were baby sitting, not mothering a child.

That all changed when Jean Pierre took Ektavia as his wife. The child was subsequently named Sarah, after Jean Pierre's mother. Sarah was a beautiful baby girl; bright black eyes and strawberry blonde hair. Once somber and obedient, Sarah became outgoing and exuberant once she had a family. It didn't even matter anymore that Ektavia only loved Sarah because she hooked Jean Pierre, because Sarah had a Daddy now, and Daddy loved her very much.

As Sarah blossomed into a perfectly polished young woman, Ektavia grew jealous of the time Jean Pierre spent doting on her every whim and desire. Sarah would want for nothing, as Jean Pierre made sure she was taken care of at every minute of every hour of every day. Ektavia began to resent Sarah, and though she tried to keep it from becoming obvious, she failed miserably. Soon, both Jean Pierre and Sarah realized what she thought, and though she hadn't even considered it before, Sarah saw an opportunity to take revenge against the mother who never loved her.

The years went on and Ektavia continued to pretend not to notice what was going on, all the way up until Sarah got pregnant. Once that happened, Ektavia could no longer contain herself and confronted Jean Pierre with her suspicions. Jean Pierre denied everything, and accused Ektavia of being crazy. He threatened her with torture should she ever speak of it again. Ektavia, shattered, suffered in silence until the child was born.

Then she could no longer keep silent.

Jean Pierre could no longer hide his love for Sarah. She had grown into such an amazingly beautiful woman. Ektavia had been right all along, of course, but she should have known that from the beginning. He confessed everything to Ektavia and she broke down in tears, falling to her knees. Sarah walked in with the baby she shared with Jean Pierre.

“Son nom est Ektavio,” Sarah says to Ektavia, in French, meaning, “His name is Ektavio.”

Ektavia looked up at Sarah standing next to her one true love, Jean Pierre, holding his baby in her arms that she had named after her own mother. Ektavia could hardly stand the horrible feeling growing inside her, sitting there, on her knees, tears streaming down her face. Standing up, she looked directly at Sarah, then down at Ektavio.

Three days later, their bodies were found.

... ..

“Jim’s Mission”

**Posted by animariumblogascent October 18, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel**

>>>..., ...!<<<

From the movie “Labyrinth,” 1986

“Men want a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.” – John Eldredge

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

The night with Zara left you with more questions than answers, but you had a basic idea of what she was trying to say about Al. Your pride was wounded at having fallen for the cover, but it wasn't something you were really ashamed of, after finding out about one of the others who had enlisted, the one Zara wants you to save by murdering Sergei – Cassie Holbright.

According to Zara, Cassie was a marine who was recruited for mass media reporting, but in Sergei's hands, she would be manipulated to serve his agenda. Sergei deviated from the group for reasons that were unclear to you, but according to Zara, he had the financial means to destroy the entire operation and use it to further his own means. Zara explained that Sergei was funding the operation that was conducting the experiments on people, like the one that was done to her. She said that these experiments in mind control were evolving so that they could eventually control other aspects of people aside from basic movements and reading their thoughts. Zara continued saying that Sergei wanted to incorporate a sort of conversion therapy to control who and what was attractive to people, thus having a measure of control over reproduction, and eventually, controlling as much as the gender and personality of the unborn baby. Sergei had visions of creating the perfect humans, and Zara said his rants were something one might expect to hear from a tyrant or dictator, such as Adolf Hitler.

You accepted the mission to save Cassie and kill Sergei without hesitation. The way Zara described it, Cassie was the crucial puzzle piece Sergei needed to make his plan work. You didn't understand why Cassie was so important yet, but you knew you were against anything having to do with Nazis, so you told Zara

you would help her. As you both continued your journey to Kiev, you asked her why she chose you.

“Because you’re sick enough to be able to handle it and not think twice,” Zara whispered, smiling at you just before closing her eyes and dozing off.

You looked at her sleeping for a second, and heard a buzzing sound coming from her hand. You see her holding her phone and expect her to open her eyes to check it. She doesn’t. You look down at her hand and see someone is calling. You can’t see the entire number, but you see what looks like a name on the caller ID. It starts with the letter E and looks like a lower case K after it. You can’t make it out. Then, it stops buzzing.

“It’s my mom,” Zara says, looking in your eyes, her eyes suddenly pitch black, darker than they were just a few seconds ago. Your spine twitches and you turn away.

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“Sa Ki Mal”

**Posted by animariumblogascent October 26, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel**

>>>..., ...!<<<

In Haitian Creole:

Konte yon fwa pou nwit la la,

Yon fwa pou limyè a,

Ak yon fwa pou pè a.

Nanm ou rete sèl pòtal pou konsyan ou vwayaje tout kote ou vle ale.

Vizite dènye paj la an premye, epi premye paj la an dènye. Pa ale pi lwen pase twazyèm sèk la nan nò.

Lè kè ou di sispann, koute vwa a nan tèt ou.

Swiv vwa a nan tèt ou.

Li anba a soti anwo jouk anba, apre gòch a dwat

Veni, vidi, vici

Malgre ke pa vre

Toujou nan lapè

Ansanm

Wa pa anyen

Nan nwaj yo

Renmen

Aprantisaj

Enspire

Bezwen

Gratitid

Pale

mwen

Dòmi

Aprè

Vermouth

Espesyalman

In English:

Count once for the night,

Once for the light,

And once for the fright.

**Your soul remains the only portal for your conscious to travel
wherever you want to go.**

**Visit the last page first, and the first page last. Don't go further
than the third circle to the north.**

When your heart says stop, listen to the voice in your head.

Follow the voice in your head.

Read below from top to bottom, after left to right

Veni, vidi, vici

Although untrue

Still at peace

Together

Kings of nothing

In the clouds

Loving

Learning

Inspiring

Needing

Gratitude

Spoken

I

Sleep

After

Vermouth

Especially

... ..

Cassie

"Бушующий ветер"

Updated: Aug 29

>>>..., ... PLEASE THANKS APPRECIATE IT YER THE BEST!<<<

Still mystified by Sergei's sudden coming out, and confused because, well, Boris (and his big booger) was his son so he must be bi-sexual, you thought.

"Vat does it matter where I stick my dick?" Sergei says out loud.

What the fuck is he doing? You think to yourself. It's like he's reading your mind and speaking aloud intelligent responses to your thoughts. You look to see if anyone notices what's happening.

"No one cares, Iva," Sergei says, putting his hand over his eyes and shaking his head. "Just wait the time I said earlier, and you

will know vat is happening."

"What? Wait 24 hours? What the hell are you talking about?"

The stewardess approaches you, plastic looking face and a recently revived beehive hairstyle, her hands clasped at her breast. "Would you like some dinner?"

As if on cue, Sergei releases the longest, squeakiest, loudest, wettest sounding fart you've ever heard in your life right then and there, and upon completely releasing the toxic fumes, sighs loudly in relief. He then smiles and looks at the stewardess, reading her nametag. "Vanda? Vanda is it?"

Wanda's expression looked like a cross between wanting to run away crying and needing to vomit. She nodded at Sergei.

"Dis my vife. She not hungry."

You look at Sergei then back at Wanda. "I'll have the chicken meal, please." Wanda nods.

Sergei laughs. "You vill get fat if you eat too much."

Boris wipes his booger on the armrest next to you, and graciously warns you not to put your arm down until it dries or it will stick to you.

... ..

"JFK"

Updated: 7 days ago

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo credit: NYC Parks, Brookville Park, nycgovparks.org

It's just after 11:00 PM and you've not only landed at JFK, but you've managed to dodge both Sergei and Boris, losing them somewhere in the airport while you hide in the bathroom, frantically searching for an available hotel room or Airbnb nearby. You locate one very close to the JFK airport and you book it without thinking. Then you schedule an Uber to pick you up and take you there ASAP.

You had no luggage with you, just your purse, so you get to the car share pick-up area as fast as you can, meeting your driver there, Nick. You get in the Honda Accord and make your way to

the Airbnb, which is surprisingly nice, you think to yourself, especially for the last minute.

After getting settled in, you breathe a sigh of relief. Getting away from Sergei was easier than you thought, but you were sure Boris kept following you. You almost sensed his eyes on you as you rode away from the airport, but maybe you were just tired and being paranoid. Your flight out of JFK to Moscow leaves early the next morning, so you lay down to try and get some sleep, leaving the horrible experience on the flight from Phoenix as far behind you as you can.

... ..

"I Have a Dream"

Updated: 8 hours ago

>>>..., ...!<<<

"The Apache don't have a word for love." - Louis L'Amour

The clock in your room buzzes at 3:30AM and you feel like you barely slept. You sit up and put your face in your hands, not ready to face the day quite yet. Your flight doesn't leave until 7:42AM so you have an hour or so to get breakfast and take a shower then catch your flight. It was a weird airline name, Aerofart or something, you couldn't remember. It was too early to think anyway.

You turn on the shower, getting the water steaming hot while you peel off your nightgown. Climbing in, you let the water wake you up, caressing your near-perfect body, minus the scar

on your chest from when you had open-heart surgery, while you cup your hand for some shampoo to wash your hair.

It had been a long day at the park and you were both exhausted. He wanted to walk you home, but you were afraid Mark would be there, so you said no. You wanted to say yes, he was so cute, but it just wouldn't have been right. Mark would have been understanding, you were sure, if it were under different circumstances. Mark was never really jealous of any other guys who paid attention to you, it was how you treated him that mattered the most, at least that's what he always said. You just knew it would be much too difficult to hide the glow this new guy brought out in you. What was his name again? Why were you always so horrible with names?

"This is embarrassing," you started, pushing little loose wispy hairs behind your ear. You suddenly feel self-conscious, like you want to look better than you think you must look right now after running five miles. You have buttcrack sweat for Christ's sake, and you need a shower. This guy is way too hot to be talking to you and you don't even know his name?! He told you what it was, what is wrong with you?!

"You want to ask me if you can come over?" He smiled at you.

Your face was red, you could feel it. You laugh nervously, looking down at the ground. Did you just pee yourself or is that cooch sweat? "I can't remember your name," you smile up at him. Jesus Christ he's fucking gorgeous. You peed, you definitely peed. Fuck.

"Oh!" He laughed loudly, showing all his teeth. "It's Paul." He extended his hand and you shook it. "And you're Charlene, right?" He asks.

"What? No, I'm - "

"Cassie," he smiled again. "Like I could forget."

You're a literal piece of shit, you know that? "I'm so sorry, Paul," you feel horrible, but try to pretend like you don't really care that much. You're peeing. "I won't forget now."

You look down at your hand and see that all the shampoo has run out of it. You refill and finish your shower. Reaching out to pull the towel off the towel rack and dry off you look at the inside of your arm. It was a tattoo of a heart with the Chinese symbol for "dream" inside of it. The heart was pink, the symbol was black. You were the only one who knew you had it. And only one other person knew what it meant to you.

You wonder where Paul is now as you get dressed and head down to find something to eat before catching a ride back to the airport to head for Moscow.

... ..

"My Little Runaway"

>>>..., ...!<<<

Everyone randomly started clapping when the plane landed at SVO. You looked around at everyone like you were the only sane person in a looney bin, but didn't want to seem odd, so you joined in clapping with them. Maybe it was a Russian thing. Kind of fun, you thought after a minute of joining in laughing with the other passengers. You'd rather get off the plane and find your way to your room.

"Iva Petrov," you mutter to yourself, trying to get used to the name. Dealing with Sergei on the plane from PHX to JFK didn't leave you much time to immerse yourself in Russian culture, nor practice your upcoming role for your mission. You realized you don't really know too much about Russian culture, and you think you should take a day or so to do some research. You haven't received any communication from AI after you received your itinerary, so you are just biding your time waiting for when you are to meet with someone from Russian World News Network. You're anxious to get started, there is a lot of work to be done.

After a painstaking journey to find your private driver, you finally managed to check in and take a shower in your room at the Novotel Sheremetyevo airport hotel. You order room service and while you're waiting, you hear your phone buzzing. It's an anonymous caller. You look at it for a minute, debating on whether or not you want to answer the phone.

Curiosity wins.

"Hello?"

You hear static on the other end. No voices.

"Is anyone there? Hello?"

"Cassie?" a male voice that sounded very far away said, in a robotic tone that told you he was calling from a very bad signal area.

Not recognizing the voice, you ask who is calling. More static. You wait another few seconds and the call disconnects.

Okay, great, prank callers. Whatever your cheeseburger is here and you're famished. Diving in, your phone buzzes again. It's the anonymous caller again. You send the call to voicemail and finish your dinner. Well, technically breakfast. This jetlag would be brutal, you thought.

Your phone alerts you to a voicemail. You check it and find the same male, robotic-sounding voice, but the words he is trying to say keep breaking up. You didn't think it was from AI, they usually text or email, you've very rarely received a phone call from them. You replay the message a few times, writing down each word you think you understand. It sounded like:

"Cassie, I have (inaudible) rest in convey. I'm gone. I went to (inaudible) you but left. I will try from a better signal area."

You had no idea what it meant, or if you even understood it correctly, but you saved it. Even though you knew it wasn't Paul, you did hope in the back of your mind that it might have been. Maybe he was trying to get in touch with you, or maybe you just had it on your mind and wanted it to be the case.

Finding it hard to keep your eyes open, you get comfy under the covers and turn on the TV. There are reruns of The Price is Right playing (on a station that isn't in Russian you were able to find) which was a show your grandma used to love. You smiled as you closed your eyes, thoroughly exhausted from your journey, but ready to head out in a few short hours.

... ..

"Count the Hours"

>>>..., ...!<<<

Waking up at 1PM Moscow Standard Time, you wash your face and make a quick cup of coffee. Changing your clothes, you run out to meet your local expert who is picking you up for your personal private tour of Moscow. You wouldn't get to see all the attractions, since you booked late and were lucky to even find someone willing to take you for the half-day, but you will see the Red Square, The Ruined Grotto, and Kremlin Cathedrals.

You are particularly interested in the history behind the Kremlin Cathedrals, specifically, Ivan the Great Bell Tower. You pretend to listen intently to the docent speak in Russian while you Google Ivan the Great on your phone and read more about Ivan III,

Someone taps your left arm and you look over to find a brunette woman with dark green eyes smiling at you. She whispers in

English, "You can't use your phone here," her Russian accent very heavy.

You smile at her and lock your phone, putting it in your pocket. You shake your head and snicker. "Sorry, I just don't speak enough Russian to know everything he is saying," you say, pointing at the docent.

"He is difficult to understand in Russian as well," the girl laughs.

You like her instantly. You smile and introduce yourself.

"I'm Cassie," you say, realizing you said your real name instead of your assumed one, but too late to take it back now. Oh well, she was nice.

"Zoe," she smiles widely, offering to shake your hand.

You shake it and compliment her English. She thanks you and says she lived in Montana for 10 years when she went to college. She wanted to move there permanently but was unable to adjust to the cost of living in comparison to the economy in the areas she wanted to live. She dreamed of building a house there someday, she said, but for now, she loved Moscow and

would return to Montana eventually, but it wasn't a priority. She asks to know more about you; what do you do, where are you from?

Both of you wander away from the group to talk, and you tell her the truth about you. You're from Arizona, you're a US Marine, and you are here on a diplomatic mission. She looks very intrigued but says she doesn't want to ask you because it's probably top secret. You say it is, and she finds that so very funny. Her eyes crinkle at the corners when she laughs, and all her teeth show. She has a great smile, you think, feeling awesome that something seems to finally be working out for you. You mention that you have to go back to your room soon, as your local expert is waiting outside. She offers to exchange numbers and you accept. You tell her where you're staying, and ask her if she would like to meet up for lunch the next day. She agrees, and she will give you a call tomorrow morning.

Things are looking really good in Moscow so far. Too bad you didn't notice someone following you the entire time you were out touring the city. They're following you now, as you ride back to your hotel room with your local expert, and they will be following your every move for the foreseeable future.

You'll find that out soon enough, though.

... ..

“Ecclesiastes 12”

Posted by animariumblog on September 27, 2021 | Posted in fiction, novel

“At forty-five degrees, the sky will burn. Fire to approach the great new city; in an instant, a great scattered flame will leap up, when one will want to get evidence from the Normans.” – Nostradamus

When he slept, he looked like an angel; more beautiful than anything you had ever seen in this world. The way his chest moved as he took his sleepy little breaths, his little closed eyes going back and forth as he was dreaming. What was he dreaming about? Fields of cherries, dancing pixies and cotton candy, you think, smiling at him. Would he ever know what terror brought him here?

The day ended nicely, but it wasn't over for you yet. Your stalker has found a way to hack into your phone, and has located your new friend Zoe, also. He is watching you search the web for short-term rentals, Russian lessons, and he sees you set up a Tinder profile. He downloads every picture in your phone as you go through Tinder looking to hook up with some Russian beefcakes.

He doesn't approve of your lewd behavior. At all. This will not sit well with him when you both eventually meet, especially if you –

You did it. You're talking to some Russian guy named Mikhail (who speaks great English) about having drinks and hooking up. You're going to meet up with him in a couple of hours. He sent you a dick pic and it's huge. You sent him a picture of your boobs and he responded with heart eyes.

Your stalker is really mad, Cassie. He expects you to be pure. He has plans for you, and they don't include you getting railed by Mikhail. He's debating on just tuning this out and pretending like he doesn't see it, or listening to the whole thing, trying to watch it if he can, just so he can justify the horrible things he knows he is going to have to do to you. It would just make it easier for you if he thought you were untainted. Even though he knows you were married, he doesn't think you've had sex with anyone since your husband died.

You haven't. You really need to get laid, and you're going to. You meet up with Mikhail and you hit it off, have some drinks, and before you know it, you're naked in bed with him in your hotel room. It lasts about an hour and you both agree that he isn't going to spend the night, but maybe you'll hook up again another time. He tries to kiss you before he leaves and you turn your cheek so he doesn't get your lips. Once he's gone, you giggle like a schoolgirl and take a shower. You needed that. Desperately.

Unfortunately, your stalker decided to tune in. After Mikhail leaves, he's decided to break into your hotel room. He's literally in the parking lot, so it doesn't take him very long to get up to you. While you're showering, he's checking out your bed, sniffing the sheets, rubbing his hands over the wet spots. On his face, an expression of rage mixed with pure disgust. He's looking at the bathroom door as you hum to yourself in the shower, happily washing your hair.

Slowly, quietly, deliberately opening the bathroom door, the steam billows out into the rest of the room as your stalker enters. You're rinsing out the shampoo and he can see your naked body through the shower door glass. Distorted, but he's looking at you. You don't see him because your eyes are closed. When you open them, he's moved to the other side of the bathroom, but you notice the bathroom door is open. Did you leave it open? Maybe. Hmm, you think to yourself, not really worrying about it. Putting some conditioner in your hair, you close your eyes again. You feel a little guilty about enjoying yourself with Mikhail, but you hadn't done anything like that since Paul.

That pain again.

Paul was more than just a one time thing though, you think to yourself. Someday, you would try to find him again. Maybe you made the wrong decision cutting it off with him after all. Maybe he was who you really belonged with all this time.

Finishing up your shower, you step out and grab a towel off the towel rack to dry off. Somehow, your stalker left the bathroom while you were finishing up and you didn't notice. He's waiting for you in your bedroom closet now, but you won't see him right away because your nightgown is on your bed.

Once you've gotten ready for bed and climbed in, you start to doze off, the TV on low volume. You don't know it, but you do snore a little when you're really tired. That's how your stalker

knew you were asleep. Once he knew that, it made it easy for him to install the cameras in your room.

... ..

“Zoe”

Posted by animariumblogascent October 5, 2021 Posted in fiction, novel

>>>..., ...!<<<

You met up with Zoe at a coffee bar called Coffee Roaster Coffee Bar in Moscow. She was such a charming person, you both instantly hit it off, talking mainly about her life in Moscow. She says she will help you learn Russian also and assist you with your top secret mission, again laughing. You ask her if she has plans for the rest of the day and she says she has to meet up with her boyfriend in a few hours but was open to hanging out. You ask if she would be willing to go with you to see some rentals you were interested in, and she excitedly agrees.

Your stalker follows, about five steps behind you both the entire way. He is taking photos of you both together and sending text messages to a partner. He checks the app he has on his phone that allows him to see what you are doing on yours. He sees you entering an address of a local rental property about 15

minutes away. He decides to head back to his office, where he keeps other things he plans on showing you soon.

Once he's there, he goes into a secret, locked dark room to develop the photos. He masturbates to one of them, grunts as he completes the deed, then wipes his mess with wet wipe he finds on the counter. He leaves the dark room and goes into the bathroom where he reads "Good Housekeeping" on the toilet. Finishing up there, he washes his hands and goes to his kitchen where a girl who looks about 18 is tied up, whimpering and crying. She is gagged, and tied to a chair sitting upright. Wearing only a bra and panties, her pale skin was covered in bruises; bones protruding from every part of her body. Her matted, short black hair was drenched in sweat, pale blue eyes wide with fear as she wept staring at your stalker, begging him to free her with her eyes. He slaps her in the face and she cries. He walks away from her and leaves the room, shutting the light out.

He goes back to his phone to see what you're doing again. You've left that location and have headed to another one with Zoe. It's about 10 minutes away. He decides to wait a little longer, because he knows you have another one that's within walking distance from where he lives.

Going back to the kitchen, he turns the light on and she cries again. He takes the gag off of her and warns her to be quiet. She complies. He feeds her baby food and she gobbles it up, starving. He drops little bits of water into her mouth and she tries to lick the bottle he's dropping them from. He puts the bottle down and she caves into herself, fearing his wrath. He punches her in the jaw and she yelps, blood spattering on the wall. She cries softly, and he smooths her hair. He holds her mouth open and she audibly winces in pain, then he pours the remaining water into her mouth, laughing as she struggles to swallow. He puts the gag back on her and she moans. He walks out of the room and shuts the light off again.

Checking his phone he sees you are close to the place he knew you would be. Leaving his home, he locks the door behind him and walks to the street behind him to see you and Zoe pull up and get out of her car.

... ..

“Twin Flames”

**Posted by animariumblogascent October 13, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel**

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo credit: “Alchemy & Astrology: Twin Flames,” Miss Muslim, 2021, Retrieved from: <https://missmuslim.nyc/alchemy-and-astrology-twin-flames/>

“Remember me when you do pray that hope doth lead from day to day.” – Anne Boleyn

Watching you walk inside the flat, he imagined all sorts of things he would love to do to you and Zoe, and felt his trousers tighten as he played those fantasies out in his mind. It was you he wanted, though, but Zoe would do nicely also, and if she was your friend now, she would be a perfect way to get to you.

His cell phone buzzed in his pocket as he stood outside, smoking a cigarette. He pulled it out and saw his partner was calling. Walking away, he took the call and whispered to him that you were looking at the place close to where he lived. Your stalker then made plans to visit his partner later, and ended the call.

You were inside falling in love with the place, and Zoe was telling you all about the area, and what was nearby. She encouraged you to rent the flat, and you decided you wanted to go ahead and do it. It was absolutely perfect for your time in Moscow, and you were ready to get some dinner. You both discuss the lease terms with the leasing manager, Zoe translating for the both of you. After about an hour, you put down a deposit and agree to a six month stay.

Deciding to head back to your hotel room, you thank Zoe for coming with you and make plans to meet up in a few days. She says she will call you later and you bid her farewell, and you start to look for a taxi, walking down the street, admiring everything around you, excited about your new home.

You see a man standing on the sidewalk smoking a cigarette and he looks familiar. You try to get a closer look but when you do, he turns and starts walking away. The hair on the back of your neck stands up. Was that Sergei? Probably not, but the thought of it was enough to make you stay back and maintain a healthy distance.

Looking across the street, you see a car pull up and a very attractive man step out of it. Tall, lean, glasses, nice confident gait. He looked over just then and you made eye contact. You didn't look away, and you actually smiled. He smiled back. Your heart is pounding. He says something but you can't hear him.

"I don't speak very much Russian," you say, giddy.

"It's fine, I speak English," he says in a Russian accent. "What's your name? Do you need some help?"

You laugh. "I'm Cassie," you reply, getting closer to him. His eyes were the palest blue-grey, they almost looked like they were white. His face was perfect; hair dark brown, freshly shaved, plucked eyebrows? He was well-groomed, and you were interested. "I'm actually looking for a cab so I can go back to my hotel and eat," you pat your stomach. "I'm starving."

"I'm Xzavier," he says, his eyes glittering when he looks at you. "I know we just met, but would you like a ride? I promise I'm not a psycho, I'm a doctor," he laughs, flashing what looks to you like some kind of medical badge or credential.

You hesitate. It's dangerous, you think to yourself, but you need a ride, he seems really nice, and you are more than capable of defending yourself. "Well, sure! I'm staying by the airport, is that okay? I'd be happy to pay for – "

He stops you by putting up his hand. "Не стоит беспокоиться, or no worries," he says. "It's not every day I meet gorgeous American women in need of a ride." His smile had you mesmerized.

... ..

“Surrogate”

**Posted by animariumblog ascent October 20, 2021 Posted
in fiction, novel Edit “Surrogate”**

>>>..., ...!<<<

Xzavier dropped you off and you wanted badly to ask him up, but you literally just met him. You did that sometimes with people – broke out of your shell and opened up. You didn’t ask him up, but he asked if he could call you to see you again, and of course you said yes. This was the first time since Paul you’d felt any kind of spark for anyone, and you weren’t sure if it was just the new surroundings, or if it there was something there.

As he drove back to Sergei’s home office, Xzavier did nothing but think about you and beam from ear to ear the whole drive. He knew what you looked like, but to see you in person was a

completely different story. Photos didn't do you justice. You made an incredible impression, one equal to your own. The only problem was, Sergei couldn't find out, and Xzavier didn't know how to keep that from happening.

Xzavier and Sergei have had an intimate, open relationship with one another for quite some time. Sergei was instrumental in opening Xzavier's private medical practice, and Xzavier knew you didn't exactly like Sergei's assertion that you belonged to him, or Iva Petrov belongs to him, but Xzavier also knew that if Sergei wanted something or someone bad enough, he would find a way to make it happen. If he couldn't make it happen naturally, he would find another way. Xzavier didn't want to make an enemy out of Sergei, no more than the opposite was true. When a beautiful woman was thrown into the mix, though, the dynamic change was palpable, at least for Xzavier.

When he arrived at Sergei's, he could tell he knew about Xzavier's attraction to you, but he wasn't reading too much into it. Yet, anyway. He gave Xzavier some dirty looks as he relayed the information to him, keeping his emotions in check and making sure to watch his voice inflection when he spoke of you. Sergei seemed to be okay with it, at least for the time being. Xzavier felt like it was going to get pretty steamy between the both of you soon, though.

Sergei wanted Xzavier to continue to see you, though he didn't specify in what capacity. Xzavier was to continue to make you feel comfortable and relay information to Sergei that would be relevant to what he was planning. While Xzavier knew exactly what that was, he wouldn't ever tell you, no matter how attracted to you he was or how in love with you he falls. He would keep it a secret because he doesn't think it should be relevant to you, as it is something you would not approve of anyway. Xzavier's reasoning is quite illogical, but there it is.

You don't see or suspect any of this because you're riding an emotional high. You made a new friend, you found a new flat,

and you met a hot Russian guy. You're on top of the world. You must have done something right somewhere along the line for this to be working out so well so far. Even though you barely know Xzavier, you have a great feeling about him, and no one has given you butterflies in your stomach since Paul. You still feel pain when you think of him, and maybe someday you will reunite, but right now this feels right. You don't know how long you're going to be in Russia anyway, but the way it's going, you might want to stay.

Your impression of Zoe is right – she's authentic and genuine, and she's your friend.

Your impression of Xzavier is right also – but he is two people, as you will eventually see. Be careful of falling too hard for him, Cassie.

... ..

Ruben

"Teniente"

Updated: 5 days ago

>>>..., ...!<<<

Your evening with Diamond would have been amazing if you had been able to get the image of El Vaquero out of your head. His chiseled good looks, his easy strut, and his ability to charm the pants off of anyone. You always envied him, but you liked him as he was someone you wish you could have been, had you been a little younger.

Now you were positive he wanted to kill you, and just imagining what atrocities he would bestow upon you in his wrath was something your aging heart was having difficulty with. Without being obvious, or so you think, you keep trying to get information about him from Diamond to sort of feel out what kind of role he plays, if any at all, in her life.

You're able to determine that he is someone Peaches sees frequently, and he is often at the club as well as other locations Peaches is known to frequent. Peaches' real name is Sandra Elia Aguilar, and when Diamond tells you this, you feel the odd sensation that you have heard this name before, but you don't know when or in what capacity. It seems, to you, that Diamond is closer to Peaches than El Vaquero, but the fact that El Vaquero is even in the same city as you is something you are extremely nervous about.

At least you will be flying out of McCarran Airport to BWI in a few hours, you think to yourself, snorting another line of cocaine alongside Diamond.

... ..

"Welcome, Mr. Rodriguez"

>>>..., ...!<<<

Diamond had a shower in her single-wide trailer so she let you take a quick one after you finished off an 8th with her. You were on your way to the airport smelling better than you did before you met Diamond, but you'd need a nap on the plane, that was for sure. At least it was a direct flight from McCarran to BWI, then a private car would be there to meet you and take you to, you check your itinerary on your phone, oh that's right, Riggs in DC. It looked elegant from the photos you saw online. You looked forward to the accommodations, and other things that looking and smelling your best could attract.

After catching a fast nap on the flight, and being unable to rid your mind of Zapata, you decide to do a quick Google search

for him to see if you can find any more information on him. You were confused as to why you would even be seeing him again after everything that happened anyway. Why wasn't he in prison like the rest of them? That is what worried you, but as long as there was some distance between the two of you, you felt a little better.

Finding nothing of interest, you imagine he is likely using an alias like you were. You shake your head at how naive you could be sometimes. In any case, it bothered you and you wanted to find out why he was in Las Vegas, at the same club you happened to be at, and at the same time. It could have been a coincidence, but you wanted to make sure. It was just really difficult for you to do that since no one in that circle knew you were even still alive, mainly because none of them wanted you to be.

You knew from experience that letting someone like Zapata find you wouldn't be good news, either. Even as much as you tried to think about your mission, your family, or anything else other than Zapata, you couldn't stop thinking about him and wondering what he was doing popping back into your life. It only made it worse for you to think about your family, actually, because if Zapata was in Las Vegas, he could be after your family.

You pause.

Mother of fuck what if he was? What the hell are you going to do on a plane to DC? You scramble to find your phone in your carry-on so you can call Esmeralda to see if she is okay. When you find it, you switch it to airplane mode and call Esmeralda on Skype. She answers and you see she is in your home. Relieved, you laugh and talk with her for a bit. She mentions that you look tired and you agree, saying you tried to sleep last night but missed her too much. She laughs and blows you a kiss, telling you to get more sleep and to eat, you look hungry too. Before you disconnect, you tell her to Skype you if she needs you for anything. She says she is fine and wonders what you could possibly do from that far away? You insist she reaches out to you if she needs you. She agrees, and you end the Skype call.

Catching a little more sleep before you land, you have a dream about Peaches, imagining her completely naked and letting you do things to her. It lasts about as long as you would in real life before you awaken to the captain saying you have landed at BWI. After squirming through the crowd in the plane, making your way off, finding your checked suitcase, and going out to meet your driver, you feel like you are ready to jump headfirst into your mission. A black Audi S8 pulls up next to you and the trunk opens. You pop your suitcase inside, close the trunk, and open the rear passenger side door of the car. Closing it, the driver pulls away and starts to leave the airport.

Your phone buzzes in your pocket and you pull it out to see a text message from Esmeralda. You immediately open your phone and see that it is a photo of Layla with car keys. You

respond to the message asking what that is for. Esmeralda responds that Layla finally bought the used car she had been saving up for, a 2015 Toyota Corolla. You respond with a smiley face and a heart, saying congratulations, chuckling aloud.

"My daughter just bought her first car," you say proudly to the driver.

"Muy bien!" He responds, "congratulations, sir!"

You thank him and smile, looking out the window at all the beautiful, green surroundings you were not used to seeing back home in Pahrump. Too bad the humidity made it feel like you were stuck inside an aquarium under a heat lamp. The beauty was breathtaking though. The whole way to Riggs you just took it in, enjoying everything you saw.

As your driver pulled up, a bellhop opened your door and greeted you warmly. Your driver exited the Audi and removed your suitcase from the trunk, setting it down on the ground gently. You reach into your pocket to pull out a \$50 bill to hand him and he looks down at you, directly in your eyes, smiling widely. Your spine twitches.

"Welcome, Mr. Rodriguez," Zapata sneers.

"Te Crees Muy Muy"

>>>..., ...!<<<

You were eviscerated by Zapata shortly after he led you up to your room. After slicing your stomach open and removing your guts, he kept you alive for a little while so you could -

Just kidding. You didn't die.

You were terrified, no, mortally petrified, when you realized Zapata had been your driver from BWI to Riggs. A million thoughts went through your head as he walked you to your room, and he was so cordial to you, not letting on to the bellhop that anything might be awry. You shit a little on the elevator ride, and you knew that they all smelled it, but you kept facing forward, barely blinking, barely moving, just standing with your

hands clasped together in front of your stomach, absorbing your fecal matter into your inner butt cheeks.

Impressive, actually. You were ready to accept your fate. You stood up and looked fearless, even though you had poop coming out, leaving streaks on your boxer briefs. So gross, but that was the only clue that you were scared, and for all they knew, you could have just been releasing a deliberate silent but violent fart to assert dominance, they were none the wiser.

Not mentioning the smell, both Zapata and the bellhop endured and led you to your room, number 1318, Layla's birthday, you think to yourself. You feel your throat constricting, remembering you mentioned her to Zapata. You could literally jump off the highest bridge right now, head first, that's how bad you felt. You felt like the biggest idiot alive, and you knew that whatever Zapata did to you, he would also do to your family. You wanted to cry. But you didn't.

Quite impressive.

The thing is, Zapata doesn't hate you, Ruben. He missed you. He desperately missed you after he corroborated your testimony without you even realizing it. He wanted to talk to you again, and was recruited by AI based on his status as a protected witness, and his expressed interest in serving the American government as a way to show penance.

No Ruben, Zapata is actually a really nice guy. He loves opera, his favorite artist being Andrea Bocelli. He tells you all about "Pagliacci," and invites you to come see it with him next time it is in town. You feel like you gained a brother. Apparently, so does he.

He does have some disturbing information, though. He was, well, shall we say, "converted" into something else. He's still human, but he volunteered to be a guinea pig in an experiment AI was conducting. He wanted to tell you all about it, but you need to gain clearance. You were jealous that he had this esteemed clearance when you didn't, and he basically piggy-backed off of you to get this position, but your jealousy quickly fades when you see Zapata lowering his eyes and apologizing to you, as though he can read your mind.

You ask him if he can give you any information at all about this experiment in conversion, remembering the twitch in your spine when you looked into his eyes. He looks at you, and mentions that he would love to tell you all about it, but if he did so without you having clearance, his life could be at risk. Your spine twitches again and he looks away.

"I know a masseuse in town that can help you out with your lower back, I know you must be sore from all that traveling," Zapata looks at your forehead.

You suddenly get it. This is the experiment. He's reading your mind, when you look in his eyes your spine twitches, et cetera. But what is it? You want to know, maybe you would like this superpower too. What if you were able to look into Peaches' eyes and make her undress -

Zapata glares at you.

You laugh audibly. He smiles.

"Is Peaches your girlfriend?" You ask Zapata.

He nods. "I love her more than my life, and she understands me more than anyone else," he looks at your forehead again.

You feel like he's trying to tell you something, but you don't want to push. He's trusting you, and wants you to trust him. You're going to, because you feel that he is in need of someone he is familiar with. You can't put your finger on it, but he seems so lost. You want to help him now, when just hours ago you wanted to avoid him like the plague.

Funny how things work out sometimes.

... ..

"President Hamilton"

>>>..., ...!<<<

**"We must make the best of those ills which cannot be avoided."
- Alexander Hamilton**

Relieved that you no longer feel like you are on the run from Zapata, you sigh loudly. You confide in him that you thought he wanted to kill you, but you presume he already knew that. He says he knew, and the thought never crossed his mind. He wanted to find you because he knew you were the only person who would be able to provide him with some sort of stability, or what he would interpret as stability, rather, since you were the last link to the old life you both once shared. You can relate to this feeling, as you are now experiencing it also since you no longer feel that your life is in danger.

"So," Zapata starts, "you're sitting in shit, man."

Oh yeah, you did shit your pants on the elevator. "What?" You can't lie, Ruben, it's pointless.

Zapata shrugs.

"Right," you get up and excuse yourself to the restroom.

Before taking you to meet a colleague, Zapata insists you shower twice, shave, and he trims your hair up for you so you look like an actual person instead of a beast. You feel like you're having a male bonding moment and it weirds you out a little bit but you like it. After you're finished getting ready, Zapata looks through your clothes and picks out a halfway decent beige Polo shirt with armpit stains and a pair of black sweatpants. He shakes his head. "We need to take you shopping," he says, handing you the clothes.

You change your clothes and you and Zapata leave to meet someone he calls Nick. Nick just came in from New York the day before and was staying at a hotel about 30 minutes away. When you arrive to meet Nick, you feel unwelcome. Nick exudes an aura of hostility to you, and he seems to dislike you from the start. You also notice he seems quite wealthy, is dressed impeccably, and you assume he just thinks you are beneath him. You really want to give him a piece of your mind, but you refrain and Zapata introduces you as Ralph Rodriguez. Nick waves his hand at you after you extend yours, and says his name is Nick Ward, with a slight British accent.

"You'll forgive me if I don't shake hands, I've been unwell," he explains with a fake smile, looking at your forehead and quickly looking away in disgust.

You smile politely. "No problem, senor," you say, giving him a once over.

Zapata starts by saying you have been debriefed but now need clearance. Nick looks confused. He berates Zapata for telling you anything without him being there, but since he did, Nick looks at you and says that you will get your coveted clearance in a tone that you really don't like.

"What the fuck is your problem?" You bark at Nick.

He looks astonished. His eyes widen and he starts laughing. "Are you, are you fucking serious?" He balks. "You're talking to me that way?"

Zapata apologizes on your behalf. "Please forgive him, Mr. Ward, he is unwell also, he's been traveling a long time."

Nick grimaces and agrees reluctantly. "If that fetid pig speaks to me in such a vulgar way again, I will have his tongue out," he states, looking directly in your eyes. Your spine vibrates and you feel pure terror. "Do you understand me, Ralph Rodriguez?" Nick asks, looking at your forehead.

Your spine stops vibrating and you feel like you have to shit again.

"He understands," Zapata says.

Nick explains that in order for you to obtain clearance, you have to fill out a stack of forms with your information, he makes sure to emphasize the information you gave Al several times when he says this. You really don't like this guy but you behave because this is what you have to do right now. You agree and take the stack of papers he hands you. He expects you to have them finished by 7 AM tomorrow morning and he will be by your hotel room personally to ensure that you do.

Then he will take you personally to meet President Hamilton, who is up for re-election in 2036.

You agree, and as you and Zapata head toward Nick's hotel room door to leave, Nick says, "Oh and Ralph, call me The Rebel. That's all. Don't ever refer to me by Nick again or I'll kill you and your family." He smiles. "Got it?"

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“President Hamilton Part II”

**Posted by animariumblogascent September 30, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel Edit “President Hamilton Part II”**

>>>..., ...!<<<

**Photo credit: Columbia College Alumni Association, Columbia
University., 2021**

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**[https://www.college.columbia.edu/alumni/content/alexander-
hamilton-cc-1778,](https://www.college.columbia.edu/alumni/content/alexander-hamilton-cc-1778)**

**Nick’s breath smelled like moldy cheese and you really wanted
to tell him that but you were afraid he would cut your tongue
off. You were seriously supposed to say, “The Rebel” when you
referred to him? That’s dumb, you think, his stank-breath
having ass yammering on about something having to do with**

food on your shirt. He looks like his head is going to explode when he yells at you. It takes all you have to keep from laughing at him on your way to the –

Wait, this isn't the way to the White House, you sense, checking your phone GPS. "Where are we?" you ask Nick.

Nick glares at you. "Are you dense as well as woefully unattractive? We're going to meet President Hamilton, as I said yesterday."

"This isn't the way to the White House, though," you say aloud, trying your best to sound like you are still submissive to this foul-mouthed, pin-headed, beady-eyed bald fuck.

Nick ignores you and you grow nervous. Where is he taking you? You're not armed, so if he wanted to take you out and kill you –

"I would," Nick finished.

FUCK. Him too?

"Yes, you inept wank stain. Pretty soon it will be you too, and I'm taking you to meet the President, but I didn't say he'd be in the White House, now did I? You need to work on your listening skills along with basic hygiene. What is this anyway?" He points to a patchy sideburn on your left side you forgot to shave off. You shaved the right one so it was uneven.

"I forgot to shave one side, Sir," you look at him, wanting to laugh. You're not going to call him that stupid shit, what is he, an action hero?

Nick ignores you again, a distasteful expression on his face as he audibly groans about an odor coming from you and plugs his nose.

You travel some distance and end up in a heavily wooded area. You're growing more nervous by the second. Within about 25

minutes of driving in the wilderness, you see a house protected by a large iron gate. At the gate, a guard, who opens the gate for the driver and you go inside the property. You look back in the rear window at the gate closing in the distance, a sinking feeling in your stomach.

“Ralph, I want you to keep your mouth closed the entire time,” Nick says in a low voice. “If you repeat anything of what you see or hear here today, I will know, and you know what will happen.”

“Yes, sir,” you agree uneasily.

The car inches down the long brick driveway toward what looked like a castle to you. The home was entirely brick, and had 5 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms, sitting on 5 acres of lush forest. It was appraised at \$85.7 million, Nick said, as though selling you the home. You stared at it in awe, starting to feel a little star struck that you are about to meet the President of the United States – in his home!

Nick laughs. “Sort of,” he says, an ominous tone in his voice.

... ..

President Hamilton Part III

Posted by animariumblogascent October 8, 2021 Posted in fiction, novel Edit President Hamilton Part III

>>>..., ...!<<<

Portrait of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, by Thomas Hamilton Crawford (Scottish, 1860 – 1948); mezzotint, 1932. (Photo by Graphica Artis/Getty Images)

As he got up from the leather seat, you swore you heard him fart right at you.

“Aww man why?” You wave your hand in front of your face and get out of the car as Nick laughs loudly.

“It smells better than you.”

You follow him and two large black men dressed in suits and ties toward the door to the house. They open it, and you are greeted by a small chihuahua who starts screaming at you in barks.

“Constance!” You hear a female voice in the distance shout. Constance the chihuahua runs away toward the voice.

“Welcome, I’m Andre, and I’ll escort you to the guest quarters to await the President,” the black man on the right introduced himself as he motioned for you to follow him inside.

You enter with Nick and you stare in awe at the gargantuan crystal chandelier in the foyer, then down at the immaculate white marble tile flooring. Looking around the room, you see portraits of Alexander Hamilton, and you ask Nick if President Hamilton is related. Nick walks ahead of you, following Andre.

You remember Nick's warning, and decide to keep your comments to yourself.

Andre leads you to a sitting room, with two leather couches, a fireplace, a television with a news station playing, and a coffee table with a small water dispenser and glass tumblers next to a container of ice. You sit down on the couch opposite Nick and he starts fumbling with his phone.

"Don't ask me any questions until after we have left, understand?" Nick says as he texts someone.

"Yes sir," you reply. You hear Andre leave the room and you look over where you heard him close the door. Next to the door he left through, you see a glass coffee table with a display of what looked like a small green pill. You look back at Nick, wanting to ask about it. He looks up at you and motions a slice across his throat with his hand. You look back at the green thing. What is it? You wonder. Maybe it was a suppository, you thought, starting to laugh out loud.

"Please shut the fuck up," Nick says.

You hear a British man laughing from behind the door Andre just closed. You look back over at the door, then the green thing. Then the door. You hear the British man talking to Andre, sounding very animated but oddly jumpy and loud. You could tell from the pausing that Andre was responding to whatever was being said, but you could only hear the British man's voice.

Suddenly, the door opens, and you see Andre walk in and Nick stand up. You look at Nick, confused as to what he is doing. He motions for you to stand up. Why? You think, you're comfortable. Nick looks at you like he's going to pull your head off your shoulders. You stand up, stifling a laugh.

"Gentlemen," Andre starts with a wide smile. "May I introduce to you, Mr. Alexander Hamilton, the 49th President of the United

States of America.” He then turns and extends his arm toward the man who enters the room.

It was the same guy in the pictures, the founding father of the United States, except he was dressed for the time. His walk was stiff and looked contrived. His expression blank, his smile wide and welcoming.

Your mouth is hanging open as he walks toward you with his hand extended.

... ..

“Hector”

**Posted by animariumblogascent October 15, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel Edit “Hector”**

>>>..., ...!<<<

New Year's Eve of 2013 began on December 30 for you, Esmeralda and your son and daughter, Israel and Yvette, fraternal twins, as you all headed to the Las Vegas strip to celebrate at the MGM Grand Hotel. So many events, so many people, it was the first time you all had been out together as a family since Israel, Yvette, and your two other sons, Michael and Victor, all lived at home. Israel and Yvette were getting ready to start high school, and Esmeralda was 7 months pregnant with your son.

You hadn't decided on a name for him yet. You'd been discussing it as a family but you were still having fun coming up with different ideas. Yvette was thrilled that she would have a little brother, as she was the youngest girl and desperately wanted someone to pick on. Israel seemed a little jealous of Yvette's excitement since they were very close, but he was also excited for the arrival of his brother, just worried he would be overshadowed.

New Year's Eve arrived and found all of you enjoying yourselves on the strip, opting to take a taxi instead of walking, since Esmeralda was pregnant. It took some doing, but you were finally able to find a taxi-van you could all fit in. The driver rolled down all the windows for you so you could enjoy the sights. It was magical for all of you, together, laughing, just enjoying your lives. It felt good to have your family together, with one on the way. It was such an exciting time for you all, the world seemed to be your oyster and you were incredibly grateful for your good luck.

You had no way of knowing how your life would be changed that night. Or that the taxi driver was texting his girlfriend when it happened, but lied to the police and got away with it because they knew him. When the Jeep Wrangler t-boned the taxi-van on the same side Esmeralda was on, hitting her directly in the stomach, separating her placenta from the inner wall of her uterus. In extreme pain, Esmeralda began having non-stop

contractions, and with all the traffic in Las Vegas that night, it took over two hours for her to be evacuated safely and transported to the emergency room. By the time she got there, she was already dilated 6 cm, losing blood rapidly.

When he was born, he wasn't breathing. Doctors were able to resuscitate him, but he went a very long time without oxygen. Doctors were doubtful he would pull through without some kind of permanent brain damage.

The first night in the hospital after he was born, you and Esmeralda sat with Yvette and Israel and wept in each other's arms. The tiny little boy who hadn't been named yet came early, and no one even knew how long he was going to be there. It was such a horrible, unstable feeling. One moment you were on top of the world, the next, that world was turned completely upside down. You all decided to pull together and at least give him a name. As a family, you chose Hector Ramon, named after your father, Hector, and Esmeralda's father, Ramon.

Hector was a tough little baby, and he pulled through. He was tentatively diagnosed with a permanent brain injury, the doctors suggested it as hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy, or HIE. They explained the full impact wouldn't likely be known until Hector started to mature, and developmental challenges presented themselves. He would need full time care his entire life.

While this was devastating news for your family, it was a blessing that he was alive. When you were finally able to hold your son, you sang these words to him:

“When the night has come

And the land is dark

And the moon is the only light we'll see

No, I won't be afraid

Oh, I won't be afraid

Just as long as you stand, stand by me.” (1)

... ..

(1) “Stand By Me,” Ben E. King, 1961

**This blog is written in memory of Daisy Dahan, reference:
<https://lasvegassun.com/news/2014/jan/13/wifes-insistence-getting-divorce-preceded-horrific/>**

“Mr. President”

**Posted by animariumblogascent October 24, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel**

>>>..., ...!<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

“Is this the first time you’re seeing the President of the country you live in, Ralph?” Andre asked, a smile forming on his face as he looked at your face.

It’s Ruben, you think to yourself. You’re in shock. You’d never really paid attention to politics much, except when there was talk about a border wall in the late ’10s. “Forgive me, sirs, I’m not much of a political man, so yes, this is my first time, and

quite an unforgettable one,” you smiled widely, and shook President Hamilton’s hand. His hands were quite warm, he had a firm grip, and had a look in his eyes you trusted but were intensely fearful of. It seemed false.

“The pleasure is mine, Mr. Rodriguez,” President Hamilton continues. As he makes his way to the couch to sit next to Nick, you look a little closer and it doesn’t seem like he’s the Alexander Hamilton you saw in the portraits. You knew who he was, he was on the \$10 bill. And you also knew he’d been dead for centuries. President Hamilton had to be a descendant.

Nick cleared his throat and you looked up to see him glaring at you with a fake smile. He then turned to President Hamilton and they started to talk about this clearance you needed for the experimental operation.

The President clapped his hands excitedly and jumped in his seat. “Ah, yes! Mr. Rodriguez, you will be given the necessary clearance within the next business day. From there, you will follow Mr. Ward’s instruction to receive the – ” he pauses dramatically, “green candy,” he laughs and his eyes sparkle. He looks in yours and your spine buzzes briefly.

“Green candy?”

“Mr. Ward will go into more detail, but it’s a coveted operation, Mr. Rodriguez,” the President explains. “I’m told you have completed the necessary paperwork to move forward with your clearance application?” He looks at Nick.

Nick nods, “He has, Mr. President, I’ve seen to it, and I have it here,” he pats a briefcase next to him.

The President nods contentedly. “Right then, you’ll see to it that the application gets to our AI support staff, won’t you, Andre?”

Andre nods, retrieves the briefcase from Nick and leaves the room.

“Mr. Rodriguez, might I ask why you want this clearance?” The President smiles at you as he awaits your answer.

You don’t, you think to yourself. You only wanted to control people’s minds so you could get women naked more easily. “I would like to serve to the best of my ability, sir, and I feel this is an honorable way to provide my services to you and my country,” you lie.

He loves it. “Good to hear!” he exclaims as you see Nick roll his eyes at you out of the corner of yours. President Hamilton invites you and Nick to join him for dinner, and you both accept.

... ..

“Hello, Mrs. Rodriguez”

**Posted by animariumblogascent November 1, 2021 Posted
infiction, novel**

>>>..., ...!<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

After Layla took Esmeralda and Hector on a joy ride in her new wheels, they decided to get some dinner at a local diner in town. Esmeralda tried calling you but you didn’t answer. She didn’t leave a message because Layla noticed someone pulling up behind her car, blocking them in.

Telling Layla to stay behind with Hector while she went outside, Esmeralda approached the black SUV cautiously. Esmeralda is a smart woman, she doesn’t say much because she keeps to herself, not because she is ignorant in any way. She knows exactly who you are, what you do, and her role. She loves you anyway, and this is what makes your bond the strongest with her. It doesn’t mean she doesn’t get scared, though, Ruben. She’s 52, and she’s alone with your daughter and handicapped son. There isn’t much she can do to defend herself. She looks around and feels somewhat comforted by the well lit parking lot, though, so she assumes this is some sort of law

enforcement, and she isn't too far from the truth, but it isn't the Pahrump Police Department in the SUV.

“Hello, Mrs. Rodriguez?” A man starts walking toward your wife, reaching into his blazer and pulling out something black and square. Esmeralda nods, not afraid that he's going to kill her, but afraid of something else happening – some other unwelcome news.

The man opens up a wallet and flashes a card at Esmeralda with his photo on it. She takes it in her right hand gingerly and inspects it.

She reads **“American Intelligence,”** and **“Daniel Thipp.”**

“Daniel Thipp?” Esmeralda says softly.

“Yes, ma'am, please call me Dan,” Dan puts his credentials back in his wallet. **“I'm sorry to disturb you and your children at dinner, but I have some bad news.”**

Esmeralda remains expressionless but inside trembles. **“What kind of bad news, Dan?”**

“I'm afraid your husband has been captured by enemy forces,” Dan says, looking directly in Esmeralda's eyes. Her jaw drops.

Layla is keeping a close eye on what is going on outside and she notices her mother's body language. Careful to not alarm Hector, she watches as the man reaches for her mother's shoulder to keep her from falling. Layla tries to distract Hector so he doesn't see what is happening outside. Esmeralda appears to be crying. Layla is doing her best to remain calm, for Hector's sake. Esmeralda and the man come inside and meet them both at the table.

“Is this Hector?” Dan asks Esmeralda. She nods, **“and my daughter, Layla,”** she motions at Layla who has her arms around Hector trying to keep him calm.

“Let’s follow Dan, okay? He is going to tell us some things about Daddy,” Esmeralda says, feigning excitement in her voice. Layla picks up on it and tries to stay positive for Hector so he doesn’t start freaking out.

“Daddy?” Hector asks. “Is Daddy okay? Where is he?”

“Daddy’s fine Hector,” Layla soothes him. He seems pacified enough, and they make their way to the SUV, explaining several times to Hector that this is what they had to do to find out more about Daddy. It was the only thing that pacified him.

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ANIMARIUM PART II – THE DESCENT

Jim

“SAM’S TOWN”

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

>>>Work your way back & get caught up by clicking here<<<

The hotel hallway seemed to stretch on for eternity, and you felt like a mere hot dog within. There was clearly nowhere to hide, and you immediately began to regret leaving room 184. Why oh why did you listen to your fear? This was unlike you, and you were mentally berating yourself for it. After the day you had yesterday, everything else in your life...maybe you just felt like you didn't want to run the risk of anything else going wrong.

Way to go, Jim. Real clever.

As you slow your pace down to a reasonable stride so when the foreign gunman sees you there he isn't alarmed by you, you silently start praying to whatever deity exists that may hear you long enough to know you didn't mean to hurt her, and you didn't want things to end the way they did. The only reason it happened that way is because it was part of the mission. You never wanted it to end like that. It was the single worst thing to ever happen to you in your entire life and not a day goes by that you don't think about it. Not a day. You aren't the type to really feel any sort of remorse for doing what you have to do, you're a survivor and you are able to focus on the bigger picture, not getting bogged down in the details.

But her...

That was something you really struggled with. Sure, you could find reasons to justify it, to really excuse yourself. You could lie to yourself so much that you start to believe it, so you can cope and move forward with your life – er, existence. But you can't do that because if you do, it almost makes you lose touch with a part of yourself you didn't even realize you had until you met her. If you wrote her off like a bad debt, you would almost be writing yourself off, too.

Sure, she was not an ideal sort of stereotypical type of woman, but was any woman? Was any person an exact match of a stereotype? Of course not, and anyone who tried to be was usually targeted or they were the ones doing the targeting. It

was complicated, but she was simple – she was the type of woman who didn't really care about what other people thought about her and her actions demonstrated that quite clearly. It wasn't with any sort of nefarious intent, you decided, though, after getting to know her through her habits, her trash, and sometimes her personal email account when you were able to get in. It made it so much easier when the time came to actually talk to her to find things to say that would hold her interest.

Her eyes, how they would light up when she would get excited about something she was talking about. The way she twirled her hair and how her lips pursed when she was listening to you. The way she looked all over your face when you talked as though she was trying to memorize you. It almost made you blush again just imagining what it was like.

You turn the corner as you hear the gunman's footsteps growing closer and faster. Your heart starts pounding and you realize you aren't ready to die. You hope that isn't what is going to happen.

Click to move forward.

HELLO, JIM

Posted on August 15, 2021 by Melissa

Previous post

The footsteps keep getting closer, and it seems like they are picking up the pace, matching your own panicked heartbeat. The last moments of your life would have been thinking about her and how you could have done something differently. You'd heard that once your life leaves your body, your bowels and bladder empty. What a sight and smell to behold, you smirk to yourself.

Then, nothing. No man, no more footsteps. Just silence.

But wait!

A voice? It sounded like someone said something. You weren't sure. What you did know is that you heard what sounded like sirens in the distance which meant the police were coming. If the police were coming, you didn't want to be anywhere near the scene of a crime.

You're on your way to the bar to meet Fair Lawn, NJ.

CLICK FOR LATEST BLOG

“SAM’S TOWN, PART 2”

Posted on August 22, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Crossing the bridge from the hotel to the riverboat where you’d find the casino and the bar, you run your fingers through your hair and marvel at your seemingly good luck. You saw police officers in the hotel lobby talking to the front desk clerks, and you didn’t notice that one of them stared at you, following your every move as you passed by, memorizing every detail.

Arriving at the bar, you have a look around while the bartender serves another guest. It was a slow night, and you didn’t see anyone there who didn’t seem to be with someone else. Looking back at your phone, you re-read the text, and yes, your eyes didn’t deceive you, your text indicates someone is at the bar. You check the number again, and decide to order a drink while you wait a few minutes before trying to call the number from Fair Lawn, NJ.

The bartender acknowledges you with a nod, heading your way. He’s tall, probably about 6’5” and heavy set. His thick brown hair parted to the left side, his bulging hazel eyes gazing at you with a sort of knowing look making you feel comfortable immediately. He introduces himself as Paul, and you shake his hand.

“I’m Jon,” you lie, ordering a Crown Royal, neat. Paul prepares it for you and serves you as another man comes up on your right, smelling of Vanilla car air freshener and dank weed. You glance at him and observe that he is about your height, dark greasy hair and a goatee, with thick glasses. He looks at you and smiles widely, extending his hand.

“Eric,” he introduces himself to you as you shake his hand firmly. “Eric Small, I sell Volvos at Holmes,” he continues, in his odd, hybrid accent.

“I’m Jon,” you continue to lie, “nice to meet you Mr. Small.”

“Please, call me Eric,” he insists, sitting down next to you, ordering a 7 & 7. He takes out his wallet and tips the bartender generously. “I love coming up here after a long day,” he declares, taking off his black blazer before folding it in half and lying it down on the bar between the both of you. “I moved here from New Jersey about 15 years ago and I started coming up here after work sometimes, just have the one drink and a steak, medium rare, then head home for the night.”

“New Jersey?” You ask, looking at Eric attentively. He doesn’t seem to be trying to alert you to anything, and he isn’t acting like he’s on any sort of official mission, but maybe that’s the decoy. “What part?”

Eric takes a sip of his drink, sets down the glass, then pulls out a Marlboro red from his jacket pocket, pausing briefly and looking directly into your eyes, expressionless. “Fair Lawn,” he says, a sort of forced smile spreading across his face, his eyes still fixed.

You feel an odd sensation in your spine. You avert your eyes and see the bartender looking over your shoulder at the group of police officers who have just entered the bar and are headed directly your way.

You look at one of the police officers who is headed straight toward you. She is about 5'4" with her platinum blonde hair pulled back in a bun and her large doe eyes staring straight at you, a look of intense hatred on her face. Your spine twitches again and you avert your gaze. "Excuse me gentlemen," she starts in her thick Louisiana drawl. "I'm Detective Cartwright from Shreveport Homicide," she says, flashing her badge and looking directly at you.

You start to sweat, avoiding her gaze but acknowledging her presence with a nod. "Hello, Detective Cartwright, how can we be of assistance to you this evening, ma'am?" Eric says next to you, his mouth clicking dryly when he speaks.

Detective Cartwright continues by saying there was a shooting in the hotel and asks if anyone saw anything that might be of interest. Reaching for her contact cards, she hands you one first, searching your face for anything that might give away how she seems to know you're feeling right now.

You look at her quickly and shake your head, "Sorry, ma'am, that's terrible to hear, I didn't see anything but I will call you if I hear anything," you proclaim with a tone of voice you hope she perceives as honesty.

Eric and Paul say the same basic things to her, and she looks at you one last time with a look of determination, her intent so thick in the air you could feel it wrapping around you like a massive boa constrictor, squeezing the air out of your throat and slowly ending you as it prepares to dine on your flesh.

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“WHAT HAPPENED IN ROOM 185?”

Posted on August 29, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Eric continues telling you stories about Volvo customers as you finish off another drink together and he inhales his steak, drenched in Worcestershire sauce. You are relieved the police are gone but still have an uneasy feeling about the way that blonde woman glared at you. She clearly wasn't a detective, detectives don't wear police uniforms, you thought. Do they? You weren't sure, but the entire thing just didn't seem right.

“Hey, are you staying here?” Eric asks, his mouth full.

You nod, looking down at your glass, pensive.

“Mind if I crash in your room? I think I might have had too much to drink,” Eric laughs.

“Sure, I guess,” you agree.

You both head back up to room 184. On the way up the elevator, Eric asks you if you actually did see anything. You shake your head but start to talk about what you heard. Unlocking the door to your room, you and Eric step inside and have a long, detailed conversation about what you think might have happened in room 185 that night.

You hold nothing back, feeling oddly comfortable with this stranger whose eyes were difficult to really get a good look at behind his thick glasses.

... ..

“THANKS, CARTWRIGHT”

Posted on September 6, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Before our white brothers arrived to make us civilized men we didn’t have any kind of prisons. Because we didn’t have prisons, we also had no delinquents, locks or keys. Because of this we had no thieves. If a person was poor and had no horse, blanket, food or tent, he would simply receive all those things as a gift. We had no written laws, no lawyers, and no politicians, in this way, we were not able to swindle and cheat on another.”

– Wise Indian Proverb, Lame Deer

Your head feels like you were hit by a car going 100 down the freeway. You don’t know where you are, you don’t remember how you got here. You rub your eyes frantically, hoping to gain some sort of clarity and figure out what exactly is going on.

You see Eric sitting in front of you on the chair in room 184. He’s flipping through channels on the television. He doesn’t seem to notice you’re there, so you wave at him and he looks over at you blankly.

“Hey man, I just let you pass out you seem like you needed the sleep,” he says, turning his attention back to the TV.

You rub your eyes again. “Shit man, I don’t even remember passing out, how long did I sleep for?”

Eric shrugs. “Not sure, I woke up just a little bit ago myself, but you passed out at least an hour before I did.” He yawns loudly, his jaw clicking.

You try to look at the time on your phone but your phone is dead. You look up at Eric. “What time is it?”

Eric picks up his phone from where he had it sitting next to him on the small table and checks the time. “5:32AM,” he replies, looking back at the TV.

You turn to look at the TV to see what has him so absorbed. It appears to be a documentary about a man on Texas Death Row who was claiming he was wrongfully convicted. He was trying to appeal to the public for assistance to get him a new trial based on lack of physical evidence presented at his original one. The story was quite compelling, you thought. The convicted murderer was claiming that he was convicted based on corroborating testimony alone, and the two co-defendants were sequestered together in their holding cells prior to his trial. When he was asked why he didn’t accept a plea agreement that was offered by the prosecution that would have guaranteed his release after serving 40 years of a life sentence, the murderer replied, “Because I’m fucking innocent. Why would I plead guilty to a crime I didn’t commit?” It was hard to disagree with his logic, but the fact that he was now begging for his life instead of just finding a way to pass the time before his eventual release made you question his sanity.

“Thanks, Cartwright,” Eric suddenly blurts, gathering his keys and getting up from his seat.

He called you by your last name. Did you tell him last night? How much did you have to drink?

“For what?” You reply, not letting on that the fact he knows your last name is unsettling to you at the current moment.

Eric flashes a wide smile, his eyes narrowing in a rare glimpse you are able to catch of them. They appear to be dark, probably brown, but it's still hard to really see them. Your hair raises on the back of your neck and you look away quickly.

“For letting me crash, man,” Eric laughs. He pulls out a business card and hands it to you. “Here, give me a call sometime for a steak,” he says, as he opens the hotel room door and closes it behind him.

Eric walks away from your hotel room quickly, but you don't see him playing with the voice recorder on his phone. He recorded the entire conversation you had last night, but you don't remember what you even said to him.

This isn't looking good for you, Jim.

... ..

“GABRIELLA”

Posted on September 13, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Wishing you could afford another night at Sam's Town in room 184, you realize you have to check out, and go down to New Orleans to find this Polyamory Palace. You tried broadening your search and looked into brothels, strip clubs, and swinger's clubs. You found a few, but still weren't sure which one you needed to go to. You decide to head down that way anyway to try to find out what you can from the locals. Maybe Polyamory Palace was code name for something.

You decide to fill up your tank before leaving Bossier City so you don't have to stop on the way. Driving all the way down, you can't help but think of her again, and wish there was some way you could turn back time and change what you did to her. She never deserved that, it didn't matter what they thought she was going to do, she wouldn't have done that to you. It took you all this to realize it; all this time, tears, pain, and all her suffering.

Ella was your first love. You both met when you were children, and you became best friends immediately. She was like a little tomboy, emphasis on little. She stood 5'0" and weighed 95 pounds soaking wet, long dark hair, freckles across the bridge of her nose, and eyes black as night. Her smile made you feel like you were invincible, her laugh made you feel like you were the funniest boy alive, and her tears made you want to kill everything that hurt her, no matter how insignificant. That's how you knew you loved her. Sadly, you didn't know if she knew that too, and you wanted to make sure she did, but you don't know how.

Somber and dutiful, you arrive in New Orleans. You decided to find a place to stay at the Hilton Garden Inn across from one of the places you found – Colette's. You called an old friend from El Paso to help you out with the money for it. You didn't know if it was the right hotel, but you'd try to find out either later that day or the next one. Right now, all you wanted was some boudin and fried okra.

You spend the day in downtown New Orleans, soaking it all in, the sounds, the tastes, the people. It was a wonderfully relaxing, beautifully sunny day. You stop at an ice cream shop to get a vanilla cone for the walk home and that's when you see her.

If Ella was alive, she was standing right next to you, ordering a chocolate ice cream cone. She was the same height, same face, same, laugh, same smile. You couldn't stop yourself from staring at her. She looked up at you and smiled. "Hi!" She says, giggling.

You shake your head, "Hi, I'm so sorry, you look like someone I used to know," you apologize weakly, feeling your resolve start to slowly crumble. Please be Ella. Please. You'd give anything to know she was okay. She was the only one who ever mattered to you. And you betrayed her.

"Oh really?" Ella's doppelganger laughed. "Should I take that as a compliment?" Her smile. It hurts you so much. It's Ella, please let it be her.

You smile as you feel a lump growing in your throat. "Yes," you swallow. "She was someone very special to me, and I haven't seen her in a long time."

"Well I hope you get to see her again!" And she was gone.

Your ice cream started to melt. You didn't even want it anymore, but you ate it, slobbered it really, and walked home. Ella would have loved this, she would have acted just like that girl. Why didn't you ask her what her name was? You should have, what if she wanted to hang out? Even if she's not Ella, you can pretend she is. It wouldn't be the first time.

You decide to follow the girl just to see where she is going. You walk a few feet behind her to make sure she doesn't see you. You don't want to hurt her, or scare her. You just want to see her, to pretend, to make believe Ella is there again. You miss her

so much, every time you see a girl who looks like her you feel it again and it's like you have to do something.

The girl gets into a Honda Accord with a Texas license plate. You take a picture of it on your phone and save it. You'd look her up later. For now, you needed to drink your sorrows away, so you found the closest bar you could, walked in, and got hammered.

You don't remember how you got to your room, but once you were in your bed, you fell into a sleep that didn't feel like sleep. It was like you were dreaming but were aware of that, and you weren't alone. There, lying by your side, was Ella. How it could be, you didn't know, and you didn't care. She was there, her tiny naked body lying on her side, dark hair covering her like a blanket. She looked at you with such love in her eyes. You couldn't resist it any longer. You let her climb on top of you.

Her face in your hands, she lowers her lips down to meet yours and you feel her hot, sweet breath against your skin for the first time since you saw her so many years ago. A lifetime, you thought. Your chest started to hurt with the immense love you have in your heart for her. Holding her in your arms while she kisses your pain away, you feel yourself start to drift as though you are detaching from your body. You float up and you can see that you are making love to Ella; your bodies moving in a rhythmic, lascivious dance. After a moment, Ella climbs off of you and you turn over on to your stomach. She runs her hands up and down your spine a few times, then stops at the base. You feel your soul being pulled back in your body like a vacuum, and wake up to the most intense pain in your lower back you have ever felt.

You let out a bloodcurdling scream as you wake up, feeling like you have a nail stuck in your sacrum.

... ..

“LAKE BORGNE”

Posted on September 20, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“The brave man inattentive to his duty, is worth little more to his country, than the coward who deserts her in the hour of danger.” – Andrew Jackson (to troops who had abandoned their lines during the Battle of New Orleans [January 8, 1815]).

The following morning, you woke up and felt the other side of the bed to see if Ella was still there.

The sheets were cold, no one was there with you.

You felt fine otherwise, your tailbone ached but it didn’t feel as horrible as it had last night. Your heart was still broken, but you were at least glad you got the chance to spend time with what looked like Ella, no telling who or what it was, or if it was a dream. Regardless, it felt good to touch her again, or pretend to touch her. You remembered the girl who looked like Ella you saw yesterday and the picture you took of her license plate. You find it in your phone and zoom in, making a mental note of the plate number. You hack into the DMV website and locate the girl in Texas.

“Jenna Ross,” you mumble. Not Ella, but she looks just like her. You take a screenshot of the photo of her drivers license, that has a Louisiana address on it. Lake Borgne, which was less than an hour from where you were staying. You had one more night booked, so you decided to take the drive to see what else you could find out about Jenna. Her license said she was 19, and wore corrective lenses. Likely contacts, as she didn’t have glasses on in her driver license photo, nor in person, as you recalled.

Putting her address into Google Maps, you see it is about a 40 minute drive, so you decide to get a small black coffee from

downstairs and take a drive to Lake Borgne.

You didn't expect to see her there, but she was outside gardening. You parked a little ways down the street and walked across the street, tying your hair back and wearing one of your runners hoodies. You wanted to get closer to her without her knowing who you were, you didn't know for certain if she would recognize you or not, but you didn't want to take the chance.

Nineteen was a little young for you, at 29, but she looked just like Ella. Is that why you are still walking slowly past her house, watching her gardening, looking down her shirt as she kneels down? Isn't that called stalking, Jim?

You head back to your car, satisfied that it isn't Ella, feeling a little guilty for taking the trip all the way down there just to find out what you already knew from the DMV website. Something just pulled you, though, you couldn't explain it. This wasn't the first time, but the last time, you went much further than just looking from across the street.

What stopped you from doing that, Jim?

... ..

“ALLEN JAMES CARTWRIGHT, JR”

Posted on September 27, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

It was getting close to lunch and you decided you wanted to head back to your hotel. The morning felt like a waste, and you just didn't feel like continuing on your mission today. You'd try again tomorrow to find this Polyamory Palace, you thought. You felt your depression creeping in, and you just needed to relax. You shouldn't have come here, you thought.

As you walked back to your car, you remembered Yvette, and how she looked just like Ella too. It seemed so long ago, but it really wasn't, was it? The scratches had started to heal, but you heal quickly, Jim, you always have. Yvette seemed to like it at first, though. It wasn't until she started crying that you realized what had happened.

Shaking your head as though that would rid your mind of the thought, or your soul of the stain, you pick up the pace and locate your car. Climbing in, you start the drive back to your hotel room.

She was scared initially when you approached her, but she warmed up to you eventually. It took some coaxing, but she agreed that you could call her Ella when you made love sometimes. You told Yvette that Ella was someone you made up, that she wasn't actually someone you knew, so Yvette hopefully wouldn't get jealous, and would just think it was a fantasy you had. It seemed to work, and Yvette never minded when you called her Ella the entire 3 months you were together. You fell in love with her pretty quickly, or you thought you did, but it declined so rapidly. It was such a difficult, hurtful thing for you to remember. You still didn't know what went wrong, but it all changed when you found the condom wrapper in her bathroom trash.

A police SUV comes up behind you quickly, their lights flashing. You become nervous and start pulling off to the side, then they zoom past you, heading toward something in the distance. Breathing a sigh of relief, you pick up speed and continue back to your hotel room.

Upon arriving, you shower again and change your clothes this time, putting on a white tank top and a pair of dingy Levi's, covering your tank-top with your hoodie to hide the scratches Yvette left on your arms. You look at the photo of Jenna's driver's license in your phone. Zooming in, you notice she has hazel eyes, not black like you originally thought. You delete the picture, and scroll through your photo album, finding one of Yvette a few weeks ago.

Zooming in on the picture of Yvette, you notice she has different colored eyes too. How could this be? You spent three months with her and she had black eyes then, you can't make black eyes suddenly turn blue. She never wore contacts. Did she?

Your stomach grumbled, so you left your hotel room in search of a local burger joint. When you finally found one, you sat outside, chewing your food and thinking about Ella's ghost.

Was it Ella's ghost? Was it a dream? You didn't know. You couldn't get it out of your head though, it was the closest you'd been to her in so long. Feelings you forgot you had for her had been stirred, and you wanted it to be last night again. You knew you needed to pull through, but you had to center yourself first. Last night really messed you up emotionally.

"Allen James Cartwright, Junior?" You hear a booming, Louisiana accent behind you. You're startled immediately. No one has ever called you by your first name since you were in grade school in Buckeye, AZ. You turn around slowly to see five police officers behind you, all of them with their hands positioned on their guns at their hips. You feel like everything is moving in slow motion. You gulp.

"Yes?"

"You're under arrest for the rape and murder of Zara Thibodeaux," the officer starts, as two large officers lift you up by your armpits to your feet and put handcuffs on you. "You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you,"

You feel nauseous.

The officer reading your Miranda rights looks you in the eyes and your spine twitches. You see a glint in them but you can't discern the color. Like it fucking matters, you think.

"Do you understand, Cartwright?"

... ..

“NEECY”

Posted on October 4, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

The next morning, you were woken up from a broken sleep by a guard saying you had a visitor. They opened the holding cell door for you and led you out to a private visiting room.

Unlocking the door, they let you inside, cuffed, and then closed the door. Another guard led you to a table, where you saw the petite blonde woman who introduced herself to you as Detective Cartwright when you were at the bar in Sam’s Town. She looks at you and you catch her gaze, looking away quickly, remembering the odd feeling you got when you spoke with her that night.

“You can take the cuffs off,” she says.

The guard uncuffs you, then moves to the side of the room, glaring at you.

You look at the blonde woman and start to speak but she stops you.

“I’m Neecey Wilson, your attorney,” she says, lowering a pair of dark glasses over her eyes before extending her hand to shake yours. You shake her hand, and she instructs the guard to leave the room. Once he does, she takes out a file folder and opens it, pulling out papers, images, and fanning them.

“You’re being charged with capital murder, Mr. Cartwright,” she says. “The state intends to seek the death penalty, but you will likely get a plea bargain, we’re just waiting for the prosecution to send one over for approval.”

“Who are you?” You whisper. “I remember meeting you at Sam’s Town.”

“I know, but we can discuss that later. For now, I’m only paid through the next two hours, so we need to talk about what the state has on you. How did you know Zara Thibodeaux?”

“I have no idea who that even is,” you raise your voice, looking like you are going to cry. Your skin is dirty from sleeping on the jailhouse floor, and your hair is one big rats nest. You’re starving, and you desperately want to brush your teeth. “I have never even met anyone by that name in my life.”

Necy starts writing down notes. “Okay, well, according to someone named Eric Small, you talked quite a bit about what you heard and saw that night. It sounds like you weren’t completely honest with the police,” she looks up at you and you can feel her gaze, but her eyes are hidden by her glasses. “Why didn’t you tell police what you told Mr. Small?”

You’re completely shocked. How on Earth did Eric know anything about what you heard or saw that night, you didn’t even meet him until you went down to the bar. “Eric said I told him something about what I heard and saw that night?”

Necy nods. “He has a recording of you, I’m waiting to get a copy of it and we can go over it together. In the meantime, Jim, may I call you Jim, or is it Jon?”

You look down. “Jim is fine.”

“Jim, in the meantime, you need to be thinking about your defense. Let’s go over what we have so far while you’re here, and we can get started on that now. We can discuss everything else later.”

Everything else is just as much of a blur as this is right now.

... ..

“BUCKEYE”

Posted on October 12, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

It was the last week of fifth grade and you were so excited to get the summer off so you could go swimming at your cousin Kelly’s house every day. Plus, you and your best friend David would hunt lizards in the desert, and try to find tarantulas to

trap and scare Kelly with. Monsoon season was your favorite time of year in Buckeye, AZ, because the lightening shows were spectacular in the desert, away from the hustle and bustle of Phoenix.

As you walked back from recess, you saw the new kid, Vasilios, who had recently relocated from Los Angeles to Buckeye. Vasilios was swinging around his backpack and laughing wildly. He was a bit of a goof, you thought to yourself, always trying to get attention by acting like an idiot. No one liked him because he was from California, and he overcompensated by trying to be as obnoxious as possible so everyone would notice him. Also, his breath smelled like manure.

You watched as a little girl was walking in the direction Vasilios was headed, oblivious to the fact that he was swinging his backpack around. How could she not notice this clown? She was looking down and just walking straight towards it until he smacked her right in the head.

She fell and blood started gushing everywhere. Screaming in pain, she touched her head and found her hand covered in blood when she pulled it away. Howling for help, about five teachers made their way over to the little girl, and Vasilios, who was laughing hysterically at this poor child crying in pain and fear. Pain and fear caused by his complete disregard for anyone but himself.

The next day, you saw the little girl at school again, a bandage on her head. The cut didn't end up being very deep, but since it was a head wound, it bled quite a lot and made it look much worse than it actually was. You saw Vasilios walk up behind her and shout, "Boo!" The little girl screamed at him and started crying, then ran away. Vasilios stood there laughing, like the complete idiot he was.

On the last day of school, you and David followed Vasilios home and pretended like you were going to be friends with him.

He was so excited and went with you both willingly to the desert thinking he was going to hunt lizards with you and David. The three of you spent the day together, you and David doing your best to make Vasilios feel as comfortable as possible. When you decided it was time, you motioned to David and he put a trash bag over Vasilios' head, then started pummeling him with his fists. Vasilios started crying and trying to get the bag off of his head, but David held it on. Vasilios started scratching David and punching him, and finally David let him go. Vasilios ran home as fast as he could, screaming and crying the whole way.

When you went back to Liberty Elementary School for sixth grade, Vasilios' family had moved back to California. The little girl was in your class, and you became friends with her, developing quite a crush on her.

One day, you followed her home, without David with you. When you saw her go inside, you looked for a minute, wanting to get closer and see what she was doing in there, but you didn't want her parents to find you. There weren't too many places to hide in the open desert where she lived, so you walked back home, saying her name to yourself over and over again, wondering if she was named after that Rhianna song.

... ..

“INSIDE”

Posted on October 19, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Life in Shreveport County Jail was the stuff of nightmares; you were awaiting transport to Allen Correctional Center and you shudder to think of what it would be like there. Fortunately, you were able to make a couple of “friends” inside who hooked you up with some edibles to help take the edge off. One of them was so strong you passed out and had the weirdest dream of your life.

You were walking out of jail, but you weren’t free, you were still being controlled by an unseen force. You felt it, but you couldn’t see it, and you didn’t even know if it was human, but you followed it. You knew it was your destiny and even though you were apprehensive about not knowing exactly what you were getting yourself into, you realized it was futile to fight it, and were curious about what it was you were supposed to do. In your dream, you saw this Zara Thibodeaux, but she didn’t have distinct features. You’d never met her before, but you knew it was her. She levitated above the ground about three inches; she was a pale, electric blue color like you’d never seen; her shape was of a woman, but there were no facial

features, or defining characteristics other than her outline. She was a blue ghost, and she told you she knew you didn't kill her.

She floated away from the jail and you followed her down the road. It led into a foggy marsh, swamp looking area. You still followed. You felt the fog encircling you, and you knew Zara was in the fog. You closed your eyes, and when you opened them again, you were in a graveyard. The air felt old, and you heard sounds that weren't familiar for the time you knew you lived in. You were lost, you thought you went back in time but you couldn't figure out why you felt like this was supposed to happen. Suddenly, Zara appeared again, hovering above the ground about three feet ahead of you. The area around her lit up and you followed her through the cemetery, unable to see dates or names on any of the headstones. They looked so old, too old, you thought. You shouldn't be able to see this, this was something that didn't exist anymore.

Zara's color shifted from electric blue to bright red, and she instantly shifted into a blinding flame that went out as soon as it started. Once it did, you saw you were in front of a particularly old and creepy grave. You saw a familiar blue glow coming from behind you and you knew it was her. You looked at the headstone and couldn't read the name, but saw the dates:

1282-1298

Then symbols. They almost looked Nordic, or something. You weren't sure what they were.

When you looked over your shoulder to find Zara, you saw her as a human. She was completely naked, her hair was long and bright red, eyes black. You walked toward her and she extended her hand to you. You took it and it felt almost like a soft fleece. She pulled you into her and you felt her inside of your body. You no longer saw her in front of you but you knew she was inside you. It was the most erotic and horrifying moment you'd ever had, simultaneously.

You woke up in sweat, with a raging hard on, and you somehow knew your bunkmate below wanted you to throat fuck him.

Whoa! What the fuck?

... ..

“MANIFESTO”

Posted on October 29, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Necy paid you another visit a couple days later. It seemed like an eternity had passed by the time you saw her again. You’d

had the opportunity to shower and brush your teeth a couple times before seeing her again. When you discussed your upcoming arraignment, you heard these voices in your head telling you what she was wearing underneath her business suit. You'd been experiencing these voices since you'd been arrested. You assumed it was your way of mentally dealing with the situation, because you hadn't ever experienced this before, just depression. The voices were new, and very demanding.

All of them came to you at once, and then slowly, they started to filter out based on the circumstance. You knew some of them, or it seemed like you did. Ella was one, you were almost positive. It hurt that you couldn't remember her voice exactly, and you thought about the night she came to you before all of this happened. The night you found Jenna. The night you felt like you were stabbed in your tailbone.

Just then, you felt your lower spine start to gently vibrate and twitch, and as it did, you felt your eyes rapidly move back and forth, unable to stop it. Then, suddenly your vision became focused again, and you heard a female voice loudly in your ear say, "PAY ATTENTION!"

You look directly at Neecey, her dark glasses covering her eyes. "Did you hear anything I just said, Jim?"

"No," you say, unapologetic. "When am I getting out of here?"

Neecey shakes her head before standing up. A male voice says, "Pink lace, 36-DD," and you hear heavy breathing. "Jim," Neecey starts, "We're due in court tomorrow for your arraignment. I will be by about two hours before you are due in court so we can talk about what's going to happen, since you are clearly not in any shape to discuss it now." Turning around to call the guard and leave the room, the male voice in your head says, "Slap her ass, Jim. Just do it, she'd fuck you right now, she's a dirty slag, Jim."

You shake your head and grunt audibly. Necy turns to look at you, her mouth slightly open.

“Are you okay?” She asks, lowering her dark glasses to look at you. You catch a glimpse of her eyes and notice when you do, you become intensely aroused. She smiles at you, almost welcoming the attention. “Jim? Are you feeling alright?” She says, turning around to face you. She takes her glasses off and you see her eyes are a rich, dark brown, and her pupils are dilated so large that her eyes look almost black.

Should you listen to the voice? You don’t have a chance before she comes up to you, unbuttoning her white blouse to reveal exactly what the male voice in your head said she had underneath it. You meet her half way in a passionate kiss, your hands all over each other. You rip off her bra and all of a sudden –

“Guard!” Necy yells loudly.

You open your eyes and realize you’ve passed out and are on the floor, convulsing. You see the guard enter the room, and pull you to your feet. You’re whisked off to medical and Necy assures you you will be fine, and she will see you tomorrow.

You know you felt her kiss your cheek but you doubted reality at the current moment.

Waking up in your cell hours later, you find yourself alone, sitting upright, masturbating. How long you’d been at it was anyone’s guess, but you were there, and you let it go, imagining Necy on top of you. You howled when you came, not realizing it, drawing the attention of some of your neighbors. They both laughed and told you to keep it down. You cleaned your mess and looked over at the side of your bunk to see a stack of papers with scribbles on them.

Pulling the papers a bit closer to have a look at what they said, you saw your handwriting but recognized none of the words,

nor did you recall writing any of it. You counted the pages and at the end of it, reached 116. One hundred sixteen pages of something you don't even remember writing. Where did you get the pen? The paper? You didn't remember any of it. Reaching for the pen, you scribble on the corner of one of the pages. It's out of ink. Looking at the last page, you read the following paragraph before it stops suddenly –

The industrial revolution has normalized the marginalization of the middle class working family. This information age has destroyed any sort of organic bond built between humans by interjecting technology into the lives of people who are not smart enough to understand how to operate them in a fashion which would enhance their lives. Because of this anomaly, the world has reached a breaking point in which its ability to sustain the ever-growing, ever-demanding, ever-changing needs of society and humanity has reached its capacity, and the next logical step in the process of evolution is to destroy the world it has created. Building a new one starts with death

Whose death, you wondered? Did they give you some kind of powerful drug when you were in medical? You didn't know, and you were tired of feeling out of control. You didn't kill Zara, you didn't want to stand trial, and you didn't want to hear these voices in your head.

You removed your bedsheet slowly, deliberately, knowing what you were intending to do, and that it was the only thing left to do. There was nothing to look forward to from here, you thought. Your life was over as you knew it, and you didn't want to face whatever consequences for talking to Eric you knew you were going to face tomorrow. Eric framed you, and you had no idea what you said to him. You just knew you were facing execution anyway.

Tying the sheet into a noose, you wrap it around the bunk frame from the top. You're tall, but you know your will to die is stronger than any natural urge you might have to live, given

your current circumstances. You take one last deep breath, put the noose around your neck, tighten it, and bend the knee.

... ..

Cassie

“CHERRY KISS”

Posted on August 29, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Tossing and turning, you feel yourself trying to speak but are unable to enunciate and just make small squeaking, mumbling noises. Then, the pierce of the needle, between your index and middle fingers on your left hand this time.

You descend into complete darkness, surrounded by what feels like velvet fabric caressing your naked body as you slide downward toward something you are not afraid of, even though every instinct is telling you that you should be. As you continue down, you start to hear what sounds like faint music, a string instrument perhaps, maybe a harp? It's difficult to really hear it clearly, but the sound of it is quite soothing as you make your way down to some unknown hell or possibly a hidden utopia. It didn't really matter which one it ended up being, you decided as you closed your eyes and listened to the music as it grew louder until it eventually surrounded you, taking the place of the black velvet.

All of a sudden, you were being bounced lightly as if you were weightless, hovering up above the clouds then descending down to the ground, but the ground was a trampoline and when you hit the grass, you bounced upward, projecting up above the trees, the clouds, even the sun. You looked down to the earth below and then you realized you recognized the harp music as "Canon in D" by Johann Pachelbel. It was the song you had playing at your wedding, you smile to yourself.

You feel yourself being cradled by a soft, fluffy arm you realize is a cloud, and it is gently rocking you back and forth as it seems to gently place you on the grass in the middle of a field of beautiful trees with thin, dark brown trunks and pale pink leaves. You recognize them as cherry trees, and inhale deeply to almost taste the sweet smell of them. You lie down in the grass and they seem to start to grow around you, protecting

you from whatever you needed to be protected from. Right now, you didn't seem to remember what that was.

You close your eyes and feel like you are falling into a deep, safe slumber as the harp continues to play lightly around you. A soft breeze blows through the cherry trees and you hear what sounds like laughter in the distance. The sun shines down on you and you let it warm you from head to toe, smiling up at it with your eyes wide open, as if it couldn't blind you, because it couldn't today, you didn't know why but you did know that it was perfectly okay for you to stare directly at the sun today. So you did. And it was the most beautiful thing you'd ever seen.

Then you heard the laughter again, it was a girl's laughter, and it sounded like it was coming from just beyond the cherry trees. You sat up to look and see if you could find out who was laughing and you saw her. She stopped and stared right at you, smiling.

She was tiny, pale, huge black eyes and freakishly long red hair. She waved at you and you suddenly knew her. She was your friend, your sister. She was here to help you. You weren't afraid. She started to walk over to you and you extended your hand as though you were inviting her to take you with her. She started to walk faster toward you, breaking into a run, and smiling widely as she laughed.

Just then, the black velvet surrounded you, and you weren't in the sun anymore, but the harp still played. All of a sudden, you felt awful. The despair that took over your entire being was so much that it felt like a brick wall was falling on top of you. You tried to sob but you couldn't cry, no tears would come out to relieve you of the intense pain you were experiencing.

Where was she? You needed her, you didn't know why.

... ..

“THE RACK”

Posted on September 8, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Wake up, Cassie,” she whispers. “Wake up, Cassie,” your foreign, black-eyed sister whispers in your ear. “Don’t let it hurt. Don’t think about it as pain, Cassie. Think about it as getting closer. You’re getting closer. Wake up, Cassie. Just open your eyes.”

You open your eyes and all you see is darkness surrounding you. You try to put your hand up but feel that it is being restrained, all of your extremities are locked to something that is, what is that? A chain? You’re chained to something. You’re naked, and you’re lying on your back, spread eagle, chained to something that wasn’t as cold as metal, so you assumed it was made of wood.

“Hello?” You try to squeak. You don’t have a voice. You can’t see. You can only hear. And smell. Oh boy, what was that foul odor? That was something very old, something that had been sitting for a while. Meat, dead rotten meat. You envision a skinned side of beef, riddled with maggots and oozing pus. You feel your throat constrict and stomach bile spew up out of your mouth. You try to turn your head to the side and you find that you are stuck. The bile gets stuck in your throat and you almost choke on it until you make the snap decision to swallow it. You instantly vomit again and this time, spit it out on the side of your mouth. You shudder as you feel it oozing down the side of your face, on your neck, and hear it splatter on the surface of whatever you were chained to.

A blinding light comes on and suddenly everything turns bright white. You close your eyes out of instinct, as the light actually hurts deeply and you hear male voices talking in a hushed tone. Then, a box is placed over your head and you hear it locking. You try to make noise to alert whoever is locking your head in a box that you are awake and coherent, but you are incapable of making any noise that doesn’t sound like little squeaks and grunts. The men ignore you.

Just then, you hear an indeterminate loud sound just outside of the box your head was locked in and you feel the chains start to tighten. Your arm muscles slowly pulling, your legs doing the same. Then, the sound stops; the chains stop tightening.

The men whisper something to themselves, you are struggling to make out what they are saying. You think one of them is Sergei, but you aren’t sure who the other one is. He is definitely not Boris. You aren’t even sure if it is Sergei’s voice you are hearing, but his name was the first that popped in your head.

What was it he told you to call him?

... ..

“FEED MY EYES”

Posted on September 15, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.” – Kahlil Gibran, “On Pain,” from “The Prophet.”<https://poets.org/poem/pain-1>

You had no idea how many hours had passed, or what was going on outside of the box your head was surrounded in. You’d tried your best to go back to sleep to avoid breaking out into a complete, disabling anxiety attack, but you were just trying your best to avoid panic, as you didn’t know whether or not there were holes for breathing, so you wanted to conserve your air. You were pretty sure there were holes in the box, though, because you could see little bits of light peeking in and hear some things, but you didn’t feel any air coming in, so you wanted to be extra careful.

While you’d never been deployed for combat, you were very skilled on terrorist interrogation techniques as a marine, and you knew sensory deprivation was a highly effective way to get your captive to say or do what you wanted them to. You were counting the positives right now – you’re alive, you’re breathing, you’re not being stretched anymore, and you haven’t been hurt yet. You don’t know how long any of that will last, but for now, that’s what you had, and you could find contentment with that since you had to, or you would lose your mind.

You still hear hushed voices talking in the same room as you, but it’s so hard to hear them, you try your best to avoid straining and save your energy. If you can’t sleep, you can at least cope with what you’re going through in the best way you are able to, given the circumstances.

Fighting the urge to kick when you feel a man’s hand touching your right foot, you lie motionless as you feel his fingers glide from the tips of your toes to your right shin, your knee, your thigh, and landing between your legs. You close your eyes and

grit your teeth, wanting with all your heart to scream but not allowing yourself to give in to that urge again. Expecting horrific pain, you instead find him caressing your vagina, massaging you. You don't like it, but it's not pain. You can accept this for now, if you have to, you think to yourself. Then, another man's hand, tracing the heart tattoo on your arm. He says something in Russian you think, you're not sure, and the man who was fingering you pauses briefly to respond. You feel him remove his hand and then they leave the room. You see the light go off and you are left in darkness.

"Breathe," you hear her whisper. "Don't talk, don't worry, just breathe. It's not going to be pleasant, but you're going to be fine, and I'm right here. Try to sleep now, I'll wake you up when you need to be alert." You feel a kiss on your cheek, but you know it couldn't be real, but again, not pain, so allowable for now as long as you are able to draw the line between insanity and sanity.

You are still able to do that. Even if it feels like you're not, you are. Never stop believing that.

... ..

“CONVERSION THERAPY”

Posted on September 22, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

False-colour anteroposterior X-ray of a normal adult, female pelvis. The pelvis is formed by the sacrum, coccyx, and two innominate (hip) bones. Here, the sacrum is at top centre, articulating with each innominate bone at the sacro-iliac joints. Left and right hip bones meet at the symphysis pubis (bottom). Also visible is the articulation of the rounded head of each femur (thigh bone) with each hip socket. The pelvis supports and protects internal organs & tissues, and provides site for attachments of the muscles of the trunk & lower limbs. Mechanically, its most important role is to transmit the weight of the upper body to the ground.

In 2027, a rare amoeba was discovered in Lake Mead. This amoeba was later discovered to cause a variant of vertebral osteomyelitis, which is a rare spinal infection that can cause back pain, however, the variant caused by this amoeba created

a parasite that fed on bone and bone marrow, causing holes in the victim's spine. The parasites would eventually die as treatment would kill them off, but the holes would remain.

This disease was named Medulla Perforata, meaning spinal holes.

The two men propped her up, still stretched on the rack. She was lethargic; subdued by the strong tranquilizer. The first man adjusted the rack so that it slid semi apart, like an accordion, spreading his patient in the shape of an X. Her head hung down and she drooled as she slept, completely unaware. The second man located a door on the back of the rack that exposed his patient's lower back when it was opened. Opening the door, the second man wipes down his patient's lower back generously with iodine, then refers to an x-ray image of her pelvis, careful to locate her sacrum. Positioning an absurdly large needle against the second man's best guess as to where the bone was located on his patient's back, he slowly pushed the needle in, working it into the bone with some effort before stopping. He then injected the device into the opening in her sacrum. All went well until the second man went to pull out the needle.

His patient woke up screaming.

While your head remains locked in a box, and your body remains chained to the rack, you are being fed intravenously, as you deduced when a needle was put in your arm and you didn't pass out. You started to feel stronger within an hour afterward, having the urge to urinate shortly thereafter. A catheter was placed in your urethra, not a pleasant experience at all, but not what it could have been, and at least this way you could just pee whenever you needed to. It seemed like you'd been in captivity for about a day or two, but it could have been longer, your concept of time was really warped. The black-eyed girl hadn't returned in a few hours, but you felt like you could manage for right now. You were terrified inside, but you sensed that whoever was out there didn't want to hurt you, they were

trying to keep you alive. You were positive this would come to an end soon.

You felt yourself start to rise, as though the rack was being pushed vertically. You breathe slowly and close your eyes. When you are fully vertical, you feel your arms going down a little and your legs spreading apart, so you sense you are in an x-shape. Your heart starts pounding as you hear whispering, again, you can't make out words, then what sounds like a small clank at your back.

You feel a needle pierce your inner left arm and you suddenly black out.

... ..

“FIND THE EVIL EYE”

Posted on September 29, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Stirring softly, you moan and realize you have a voice again. Opening your eyes, you see you are blindfolded but can tell your head is no longer locked in a box. The blindfold is a dark material, so you can't see where you are, but it is a huge relief to not have the box on your head anymore. You feel a very odd numb sensation in the lower part of your stomach. You try to move your hand and can feel that while chained, the chain is loose enough to allow movement so you can touch your face, but no lower. You try to move your legs and realize you can't move them. You feel your heart start to pound and panic start to set in as you imagine all sorts of atrocities, namely, you're afraid you've had your legs amputated. You want to scream, but you don't want to aggravate an already hostile situation. You start to whimper and cry, which actually feels really good. It's not something you normally let yourself do, so you decided it was time.

Sobbing until you hear a door open, you sniffle as you hear someone enter and close the door behind them. It sounds like they are walking on hard flooring, concrete maybe, or porcelain, it sounded the same to you.

“Iva Petrov?” You hear a male Russian voice ask you, an almost timid tone in his voice. It's not Sergei.

What should you say? “Um, yes? Sort of?” You answer, your voice scratchy.

You hear him shuffling papers. “Cassandra?” he tries again.

“Cassie, but yeah,” you answer. “Iva Petrov is an assigned name.”

“Assigned?”

You gulp. What was that tone in his voice? Apprehension? Genuine confusion? “Yes,” you almost whisper.

“Why is it assigned? What do I call you, miss?” He sounds like he’s really just confused.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be confusing, I’m just really disoriented,” you start, feeling his hand on your arm. “Is it possible for you to take this blindfold off, please?” He caresses your skin softly.

“Blindfold off?” He repeats. “Okay, sure. Close your eyes.”

You close your eyes, preparing yourself for anything. He leans toward you and you smell him. He smells expensive, and musky. He’s taking the blindfold off of you.

“Wait to open your eyes, I’ll shut the light off so you aren’t blinded at first,” he says, caressing your cheek. “I’ll light a candle.”

When you see the light go out, you open your eyes. You see a shadow light a candle, then a man in a long white coat, with dark glasses. You can’t make out his features, but he smiles at you. You look down at your legs, and it looks like they are there, but covered up by a white sheet. A hospital room? You look around and see an IV hooked to your arm. There’s a picture framed on the wall of symbols corresponding with the English alphabet next to a window. You’re covered with a hospital type gown. You look back at the man who is now sitting right next to you, at your left, running his fingers up and down the inside of your arm.

“Where am I?” You ask him.

“What should I call you, first, Iva, or Cassie?”

You hesitate. “Cassie is my real name, so Cassie.”

He smiles at you again. “Cassie,” he says, drawing it out. “I like Cassandra better, but I will call you Cassie, as you please, miss.” Why is he being so nice to you?

“What’s going on, why am I here?”

He pulls the sheet down to your stomach, right near where you started to feel the numbness. “I performed surgery on you,” he answers.

“Surgery?!” You’re horrified and your eyes show it.

He nods. “It’s not bad, you are still you now, and all your parts are still there. See?” He pulls the covers all the way off so you can see your legs, ankles chained to the footboard of the bed.

“What kind of surgery? What did you do to me?”

He takes your face in his hands and kisses you on your lips. Should you play along? What the fuck is this? You pull back a little to see what he does. He looks in your eyes. “Cassie, you’re beautiful, may I kiss you one more time?”

Shit. “Okay?”

He kisses you again. He’s gentle, not forceful. “Cassie, I put a device in your spine that will give you eternal life,” he says, kissing your forehead.

“Huh?”

“I don’t want to go into too much detail right now, you need to rest,” he says, pulling the covers back up over you. “We can talk tomorrow, and I will tell you everything,” he takes your hand and kisses it. “I’m Xzavier, or Dr. Popov, whatever you prefer, Cassie.”

“Dr. Popov, please don’t leave me here,” you beg. You don’t know who he is or what he did to you, but he’s being nice right

now so you're trying to milk it for all it's worth. "I'm afraid, and these chains are making it worse."

Dr. Popov smiles at you again. He leans in and kisses your cheek, his hand tracing your jawbone, then down your throat, across your collar bone, then he lets it drift inside your hospital gown, reaching inside and tracing the outline of your breasts. You wince internally but do your best not to show it.

"Cassie, you're so beautiful," Dr. Popov swoons. "I will take the chains off tomorrow, because you need physical therapy to heal from your surgery. Then we will prep you for your job."

"My job?"

"At the news station."

You're not sure how to feel. What device was he talking about? Where the fuck are you? Panic is setting in and you're still fighting it.

Dr. Popov gets up from his seat and goes to the door. "I'll blow out the candle, but it will be dark, would you like me to crack the window, or would you like a night light?" He asks.

"Night light, please," the thought of anyone else seeing you like this was humiliating. You don't even know who already has yet. "Thank you, Dr. Popov."

He nods. Leaving the room, he returns within a few seconds with a plug in night light. He plugs it in and blows you a kiss, closing and locking the door behind you.

Everything inside you wants to scream. Sleep won't come tonight.

... ..

“DR. POPOV”

Posted on October 6, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“I was born with the devil in me. I could not help the fact that I was a murderer, no more than the poet can help the inspiration to sing. I was born with the evil one standing as my sponsor beside the bed where I was ushered into the world, and he has been with me since.” – H.H. Holmes

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

On October 31, 1998, Xzavier Popov was born to Hilga and Maxim Popov in the small town of Ostashkov, Russia. He was born two months premature, and breach. His mother, Hilga, died during childbirth, hemorrhaging to death as she was a hemophiliac. Maxim was beside himself with grief at the loss of Hilga, his one true love, and blamed Xzavier for it his entire life.

Xzavier dealt with his father’s abuse by throwing himself into academics, and vowed to someday become a doctor so he could save lives and make his father proud. He was an exemplary student all through his tenure in schools, university, and med school. Xzavier became an orthopedic surgeon by the young age of 32, but it was short-lived. He was caught conducting experiments on patients who were having spinal surgery.

Becoming obsessed with the central nervous system and the correlation with the spine upon learning of the parasitic bone eating amoeba in Lake Mead and the resulting bone disease Medulla Perforata, Xzavier wanted to take a closer look at patients coming in for surgery who had this disease. He became obsessed with the holes in the spine, and wanted to know if there was a way to fuse the holes closed, as they didn't close on their own once the person was infected with the disease. He was convinced Medulla Perforata could contribute to spinal degeneration, and other disorders of the central nervous system. Because of this, he also thought it would be easy to exploit that vulnerability by devising a mechanism that would at the very least strengthen a person's spine, but would also provide a more sinister opportunity to potentially control people's minds.

Xzavier's initial idea involved injecting plastic capsules of paint into the holes of the spines of some who would go in for corrective surgery, just to see if it was possible to do. He would craft small capsules of metallic silver paint, and fit them into needles used for epidurals. When the patient was out, Xzavier would use the x-ray images of the person's spine to locate holes, and would then use the needle to inject the capsule of paint. After he did this on a couple of patients, he would wait until they had recovered from their surgery, then review follow up x-rays to see where the capsules would actually end up. Most of the time, he was able to inject them into holes created by Medulla Perforata. On one horrific occasion, he mistakenly butchered the spinal cord of a patient and paralyzed them from the waist down.

The hospital staff started to become alarmed when they noticed Xzavier looking at an x-ray of one of his experiments, after he injected the capsule of paint in their spine, pointing at the area he injected with the needle he used. He was talking to himself, but the words he used were not clear. The nurse who saw him told hospital staff that the x-ray he was looking at was not the

one that was in the patient's file. By the time the nurse returned to question Xzavier about the rogue x-ray, he was gone, along with it.

About a year into Xzavier's experiment, he had gotten very adept at locating spinal holes based on x-rays, and injecting these paint-filled capsules into his victim's spines. He was caught by the same nurse who found him looking at the unauthorized x-ray of a former patient. She watched him as he injected a patient with a capsule, and confronted him immediately afterward.

He confessed everything, and his medical license was subsequently revoked. The hospital paid Xzavier a handsome severance for their shared silence on the experiment, and all the unauthorized x-rays were destroyed.

A shame to his family, Xzavier was subsequently disowned by them and moved to Moscow to try and find some other way to feed his obsession. It was there he met up with a man named Sergei, who had nothing but admiration for the experiment, and wanted to help fund it. Sergei was willing to provide Xzavier with a private office and practice, and subjects to practice on.

... ..

DR. POPOV PART II

Posted on October 14, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“...even as love crowns you, so shall he crucify you.” – Kahlil Gibran, “On Love,” from “The Prophet, 1923. Retrieved from: On Love by Kahlil Gibran – Poems | Academy of American Poets

Your face looked so serene as you slept, blissfully unaware, vulnerable, beautiful. Xzavier traced the outline of your cheekbones, your chin, ran his fingers down your throat, played with your hair. He was falling in love with you, and the intensity of it grew so much more now that you were awake and able to respond coherently to his physical touch. He never knew if your reactions to him while you were sedated were genuine, but he liked to think they were. You seemed pensive when he kissed you, but he understood why. You were afraid. Xzavier would never hurt you, at least he wouldn't think of it as hurting you.

Preparing your bath, he gently sedates you with a light tranquilizer to make sure you don't wake up while he is bathing you, since he will be removing your chains. Your wrists are bruised terribly, and he winces at the sight, but looks forward to when they can be permanently removed. As the water heats up, he massages your body gently, your neck, shoulders, arms, back, legs, feet. When the water heats up to a comfortable temperature, he fills up the tub, adding some Epsom salt and peppermint oil to the water. Gently picking you up and placing you on top of the bath pillow he put in the tub for you, he lays your head down against the palm of his hand, while he reaches over to obtain another small pillow for your head.

Hardly able to keep his eyes off of your naked body, he feels himself becoming more and more turned on at the thought of actually being with you, since it was something he could never bring himself to do to you while you were sleeping, though he wanted to badly. He rests your head on the pillow and finishes filling up the bath, rubbing your body down gently with a wet cloth.

Sergei wasn't happy about Xzavier's crush on you, but he was able to appease him in other ways. The only thing that worried Xzavier, and thrilled him simultaneously, was that if his crush was reciprocated by you, Sergei might go off the deep end. Xzavier tried to just focus on taking care of you for now, with the hope that you would someday grow as infatuated with him as he is with you.

No longer able to fight the urge to cum all over you, he starts to masturbate fervently as you lie there, completely sedated, breasts poking up out of the bath water, nipples hard as rocks. He finished quickly, and did his best to control the spurting, but some of it got on your left breast. Xzavier stared at his cum on your breast as he struggled to catch his breath, then leaned over and ran his tongue across one side of it to the other, stopping to suck it up off of your nipple. He swore he thought he heard you moan in pleasure, but when he looked at your face, you were still asleep.

Ashamed of himself, he put his cock away and zipped up his pants, finishing your bath. After drying you off, he carried you back to the rack, and chained you up again.

"We will be together soon, Cassie," Xzavier whispered in your ear, kissing your cheek. Then, he turned out the light and left the room.

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“BABY STEPS”

Posted on October 23, 2021 by Melissa

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“Mmmph,” you grunt, your head throbbing. Opening your eyes, you look around the room and see the lights are on, and it is a sort of make-shift hospital room. You’re no longer in chains, though, you notice. You touch your face immediately, mainly to make sure it’s still there. Next, you count your teeth, then touch your hair, eyebrows, lips, breasts, all of it to make sure it was there. Everything seemed to be in place.

“Hello? Doctor...” What was his name?

Just then, a soft knock at the door and Dr. Popov walked in. If you’d met him under different circumstances, you would have probably wanted to fuck him, you couldn’t help but think. As though he read your mind, he smiled immediately. You banished the thought. Stockholm syndrome, you thought to yourself. He was really attractive, though.

“Hi, Cassie,” he says, sitting down next to you. “How are you feeling?” He takes your hand and holds it in his, putting his other hand on top of it. He looks at you with an expression of heartfelt sympathy, and his eyes were the palest blue-grey you’d ever seen. His pupils were slightly dilated, and you felt like maybe you were starting to become sexually attracted to him because of the circumstances. You’d been through so much emotional torture, sexual tension was a welcome distraction.

You chose your words carefully. “I think I want to walk, can I walk? Can you help me do that?” You look at Dr. Popov, who seems to be thinking about how he can try to appease you.

“We can try to pick you up and get you standing if you would like, but I do not know if you are strong enough to stand on your own,” he starts. “I can pick you up and hold you up from behind if you would like to look out the window or something?” His eyes are sparkling.

“Yes, I want to do that,” you agree, almost salivating. He gently takes the covers off of you and when you look at yourself it seems like you’ve lost at least 15 pounds. Dr. Popov adjusts you so that you are sitting, propped up by the back of the hospital bed. Picking you up and carrying you to the window, he lays you down on the chaise lounge below it, drawing the curtains to reveal a slightly overcast day.

“Would you like to have the window opened?” Dr. Popov asks, glancing quickly in your eyes then down to your chest.

You look down and see your gown has slid down a little too far on one side. You immediately pull it up, but the thought of him seeing you naked suddenly turned you on fiercely, and you wanted nothing more, at that moment, than to feel him inside of you, but you couldn’t feel anything from the waist down.

He opened the window and you could feel a nice breeze blow in. He turned you to your side, then picked you up slowly, putting his arms around your ribcage just below your breasts to hold you up so you could see outside. You could feel that your feet were on the ground, but you knew without his strong arms holding you, you would fall flat on your face. You were convinced you were suffering from full blown Stockholm syndrome, but at this point, feeling the cool breeze on your face, seeing the beautiful forest with the leaves changing, and a small pond in the distance, birds chirping, all of that was

making you feel happy for the first time in you didn't know how long.

Happy. Odd, you think to yourself. But again, not pain.

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UNSOLVED MYSTERY

Posted on October 31, 2021 by Melissa

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What Happened to Iva Petrov?

That was the English translation for the headline in the Moscow Messenger newspaper on July 27, 2029. Iva Petrov had been missing for ten years and no one knew what became of her. Her

case went cold after all leads turned up dead ends, and the local paper wanted to revive public interest in the beautiful expat in Russia who disappeared one day without a trace.

In March of 2018, Iva relocated to Moscow from Vienna, trying to start her life over after a painful breakup with her high school sweetheart. She got a job as a bartender and made money on the side as a call girl. Over the summer of 2018, she met a man she called Boris Petrovski, who instantly fell head over heels in love with her. Her co-workers described him as short, stocky, piercing blue eyes, and just a generally commanding yet extremely creepy presence. Iva seemed to like him a lot, though, and became very good friends with him. All her coworkers tried telling her Boris liked her much more than she liked him, but she wouldn't listen, she said he just wanted a friend.

On the hot summer night of July 27, 2019, Iva's badly beaten body was found in a dumpster by a homeless man looking for food. She was stuffed inside a large suitcase, her 5'4" frame bent in half, bones broken, body bruised and bloody. Her waist-length, platinum blonde hair was stained crimson from the roots to halfway down her back, and the police report was later corrected to reflect the accurate hair color.

The cause of Iva's death was determined to be strangulation, and the beating was performed post-mortem. Iva was savagely raped both vaginally and anally before being choked to death. After she died, her murderer broke both of her arms and hit her in the face several times with her own hands. The medical examiner was able to determine this based on the small amounts of DNA left behind under Iva's fingernails from scratching her skin involuntarily after making contact. The killer also carved symbols into her stomach and each of her breasts. There were photos of the symbols in the case file, but they were never released to the public. The Unsolved Mysteries show

emphasized that if anyone knew the meaning of the symbols, to please come forward.

Any information on Iva Petrov was welcomed by Russian police. Iva didn't come from a large family in Vienna, but her mother was beside herself with grief when she had to bury her 19 year old daughter. Ten years after her body was found, Iva's mother pleaded once again with the public for any information leading to the arrest and detention of her daughter's killer.

Police originally suspected Boris, and when they went to question him about his relationship with Iva, they found that he had mysteriously disappeared. His photo was shown and police named him a person of interest, noting that he was wanted for questioning about Iva's rape and murder. His photo was shown again, but this time with age-enhancing technology to show the viewer what he may look like today.

It was a spitting image of Sergei, with the exception of the eye-color – he always wore contacts and thick glasses on top of them when he saw Iva. He was never questioned in connection with Iva's death, however, because his real name wasn't Boris and his disguise was simple yet complicated enough that no one realized it was really him. He never mentioned anyone named Iva, and he lived his life as an openly gay man, so no one ever suspected he even liked women.

Sergei never admitted or denied his role in Iva's rape and murder to anyone, even when Xzavier confronted him about it. Sergei only said Iva Petrov would live again, and Xzavier loved Sergei (and his money) too much to push it beyond that.

... ..

Ruben

“FLAGSTAFF”

Posted on August 29, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo credit: Tom Alexander, Official Tourism Site of Flagstaff

Getting settled in your room at the Ramada in Flagstaff, AZ, you are still reeling from the accident you saw in Kingman. You check your phone and realize it is way too late to call home, everyone is likely asleep by now. You decide you want to turn on the TV and see if you can find any information about the accident. And who was that woman? You didn't imagine that, even though you wanted desperately to believe that the whole thing was some sort of mirage.

You flip through the stations to see if there is anything on television discussing horrible accidents in Kingman but are unable to find anything that doesn't just pertain to Flagstaff.

Convinced there is something somewhere about this, you pull out your phone and try to search the internet to see if you can find any information online about what happened on I-40 a few short hours ago.

Then you find it, a link to a Kingman news story.

“Horrrifying One Way Collision Leaves One Dead on I-40E Onramp in Kingman”

You click and find a photo of the two vehicles that were involved in the accident, and they are the same two vehicles you saw earlier. You were wrong about the compact car make and model, though, it was a Toyota Corolla, not a Hyundai Accent.

As you read further into the post, you learn that the identity of the person who was killed is still a mystery, as they didn’t have any identification on them. The police were trying to find more information and possibly locate the person based on their fingerprints and DNA. The license plate of the Corolla came back as stolen, so that was a dead end also. Police were asking the public for more information about this person who was driving the Corolla, and offering a reward for anyone who was able to provide information leading to the discovery of their identity.

You don’t find any information about the woman driving the Tundra, though. You continue to search and search to no avail. Of course, since it was an accident, you assume that there isn’t much focus on her because it’s not like she is suspected of anything. Maybe it’s better that you don’t know who she is. Maybe you should just try to forget and focus on the task at hand – getting to El Paso on time.

You text Omar and let him know you are about a day away and he responds that he has found a few things he thinks you might be interested in. You decide to go to sleep for the night, and wake up early the next morning to start heading that way.

The following morning, you take a long hot shower, enjoy your complimentary breakfast, and check out, making your way toward Albuquerque. As you're driving along I-40E, Esmeralda calls you, and you both talk about what's going on with you. You tell her about the accident you saw, leaving out the part about the grey-haired woman and what she said. Esmeralda tells you about a package that came for you with no return address on it. You have her store it in your shed, for you to open when you return home. She tells you that she is planning to take a trip to Las Vegas with Hector and Layla to look at apartments for Layla. You ask her to take lots of pictures for you and she agrees, telling you she has to go because there is someone at the door. You tell her you love her and disconnect the call.

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“THE PETTY QUARRELS OF MEN”

Posted on September 10, 2021 by Melissa

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Photo credit: Edwin McSweeney, “Geronimo’s Last Surrender,” History.net, 2021 [<https://www.historynet.com/geronimos-last-surrender.htm>]

“When a child my mother taught me the legends of our people, taught me of the sun and sky, the moon and stars, the clouds and storms. She also taught me to kneel and pray to Usen for strength, health, wisdom, and protection. We never prayed against any person, but if we had aught against any individual we ourselves took vengeance. We were taught that Usen does not care for the petty quarrels of men.” – Geronimo (Goyathlay), Chiracahua Apache

You feel woozy all the way to Albuquerque, almost mesmerized by the red clay against the blue sky; the sun spackling the ridges with light kisses of glittering eminence. It hardly seemed real passing through, as though you were floating on a dream scape, looking into a kaleidoscope at another galaxy mirrored back to Earth but perfected in a way that you were too simple minded to understand. Did that even make sense? You weren’t sure, but for now, it was all that was keeping you from vomiting.

Arriving in Albuquerque, you meet up with Omar who has good news. He has a friend who lives on an Indian reservation who has access to weapons that have their serial numbers removed so they are untraceable. This sounds like exactly what you are looking for, so you agree to go with Omar to the Apache Indian reservation where his friend Charlie, a.k.a. White Horse, lived.

Omar explained that White Horse earned his name because he tamed a rare white foal that wandered on to his family’s property. The colt lived many years and would only let Charlie

ride him. When Charlie earned his name White Horse, he subsequently named his colt Usen, as he believed the animal possessed supernatural powers that he himself was able to connect with. When Usen passed on, White Horse gave him a ceremonial burial, complete with grave markings. On the day Usen transcended from Earth, White Horse honors his memory by hosting a feast at his home for his family and friends to celebrate Usen's life and devotion to White Horse. Omar tells you he has attended one of these ceremonies and they are very beautiful. He also cautions you about White Horse, explaining that he is very proud of his Apache culture, and to be respectful if you do not want to incur his wrath.

When you finally meet White Horse, you are quite impressed with him. Soft spoken and mild mannered, he stood about 6'5" with long, thick black hair and beady eyes. He certainly looked intimidating, but was very kind, accommodating and answered all the questions you had about the weapons he had on offer. Once you decided on a 9MM, you made your purchase from him and he shook your hand, inviting you to smoke a hookah with him. How could you refuse this gentle creature? You agree, and you, White Horse, and Omar all congregate in White Horse's smoking room.

After a couple of hits, White Horse looks at Omar first, a pointed expression on his face, like he wanted to gauge Omar's potential reaction to what he was about to say. Then, White Horse looks at you, a haunted expression in his eyes, mixed with genuine concern reflected in his furrowed brow. You feel your heart start to beat a little faster as you can tell he has something incredibly important to say, and you really want to know what it is.

"Ruben," White Horse starts, "is that your name? Or is it Ralph Rodriguez?"

Your eyes widen. How did he know your alias? Only people in Pahrump and Al knew your alias. That's all it was for. "How do

you know my name?”

White Horse takes your hand. “Do not be afraid, I have the gift of psychic ability. Sometimes it is very accurate, sometimes it isn’t. I’m guessing I was right in your case, since it looks like you just saw a ghost,” he laughs, trying to make you feel comfortable again.

It isn’t working. You still feel like he has something important to say to you, though, and you want to know what it is. “Who do you work for?” You ask White Horse.

White Horse shakes his head. “I’m so sorry, Ruben, you introduced yourself to me with that name, I just really need to make you aware of a very serious problem you need my assistance with, and that seemed like the easiest way to get you to pay attention.”

Omar’s mouth was hanging open. “Bro what?”

You look back at White Horse. “Well, please tell me because now I’m ready to get the hell out of here and never look back.”

White Horse laughs. “I understand. What I wanted to tell you was that someone put a curse on you, a very evil woman, and you need a cleansing. It’s so important that I had to make sure you knew now, because I don’t know when you will meet another person who can help you with this, or who will even notice it like I did.”

You freeze. “A curse?” Was he talking about the grey haired woman and what she said to you? The accident? You didn’t want to think it, you really wanted to just believe you imagined the whole thing, but you know what you heard, and now it seems White Horse was validating it.

White Horse nodded. “You need a cleansing or this curse will wreak havoc on your life. I am willing to provide you with a cleansing, if you would like to stay the night. I insist you do not travel further the same day the cleansing is performed.” He

takes your hand and covers it with his other one in a gesture of faith, hoping you will see he is truly trying to help you.

Trust him.

... ..

“EL PADRINO”

Posted on September 17, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“The soul that has conceived one wickedness can nurse no good thereafter.” – Sophocles

His face and chest paint were enough to intimidate you. He insisted that is not what he wanted to do, but you were still tense, and in awe at the same time. You closed your eyes as he painted your face. He’d insisted it was only you and he in the teepee together, so Omar waited outside.

There had been a man, an older man, one who was respected among the tribe, who gave White Horse some grief about having you there. The man, Sitting Bull, insisted you have evil attached to you that will not leave even with an Apache smudging ceremony. Sitting Bull grabbed White Horse’s arm and pushed you back at the same time, raising his voice to White Horse. You took a step back alongside Omar while Sitting Bull stared up at White Horse, challenging his authority.

White Horse remained expressionless as he blinked once at Sitting Bull, then picked him up and carried him by his throat to the side of his gun shop. His legs writhing, Sitting Bull grabbed at White Horse’s hand to try and pry his fingers away so he could breathe but his attempts were futile.

“Don’t ever tell me what I can and can’t do in my home,” White Horse looks in Sitting Bull’s eyes as Sitting Bull gasps for air.

White Horse slowly sets him down on his feet and releases his grip, holding Sitting Bull up as he coughs emphatically and catches his breath.

Omar nudges you. “That’s what I mean,” he says. “He’s a cool ass dude but he will fuck you up if you piss him off. Just don’t piss him off,” he laughs.

You see why that’s wise advice now. You agreed.

During the ceremony, White Horse was able to tune in to three evil spirits he says are attached to you. He says Sitting Bull is right, you have evil that will not leave, and you are putting his community at risk by even being there. However, he is a man of his word, and he is going to do everything he can to help you. He wants to form an alliance. You don’t understand what he means.

He tells you that you are “El Padrino,” and that is why this evil woman cursed you. She is a contractor for a group that wants you to act against your own best interests, and sacrifice everything that matters to you, but you are on the wrong path for that.

You raise your eyebrows but remain silent. White Horse is basically describing everything correctly and you haven’t told him anything. “Go on, please,” you ask, smiling so that he knows you are pleased with what he is saying.

He says the woman wants you to be cursed because she wants you to be on another path. She says you keep deviating from it and you are being monitored. If you are not where you are supposed to be you are out of their control, but it doesn’t mean they can’t hurt you. You would need protection, and he offered you cufflinks with black stones on them.

“Apache Tears,” he says, “actually they are obsidian. They ward off negativity, and will help, but you need more than this.”

“I generally don’t wear suits,” you say.

“You need to,” he says. “You need to look the part, because if you continue on the path you are on now, you are going to be more powerful than you have ever been, but you will be taking a big risk. You will leave a legacy for your family, but you will be making yourself out to be bait.” He pauses, looking confused. “If this is not making sense, it is because it seems like it’s going in and out. I’m not sure exactly what this means, but I do know you need my help for more than just this cleansing.” He looks at you earnestly. “I’m promising you I will help. We need an alliance, though. I need to have your word you will be on my side as I will be on yours.” He pauses and looks down.

“But before you answer, Ruben, remember, we are natural enemies, if that is how you want to see it. Some do in this situation. If you want to bury that hatchet, I’m ready,” White Horse extends his hand.

You take it. You agree to an alliance with him.

He says he is able to remove two of the evil spirits the woman attached to you, but one is still remaining. He said it had a name, and it gave you chills down your spine when he told you what it was.

El Tio.

... ..

“LOST ANGELS”

Posted on September 24, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

White Horse asks you if you have told anyone else of this curse the witch placed on you, an extremely urgent tone in his voice as he grabs you by your arms and looks directly in your eyes. You shake your head, not wavering your gaze. You’ve told no one what she said, only Esmeralda knew of the accident.

“Who is – oh your wife?” White Horse asks.

“Yes, I told her about the accident, nothing of the woman or the curse,” you answer. “You’re sure she is a witch? How do you know?”

White Horse stands up, an odd look of determination on his face. You weren’t sure yet if you liked him, he did make a great first impression but he had a god complex that was a little intimidating. You would have to make sure to keep him on your side, and as long as his demands were reasonable, hopefully that would be easy to do. He seemed to really respect you and genuinely want to help you. You start to wonder why he seems so invested in you. You start to think more about this alliance he was basically demanding from you.

White Horse looks at you, “Ruben, yes, she is a witch. I know this because I know who she is. She is an ancient spirit that has lived many lives and has failed her mission each life time. She is an evolved spirit, and she has many names. She is commonly known around here as La Bruja, or – “

“The witch,” you reply. “I’m Mexican, remember?” You laugh.

“Yeah,” White Horse grins. “As long as you didn’t tell your wife exactly what she said to you, she won’t be impacted by this curse, but there is a chance someone else might be trying to hurt her.” White Horse gestures for you to follow him out of the

teepee. "Let's get Omar, we need to head back to your home now."

You're shocked, scared, confused, and tired. "What are you talking about? I have to go to El Paso, I'm running behind as it is."

White Horse stops and looks you in the eyes again, a sad expression on his face. "Ruben, do as you please, but if you go to El Paso, you will die." He pauses, putting his hand on your shoulder. "You must join us on our journey to California."

"California? Why?"

"We will talk on the way. You live near Las Vegas, right?"

You feel like this is moving way too fast for you. Uncomfortably so, you think to yourself, hoping your eyes don't betray you. If White Horse hadn't made such a display of his temper earlier, you might have just walked out and continued on, but you were genuinely afraid of him.

Despite these misgivings, part of you believed what he said, and wanted to trust him because you felt strongly that he was being sincere. You haven't been in any sort of leadership role or position in your life at all since you assumed your new identity as Ralph Rodriguez, and you missed it. Mostly, you missed being yourself. You hated who you'd become, but you were grateful to be alive, and have your family with you. Somehow, this man seemed to be able to provide you with a path to having both your old life and your family again.

It seems like a no brainer, but you're having doubts.

"Yes, I live in Pahrump, it's about an hour out of Vegas," you answer slowly. "I'm going to be honest, White Horse, I mean absolutely no offense, but I'm really feeling like this is moving way too fast. I believe you, and I trust you, but please tell me more, I'm just nervous about abandoning my mission

completely without knowing why you're having me go to California."

"I understand, friend," White Horse smiles. "I appreciate your communication, it is something that I can work with. If you ever feel like you need to talk to me, you can always come to me and do so, so long as you are exactly as you are now," he motions outside the teepee, evidently referring to the incident earlier. "Sitting Bull is someone I respect, but he is very envious of me and it impacts his behavior. You are not Sitting Bull."

You feel a lot better. "That's good to know, but please tell me, why California?"

White Horse stares off in the distance for a few seconds, then looks back at you.

"We're going to start a war."

... ..

"DEAR MRS. RODRIGUEZ"

Posted on October 1, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

Esmeralda hung up the phone with you after you told her about the accident on I-40, and answered the door to see a tall blonde man with dark sunglasses who greeted her with a letter, then left promptly. The package that you advised her to leave in the shed for you was still on the kitchen table when Esmeralda closed the front door and sat down to open the letter. On the front of the envelope, the words, "To the Family of Ralph Rodriguez."

Slowly peeling the envelope open, Esmeralda removes a letter with a paragraph of words printed in English. They read:

Dear Mrs. Rodriguez,

It is with deep regret that we are contacting you with this news. Your husband, Ralph Rodriguez, an American patriot and true servant to his county, has perished on his mission. We have sent a separate package addressed to Mr. Rodriguez with an award of the highest accolade for his service. We have also enclosed a check in the amount of \$500,000, to assist with final expenses for Mr. Rodriguez and for anything else your family may need.

Our prayers are with you in this difficult time. Thank you for being part of American Intelligence.

Regards,

Daniel Thipp

Esmeralda is quite shaken, but she knows you are not dead, she just hung up the phone with you. She wants to call you but she doesn't want to alarm you. She also doesn't want you to die. She shows Layla the letter, who is immediately frantic, and tries calling you. Unable to reach you, they try to remember where you said you were going so they could retrace your steps. All they knew was you were headed on a mission and would be home in a few weeks. They thought you said something about Las Vegas, and Esmeralda remembers hearing

you mention Washington D.C. when you were talking about the mission. Both Esmeralda and Layla decide to head to the bank to deposit the check. Before they leave, Esmeralda, teary and worried, decides to put the package in the shed like you asked just incase you come home before they do.

When they get to the bank, they go inside and are able to deposit the check with a teller. The teller advises them of a three day hold on the funds, so Esmeralda and Layla decide to head back home and try calling you again. They keep getting your voicemail, and leave message after message for you.

In one message from Layla, she says she won't be able to sleep until she knows you are alive and okay.

In one message from Esmeralda, she cries for 90 solid seconds and just says she loves you.

Hector doesn't know what's going on but he is picking up on the vibe from Esmeralda and Layla and he starts to have an extremely severe panic attack, screaming and crying for you. It takes Esmeralda and Layla over two hours to get him to calm down. After they are able to calm him enough to get him to sleep, they try calling you again.

And again.

You don't answer.

Fearing the worst, Layla finds a hotel in Washington D.C. and uses one of Esmeralda's credit cards to reserve a room. They can't yet afford the flight there, but in three days, they will book the first one and fly out to try and find you because that's where they think you are.

You're with White Horse, though, on your way back to Pahrump. By the time you have a signal and can check your phone, you may catch them before they fly to try to find you.

If nothing happens on the way there, of course.

... ..

“REVELATION 6:8”

Posted on October 8, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.” – Rev. 6-Bible, King James Version

Waking up in a guest room White Horse prepared for you after the ceremony, you take a shower, brush your teeth and go out to the kitchen to ask for some coffee you smell brewing. White Horse serves you a cup, black with one sugar, and you both join Omar at the kitchen table.

After a few minutes, your conversation is interrupted by a knocking at the door. White Horse answers and it is Sitting Bull. He peeks in the house and politely refuses White Horse’s invitation to come inside. He beckons for White Horse to join

him outside, and White Horse looks back at you and Omar, then joins Sitting Bull outside, closing the door behind him.

“So how did it go last night?” Omar asks you.

You tell Omar about the ceremony, but refrain from telling him anything about El Tio, the war, or California. You just talk about the curse and what the witch said, and why White Horse felt you needed to have a cleansing. Omar is extremely interested in the curse, and the accident. You find the link to the news story you found online when you were staying in Flagstaff. He pores over it, and can't believe you actually saw it. Omar also notices nothing is said about the woman, but again, like you assumed before, no one made mention of her because she didn't actually commit a crime, and no one really follows up too much on random traffic accidents unless they know the person who was involved. You and Omar both check to see if there were any updates on the person who was driving the Toyota Corolla and find none.

“You said you saw something green fly out of dude's back?” Omar asks you, laughing. “What the hell you been smoking, man?”

“I'm not kidding, I don't know if the person had some sort of back surgery or something and the sunlight hit it or what, but that's what I saw right before I looked at that -” you shudder, “beast of a woman.”

Omar laughs. “Oh come on man, can't be the first time a woman scared you off.”

You and Omar both have some laughs at memories of romps in days of old. Then, White Horse and Sitting Bull enter the room, tension immediately filling the air. White Horse closes the door and both he and Sitting Bull join you and Omar at the table.

“Sitting Bull, would you like to speak?” White Horse asks.

“Yes, thank you,” Sitting Bull responds. He clears his throat and faces you. “Ruben, it’s nice to meet you under better circumstances, and I apologize for my behavior last night,” he apologizes, seeming sincere.

You nod. “I understand your concern, White Horse explained it to me. I’m sorry to have worried you or to have caused you to be afraid at all.”

Sitting Bull smiles winsomely. “Thank you, I’m afraid it won’t help our situation, but you are not to blame for that. You have been impacted by it just like we all have.”

You look at Sitting Bull, a confused expression on your face. “What do you mean?”

Sitting Bull sighs. “Omar, right? It’s nice to meet you also, I’m sorry if I offended you with my behavior last night.”

Omar nods. “Not a problem, bro, we’re good.”

“We want you to both join us on an expedition to California, but first we need to go to Ruben’s home in Pahrump to bring his family with us, they are not safe,” Sitting Bull states, looking at you. “There is a group that is after them right now.”

You are immediately alarmed and reach for your phone. It’s dead. Your charger is in your car. You start to get up from your seat but Sitting Bull stops you.

“You must leave your rental car here,” Sitting Bull insists. “You can use it to charge your phone, but it has to stay here, we all travel in our bus.”

“Seriously?” You ask. “I’ll get reported as a car thief.”

“That’s the least of your worries right now, Ruben, I’m sorry to say,” Sitting Bull says in a grave tone. “Your family is in great danger. We need to hurry.”

“Then I’m taking my car,” you get up. “I will follow you, but I need my phone charger. Does your bus have a charger?”

Sitting Bull looks at White Horse, who looks down. “You can take your car, Ruben, Omar will travel with you and we will all follow in the bus.”

You sigh in relief. “Thank you, that makes me feel better. Do you have cell phones?”

“I do,” White Horse says. “There isn’t a signal here, but I have a burner phone I keep fully charged for when I go into town.”

You exchange numbers with White Horse incase you lose each other on the road. You also give him your home address, and decide instead to have Omar ride with White Horse, while Sitting Bull rides with you.

You and Sitting Bull get in your car, and Omar, White Horse, and ten other men climb into an old school bus, then you head out, bound for Pahrump.

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“PARADIGM SHIFT”

Posted on October 16, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

“What are kings, when regiment is gone, but perfect shadows in a sunshine day?” – Christopher Marlowe.

For an hour after you got your phone to charge, you tried calling Esmeralda. When you heard her voicemail, and Layla’s, you almost broke down in tears. If it hadn’t been for Sitting Bull, you would have lost your mind with worry about them. Sitting Bull was helping you by continually trying to call them while you drove. Finally able to reach them, you explained to them what was happening, and what you were currently doing. They told you they were just heading to the airport to fly out to Washington D.C. when you called, and about the “severance” check from AI. You tell them to go to your son Victor’s house in

Henderson, and stay there. You call Victor and reach his girlfriend Vanessa, letting her know what was going on.

Feeling tears streaming down your cheeks as you drove, you were a little shocked by your open display of emotion in front of Sitting Bull. Wiping them away and apologizing, Sitting Bull says you're just being a good father, and pays your tears no mind. Driving in a comfortable sort of silence while you process what you could have just prevented, you try your best to focus on the fact that you were able to intervene before anything else happened and you would be seeing your family in a few hours. Now, the mission seemed so far behind you, you didn't even care what the consequences were for going AWOL. You were just grateful that you met White Horse and could get to your family in time, hopefully. He had been right about everything so far.

After a while, Sitting Bull started talking to you about the trip to California, trying to get an idea of what you thought about the pilgrimage, if anything. You were mixed about it, and didn't really understand what White Horse meant by starting a war, and honestly, you were more concerned about your family. You felt like you had been reeled in by everything else White Horse said to you – the curse, the ceremony, and the war. You believed and trusted him, however, given that everything he told you had been accurate. You still didn't know what the war meant, or why he wanted to start one.

Sitting Bull started to explain the group White Horse was referring to, as best as he could, and how they were going to end up starting a war anyway. Sitting Bull alluded that this group had an agenda that loosely revolved around the concept of eugenics, and compared them to Nazis. You were quite interested in what he had to say, and tried your best to focus on it but failed to take your mind off of your family.

“White Horse wants you to lead an army,” Sitting Bull said slowly.

“I don’t have an army, I don’t understand, he also said I am El Padrino, I am no longer involved in anything remotely close to that anymore,” you explain. “I’m old now, I’ve paid my dues and I’m living as a ghost basically, because of AI. I have my life because of them, I don’t understand what any of this means.”

“You still have contacts and influence, Ruben,” Sitting Bull explains. “That is what White Horse wants. He wants you to reconnect, and he is going to help you do that. We need to recruit.”

“But why California? Even when I was living that lifestyle, I never lived in California. I was in El Paso mostly, or Tucson. Never California.”

“It’s his starting point because it will attract the most attention,” Sitting Bull continues.

“What is he planning on doing there? How am I supposed to help with this? What does my family have to do with any of it? I’m just confused,” you say.

“We will discuss strategy when we arrive, you will help by gaining notoriety and re-establishing yourself as a leader, and your family needs our protection, especially afterward.”

You blink, and your face shows a puzzled expression. “So, White Horse is using me? In a way?” You ask, remembering the 10 men in the school bus. That definitely wasn’t an army.

Sitting Bull laughs. “You could say that, but he uses everyone if that’s how you see it. He is resourceful, and he knows we can win this war with you at our side.”

“I just want to get to my family,” you say. “We definitely need to talk about this more, but I can’t focus on anything other than them.”

Sitting Bull pats your shoulder. “I understand, Ruben. We will get them to safety, and when we get to your son’s home, we will discuss our strategy.”

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“TOY SOLDIERS”

Posted on October 25, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo credit: IMDB, “The Indian in the Cupboard,” 1995.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113419/mediaindex>

California. It seemed like such an odd place to start a war, until you talked to White Horse and Sitting Bull at length about it, and his reasoning. It felt so good to hold your family again; the drive to Henderson was torture for you, and you called Esmeralda about 50 times before you arrived. You were ready to seek whatever recourse you could to exact your revenge against Al. Your one comfort was the money they gave your family, but as White Horse pointed out, they would be back to try and recoup the funds. You had Victor take Layla and Esmeralda to the local bank to close the account. White Horse suggested finding a suitable location for your base. California was out of the question because it was too obvious, for one. Arizona was a safe bet, but it had to be somewhere remote. You opted for Quartzite, and asked Vanessa to search for mobile homes for rent.

“Why not just rent a space and buy a couple RVs?” Vanessa suggested. “I mean, it’s not my money, but it seems easier for you to move around that way, and if you need to up and leave all of a sudden, you can.” She shrugged. “Not to be a Debbie Downer, but you know the police will come asking questions. We can’t know where you are anyway, and it’s better if you are able to move around.”

White Horse smiles. “This is your daughter, Ruben?”

You shake your head and laugh. “She is my son Victor’s girlfriend, but basically she is my daughter, or will be soon enough,” you answer.

Vanessa laughs. “I’m just saying, it’s easier. What do you think though?”

“I love the idea,” you respond. “What about you two?”

White Horse and Sitting Bull both nod. “It’s perfect,” Sitting Bull says. “If you want to spend the money, I think she has a great point. We should also get some disposable phones.”

Vanessa nods and starts searching for RVs for sale and lots for rent in Quartzite.

“Lets go somewhere and talk strategy, Ruben,” White Horse puts his hand on your shoulder and motions for you to join him and Sitting Bull outside. “We can do that in the school bus.”

You three make your way to the bus where you find Omar hanging out with the other men smoking a hookah.

“Hey man!” Omar greets you.

You all sit down and start discussing White Horse’s strategy. You explain that you are confused by why he wants to even start the war, but mention also that Sitting Bull says that Al wants to start a war anyway. You listen intently as White Horse explains his vision of the war, and why he is choosing the locations he is. He also explains why he feels it is necessary to

start the war first, and the symbolism of it. He feels his vision is the only way to save the country.

He passes you a list of locations. It reads:

- 1. Hollywood, CA**
- 2. Silicon Valley, CA**
- 3. San Antonio, TX**
- 4. Houston, TX**
- 5. Dallas, TX**
- 6. St. Louis, MO**
- 7. Miami, FL**
- 8. Toms River, NJ**
- 9. Boston, MA**
- 10. Washington DC**

White Horse explains the strategic importance of these locations, and says that there may be stops along the way, and the order of the list may be altered to throw off their tracks. Your concern is someone seeing the RVs and the license plates. Sitting Bull suggests worrying about that later, the resources to create makeshift plates are available, and the registration would be the only caveat. White Horse suggests it wouldn't be a problem. He claims to not foresee any law enforcement interference. You admire his confidence, but think you should keep an open mind as far as that goes, and say that. White Horse seems slightly offended, but listens to you nonetheless. You point out that while you don't doubt his vision at all, you feel like moving forward with the mindset that you are being watched, followed, and investigated, you will have a better chance of evading detection as you will be expecting it, rather than being surprised by it. White Horse seems to really like this point, and suggests you control the movements based on what

you feel is a good move, and you agree, saying you will only do it if White Horse advises you against any bad moves based on his visions of what could happen.

White Horse laughs, and says, “Friend, I will not let us lose this war. If you are with us, we will prevail.”

You laugh and fart simultaneously.

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“TRAIL OF TEARS”

Posted on November 1, 2021 by Melissa

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo credit: “Apache Warrior” by Danthemanfantastic, 2015.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.deviantart.com/danthemanfantastic/art/Apache-Warrior-511932755>

Recruiting meant reconnecting with old ghosts and rebuilding bridges you thought were long since burned and had turned to ash. White Horse insisted you were more connected than you felt, and you didn’t know how it was possible to be. White Horse tries his best to explain to you the devotion you inspired during your tenure as leader in the cartel, but you are overwrought with grief after having ratted them out to save your own skin. White Horse reminds you that you didn’t just do it for yourself, that you also did it for your family, and never to forget that. He persisted saying that this is what your former cartel family still thinks of you, and they see the real reason behind why you did it because they see the real you.

Even as hard as it was to believe him, you knew White Horse was usually right. You didn’t know where you or your family would be without him, actually. You discussed, at length, what his thoughts were on how to go about reconnecting with them when you were a shell of your former self, exhausting all efforts to remain anonymous and not stir up any fuss in your

neighborhood. Struggling to make people like you without the use of force was something that made you feel inferior, and feeling inferior made you angry. It was a traumatic learning experience for you to adjust from being Ruben Salazar, the cartel boss, to Ralph Rodriguez, the local Mexican who sold crack-laced tamales made by his Mexican wife to the neighborhood. You were basically having to become the complete opposite of who you were – what came naturally to you. Now, White Horse was asking you to, in essence, switch back to who you really are. While it seemed like it could work, it was so mind-blowing for you to imagine that lifestyle again, given your age and how much you've changed.

While you agree with Sitting Bull that it isn't necessary to have as active a role as you used to play, you feel like you need more support going in than what you currently have. While Omar, White Horse, and Sitting Bull are all willing to stand in for you, none of them are a part of the life you used to live. The only one who is is Esmeralda, and she is your wife, you don't want to involve her in your lifestyle.

White Horse insists you should. He tells you of her capabilities, and sings her praises, calling her the Bonnie to your Clyde. You laugh at the comparison – you don't see your wife in this light at all, she is your companion and the mother of your children, but you protect her, she isn't someone you would ever want to put in any kind of danger.

“Then why is she still with you, Ruben?” White Horse asks, clearly exasperated with you. “She is perfect, she supports you and she is lovable. People will remember her from your old life, won't they?”

“That's true,” you agree.

“Look at it like this, Ruben,” Sitting Bull says, “she knows what she is up against. She knew that when she married you, I take it?”

You nod.

“Then, let her be a part of it. She has the autonomy to say no if she doesn’t want to,” Sitting Bull points out. “But give her a chance. I think White Horse is right.”

White Horse stands up and beats his chest.

“We need an army!”

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ANIMARIUM PART III

Jim the Ascent

“Kiev”

Posted by animariumblogascent November 2, 2021 Posted in fiction, novel

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Photo credit: "Kiev as the 'mother of Russian cities': Fact or Fiction?" Russia Beyond, 2017, Getty Images. Retrieved from: <https://www.rbth.com/history/326434-kiev-as-mother-of-russian-cities>

"Good morning, Jim," Zara says, yawning.

"It's five PM," you respond from the other side of the room, your back to her.

"You're still sleeping though, and we need to get out of here and eat," Zara gets up from her bed and sits on yours, poking your ribs.

"Ouch!" You exclaim, jumping up and rubbing your rib. "What the fuck?"

"Quit being a baby," Zara says, getting up from the bed and walking into the bathroom, closing the door behind her. You hear the toilet lid lift and pee hitting the water. "Stop listening to me pee, Jim," you hear Zara's muffled voice from behind the door.

You look at the photo of Cassie again. You are shocked to find out how old she is, and are definitely interested in saving her. According to Zara, she is supposed to visit Kiev as a part of her mission within the next few days. When that happens, Zara will have specific instructions she says she will give you at that time, since she still seems to be having difficulty trusting you, but just with this mission apparently. She told you quite a bit about Cassie, Sergei, the plot to colonize the world and eventually destroy it, and a lot even about herself. Some of what she said was highly improbable, and not something you were really open to, but you believed she was convinced in what she said.

"Why is Cassie so important, other than the fact that she's hot?" You ask Zara.

"Didn't I tell you that last night?"

You shake your head. “Nope, just that he has these weird plans.”

“He wants to use her as an incubator to create hybrid children,” Zara explains.

“What?”

“Sergei wants to create the perfect species, and he has partnered with a former doctor who is performing experiments on people,” Zara gestured at herself. “I had one of these experimental operations by Dr. Popov, before things went bad with Sergei. We all did, but Sergei started to take it to a dark place.

“He wants to basically create the perfect race by breeding as much of human weakness out of us as he possibly can. I don’t know the science behind it, or the medical whatever, but that’s what he’s trying to do, and Cassie is who he has chosen to do that, for a few reasons.

“One, Cassie is in prime physical condition, despite being 37, and despite having open heart surgery when she was 35. Sergei is also attracted to her because she reminds him of a woman he loved who disappeared, named Iva Petrov. This is supposed to be her assumed name, as she was to ingratiate herself in Russian media and attempt to influence it under the guise of Iva Petrov. The problem with that is Iva was murdered, and it is a high profile case, as she was a beautiful, young expat from Austria.

“Long story short, Cassie was misled in order for Sergei to realize his fantasy of bringing Iva back to life, since he is obsessed with her. He never told anyone about it until after the need for Cassie’s mission became apparent. When he mentioned the name, I believe it was Dr. Popov who brought up the murder, and Sergei explained it by saying he was obsessed with the case, and wanted to bring the girl back to life,” Zara paused to take a sip of coffee. “Sergei isn’t a tender person, though.”

“So basically he wants to use Cassie as his sort of surrogate Iva?” You ask Zara. “Are you afraid he’s going to murder her when he’s

finished using her for experimental hybrid breeding?”

Zara shrugged. “There’s no telling what he will do, no one knows much beyond that. Other than he’s tried killing everyone at least once, and thankfully we’ve all avoided it. He only loves the doctor.”

“So you want me to kill him? Sergei? What about the doctor?”

Zara shook her head emphatically. “Not the doctor, just Sergei. Dr. Popov is extremely useful, which makes him valuable. Sergei is dangerous, plain and simple.”

“Got it,” you respond. “When are we headed to Moscow?”

Zara looks out the window then back at you. “Tomorrow?” She stands up and takes off her clothes.

“Not this again,” you turn away. “I don’t want to even look because you’re not interested, I thought.”

Zara laughs. “Come on, it’s just for fun, nothing serious. I know who you love anyway,” she reaches over and starts rubbing your cock.

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“33°14’48.7”N 112°29’44.3”W”

NOVEMBER 8, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>..., ...!<<<

Summer was almost over and you were getting ready for your last year of high school. With plans to go into either the Army or the Air Force afterward, you felt like you were on your way to a good, secure future. All you needed was someone to share it with, someone you could start a life with, a family, and all of that.

Someone to make you look normal to the outside world.

When you graduated, you had clear plans for what you wanted to do as far as a place to live. Your childhood home was more like a shelter for alcoholics and transients since your mother disappeared. You wanted to find a place where you could be away from your

father and his friends, and focus on what you really wanted to do with your life.

Fix things with Ella and marry her before you went away to boot camp somewhere.

During your sophomore year, Ella became pregnant. This came as a huge surprise to both of you, but it wasn't really an unwelcome one after you'd had a chance to really think about having a child together. You both realized you were way too young to become parents, but it bonded you, and it seemed to really make her glow. When she was happy, you were happy, so you wanted her to have the baby and you would take care of them, you promised her.

Her parents were livid, and went to your father to tell him about what you did to their daughter. Causing a huge scene with him in front of your neighbors, your father, drunk, pointed a shotgun at Ella's parents and told them to get off of his property. They left, but later returned with the police, and had your father arrested. You were secretly grateful for this, but because of it, you were forced to stay with your racist grandfather, who was tempted to throw you out over your relationship with Ella. Your mother had disappeared when you were in 8th grade, and no one had seen or heard from her in two years, that was the only reason your grandfather didn't throw you out on the streets at 16.

Ella moved away without ever saying goodbye. She was angry the last time you saw her, and you didn't know if she was angry with you, your father, or your grandfather, but it didn't matter because she wasn't there. Her and your son. You were going to name him Isaac James, because Ella said she liked that name for a boy. She said if it was a girl, she would name her Fawn Briella, but you said your seed was too strong to have a girl and it was a boy. She looked at you weird, but she laughed. You thought at the time that she knew you were joking but did it make her mad?

You were devastated. All you wanted was her. Her voicemail was full, but least every time you called, you didn't hear that her number

was disconnected. You kept calling, until eventually, it was disconnected. When that happened, you threw your phone away and found your father's shotgun.

Walking inside to your grandfather's bedroom, you put the gun up to his head as he slept, wanting so badly to cock it and blow his miserable head off. It was all his fault. If he would have died in the war, your father wouldn't have been born. If your father hadn't been born, you wouldn't have been born, and wouldn't now know this horrible emptiness that consumed more of you with every drawing breath.

He woke up and you shot him. You didn't even realize you did it at first, even when his head exploded like a watermelon flung in front of a Peterbilt going 90 down the freeway. Was it cocked? Did you cock it? You must have.

No one could know about this, what would you tell Ella? How could you ever face her if she knew what you did? Even though you did it for her, she wouldn't like it. You're a murderer now. A cold blooded killer, never to be the same again. Almost turning the gun on yourself, the only thing that stopped you was a beam of sunlight coming in the window that shone right into your eyes, blinding you for a moment.

In that single space of a second in time, you knew what you needed to do, and that it was going to be okay.

Finding a shovel in the shed, you loaded it in the back of Grandpa's pick up truck. Loading Grandpa into an old plastic storage trunk, you load him in the back as well, slam the tailgate, and take a drive out to the desert.

The moon was high in the sky by the time Grandpa was laid to rest, your forehead dripping sweat, your hands calloused and stiff from digging and pulling the body. You buried him deep enough, you convinced yourself, and by now, his house was completely engulfed in flames. You were done with this life. Getting back in Grandpa's truck, you drive into Phoenix, steal a car from an old woman who

went inside a Circle K to get a pack of Virginia Slims and accidentally left her keys in her car, and headed east.

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“Just Trust It”

NOVEMBER 16, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

You push Zara’s hand away before she has the opportunity to turn you on. “I just don’t get you, Zara,” you say.

Zara smiles and her eyes darken, her irises growing larger. Before you realize what’s happening to you, you’re on your back and she is on top of you, her eyes completely blackened now, her skin an odd shade of bluish grey. “Of course you don’t ‘get’ me, Jim,” she sneers, her lips curling back in a purely evil grin, her teeth appearing to sharpen. You’re frozen again, but this time, you are incapable of feeling fear. You feel denial. Everything inside of you knows you are in mortal danger, but you refuse to allow yourself to react to it emotionally.

Zara’s body begins to wither until her frame is much more frail and old looking, her eyes never changing, her hair turning bright white. “You don’t get me because I’m smarter than you, Jim, and I’ve been watching you your whole life. I know everything that’s happened to you, every feeling you’ve ever had, every thought, every little thing you’ve ever done that you thought was private,” she hisses. “I know

all of it, and that's why I chose you, but if you can't keep your sick perversions in check, we're going to have a big problem. I know what you like, and I know how you justify what you do. I'm not interested in you because I know who you really are Jim," Zara's face inching closer to yours, her body now morphing into more of a ghostly figure floating right above you, paralyzing you and rendering you completely numb.

Zara gets so close to you that you can almost feel her essence entering your body, like a heavy mist; your skin absorbing her like a sponge. You finally feel something – but it's not you. It's her, you sense her very soul entering your body and you feel an old pain, and a grudge long unsatisfied. Your stomach starts to turn as you see images of dead people, people who were important, people who created her. You see her. You know now who she is.

You don't hear her, but you feel her message.

"You are only here, with me, to kill Sergei. That is all. That is your only purpose on this planet, Jim. This is your shot at redemption, and if you blow it, if you do anything to hurt Cassie or put her in jeopardy because of your sickness, because of your obsession with Ella..." The feeling grew faint, then strong again. "If you do to Cassie what you did to Yvette, I won't kill you, Jim. Oh no.

"I'll live inside you. I'll control your every movement and base it on what I want you to experience. I'll make you do and say things that will put you in the worst possible circumstances so that your despair will become so completely overwhelming, you will try again and again to take your own life, just to end it. Just to stop the voices, the suffering," you felt her laughter, "the madness.

"But it won't stop, Jim. Oh no. I won't let you die if you hurt Cassie. Not by your own hand. If you do anything to her, you will suffer in all ways imaginable and you will live through it all. You will only die when you have avenged me, my original purpose, my original plan, one you are not even privy to because all you see is what you want to see; you see what pleases you.

“But if you betray me, I’ll make you see everything. I’ll make you hate me so much you won’t even know what hate is anymore because when you feel it, you’ll think of me.”

Her spirit pulls away from you, and once more, she’s the Zara you met outside of room 184 at Sam’s Town, naked, supple, red-haired and beautiful. You can’t move as she takes your pants off and rapes you.

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“The Twins”

NOVEMBER 17, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>... FOR ...<<<

“Yvette?” You say again, dropping to the floor. What was that popping sound? Why wasn’t she answering? She’s still breathing, isn’t she?

You turn her over on her back and put your hand to your mouth, unable to believe your eyes. She’s dead, she’s really dead. You killed her.

Yvette is dead, Jim.

Dead.

“No!” You howl, falling to your knees, pulling the hair out of your head. “No, no, no, no, NO!” You can’t stop screaming. “Oh my God, Yvette!”

She’s still lying there, motionless, her mouth open, eyes wide, hair strewn across her face. She’s only wearing her pink nightgown under her black velour robe. You touch her hips softly, feeling the slight protrusion of the bone.

“God, no,” you sob. “Not you, Yvette. Not you.”

You sat with her for two hours, waiting for her husband to come home and find you. You weren’t sure what you were going to do when he did, but you felt like you deserved every bit of his wrath after killing Yvette.

“I won’t hurt you,” your words repeating over and over in your mind.

“GOD PLEASE NO!” You wail, not caring if anyone heard you. Sobbing, you try to think of what you should do. You couldn’t leave her there.

Or could you?

You thought for a minute. Looking down on the ground next to Yvette’s body, you saw the condom you found in her trash earlier. Looking back at Yvette, you noticed she wasn’t wearing any panties.

“Fuck me God no,” you wail, not believing what you’re thinking, but you know it has to be done. You were lucky to get away with killing

Grandpa, you can't run the risk of being caught for this. Arizona would surely reopen the investigation if you were prosecuted for murder in Oklahoma.

You had to frame the motorcycle guy. It made perfect sense. He was her husband, he found out she was having an affair and then he killed her. The condom was right there, with his DNA. She's not wearing any panties, and he was the last person to be seen there. Your car was hidden in the dirt lot, and you were certain no one could see it, there were no street lamps at all on that corner, and plenty of overgrown shrubbery. You'd worry about them finding your DNA there later, after all, you were the one having the affair, but that wasn't your cum inside that used condom next to Yvette.

Pulling yourself together, you retrieve your phone and locate the text message about Ella. You look at the area code and notice it is from Fair Lawn, NJ. You disregard the message since you don't know anyone from there.

Just then, another text message comes through from Dan with instructions to go to Room 184 at Sam's Town in Shreveport, LA.

Fast forward.

"I never meant to hurt Yvette," you tell Zara, fighting tears. "I just got jealous when I found that guy with her all night, then I found that used condom – "

"In her fucking trash," Zara finishes, smoking a cigarette in the bed next to you. "Why are you going through people's trash in the first place? That's disgusting."

You shake your head. You look over at Zara, feeling something for her you don't want to feel, despite what she showed you, despite the fact that you now know she isn't human.

"Jim," Zara looks at you, "you can feel anything you want to feel for me, and I'll reciprocate it, but you know where I stand in the end," she reaches out and takes your hand. "I don't want you to get obsessed with Cassie. I don't trust that you can handle it."

“Why is she so important to you?” You ask her, remembering the visions she showed you.

Zara looks down. “She saved me,” she says, puffing her cigarette. “I have to do the same for her.”

You still don’t understand. “But I’m saving her,” you say.

Zara rolls her eyes. “Yes, you are, but you’re going to do it for me, and ultimately, the world.”

“That’s something else, what do you mean that’s my only purpose on this planet?” You’re hurt by her vicious words, even though you know you deserve every one of them.

“You really don’t see the error of your ways, do you, Jim?” Zara stubs her cigarette out in an empty wine glass.

You don’t know how to respond. “Well, I know I’m not perfect, obviously, and I’m a bit of a scumbag, but I feel like there is something I can do that is good in this world,” you defend yourself weakly.

“You’re right,” she says. “This is it. This is your redemption, like I said, and if you can do this, you won’t suffer for everything you’ve never been caught for. You’ll just have to live with knowing someone else will be rotting in prison for a murder you committed, that’s all.”

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“Spellbound”

NOVEMBER 30, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>..., ...!<<<

Across the river was where he found her lifeless body, half eaten by wild animals and vultures. Enough remained of her carcass so that he was able to examine the inside. The people across the river were different from his people, and much later in the future, would be called a different species, coinhabiting the area within swimming distance. Both species were fully aware of one another, and had

their own individual languages, demeanors, customs, and even their appearances were hugely different, though similar enough to both be called human, once the word was invented.

When he gathered her remains, he journeyed back to the cave where he planned to study his eventual offering. She was already dead, and he was simply taking the opportunity to examine her remains, to hopefully glean a deeper understanding of the race across the water. She had been beautiful, from what he could tell, and he was quite grateful to the gods for this particular female, as it had crossed his mind whether or not he could breed with the unknown race. They looked human, they acted human, though rudimentarily so, but he was obsessed with finding out what a crossbreed baby would look like.

His findings after examining the corpse were that the parts were all there; it looked the same as any other human corpse he had ever seen, and being a hunter, he'd seen quite a few protecting his family. He was bored of his life, though, and needed more stimulation. After confirming, to his satisfaction, that this sample of the race across the river was somewhat human, or close enough to human, he decided to kidnap one of the females and experiment with her, to create a hybrid race.

He found one, and when he saw her, he knew she was the right one. She had a male with her, but he didn't appear very strong. After killing her male escort, he kidnapped her and took her with him, back to his cave across the river, to examine her before taking her back to his home. She was scared and fought him, but he beat the will out of her, and once compliant, he had his way with her. After asserting his dominance, he took her to his family home and introduced her to his family as his second woman. No one argued with him.

Months passed and he continually tried getting her pregnant. Nearly giving up and killing her, she was finally with child. When the child was born, his first woman tried killing the newborn with a knife, and he snapped her neck. The baby was a girl, and was born with solid black eyes, terrifying both Mother and Father. Mother feared for her

baby's life, and tried to escape. Father took the baby and looked closely at her, fascinated with her eyes. The baby started to cry and Mother tried taking her away from Father, but Father struck Mother, and continued to stare at the baby. After a few seconds, the baby's eyes changed to pale grey and she looked like a normal newborn. Dumbfounded, Father gave the baby back to Mother and demanded she leave to go back across the river. He felt his experiment was a failure, and the child was stunted. Unable to bring himself to kill them, he simply banished them and found another wife, one of his own species.

Growing up as a hybrid child, the little girl suffered horrible torture at the hands of village people, and her own mother at times. Miraculously, the little girl survived childhood and grew to be an alpha female, choosing her destiny as a nomad rather than be burdened by traditional female roles. As such, she was shunned by her tribe, her mother, and so she left her village, and wandered across the river to find her father. She'd never met him before, but all her life she'd been haunted by an image of a man killing a woman who was trying to hurt her as a baby, and doing it right in front of her. She knew that if she found her father, he would be the only person who would protect her, and possibly give her the normal life she always craved.

Once she was able to locate a man who she felt very strongly was her biological father, she stalked him for weeks, memorizing his habits, trying to figure out who was around him and when, and seeing if she could ascertain his strengths and weaknesses, just in case she had to fight him for any reason. When she discovered a vulnerability, she decided to work on the timing for their reunion. She would need to wait for the most opportune moment to interject herself in his life when he was vulnerable, so she would have the advantage should he not be very happy to see her again. By this time, she was completely convinced he was her father, and the only thing left to do would be to see it in his eyes when they finally reunited.

The day came when she was able to do just that, and finally come face to face with the man who deliberately gave her life, and murdered for her. When he saw her, she saw a look of familiarity in his face that was unmistakable. He knew her, and she felt vindicated. Moving more closely to him, smiling so as not to appear threatening, she motioned that she was family, trying to make it clear who she was without alarming him.

She failed. He knew who she was, but he was more afraid of her than happy to see her. She had grown up beautiful, but her eyes would change from pale grey to solid black, and people thought she was a demon or a witch. She never realized when her eyes would change, only when she would see the reaction of the people she was trying to communicate with, would she understand what happened to make them look so scared. Mainly, she avoided communicating with anyone because it pained her so much to not be able to bond with anyone because they were afraid of her eyes.

Her father's face betrayed his fear and her heart broke. He was her last salvation, and if he was afraid of her, she just didn't see any reason to go on anymore. She didn't belong here. As her father came toward her, obviously in a defensive move, she closed her eyes and let him kill her. She felt her skull crack as he slammed her head with a piece of wood, blood streaming down over her eyelids, mixing with the tears that fell from her eyes as she wished for a different fate.

She fell to the ground and the beatings wouldn't stop. Finally, after he exhausted himself, she opened her eyes, stunned to find that she was still alive. Getting up from the ground, she looked down and saw a shell, a bloody shell, a casing maybe? The skin she shed when her father beat the life out of her? In any case, she looked at her father, chest heaving after his exertions. She saw her blood spatters all over his chest, his hands crimson from the stains. The man who created her, ended her.

Or thought he did.

When he looked up, he saw her, a second version of her, with solid black eyes, her hair bright red going all the way down to her knees, covering her entire nude body. He froze, staring, unable to believe his eyes. She walked over to him and looked down at him, sweating, bloody, terrified, motionless. Taking her right hand and forming a V with her forefinger and middle finger, she inserted both into his eyes, him unable to move to stop it, unable to scream in pain, unable to do anything but bleed. Once she skewered his eyeballs with her fingers, she pulled them out slowly, and he was suddenly able to scream. As she pulled, she felt each tendon ripping out of the socket, and she giggled when the last ones ripped out.

A guttural voice emitting from her throat, she spoke Basque, and said,

“Luzaro biziko zara iluntasunean eta atsekabea.”

The man lived to be 67, which was incredibly old for his time. On the day of his death, he was attended by his last daughter, who wouldn't leave his side after he lost his eyes. When he took his last breath, his daughter burned his body inside his secret cave and buried his bones as an offering. The day following the ceremonial burial, his daughter returned to the cave to find his bones arranged in an odd, angular pattern, his skull in the center of them. Fearing her life, his daughter ran away from the cave never to return.

The bones gathered dust and dirt over time, and were eventually covered when the cave collapsed on top of them. Over the centuries, people have reported seeing a man's ghost wandering aimlessly at night, often reaching up to touch his eyes.

Or perhaps the sockets where they used to be.

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“The Hunt”

DECEMBER 11, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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Finding a plethora of information about Sergei Laskin online after Zara gave you his full name, you located an article describing Sergei as Russia’s favorite pilot, and apparently, he was a fairly influential person in Moscow. She also showed you Iva Petrov’s case information online, and gave you backdoor access to what looked like the United States FBI website, so you could see if you could find out anything about him there, just because she wanted to have as many people hunting Sergei as possible.

“Even if I’m going to kill him?” You ask her.

“Especially if you’re going to kill him,” Zara responds. “Only he knows how many people he has involved in his warped plan, so even if he’s dead, he needs to be exposed for what he is. That way, his minions, however many there are, see their leader has been taken out. It will be easier to stop anything he might be setting in motion right now.”

“How are we supposed to save Cassie from him?”

“That’s the reason she’s coming to Kiev,” Zara says. “She’s probably already here by now, so we need to get to Moscow quickly before Sergei finds out she is gone.”

Zara arranges for a private car to pick you up and take you to Moscow after you’ve had time to clean up. She then leaves, saying she will call you when you get to Moscow.

On the way there, you start looking things up about Cassie online, even though Zara’s warning was still fresh in your mind. You weren’t

looking up information to hurt her, you were trying to help her. It was a long drive from Kiev to Moscow, and you had plenty of time.

After about an hour or so of searching for information about Cassie, you came upon a forum that required a login to view content that appeared in your search results when you tried a reverse image search for her FaceMedia profile photo. You created the login, using an assumed name, Cornholio69, and noticed that the forum required you to wait 24 hours and make 3 posts that weren't spammy before reading that specific post where Cassie's photo appeared. It had a heightened level of security due to the content contained inside. Looking through the forum, you decide to search for Sergei, or Iva Petrov. Finding nothing on Sergei, you found loads of posts about Iva Petrov, and many photos.

Engrossed, you discovered Iva was murdered under mysterious circumstances after relocating to Moscow from Vienna, Austria. Alarmingly beautiful, you locate a personal website she created in the months preceding her death. She had many selfies posted, most of them in frilly, sheer outfits that left little to the imagination. Her videos had you captivated, her accent and Russian sounded amazing, and you wished you could understand her. You'd have to see if Zara could translate when she contacted you. It seemed like something she'd probably be able to do.

You found some poems she wrote, in Russian, some of them appearing oddly cryptic with drawings of various methods of murder posted below each poem. Some of the poems appeared in shapes, triangular, circular, odd symbols; she typed the words on the page in such a way that they looked like art forms in addition to poems. Too bad you couldn't read them, but you could attempt to translate one. Finding one in the shape of a diamond, you go to Google translate to figure out what it means.

Ты

Доброкачественный

Почти скучно

Такой умный облик

Гневный внутри

Демонический

Кто

After reading the translation, you are more confused by the picture she selected for it. It was almost as though she loved the person she wrote it about, like they were someone she knew would hurt her. Deep down, you felt strongly it was about the person who eventually did murder her.

The photo she chose with the poem was a skull with a rose clutched between its teeth. What struck you was the last line of the poem. Like she was teasing you about who killed her; like she knew but couldn't say because now she was unable to. The identity of her killer was in that website, you were sure of it.

First things first, though, you had to find Sergei.

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“The Staircase”

DECEMBER 20, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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It was after 3AM, and he set his alarm twice before actually getting out of bed to do what he set out to do. He'd planned it for weeks.

Waiting for the perfect moment, when everyone would either be gone or asleep. Since the former was rarely true, the latter would have to suffice, and it eventually became a reality when he set his feet on the floor.

Taking the scissors in hand, he got down on his knees and crawled all the way down to the bottom. With each step, he remembered.

All the times he was scared. Anytime he felt like he couldn't get away, like he was trapped as the beatings rained down on his little body.

All the times he was hurt. Every landing blow and the heartbreak that accompanied it.

All the bruises. Reminders of all the times his heart, and sometimes his bones, broke.

All the scratches.

All the tears.

One by one, he inched his way down the stairs, motivating himself with each descending step. The oxygen machine was at the bottom. Even at 10, he knew how to find the hose that connected to his mother's nasal intubation tube. Would it work? He didn't know, but he had to try.

It had to have been at least a half hour he stood there, the scissors in his little shaking hand. He stared at the tube, listening to the low hum of the oxygen machine pumping the air through it, knowing it led to her, her nose, her lungs. It was helping to keep her alive.

Finally, deliberately, after weeks of planning to murder his own mother, he got down on his knees and cut, just a small cut, maybe a half inch, into the plastic tubing that led into the spare bedroom, under the sliding door, and through to the living room where his mother was laid up, unable to move or care for herself, his father taking care of her day and night after her terminal diagnosis.

Putting his little fingers against the cut he created on the tubing to feel the air coming out of the opening, he was satisfied his mother would be dead by the time he woke up. Taking his time to walk up the stairs back to his temporary bedroom and get some sleep, the little boy looked forward to the next day.

Low talking from the first floor drifted up the stairs to wake the little boy up the following morning. From what he could hear, they were talking about the cut in the tubing. Excited, the little boy jumped out of bed and ran down the stairs to see that the oxygen tank was still there, and a new tube had been installed. He didn't understand why she would need a new tube if she suffocated, so he went into the living room to see what was going on in there.

She was sitting up on her hospital bed, a concerned expression on her face. His father was discussing the tube with her, and when they saw you, they acknowledged you with gestures and went back to what they were discussing.

She didn't die.

The little boy, sorely disappointed, went back up to his bedroom. It didn't work, and he didn't have it in him to try again. She'd die eventually, he'd just have to wait a little longer.

When she eventually did, he lost his mind. He refused to believe it happened, and for six months, he denied her death. Even at her funeral, he didn't shed a tear. People wondered if he was really in mourning for her because he seemed jubilant and not at all the grieving son they expected to see. Acting like he understood she wasn't coming back, his father just said the little boy was still in shock, and that he was seeing a therapist.

Years later, when Sergei grew up, he told his father what he tried to do to his mother. His father was on his death bed, and Sergei was spending a lot of time with him at the convalescent home. He waited until he was sure his father would be gone soon, and confessed to him that the person who cut his mother's oxygen tube all those years ago was him, that he'd planned it down to the minute for weeks, and

was hopeful it would have killed her. When his father heard this, he wasn't shocked. He was saddened, and expressed it openly, but not surprised by it. Sergei asked his father why it didn't shock him that he tried to kill his mother. His father explained that he'd always seen Sergei as the type to become violent, but because he was intelligent and had many other qualities, he never thought to put him in therapy because he wanted Sergei to develop his talents for good. Instead of a psychiatrist, his father sent him to flight school, and bought him his first house.

A few hours after Sergei confessed, his father slipped into a deep sleep. Sergei sat with him for another hour holding his left knee, then he left, never to see him again.

Iva was such a sad girl, and so lost. She needed someone strong to guide her, like his mother did. She looked a little like his mother, long blonde hair and bright blue eyes. He wanted to get to know her better, to see if she was a better person than his mother was. He had expectations of women that were impossible to meet, but Iva seemed like she might be able to, if she wasn't so weepy and weak. His mother was at least strong, that was something Sergei could say for her. He could never defend himself against her, though he tried.

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“Sado-Monarchism”

DECEMBER 31, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>Also see this blog (Cassie's Ascent) for reference<<<

>>>And this blog (Cassie's Ascent) for reference<<<

“And if you would know God be not therefore a solver of riddles.

Rather look about you and you shall see Him playing with your children.

And look into space; you shall see Him walking in the cloud, outstretching His arms in the lightning and descending in rain.

You shall see Him smiling in flowers, then rising and waving His hands in trees.” – Kahlil Gibran, “On Religion,” from “The Prophet,” 1923. Retrieved from: <https://poets.org/poem/religion>

The commandments had to be rewritten, and changed to reflect the coming times. The new Bible would be called something else also, because it could not reflect the old world at all. It would need to be timely, and set the bar for what would be expected of humanity under the Czar’s rule.

All his life, Sergei had admired ancient Roman civilization and the way it shaped the Western world. Becoming obsessed with the story of Jesus and Pilate, Sergei decided if he were to recreate this the way he always envisioned, there would need to be adequate surrogates in place. It was something that would need to also be chronicled, so it would have to be on the news. This way, multiple accounts would be recorded, so when the eventual “rule book” was disbursed among those selected (and those left behind, both strategically and carelessly), it would slowly become gospel. It was human nature to flock to scenes like this, and he had been planning a world take over his whole life. Even though most of it, he thought it was a fantasy. Today, Sergei was confident he had the ways and means to rule the Earth by destroying all opposition with war, and once he had achieved this goal, colonizing the areas he meant to purify, so that each race would be bred according to strengths, in order to best purify those remaining. The generations to come would follow under Sergei’s heir’s rule by Iva, and it was already predetermined how it would come to pass. The only remaining step was insemination, and complete isolation for the duration of the pregnancy. It would be a controlled process, one in which Sergei

would monitor everything about what went in Iva's body and what she did at every moment of every day, as all her actions would impact the eventual King of the Colonies, his successor. Sergei's plans for his son and heir included space exploration, to expand their rule. While it seemed improbable in his lifetime, new developments led Sergei to believe it would be possible in his eventual son's lifetime.

In 2035, when the group known as American Intelligence broke apart, Sergei decided it was time to put his plan into action. Recruiting Dr. Popov, he essentially dropped off their radar and began his experiments with people no one really cared about or missed on the streets of Moscow. When he finally recruited Cassie, his plan failed as she was able to escape, but that didn't stop Sergei from finding her and monitoring everything she did. Even now, as she was trying to evade him, worrying herself sick about AI, when the whole time, it was Sergei directing her every move. Leading her straight to him to fulfill his ultimate fantasy of creating his future king using Cassie as his surrogate Iva, and putting her on the news to deliver his final message of doom to the world when the time came.

The religion Sergei imagined revolved around a monarchy, with his family name, Laskin, being the first to hold the titles, having earned the right through the third world war, which was brewing. Sergei silently built his army with Dr. Popov, in hiding, and they were starting to develop. After Sergei recruited Dr. Popov to conduct his experiments in a private practice paid for by Sergei, he wanted to supervise a few of them, just to fully understand what it was Dr. Popov did to lose his privilege to practice medicine. After he was present during some of these experiments, he kept the subjects alive for years to monitor their reactions to the surgeries; insertion of caps of paint in their spines. Some died horribly within weeks, others lived and became deformed, but there were a few who started to act like zombies – not sleeping, losing their appetite, becoming aggressive and attacking each other. Sometimes, the zombies would even kill each other, the victor consuming some of the remains of the fallen.

Sergei demanded Dr. Popov create as many of these zombies as possible, and he held them all as prisoners in his cellar. Dr. Popov had a storm cellar on his farm he held some of these zombies prisoner also, but the ones Dr. Popov kept captive were different from the ones Sergei had. The ones at Dr. Popov's farm were inbred. Sergei and Dr. Popov kidnapped a few poor families to conduct spinal experiments on them, and then, would force them to copulate and breed with each other. The offspring were contained at Dr. Popov's remote farm property in Ostashkov.

Planning to use these zombies to start the third world war, Sergei was upset by the fact that he could not find Dr. Popov to strategize. He was suspicious of Dr. Popov's intentions with Cassie, as he was fully aware he gave her a ride home and they exchanged numbers. For all he knew though, that was where they left it. It was just troubling that neither Cassie nor Dr. Popov could be found at the current moment, though that was subject to change. Sergei had a way of finding anyone he wanted to, even you, Jim.

While you were diligently following Zara's orders and trying to locate Sergei, he was alerted when you started searching for information about his pilot's license. When he found out someone was looking for him, it prompted him to contact his friend, Harry Buono, an American computer hacker who evaded imprisonment by seeking asylum in Russia when he was indicted for multiple counts of wire fraud and whistleblowing. Buono was able to find out the location of the person looking for Sergei, but the problem is that Sergei thinks it's Zara. He doesn't know who you are, or that Zara even recruited you for a mission.

Sergei and Buono decide to hunt for Zara, and find out why she was searching for Sergei. They didn't end things very well, and the last time they spoke, they basically both threatened each other's lives, under no uncertain terms. After a few hours of searching, Buono located Zara in the Ukraine.

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“Under Siege”

JANUARY 15, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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Once Buono located Zara in the Ukraine, finding Cassie was easy. Before too long, a plan was underway to lay siege to Arseny’s farm to lure Zara out into the open. Sergei was sure she was there, as she had been trying to thwart his plans with Cassie from day one, for her own designs. Sergei had been trying to kill her for months, but she was always three steps ahead of him.

Not this time. This was too important. Things were starting to happen in the United States, and their election year was approaching quickly. The charades had already begun, but the time for Russia to act was now, and he needed to do something quickly, before the government stepped in. He needed to respond first, like this White Horse was doing in the United States. And the girl, he couldn't remember her name. Sergei ordered Buono to find everything he could on Red Fury while Sergei enlisted the help of Dr. Popov to lure Cassie out of hiding.

Buono was able to hack into Cassie's phone, and before long, was able to re-route calls going to her phone to his number so that she would only be able to make outgoing calls, which he could track. Buono then hacked Zoe's and Arseny's phones, confirming they were all together inside the home on Arseny's property. Once he had those three targets on his radar, he got to work digging up everything on Red Fury for Sergei.

Dr. Popov was very agreeable when Sergei suggested he lure Cassie out of hiding. Excited at the opportunity to see her again, he didn't even consider the circumstances. It was as though he thought it didn't really make a difference, considering the powerful connection they experienced when they met. He wanted to meet up with her again after that, but was fearful of Sergei's jealousy. Cassie avoided reaching out after learning of Sergei's true identity, but she was still very interested in Xzavier. Sergei suggested Xzavier contact Cassie, not knowing she was unable to receive incoming calls. When he discovered Buono rigged her phone this way, he immediately returned with Dr. Popov to his office where Buono waited for him, pensive.

When Buono gave Sergei all the information he found on Red Fury, Sergei ordered Dr. Popov to tie up Buono while Sergei demanded Buono show Dr. Popov how to reverse this hack on Cassie's phone. Buono walked Xzavier through it, and when it was completed, Sergei put a ball gag in Buono's mouth and ordered Xzavier to call Cassie. After a few moments of a very awkwardly flirty conversation, they

agreed to meet up. Cassie didn't say she was in Kiev though, not to Xzavier, though they all knew that's where she was. They were going to meet up in Moscow the following day. At least, that's what she said on the phone. Sergei released Buono and ordered him to stay at the office in Moscow with Xzavier while Sergei recruited another friend of his, Svetozar Dornink, a professional assassin, to join him on his hunt for Zara, as well as Cassie.

Sergei called Cassie's story a bluff, and said she was saying that to throw anyone off who might be looking for her. Xzavier wasn't sure, she seemed sincere, but then again, she could just be planning to stand him up. Either way, he knew where she was, so he'd get to see her again, so Xzavier remained unconcerned. Sergei seemed a little miffed that Xzavier exhibited such confidence, and was jealous that he was much better looking also. They also hadn't been intimate in a few days, something Sergei was growing angrier about by the hour. Not one to beg for sex, Serge enlisted Svetozar as his temporary lover, while Xzavier seemed to take pleasure in infuriating him.

You were able to find Sergei's office, and noticed it was different from the flat near where Cassie lived. It was located closer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Digging a little deeper, you discovered it was an underground bunker of sorts, and you shuddered to think of the horrors you might find there.

Somehow eager to avoid disappointing Zara, you decided to take a small detour to find his office in Moscow. Making note of the coordinates of Arseny's farm, you create your route from Kiev to Moscow based on how you think Sergei would travel. Knowing what little you did about him, you figured it would be more than enough for you to attempt to think like him, and you were able to put yourself in a fugitive's frame of mind anyway, given what you did in Arizona. If you were successful in finding Sergei on the road, you could kill two birds with one stone, no pun intended.

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Moon Conjunct Pluto

JANUARY 29, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT / EDIT

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“The native with this aspect is most likely to have had a powerful connection to the Mother or Mother figure. Whether it’s love or hate, either way, ‘Mother’ has been a dynamic force in shaping the emotional landscape. There may be a super-sensitive antenna for trouble, drama, chaos, darkness or simply negative energy.” – Leah Whitehorse, “Natal Aspects – Moon conjunct Pluto,” 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.leahwhitehorse.com/2013/09/27/natal-aspects-moon-conjunct-pluto/>

On Tuesday, January 29, 2036, Sergei and 25 of his militant foot soldiers laid traps around Arseny’s farm in Kiev, effectively isolating Arseny, Zoe, and Cassie. While Buono hunted Zara, you stayed at the farm, pensively watching without notice, knowing you had to prioritize saving Cassie. There wasn’t much you could do but watch at this point, as you were sorely outnumbered. Hearing Sergei speaking Russian over a megaphone, you see Arseny come out of the farm and throw his hands up in the air, clearly frightened and

exasperated. A single gunshot to the head brought the big man to the ground, and your jaw dropped as you watched him fall, not expecting to see anyone die today.

Hearing screams coming from inside, you see a woman come running out to Arseny, crying and screaming something in Russian. Another shot and she drops to his side. Was that Cassie? You wanted to run over there, but you didn't dare. Suddenly, you see the woman they shot sit up, dizzy, holding her hand to her head. A soldier runs up to her with his gun pointed at her and yanks her up off the ground as three other soldiers put something over her head, hold her down on the ground, and shoot her in the back of the head. The soldiers then retrieve Arseny's body, and begin to dig a grave for the two near what you now assume is Zoe's body.

"Iva," Sergei shouts over the megaphone, "your friends all dead. Come out and you'll not be hurt."

You're shaking. How are you supposed to kill him without being noticed? You pull out the only weapon you had, your .38 revolver, fully loaded, your hands shaking. Taking a few deep breaths, you look around to find a tree to climb, so you can hopefully get a better vantage point. You were a great shot, but without a ranged weapon, it would be a struggle killing Sergei.

You had to try. Cassie's life depended on it.

Finding a massive black alder tree, you started to climb up when you realized it wouldn't hold your weight. The only other trees you could find nearby were pine, and you started to lose confidence in this plan to kill Sergei. The only way it would work is if you got closer, you realized, looking back to see the militant soldiers raising their weapons and pointing them at the cabin where Cassie was still hiding inside.

"Iva, you are surrounded and will be shot if you do not come out in the next five minutes," Sergei orders, turning around and saying something in Russian to a man next to him, who then started to walk toward the front door of the cabin.

“Now,” you whisper under your breath, breaking into a run.

Not worrying about being seen or possibly shot, you run, zig zagging through the trees, looking directly at Sergei, your gun in your right hand, ready to shoot anyone who tried to stop you. Once you got about 100 feet away, you stopped and crouched behind a thick pine tree for cover. It didn't appear anyone saw you, and you weren't being followed.

Raising the .38 and taking a deep breath, you aimed it at Sergei's legs. If you could get him off his feet at least, it might be enough of a distraction for the rest of the soldiers so that they stopped focusing on Cassie. Then you could somehow break into the cabin and get her to safety.

You pull the trigger. Sergei drops, his blood pooling around his left leg, his screams of agony echoing throughout the forest.

The militants stop and immediately look in your direction. You stare at them, not moving for fear of being seen or heard. Some of them start running toward where you are, and you slowly start backing away from the tree, careful not to make too much noise in the snow. They still don't see you. You start to slowly slide to the left, closer to a clearing where you'd eventually have to run to get to the back of the cabin. You hide behind a large hill, the militants still searching for any sign of life. You hear a storm of bullets as the soldiers take aim at something about 500 feet to your right. You take that opportunity to run further away from them, still staying close to the edge of the clearing so you could make your way down to the cabin as soon as you were able to.

After the militants discovered a dead moose riddled with bullets, they shouted something back at Sergei in Russian, you assumed they were relaying the message that they failed to find the shooter. Sergei was howling in pain, and the soldiers who were burying Zoe and Arseny dropped what they were doing and picked Sergei up, escorting them back to their vehicles.

“Iva, I vill return, if you leave here, you die!” Sergei shouted in the megaphone one last time before being loaded into an SUV.

About an hour after the majority of the militants left to escort Sergei to a hospital, you noticed five of them stayed behind, outside the cabin. You wished you could see what was going on inside the cabin, if Cassie was safe, or if she was even in there. You’d have to kill the five soldiers to find out, and you only have five bullets left.

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“Masquerade”

FEBRUARY 7, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog (Cassie’s) for reference<<<

>>>And this blog (Cassie’s) for reference<<<

“Fifty Million Different Masks”

Fifty million different masks,

All unique in their own way,

Casually, yet carefully, placed on her face

And worn each and every day.

Each have one distinctive trait

One can often recognize

Easily, and yet almost reluctantly,

The truth is bared in her eyes.

Her inner self left hidden,

Oh, it must be quite a task,

For one cannot hide what lies inside with just

Fifty million different masks.

-Melissa Starr, 1993

Completely unaware of it, Cassie served as a portal to life for Zara, and she was the reason for nearly everything that happened from that point forward. Slowly piecing together why Cassie was truly important, you started to become more protective of her, remembering the visions you had when Zara possessed you. Cassie was the focal point for all of AI, simply because she was a medium, she just didn't realize it. She didn't even realize it after her heart surgery, when she became much more than a medium; she was now a vessel.

Inside Cassie's heart was a small computer chip that was implanted when she died briefly after her MDMA experience in Cave Creek. In the years preceding the missions you and Cassie were called for, Cassie was continually monitored through this device, which was able to record emotional responses to situations, and even create emotional responses where ones didn't normally exist. Experiments had been conducted on Cassie without her even realizing it; these experiments were what Zara struggled to explain to Cassie now, as you listened with intent. You didn't really like Zara, but you didn't want to upset her, and you weren't sure what she was planning to do with you now that she had Cassie there.

Cassie had the same reaction you did at first, when she listened to Zara explaining AI and these experiments, and thought Zara was full of shit. Zara was able to convince Cassie that she was telling the truth by describing detailed events of Cassie's life, events that only Cassie would know about. You remembered when Zara told you the same things about your life, when she was trying to convince you she was telling the truth about who she was. You still didn't fully understand who she was, but you were too afraid to ask her about any more details.

Zara explained, as best she could, that Cassie was chosen because of her heart condition, and when the opportunity arose to implant the

computer chip in her heart, AI took it. The entire thing, the MDMA, the party, everything, was orchestrated by AI. Zara didn't say it explicitly, but you knew she was the reason behind all of it. She wanted to be Cassie, wanted to have her life, and if she was unable to do that, she would control every aspect of it. It made sense now, that's how she saved her.

It was starting to make you angry how Zara just thought she could come into anyone's life and just use them to further her own means. Now that she had Cassie, all that was left for you was to kill Sergei and what then? Would she kill you?

Continuing to explain why Cassie was a vessel, Zara said the plan was for the chosen ones to be reduced to a digital conscience that could then be transferred into compartmentalized data that would be uploaded and stored within this computer chip inside Cassie's heart. She would essentially be carrying the souls of hundreds of thousands of people. These "chosen ones" would travel inside Cassie's heart while she was frozen cryogenically and shipped to another planet, one that had been selected by the members of AI. Zara wanted you to kill Sergei because she didn't want him to somehow end up there, in Cassie's heart, awaiting transport. Explaining that Cassie would live her natural life, and would not sacrifice any of the experiences that life has to offer, Zara said the choice was ultimately Cassie's, and she could live as long or as short a life as she wanted. At the date of her choosing, Cassie would then be frozen, for thousands of years, until the year 3300, when the new planet was to be colonized.

When she awoke, she would give birth to the entire population of the new planet, and would rule as its Queen. That was the plan. Cassie was chosen by Zara for this role, and explained that the reason she didn't take the role for herself was because this lifetime was her last, and once it was over, she was to return to where she came from, but she would leave a daughter behind, so she could be a sister to Cassie's eventual son.

None of it made any sense, but Zara didn't possess Cassie to prove it to her, like she did to you, she showed her the AI database, and everything that had been planned for years. She showed Cassie her own childhood, in oddly pieced together videos, seeming like she was cutting parts out of it. You started to have flashbacks of your own childhood when you watched the videos, seeing that Cassie lived in the same area you did when you were a child.

Zara looked hard at you and you knew who Cassie was to you now.

"Don't tell her yet," you heard Zara's silent whisper in your ear as she continued to try to explain to Cassie what the whole point of AI was in the first place, and why she had to fulfill her mission.

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“Vessel”

FEBRUARY 18, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>See this blog for reference also<<<

>>>Also see this blog (Cassie’s ascent) for reference too pls<<<

“Jim, I need to talk to you for a minute,” Zara motions for you to follow her inside so she can talk to you privately.

You look over at Cassie and roll your eyes, then follow Zara inside, going into one of the bedrooms and closing the door behind you.

“What?”

“What are you doing?”

“Talking to Cassie, why do you care?”

“I told you not to tell her yet.”

You roll your eyes and sigh. “I didn’t tell her anything, do you think she’s stupid? She already knows, she put it together,” you say. “I put it together, didn’t I?”

“There’s a reason I didn’t want her to know,” Zara replies, turning her back to you and lighting a cigarette.

“And that might be?”

Zara took a long puff of her cigarette and turned around, blowing the smoke in your face. “I don’t have to explain myself to you, Jim. I can

end you right here and now, I don't owe you anything."

"I'm sick of this power trip, you tell me just enough information to keep me interested and then you close off when it really matters, turning into whatever kind of alien you are to try and scare me, well, I've had it, Zara," you reply to her vague threat. "Tell me why you don't want her to know I'm her brother. I want her to know, I know, and she should too."

"I don't want her to know yet because of all the emotional trauma she's been through already. Like she needs another disappointment," Zara gives you a disapproving look. "Your mother left you behind because you were violent with Cassie, did you know that? That's why she left you with your father."

You blinked. Her words stung, but you knew they were true. You remembered hitting Cassie when you were kids, punching her and pulling her hair. You didn't consider it anything but playing though, albeit a bit rough. You were both kids, kids sometimes play rough with each other.

"I also didn't want her to know because of what she is to us, to the world," Zara explains further. "I'm sorry, Jim, but your family is a stain, she just happened to come from it, but she was the best thing that did."

You sat down on the bed. "What's the point of all this? I'm tired of trying to figure you out, to do what you want me to do and still be left with nothing but confusion. Why do you still need me?" You reached for one of Zara's cigarettes and lit it. "Do you even still need me?"

Zara laughed. "If I didn't, do you think I would have let you live? You killed Sergei, that in itself is a major step toward your redemption."

"I did?"

Zara nodded, smiling. "Yes, he died on the way to the hospital," she puffed her cigarette again. "It doesn't mean he's completely gone though, I'm sure Dr. Popov has him preserved, but he's easier to manipulate than Sergei was."

“So what now?”

“We find him.”

“Dr. Popov?”

“Yes, he’s probably at his farm, and he’s probably already looking for us. We have to find him and destroy Sergei’s essence, otherwise there is a chance he could be reborn and we’d have to find him again.”

“Okay, and you need me to do this?”

Zara laughed. “Are you completely stupid, Jim? Yes, I need you to do this,” Zara mocked your voice. “But you have to stay out of the way of him and Cassie.”

“What do you mean?”

“He likes her, and she likes him, so she’s perfect bait to get him to come to us.”

You stand up and look at Zara like she’s crazy. “Bait? I thought Cassie was the most important person on the planet to you,” you say, your arms outstretched, “the most important person on the planet to humanity, according to your story. So you’re saying the most important person in the world has been reduced to bait so you can get this doctor to come out of hiding?” You take a drag from your cigarette and blow it into her face. She blinks and waves the smoke away. “You have a crush on Dr. Popov don’t you, Zara?” You start laughing. “You trying to get laid one last time before you die?”

“Fuck you,” Zara laughed. “I want him on our side, he’s still loyal to Sergei. We need him if we are going to be successful.”

“Again, I don’t understand what the fuck you mean. It’s like you’re talking to yourself half the time and expect everyone to have the same mind reading ability you do.”

Zara looks in your eyes and suddenly you have a flashback of when you were on your way to New Orleans, and you saw the accident between the Dodge Challenger and the Acura Integra. Ivan

Semenov, the Russian who you thought was eviscerated after the head-on collision in front of the gas station where you were changing your flat tire.

You remembered the alien looking creature, the one who looked at you and when it did, you felt your spine twitch.

The note. Did you still have it? What did it say?

“It said “the rebels did this,” Zara pulled the note out of her bra and showed it to you.

“Okay, what does this have to do with anything?”

“That alien you saw, that was the point, Jim.”

“You’re confusing the fuck out of me, would you please just say what you mean?” You stub out your cigarette.

“The Russians are going to be making a large deposit in Montana soon, and Dr. Popov is arranging it right now, as we speak. This deposit is going to start a war, and some of us will still be left behind because that’s our role – to fight it.”

“Our role?”

“Not mine, I’ll be dead long before any of that happens,” Zara stubs out her cigarette. “But you’re going to need to be equipped to handle the new world after everyone selected to go to Algorab leaves the planet.”

“Huh?”

“You’re not going to space right now, Jim, Jesus Christ, why are you so stupid sometimes?”

“So I get to stay here? That’s good, I don’t want to go to space, but what kind of deposit are you talking about?”

“Back to the point, Jim. The alien. It wasn’t actually an alien, it was an essence that had been released without having a body to be released in. Think of it as an earthbound spirit, the concept is essentially the same. Those are basically spirits that roam the Earth

without a destination because they still have a mission to accomplish before they can move on. While these aliens, as you like to call them, are similar to the concept of earthbound spirits, they are different in that they can never move on until they are able to possess a body of someone susceptible to mediumship, someone who is open enough to allow them to completely possess them, someone weak enough to give over their entire being to the essence of the alien.

“The alien you saw was an essence that is still here to work on its mission. You will likely see many more during your time on Earth, as you will be here for a very long time before you can go to Algorab.”

“What the fuck is an Algorab?” You ask.

“It’s the new planet. It’s where we’re going to avoid the apocalypse. The chosen ones get to go first, and others who are strong enough to survive the aftermath will come in time,” Zara looked at you and smiled. “It might take you centuries before you are able to join us.”

“I don’t get it, I’m sorry.”

“You will when we get to Dr. Popov, he will give you the operation and you will understand far more then. Until then though, it will seem confusing to you because you are still looking at it literally instead of looking at it in a more abstract light.”

Operation? “I don’t want some psycho doctor to operate on me,” you protest.

“You won’t even know it happened when it’s finished. And when the time is right, you’ll get to choose your death and Dr. Popov will release your essence so that you can find a new body to possess. You’ll get to be just like me, basically, except you won’t have to endure nearly as much time on Earth as I have,” Zara laughs. “And you’ll get to time travel, so you can go back to reference anything you might have forgotten that you need to get to Algorab and reunite with Cassie.”

“So what I understand so far is that alien I saw in Louisiana is some spirit that is still here because they need a body to possess,” you speak slowly. “Was that alien trying to possess me?”

“Yes, it was, actually,” Zara smiled at you. “Look at you catching on. You have a long way to go though, Jim.”

“Well a little help would be nice, I mean, you have done this, I haven’t. So I’m going to have an operation by Dr. Popov, become immortal like you, and roam the Earth for hundreds of years looking for a body to possess so I can join everyone in space, basically,” you restated, grateful that she wasn’t going to kill you at least. “Who was that alien I saw, though? Who’s spirit was that? And why did they want my body?”

“The alien was you, Jim. You. That was your essence.”

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Cassie the Ascent

“Sven”

NOVEMBER 3, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>..., ...!<<<

You're reading over the paperwork you have on your mission and you start to get the feeling something is missing. You look through your stuff again and again, and try logging into the remote, external-facing access point system AI gave you for the purpose of logging your findings when you eventually are recruited at RWNN. You can't find anything out of place, and it's extraordinarily rare for you to leave anything behind. You're incredibly organized, this just doesn't feel right to you. It's as though you left something at the – oh okay, maybe the hotel room? You still had it for another couple of nights. You felt like moving some stuff into your new flat, though, and you thought you'd retrieved all your work stuff but evidently not.

An unexpected knock at your front door had you wondering who was there to visit. The only person you could think of could be Zoe, no one else but the landlord knew you lived there. Well, and Xzavier, but he didn't really know, not officially. You look out the small peephole in your front door and see an old man with thick glasses and an ushanka, even though you didn't feel like it was cold enough for all that, and you're from Phoenix. You opened the door, a little curious as to who this old man was.

He looked up at you and while you felt like you'd seen him somewhere before, you didn't recognize him, and quickly put it aside. He introduced himself as Sven, and said he was your neighbor. He noticed you had moved in and wanted to invite you to meet his son, Xzavier. You mentioned you'd met Xzavier and invited Sven inside, feeling immediately comfortable with him.

It's Sergei, of course, but he is somehow able to convince you he is Sven, the benign neighbor. You didn't spend too much time with Sergei, really, in retrospect. You weren't even aware that he was the one flying you from JFK to Moscow. Xzavier had been following you after Boris lost track of you, and this was all rehearsed. Of course, you were none the wiser. You simply thought this was all happening naturally. Sven tells you a bit about the history of the flat you are renting, and you are fascinated by the story of a girl named Iva Petrov he starts to tell you about. Without revealing anything about your mission, Sven tells you of Iva's murder, and that she once stayed in the flat you are now renting.

You're taken aback by this revelation, and you don't understand why you would be trying to adopt the personality and identity of a high profile murder victim in order to obtain a job at a major news network where everyone would know you were not who you said you were. You voiced your concerns and were met with Sven's blank face. It was like he just simply blacked out and stared off into the distance at nothing. You looked off at where he was looking and didn't see anything out of the ordinary, and when you looked back at Sven, he was looking directly at you, a strange smile on his face. You shivered.

"I must go," he said, getting up from his seat at your kitchen table. He saw himself out.

You decided to pore over the internet to find anything you can about Iva Petrov. You find all the articles about her disappearance and when she was found. You see the photos of Boris and remember Boris on the plane. The man in the picture called Boris reminds you of Sergei, and you start to feel the hair on the back of your neck stand up. You pull out your cell phone to find a contact for AI and notice that they have all been mysteriously deleted from your contact list. You try to get your contact list from your laptop app that's connected to your phone, hoping you have some sort of back up.

Nothing.

Why would AI want you on a mission where you would be playing the role of a dead girl news reporter?

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“An American Disease”

NOVEMBER 13, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>..., ...!<<<

Late summer 2035 brought about an eccentric ailment an increasing number of American expats near Moscow and St. Petersburg were reported as receiving treatment for, according to the Russian Medical Council. The news reported it as being isolated to travelers coming from America, but failed to report that most of the people reporting this illness already lived in Russia.

Symptoms were aggression, sleep problems, loss of appetite, vomiting, memory loss, and body numbness. Some people afflicted

reported being unable to feel pain due to the numbness in their bodies. Treatment was reportedly similar to treatment of flu symptoms, but virologists were studying other explanations, as offspring of afflicted individuals with children were reportedly also affected. This was also not mentioned in the news, so as not to create a panic.

Xzavier became very interested in the progression of research on this mysterious ailment, especially since a lot of the people reporting it were people he treated before he lost his medical license.

Deciding to contact his former employer, Xzavier explained that he had some concerns with the symptoms being reported by these American expats, and wanted to discuss these concerns with the chief physician. After a little difficulty getting the hospital staff to take him seriously and listen, he was finally successful with booking an appointment with the chief physician to talk about what he thought was really happening.

When Xzavier lost his medical license, he was paid handsomely for his silence regarding his experimental spinal operations on unsuspecting patients by the hospital where he was discovered. Upon meeting with the chief physician, Xzavier explained that when he was conducting these experiments, he would sometimes inject capsules of lead-based paint into the vertebrae of his patients, and that their symptoms sounded like some sort of evolved lead poisoning. Furthermore, Xzavier feared that the offspring of these afflicted Americans were also affected because the lead must have entered the patient's blood stream after some time had passed. Expressing his sincerest regret, he stated he thought that the capsules must have burst over time, giving the patient a time-released tolerance to the lead-based paint, thus creating some sort of evolved poisoning that can now be transmuted through DNA on to the afflicted person's children.

The hospital again paid Xzavier for his silence, and agreed to keep him in their employ for possible treatment options, and for assistance should this American disease evolve further.

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“The Girl With the Golden Heart”

NOVEMBER 16, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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“Some girls are born different than others,” your mother said to you as you lay on her lap, sucking your thumb. You tried playing hopscotch with some of the other girls at school but you kept losing your breath, and your heart kept pounding too fast. It was making you tired.

Momma always knew how to make you feel better. You’d lay down on her lap and cry sometimes, or you would just suck your thumb and let her play with your hair to calm you down. You’d fall asleep there occasionally, because you felt safe. You always wanted her whenever you felt like you were in trouble, and it’s something that will never change, even though she’s gone now.

When she was there, though, she told you why you felt like that. She knew everything, everything you ever had a question about, Momma had the answer to. She said the reason you couldn’t play with the other girls sometimes is because you needed your body to be as strong as your heart was. She’d crouch down to your height, put your hair behind your ears, kiss your forehead, boop your nose, and tell you,

“Cassie, you don’t know who you are, do you?”

You’d shake your head every time, excited, because you knew what she’d say. It was just so much fun for you to hear her say it again and again.

She’d smile. “You’re the girl with the golden heart. Your heart is made of gold, so you have to have a big, strong body to be able to

support your big, strong heart,” Momma would always cry when she would say that, and you just thought it was because she was happy.

“Why is my heart made of gold, Momma?” You’d ask her.

She’d pause and either look away to hide the tears, or look down to mask the fact that they were falling. “You have a heart of gold because God chose you to be the Queen of the World, and he decided to hide his Royal Crown Jewels inside of your chest since he knew you’d grow big and strong,” her voice would sometimes crack right there. You always thought it was because she was sad you wouldn’t be a little girl forever. “When you grow up Cassie, when you’re strong enough to give him the jewels back, he will come for you and replace your heart of gold with a heart made of diamonds, and you will be Queen forever.” That was the part where she’d usually grab you and squeeze you tight, trying to hide the fact that she was sobbing.

After Mark was diagnosed with cancer, you didn’t cope with it well. Before you met Paul, you tried to lose yourself in your work, and you were successful with doing so, but your fatigue became a problem. So did your anxiety. A friend suggested you join her after work one weekend to go to a house party a friend of hers was having in Cave Creek. Her friend had a large estate with 2 acres of land, and said that there would be MDMA there. You’d never tried MDMA, and your friend told you if you had any worries in the world, you’d forget them. Your friend also said you’d likely want to hook up with someone, most people did when they were on it. You were intrigued, and even though you didn’t think it was a good idea at all to do drugs, you wanted some sort of escape from your reality.

At first, it was wonderful; every feeling, sound, taste was amplified by a hundred for you. You felt like you were invincible, like you could dance and drink all night. Before long, you met someone named Rob who was there with his girlfriend. His girlfriend told you she didn’t have a name, she was a symbol. You were fascinated with them. They said they were swingers and invited you into a threesome. You politely declined, but later, Rob came back and said he wanted to be

alone with you, that his girlfriend found someone she was interested in.

You let Rob massage your back, and it felt amazing. His girlfriend came in and Rob left you there, on the couch, to just bask in the air conditioning and music blaring. Your friend came to find you and seemed worried about your appearance. You sat up quickly, and felt vertigo.

The next thing you remember, you woke up and you were in a hospital room, floating above a hospital bed. You looked down and saw yourself, your chest opened, a team of surgeons working on you. You turned around to see a light shining and a golden figure hovering, beckoning you to come. You made your way toward the figure, and it was your mother. You could see her face clearly, just as you remembered her as a little girl.

“Cassie, do you remember who you are?” she said in a musical sounding voice, almost singing.

You opened your mouth to speak and you were awake in the bed, looking up at the bright light above you. A doctor notices you fluttering your eyes and puts something over your mouth, putting you back to sleep.

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“Come Alive”

NOVEMBER 23, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>..., ...!<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive. – Howard Thurman

You became obsessed with finding out who Iva Petrov really was, and why you were supposed to become her, especially if she was dead. Unable to locate any back up copies of your AI contacts list, you tried logging into your email account you used exclusively for communication. The password didn’t seem to be working, so you tried to reset it, and you noticed your back up phone number had changed. The last four digits were ones you didn’t recognize.

There was only one person you trusted in Russia, and that was Zoe. You decided to call her and tell her everything. She listened to you as you spoke, often rambling because of your fear, continuing to tell her everything for over three hours. Barely speaking other than to acknowledge and validate what you were saying, Zoe finally, after three hours suggested she come to your flat to talk to you. Disconnecting the call, you realized as soon as you hung up with her, you didn’t know anyone else in Russia, and you suddenly felt incredibly vulnerable.

Your cell phone rang, and you immediately answered without checking the caller ID, thinking it was Zoe calling back. You hear static. Then someone who sounded faint in the distance. “Cassie?” “Hello?” You respond. It sounded like Paul. Again. Like the time in your hotel room.

The call dropped and you checked the caller ID to find it was blocked, just like before. Going back onto your laptop to watch the videos you found on Iva’s personal YourVid channel, you poured a glass of ice water, and tried not to think about the phone call. You

wondered if Sven was at his flat down the street. You decided to go outside to wait for Zoe to come over. You had to feel safe where you were living after all. Even if Sven gave you the creeps, you liked his son, so you tried to think about him instead.

Stepping out onto your small porch area, you look down the street where Sven lived. You noticed a light in his front window go out as soon as you close your front door. Expecting to see him come outside, you decide to crouch down so he doesn't see you right away. You sit on the front steps, and just then, Zoe pulls up.

Thankful to see her, you stand up to say hello. She exits her car and walks up to you, giving you a hug and asking if you are alright. You're very grateful you met her, even though you're still not even sure you can trust her. Zoe feels like a safe person, though, so you're going to. She follows you into your flat and you close and lock both deadbolts on the door behind you.

Showing her everything you find on Iva Petrov, you tell her you still haven't figured out why you would be recruited to be her on the news. You tell Zoe you don't know how you know you are supposed to be a reporter, that is a vision that came to you. It sounds incredibly strange when you say it, as you are not one prone to having visions, or anything remotely like that. When you tell her this, you are reminded of what Sergei told you on the plane after your spine was twitching. Like he was reading your mind.

"He said wait for 24 hours or something," you mutter under your breath.

"Pardon?" Zoe asks.

"Nothing, sorry, I just thought of something," you shrug it off. How do you know what role you will be playing at RWNN? No one told you. There wasn't anything about that in your briefing, that you remember. You can't check now, though, because you no longer have access to anything AI related. You ask Zoe if she has heard of anything to do with AI, or American Intelligence.

Zoe giggles, “No, I’m not very interested in politics at all, honestly,” she says. “When you told me about your mission the first time, I laughed, because I heard about you, and I was told you would be coming on a mission, I didn’t believe it until I saw you at the museum that day.”

You’re shocked. “You heard about me? What do you mean?”

Zoe asks to use your computer. You give her your laptop, and she pulls up a website where she logs in to a member forum page. She explains to you that this is a conspiracy theory website that claims you are going to start the third world war. She shows you an article posted in this forum with your FaceMedia profile photo. You read the forum post incredulously, finding wonder in the fact that anyone would even devote time to you in this way.

“What on Earth inspired this?” You ask.

Zoe laughs loudly. “I really don’t know, I just find it funny, I never take any of it seriously. I didn’t know you were real until we met that day. Nothing online can be trusted.”

It’s still disturbing to you, especially that now you are in a foreign country with one friend and no way to contact AI. “Where is the American Embassy?” You ask Zoe.

Zoe searches for it on Google Maps. You save the directions from your flat. You decide to contact them the next day. You don’t feel like doing anything but sitting inside and staying safe. Zoe asks if you want her to hang out with you for the night. You do, so you ask her to and she agrees. You ask her to have her boyfriend come over and hang out too, and she thinks that’s a great idea, so it’s not just the two of you alone. He comes by, and you meet him. His name is Arseny and says you can call him Arse. You laugh about that while he remains straight-faced. Feeling idiotic, you apologize and he laughs.

Deciding to watch “What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?” on a Pay-Per-View channel, you all have a small pow wow on the floor in your flat.

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Путешествие

DECEMBER 2, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>..., ...!<<<

Arseny suggested a detour from the American Embassy when you all woke up the following morning. Hesitant, you only agreed because you felt like putting some distance between yourself and the situation would be a good idea. Discussing at length where you would go and why, Arseny mentioned he had property in the Ukraine.

“The Ukraine?” You ask, not hiding your concern. You look at Zoe, who seems to be encouraging you. Your gut tells you to trust her, but you really feel like it would be better (and closer) to just go to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. You say that, and wait for their response, pensive.

Arseny shrugs, “It makes sense,” he says, “you are concerned, but you didn’t consider this when you came? You just came here and became fortunate to meet Zoe?” He gestures at her. She looks down at her hands.

He’s right. You realize now how naive you were and marvel at how you blindly followed orders without question. You were so wrapped up in your job, in being someone else so you didn’t have to face your mounting personal issues after Mark died, after you broke up with Paul. You didn’t even pay attention to what you were doing, you just did it, like a machine. You look at him, embarrassed. “You’re right,” you say weakly. “I just, I guess – “

“She didn’t know,” Zoe defends you, putting her hand up at Arseny as though trying to stop him from continuing. “Let’s just go to Kyiv.”

You look at her and then back at him. “Okay, I guess you’re right, what do we do when we get there?”

“There is Embassy there, and you will be much safer,” Arseny smiles, seemingly apologetic.

Once you’ve packed a sufficient amount of clothing and personal belongings for your stay, you left. Not too much, you don’t want to cause alarm should there be some kind of massive error in AI’s system and someone came looking for you. You didn’t want anyone to think you were on the run. You rode in a comfortable silence in Arseny’s backseat, listening to some sort of ambient music he had playing. Thinking about what he said, you decided you wanted to try to talk about it a little more.

“Did you know about what Zoe showed me?” You ask him, referencing the internet forum post with your information. “What is that? What does it mean?”

Arseny shook his head. “What are you meaning?”

Zoe explains the post to him, and he seems shocked that she didn’t tell him about it. He says he has heard of similar conspiracies but the post with your specific photo was alarming to him. You were glad to find he was on the same page, and felt a little more relaxed around him. He goes on to say he is alarmed because of where you were staying also.

“That is where the girl, oh what was her name, the blonde one?” Arseny waves his hand in the air, seemingly trying to pull an answer out of it.

“Iva Petrov,” Zoe answers, “don’t tell her that! That was a long time ago,” Zoe looks at you. “You liked the place so much, I didn’t want to ruin it.”

You shake your head. “It’s not your fault at all, the neighbor told me about – ” you stop, trailing off. You remember when he was in your flat, when he looked down at the floor, then when you looked back at him.

Just like Sergei did on the plane from Phoenix to JFK.

Goosebumps forming on your arms, “When was Iva murdered?”

Zoe looks her up online while Arseny continues to drive and pull thoughts out of thin air. “2019,” Zoe says after a moment.

“Why would they want me to be her? That was my assumed name,” you tell Zoe. “That was who I was sent here to be. Why?”

Arseny laughs. “I’d worry more about getting the hell away from whoever wants you to be Iva Petrov,” he says. “Do you know what happened to her? How she was killed? How she was found?”

You don’t, and you don’t really want to, but in a way, you do. “No, I don’t know anything about her. My neighbor only told me about her one day.”

“Your neighbor?” Zoe asks.

You nod. “He’s an old man. His son took me home when we went out that day, so he came over and introduced himself. He told me about Iva Petrov, and that she lived at my flat before, then he just looked off in the distance.” You look at Zoe. “Was she murdered there?”

Zoe looks online again for more information about how Iva Petrov died. “Um, I can’t find anything where they know,” she says. “I think that’s what they’re trying to find out, they still don’t know who killed her. There was a man named Boris who they suspected of it – “

“Boris?” You get chills.

“Yes,” Zoe shows you his photo on her phone.

Your jaw drops. “That’s my neighbor,” you whisper. He looked younger, and didn’t have an ushanka on, but it was the same man, you were positive.

You also had a nagging feeling it was Sergei.

“Why is this happening?” You whisper in horror.

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“Les restes épars de ce qui était autrefois”

DECEMBER 13, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT / EDIT

>>>...<<<

“And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, “The Little Prince,” 1943

Waiting, hidden in the forest of trees on Arseny’s farm, she was completely bundled up and inside a small tent. Keeping a close eye where she left the note for you, she waited patiently for Arseny to

pull up to the farm. She hadn't seen you since she had to leave, and she was anxious to be near you again. She missed the innocence she felt from you, and needed to bask in it again, even from afar, even now. Remembering the way you cried when the girls at school made fun of you, how you would hide away for days, drawing pictures of a trailer park you remembered, and a little brother you were sure you would never see again. Best to just put him out of your mind, you thought then.

And so you did, and she thought it was time for her to move on. Easier said than done, though, because she wanted to give you the life you deserved – the one she felt she deserved too. After everything, though, you were always innocent, and you didn't deserve the fate that lay before you, no more than you deserved the deep, singular misery you surely would have known at that trailer park.

Her face began to show worry, though externally, if anyone could see her right then, she never betrayed the anxiety she felt. Shortly, she saw Arseny's car pull up, and she stared as you all took your time inside.

"We can stay here as long as you like," Arseny said to you, collecting some things from the console before finally turning off the car, unlocking the doors. Stepping out, you were suddenly frozen to the core, and realized you didn't have enough warm clothes for this weather. You'd need to go shopping.

Zoe says she will take you to some clothing stores in town the next day. You collect your belongings from the trunk, and Arseny walks up to the front door, saying something about a piece of paper stuck to it. You feel the hair on the back of your neck standing up, hanging back at the car to see what Arseny said about the note on the door.

Arseny looks puzzled as he reads the note silently. Then he looks up at you, a strange expression on his face. Walking toward you, he hands you the note, saying it was for you.

"For me?" You ask. He nods, as you take the note from his hand.

“Dear Cassie,

“My name is Zara Thibodeaux and I am from American Intelligence. Please do not worry, I know why you have left Moscow and completely sanction this. You will be under my protection while you are in the Ukraine, and will not be harmed in any way. Please understand, I had nothing to do with what has happened to you so far, and I also had nothing to do with Sergei Laskin’s desire to make you become Iva Petrov, or some reincarnated version of her. Sergei’s visions are disturbing, to be gentle. I would like to help you to safety and redirect your mission.

“Please meet with me tomorrow. I will be in town at Arber. If you can be there around 2PM local time, I’ll find you.”

You hand the note to Zoe and she looks it over. “Should I do it?”

Zoe looks at Arseny, then back at you. “It’s your choice, but you shouldn’t go alone.”

Arseny looks angry. “What if they try to take you?”

“You should come, then,” Zoe retorts.

Rolling his eyes, Arseny reluctantly agrees to escort you both to meet Zara at the coat shop in Kyiv the next day. Gathering the rest of your things from the car, you, Zoe, and Arseny put everything inside and retreat to the living room. It’s completely freezing inside, and Arseny lights a fire in the fireplace. The three of you huddle around it, desperately trying to get warm.

Outside, Zara sees your shadows against the wall through the window. Pleased to learn you will be arriving tomorrow, even with company, she decides to leave. Exiting her tent and putting it back together, she makes the 12 mile trek back to her car, in the dark. Pulling out her phone to call Jim, she notices the time and decides to give him a little bit longer to get there and get settled.

It wouldn’t be much longer now.

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“Laufender Mokassin”

DECEMBER 22, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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No one ever thinks its going to happen to them, even right up until it does, sometimes at that moment. Denial is a powerful emotion, something chemical happening in the brain in response to trauma so great we don't yet have the tools to process it. Suppressed memories act similarly in that they are pushed back to a compartmentalized area of the mind that has delegated that task for another day. That other day sometimes comes at inopportune moments, and illustrates why it is essential for one to attain closure whenever possible surrounding issues of trauma, even if that closure is achieved by means of some sort of therapy.

When Iva left her boyfriend on Christmas Eve 2018, she didn't know where to go. Young and pregnant, she wanted to escape her boyfriend's grasp after finding out he had another family he played an active role in, and never told her about. Devastated, she decided to have the baby on her own, and didn't even tell her boyfriend she was pregnant until she decided to leave. Not sure why she chose that moment to confess her physical state, she didn't expect his reaction and when she got it, it scared her more than made her feel relieved or happy, as most girls would when they found out their boyfriend was happy they were pregnant teen soon-to-be-moms. Iva

wasn't in high school any longer, but it was the point, she had other goals that didn't involve being a mom, but since she was about to be one anyway, she decided since her boyfriend wasn't honest about his other family, why should she believe he would play any kind of role in their child's life? She decided to move on.

Struggling to find a permanent place of residence in Austria after leaving, she decided she wanted to move to Russia after having a miscarriage. She didn't want to be anywhere near her old childhood home any more, the memories and everything leading up to the miscarriage was just overly emotionally charged and she didn't think it was healthy to put herself through that misery every day. Moving as fast as she was able to save up the money, she met Boris shortly after arriving in Moscow, and became very good friends with him being she was on the rebound and quite distraught after her miscarriage as well.

Boris manipulated Iva into a sexual relationship, and read more into it than what she intended him to. She didn't mind the attention, or the sex, but she didn't want the relationship to go the same way Boris wanted it to. Humoring him for as long as she could, she finally couldn't keep up the charade any longer, and had to confess that she wasn't really in love with him, that she thought of him as a very close friend who got her through one of the hardest times of her life, and she was grateful for him. She told him that she wanted them to always be friends, and she would never want to lead him on or hurt him, that she was sorry if she ended up doing it anyway by telling him this, but she just couldn't go on without being completely honest with him about her feelings. It just didn't seem right to her. She hoped he'd understand, and that they could still be friends.

Of course, things didn't end well for Iva. Boris didn't take the news well, or rather, Sergei didn't take the news well. Iva was pregnant with his child, and he wanted to have a family with her. He was afraid she was planning to leave him and abort the child. He accused her of lying about her miscarriage and said she was trying to cover up the fact that she really aborted the baby, and that's why she had to

come to Russia, because she was outcast from her friends and family. Even as much as Iva tried to convince Boris that she wasn't lying, that she never aborted the baby, he wouldn't believe her.

Kidnapping Iva, he took her to his home office, where he had a makeshift operating table. He didn't know much about surgery, but what he did know was enough for him to have created living things crossed with inanimate objects. They didn't live very long, but that could change, he was certain of it. If only he could find a doctor who would help him with his experiments. In the meantime, Boris made use of his internet connection and avid curiosity about the human anatomy. Though his experiments had not yet evolved to human, he was positive he was ready to take the plunge with Iva.

Following his guidebook and the video he found online about how to successfully drain blood just enough to keep the victim alive, but lethargic. Once he drained Iva's blood to that point, he made sure she was awake and coherent enough to experience him removing their child from her womb. He wanted her to see as he took their son out of her body and placed him, still alive, inside a tube filled with fluid he hoped would preserve his son's body. Closing the container, he looked in Iva's eyes and explained with excitement that their son would be part of the first experimental hybrid race of aliens and human beings. Iva tried to fight Boris, but was too weak, and could only verbally threaten him. To Boris, or Sergei, the verbal threats were enough, and the rest was history. Iva was murdered, beaten, raped, and her arms broken.

When Sergei had her there, her eyes fixed, mouth open, pulse flat, he looked at her pretty blue eyes and thought that she never looked as beautiful as she did right then. He took the part of her he wanted, and broke her arms, beating her in the face several times before he finally folded her small body into the suitcase.

Placing Iva's ovaries into the same fluid-filled container as the son Sergei shared with her, Sergei then closed the container and disposed of Iva's body, crushed that his love was dead, but

determined to find another who was close enough to her so that they could have the family they were always meant to have together.

He would stop at nothing to have Iva at his side, the mother of his child. Forever.

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“My Beautiful Show”

JANUARY 6, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

“This is my beautiful show, and everything is shot in slow motion.” – Brian Warner

Unable to grasp the power which propelled you to the point at which you currently occupied, you accepted there were forces beyond your capability of understanding, and decided to simply observe the wonders you were given the unique ability to now see. As though you floated upward toward a realm of existence unknown to anyone or anything but you and whatever being was allowing you this coveted knowledge, you delighted in the fact that you felt unencumbered by the usual chains of routine life so dependably provided you with on a daily basis. It was as though you were dead, but not completely obliterated. You failed to describe it to yourself, so you decided experiencing it was the next best thing.

When you were able to discern a time frame, you deduced childhood and a painful memory you wouldn't allow yourself to see with any sort of clarity. You could only see shapes, colors, images in your mind, and interpret feelings as tangible things that pained you by their very existence. They would emerge unannounced and take over your entire emotional being, as though you were being

possessed by some evil spirit only wishing to cause harm on you and all around you by inspiring violence from the pain it inflicted on your soul, which was bare currently. Your very essence was completely exposed to whatever it was that was giving you this ability, so any sort of negative emotional manifestation felt like a sharp dagger through your heart.

Keenly aware of something foreign inside you, and outside of you, you continue upward mobility, as that was how you envisioned yourself. It was what kept you from feeling like you were falling, which was also entirely possible, you supposed, as the mind was capable of astounding trickery in order to preserve itself; the trickery being survival techniques. You fancied yourself a sort of student of philosophy, as that is the only true way to describe anyone who thinks about that which is bigger than themselves; a student of philosophy. We are all students, you think, no one knows everything.

But it feels like you do right now. As though you could tap into any secret knowledge you wanted to and you would immediately be aware of all circumstances, all possible paths to the answer, all of everything that made up the entire situation or era, or anything.

You knew. You just knew. It was inside of you. Implanted somewhere you could never touch it. Inside your very essence, and that is why you were being shown these things; that is why you were being gifted this precious knowledge of forbidden secrets and things you would have never been privy to before. Somehow, by going to Russia, you became different, although you knew this knowledge was within you before you even accepted this mission. Somehow, you were given this missing puzzle piece to explain why this was all happening.

Confusion was still quite prevalent, however, and you still aren't sure why you were chosen, though you know you were now. Maybe there was more work to do, maybe this wasn't the final puzzle piece. That's okay, though, you think to yourself. Just enjoy the ride.

You realize you have a brother, someone you have been trying to bury in your psyche somewhere no one would ever find him. You remember him suddenly, and visualize him as though he is standing in front of you. Though you cannot see him with much clarity currently, you know you would recognize him if you saw him in front of you in person, in the flesh, and you suddenly feel as though you are going to get that opportunity very soon. You feel as though he is on his way to you right now, and you are doing everything right; you are on the right path.

He is meant to become someone else to you, because of a response to an experiment. This being that has taken over you is still trying to convey a message, to provide you with this information that they feel will arm you with something to help protect you in the times to come, as you are in great danger. Your brother is to become a martyr in your name, but he is not going to die, he will be reborn. As will you.

You still have questions, mainly if you are meant to die in order to be reborn, but you are met with what feels like some sort of wall between you and whatever entity is providing you with these vague, cryptic answers, or pieces of information that almost make sense, but do more to upset you than inform you.

Visualizing yourself lying down in a field of dark green grass, abnormally colored to denote it could not possibly be authentic, you see yourself heavy with child, your hair bright white, your eyes solid black. You are lying down facing upward looking at what appears to be the sun, but it is not, at least, not the sun you are currently used to experiencing every day. This is an alternate sun that warms you with its false light, and you feel yourself start to crumble under the weight of what you see in your mind's eye.

Answering your own question about mortality, you decide to ask this unknown oracle about the unborn child in your womb, but are again met with a sort of wall, or block, when you try to access this hidden knowledge. Suddenly, an opening, albeit tiny, was enough for you to peer inside to see the answer to the question about your unborn child.

You see a young man sitting on a golden throne, in his arms what appears to be an animal but as you look closer and your eyes play less tricks on your mind, you see a serpent curling around his hands, up his arms, and around his throat. The young king looks unaffected, and almost seems to notice you looking in. As though he can see you and read your mind simultaneously, he pulls the serpent from his throat, holds it level in front of you and tears it in half, both sides of it flailing as its blood sprays across the young king's now smiling face, his white eyes glistening.

Darkness envelops you as you feel yourself falling into a pit of sadness, literal sadness, and the velvet hands of despair guide your descent into the madness you know you will experience as you continue to fall into this fate that has been prewritten for you. Unable to even weep for your future, you fall into a sort of restless slumber as you let this oracle take you to the absolute pits of depravity and feel yourself become hardened because of it, every second you spent knowing you would give life to this creature of horrific, torturous, evil incarnate. You wanted to end your life knowing it was something you were meant to do, as that would be the only solution. If you were no longer alive, you wouldn't be able to give life to this cruel young king, but in the back of your mind was a voice telling you that you wouldn't be able to die, that was something that was taken from you a long time ago.

You could try over and over again to die, but you were meant to live, and this was why.

To give birth to him.

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The Harvest

JANUARY 21, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

muř must ġuř certain people to solve hanash(1) – We must kill certain people to solve hunger.

Cannibalism was normalized across the world in 2188. Volunteers were always preferred, and would be processed first. There were never more than 5 people who volunteered to be cannibalized in a quarter. For years, five people per quarter were more than enough, and there ended up being a small waiting list of volunteers. These volunteers were people who understood the way of the world now, and were willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Altruistic, terminal (for experimental purposes), mentally ill who were unable to function in society and no longer wished to continue their lives, elderly, and suicidal people were the first to volunteer.

It felt wrong the first year, and many outraged Ngikhgekknim residents (formerly known as Australians) acted out violently in protest of

cannibalism as it was being normalized. What the Ngikhgeknimese didn't know was they were the first country to experiment with cannibalism, to see if it was something the rest of the world could use to feed their hungry masses. The only food left in the world was food people grew themselves, and though the impoverished frequently ate one another, the civilized simply gave up meat, because every species of animal was near extinction, and the only things left to eat were what could still grow in the polluted ground.

The Ngikhgeknimese were cannibal pioneers, the first civilized people to normalize cannibalism among its population. Specialty grocery stores and butcher shops were built all over Ngikhgeknim, and the masses were outraged at first, breaking the windows, assaulting workers, destroying the meat inside, saying it was the Devil's meat, and it was tainted with sin. They claimed the land would be cursed if they continued consumption.

Eventually, most of the people who protested cannibalism died of starvation after systematically segregating them from the rest of society, either by imprisonment, killing them, or deporting them. Once the masses became more compliant, cannibalism became a way of life among the Ngikhgeknimese, and subsequently, the world.

In 2190, there were only 100 million humans left on the planet Earth. Birthing restrictions had been placed on parents in most countries, with the threat of harvesting their first child should the parents fail to comply. In the colonies ruled by communist monarchs, the citizens were under constant surveillance via microchip implants in their spines which monitored their every movement, thought, and word.

By 2199, the world was a place governed by the rich and privileged, just like every century before it. The exception was a birthing protest had been underway, and many people had gone rogue, trying to escape the radar but not knowing there was no escape except death. These people had more children than they were supposed to have, and though the government forbade it in most colonies, a moratorium was in place, to allow the children to be born, educated,

and grow up. The moratorium lasted 20 years, and in 2219, the world population had soared to 500 trillion people.

Some had abused the moratorium, having children out of wedlock by partners other than their spouses. More children who weren't accounted for by the government existed and had to be microchipped. The control the government once had over the population was slipping, and they desperately needed to regain it.

Since the only way to regain control was to microchip the young, it was collectively decided by the colonies of the world to harvest the old, the parents who insisted on the moratorium in the first place, then abused it and caused the population to grow larger than ever intended.

Prior to the harvest, every colony was responsible for collecting the humans without microchips and rounding them up to be chipped. If a person refused, they were to be executed and added to the harvest. If they were obedient, they were rewarded with their lives, and given the opportunity to participate in the harvest to avoid any legal repercussions for their failure to be microchipped when they came of age. Most of them agreed, and were then employed by their respective governments to hunt and kill their own relatives, since it was the cheapest, most effective way to collect the remaining humans they needed to harvest.

Son turned on father, daughter on mother, grandson on grandfather, and so on. The betrayals were assuredly heart wrenching, at least for the old, but the young, recently microchipped hunters had been equipped with a new chip by their government which depleted them of empathy, and was able to implant images in their minds, controlling their perception of the outside world. By the time their offspring had come to deliver them to the butcher, the harvested were nothing but meat and bones thrown together in sacks of thin, wrinkled, old skin.

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(1) The language of Ngikhgekhnimish, Tongue of the Cannibals –
LEARN IT BELOW THE VIDEO

The Language of Ngikhgekhnimish

Natively known as: ngikhgekhnim /ngix'gəxnim/

...and he stood holding his hat and turned his wet face to the wind...

she dǐ dǐ dǐg' dag wǐbǔb she nǔwkhi maw dǐ nag' dzdiw g'i

Pronunciation: /ʃə dɪ dɪ dɪg' dag 'wɪbʊb ʃə 'nʊwxi maw dɪ nag' dzdiw
gi/

Ngikhgekhnimish word order: and he his hat holding stood and the
wind to his wet face turned

“Allen”

FEBRUARY 1, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog (Jim's) for reference<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>And this blog for reference<<<

Frantic, you crawled to the back of the cabin and stood up quietly to peek out the back window. Two armed Russian soldiers were standing at the back door, and you could hear some in the front also. You didn't see Zoe and Arseny. Trembling and sobbing you were struggling with what Sergei said about your friends being dead. They would have died for you, and for what? They saved you, and you felt like you only lead them to their deaths. You were only alive because Arseny insisted you hide when Sergei and his men arrived. You hid in the basement, still able to hear the gunshots and yelling, but unable to see what was happening. You couldn't help but wonder if Zara had something to do with it, because right after you received

the note from her, Sergei showed up on Arseny's property. Arseny's last words to you would haunt you for the rest of your life.

"If I die because of you, Cassie, I'm going to haunt you for the rest of your life," he laughed, and patted your shoulder, urging you to hide in the basement as he went outside to face Sergei. Zoe was supposed to follow you, but you heard the gunshot, then her screams.

"Oh my God," you break down as you're trying to crawl back to the basement to safety, realizing the gravity of the situation, feeling like you could have done something to save them, but what? Never getting on the plane to begin with would have been a good start, but you thought you had to. You thought you were on a mission, you thought you were going to find out what propaganda was being spread in Russia about America, and you thought you were going to be able to help stop a war.

You thought you were doing the right thing.

The only person you could reach out to now would be Zara, but you weren't going to make it to meet her now, you were trapped. How were you going to even get out of Arseny's cabin? You didn't even know where you were, how to get out, where to go. Zoe knew all of that, and now she was dead.

How could this have happened? You wanted to deny it, to block yourself from feeling anything because you couldn't yet process exactly what happened. How could they both be dead? How could any of this be true? You stopped crying long enough to hear commotion outside. It sounded like the guards were fighting.

Tiptoeing back to the back door, you peek out the window again to see the soldiers are no longer there. You hear yelling in Russian, but you still don't yet speak enough of it to know what is being said. You run to the front door to see who is out there, if you can. You see three soldiers lying on the ground, and two are running into the forest. You stare out the window, looking for Zoe and Arseny, hoping Sergei was lying and they weren't really dead. You don't see them, but you see blood on the porch. Your stomach turns and you vomit,

putting your hand to your mouth as you try to get to the kitchen to puke in the sink.

Pop! Pop!

Were those gunshots? You drop to the ground, and try not to scream, but you can't stop yourself from whimpering in fear. You were completely vulnerable, but those were Russian soldiers on the ground, so whoever was shooting might be there to help? Maybe it was that Zara person?

"Cassie?" You hear a male voice call from outside.

Fuck, it's Sergei, was your first thought, but then you realized the accent wasn't Russian, it was American.

"Cassie, my name is Allen, I was sent here by Zara," he calls out again. "You're safe, you can come out."

Safe? What's that? You think to yourself.

Gripping the loaded .357 Magnum revolver Arseny handed you before escorting you down to the basement, you crawl toward the front door, shaking. "I'm armed," you reply to him.

"I have a handgun, and I'm putting it on the porch now. There is no one else out here, just me. Please hurry, we have to get you out of here," Allen cries out.

You open the front door and hold the gun toward it, expecting to see him charge in. He doesn't, so you stand up, and tiptoe out to the porch, pointing the gun directly at him as you quickly glance around to make sure no one else is still there.

Allen holds his hands up to show you that he is unarmed. "Cassie, you can put the gun down, I am here to help you," he reaches out to take the gun away from you, and you let him.

You look at his face for a long moment, recognizing him from somewhere. "Do I know you?" You ask him.

He looks at you the same way, shrugging it off. "Don't think so? Let's get out of here, Zara needs to meet with you."

"Who is Zara?" You ask as you follow him off the property, walking toward a pick up truck parked in the forest. Your eyes wander across the property, looking for any sign of Zoe or Arseny. "And where are Zoe and Arseny, my friends?" You see Arseny's car, and strain to see if someone is in there. "This is his cabin, I can't just leave it open like this, I have to tell him."

Allen takes your hand in his, and looks at you with an expression you knew all too well. "Let's get you to safety, Cassie."

It hits you. They are really dead. You start screaming, unable to control it, and crying out Zoe's name. You can't believe they died for you, after they helped you escape and gave you a place to hide.

Allen grabs you and picks you up, putting his hand over your mouth. You bite his hand and scream, taking off running back toward the cabin. You had to find Zoe and Arseny, they didn't deserve to be out there in the snow with those murderers. "Zoe!" You scream. "Arseny!"

"Cassie don't!" Allen runs after you.

You continue running until you see. Arseny laid on his back staring up at the sky, Zoe next to him, a bag over her head that was covered in blood. You knew it was her because of her shoes. You complimented her on them just hours earlier.

"No!" You fall to your knees and sob. "Why? Oh my God!" You can't control it. You feel like the worst person alive. They did nothing wrong except to help you. You were cursed, you just knew it.

Allen puts his hand on your back, then leans down to turn you away from them, hugging you, smoothing your hair back. You fall into his arms and just cry, feeling safe for some reason. He picks you up and carries you to the truck, you sobbing into his chest the whole time.

Loading you into the cab, Allen turns on the truck to warm it up, giving you a blanket he had inside so you could cover up. You can't

stop crying, seeing Arseny's face. He died for you, Zoe died for you. She saw him die and then she died. It was the worst feeling you ever had, and you couldn't imagine what she must have gone through seeing that. That was the last thing you left her with, the image of her boyfriend being murdered. And all she ever was to you was your friend.

You start howling in pain, regret, agony. Not able to accept what just happened; what is happening, and not knowing what would happen next. Why did you ever accept the mission from AI? Why did you ever go to Russia? Who is this man next to you?

"Cassie, if you want to take a nap, you can. There's a pillow on the floorboard, or you can use my jacket," Allen patted the jacket sitting between you. "I'll get the heater on. It's not a very long drive. I'm just glad I got to you in time."

You turned to look at him again, baffled at how familiar he looks to you but you still can't place it. "Were you there? Did you see it? Sergei?" Your voice cracks and you start crying again.

Allen looks at you and hands you a Kleenex, nodding. "I shot Sergei, though," he says smiling.

"You did?"

He nods. "In the legs, but that's just because all I have is a .38. I had no idea he'd have that many men with him. Got them to leave, though, and we will get to Zara in a little bit, then she can tell you why it was so important to get you away from him." Allen looks at you again. "I think you can already see that, though, but I honestly don't know much more about what she wants to talk about with you than that. I know you were sent on a mission from AI, though, and I was too, but with Zara."

You get goosebumps. "AI? You're with AI?"

Allen shakes his head emphatically. "No, not with them, just was recruited by them, like you were. Zara told me about that, but she also told me something else," Allen looks at you again, like he is

trying to gauge whether or not he can trust you. “She said they’re not real.”

You actually laugh, because to hear him say that out loud sounds hilarious to you now, after everything that has just happened. “No shit?” You respond.

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“In the Shadow of the Valley of Death”

FEBRUARY 10, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog (Jim’s) for reference<<<

>>>See this blog (Jim’s) for reference also, pls<<<

“The Second Hellrider”

I am hidden within you

You don't know where...

You don't know why...

I have come to take away all that is "yours" ...

You don't know when...

You don't care why...

The blood of men will fill the streets as their women cry out in grief.

The innocent children will watch in horror and disbelief.

I am the Mother Earth, the one you forgot about

It is I who will rise like the Phoenix from the ashes just so I can shout

Come, the Second Hellrider, as the dawn of dusk approaches.

Deliver the message of doom and watch them scatter like
cockroaches.

Will you not fight for me as I have cared for you?

Will you let me die and burn as you do?

If that is Fate, then Fate it shall be.

But think not of what you can do to me.

For my wrath is more than you can fathom or second-guess.

If I shall die, then my last gift to give is universal distress.

Just because I walked away so quietly didn't mean it was all right.

Never fear the ones who boast their will to fight.

If never a lesson taught was learned since you were born,

Retain this:

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

- Melissa Starr, 09/14/2001

Without realizing it, Jim shot Sergei in his femoral artery, and while he was en route to the hospital, he bled to death in the back of the SUV. Instead of taking him to the hospital, his militant soldier companions took him to see Dr. Popov, who was the only one who knew how to save Sergei.

After arriving at Dr. Popov's farm in Ostashkov, Sergei was unloaded and taken to a private room inside, where Dr. Popov had his operating table along with a refrigerated storage filled with body parts he removed when experimenting on some of the zombies he had in his basement. He drained the remaining blood from Sergei's body, then dissected his corpse, carefully storing his organs in airtight containers which he then put in a locked freezer. When Sergei's carcass was finally emptied of his organs, blood, and entrails, Dr. Popov cut his body in half, severing his spine from his pelvis, then cut off both of Sergei's legs, isolating the pelvis. Opening Sergei's sacrum, Dr. Popov retrieved the capsule, careful not to jostle it or shake it, as that could cause Sergei's essence to be permanently erased. Storing Sergei's consciousness in a small vial, he then placed it in a smaller lock box inside the refrigerated storage, marking it with Sergei's initials, so that retrieval would be possible once you were detained, not having any idea where you might be now.

When he finished cleaning up the rest of Sergei, Dr. Popov found himself a little nostalgic, and regretful that things were so strained between the two of them the last time they spoke. Doing his best to suppress the emotions he felt bubbling up and over inside of him, Dr. Popov tried to focus more on you, and whether or not you knew about his association with Sergei yet. You don't yet, of course, because Zara isn't telling you everything. You weren't sure what she was leaving out, but you knew she wasn't being entirely honest, and you didn't trust her at all.

Jim seemed like he was keeping something from you too, and you were feeling much more vulnerable now than you had the entire time you'd been in Russia. Arseny's words about how lucky you were to

meet Zoe kept playing over and over like a broken record, and all you could see was his face, staring up at the sky.

“Cassie, can we talk for a minute?” Jim approached you, as you sat out on the patio, staring up at the night sky, freezing. Whispering, Jim didn’t want to attract Zara’s attention as she was sleeping.

“Sure, Allen” you reply, as he sits down next to you. “What’s going on?”

He took a deep breath and looked down at his hands. “My name’s Allen, but I go by Jim,” he says to you, slowly, almost like he’s trying to choose his words.

You’re confused, but not surprised. Nothing was as it seemed, not since you got on the plane, not even before that, according to Zara and everything she showed you and told you. “Okay, Jim,” you smile at him, still wondering why he seemed so familiar to you.

Jim looked deep in your eyes, like he was trying to tell you something without saying it.

“What?” You blinked and looked away, the eye contact making you nervous.

“You’re from Buckeye?”

“I lived there when I was a kid, then my mom left my dad and took me to Phoenix.”

“I’m from Buckeye, too.”

Was he flirting with you? You weren’t interested, he felt like someone you would be friends with, but he wasn’t your type. “Okay?”

Jim looks down at his hands again. “Do you remember anything about your dad?”

You thought hard for a minute. You didn’t really remember much, but you thought you remembered someone else being there, a younger sibling.

It hit you, and you looked up at him, staring him in the face.

“What are you doing out here?” Zara said as she opened the patio door. “It’s freezing!”

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“Gallia Aquitania”

FEBRUARY 20, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>See this blog for reference too pls<<<

“Decius, well urged. I think it is not meet Mark Antony, so well beloved of Caesar, should outlive Caesar. We shall find of him a shrewd contriver. And you know, his means, if he improve them, may well stretch so far as to annoy us all; which to prevent, let Antony and Caesar fall together. Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius. To cut the head off and then hack the limbs, like wrath in death and envy afterwards, for Antony is but a limb of Caesar.” – William Shakespeare, from “Julius Caesar,” Act II, Scene I, 1599. Retrieved from:

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/juliuscaesar/quotes/section/act-ii-scene-i/>

Running toward the hut where she lived, she found her mother there, dead, alongside her father. Sheer terror dictating the little girl's actions, she ran as far away as she could until she found another hut at the far end of the village to hide in. Inside was an old woman and a small dog, who barked excitedly at the little girl when she came inside.

The little girl pet the dog and the old woman offered the girl some water. The little girl gulped it down eagerly, and asked the old woman, in French, if the war was over, and if she could stay with her, since her parents had been murdered.

The old woman agreed that the little girl could stay with her, but warned that the war was far from over. The battle may have ended in the small village, but Caesar meant to conquer all of Gaul, and those who remained would likely be tortured and killed, or sold into slavery. The old woman said they would have to find another place before long, but the little girl was welcome to stay with her for a little while, at least until early the next morning, before the remaining Roman Legionaries were able to finish what they started in the small village.

Early the next morning, before the sun came up, the little girl, the old woman and her dog, set out to find a new home in Aquitania, a small village that they could spend a few nights in until they were able to escape to a safer region. For a few weeks, the old woman and the little girl were able to thrive, until the Romans came to visit their village one night, just like they had in the weeks prior.

This time, the little girl was taken from the old woman, and forced to watch as the old woman was brutally raped and murdered. The dog was able to run away to safety, but the little girl was enslaved, and travelled with the Roman soldiers until the end of the Gallic wars, at which time she returned with them to Rome alongside Julius Caesar.

Months passed and the little girl grew to hate Caesar more with each passing minute. His pomposity, warped sense of entitlement, the

way he treated his subordinates, and his convulsions. She was privy to Caesar's secret illness, and though she was not to tell anyone what she saw, for to imagine weakness in the dictator would have been the end of his rule, she told everyone she was able to. She made sure to procure payment before disclosing the damning information about the tyrant of Rome, and in doing so, was able to earn enough to buy her freedom.

Wanting desperately to find a way to murder the man who led the attacks on her village, she instead decided to send him a message, since it was too difficult for a commoner like her to reach Caesar, he was too well-protected at that time. One night, after she had been freed, she snuck in to barracks occupied by the Legio XIII Gemina, the Thirteenth Legion. She made herself available to every soldier she could wake up, and when she was finished pleasing them, she sliced their throats and left them to die.

When the sun started to rise, she attempted escape but was caught by one of the guards outside of the barracks. When the bodies of some of the Thirteen were found in their bunks, the girl was blamed for their murders and brought before Julius Caesar, the commander and tyrant himself. He would decide her fate.

After surveying the corpses and torturing the girl in an attempt to gain more information, it was determined that she was the sole participant in the murders, and she was sentenced to be crucified and burned. On the day of her execution, Roman onlookers claimed to see her soul leave her body, describing it as a black mass with green eyes, saying it floated above her burning body initially, then soared over the crowd, stopping at the back, behind everyone who gathered to watch her execution.

The Romans could do nothing but stare at her in fear and awe. She started to speak French, saying the same thing over and over, until finally disappearing after nearly an hour of repeating the same phrase.

“Comptez les heures et trouvez le mauvais œil.”

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Ruben the Ascent

“Yvette”

NOVEMBER 5, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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Photo credit: “Salt River Tubing to open early, celebrates 35 years,” AZ Big Media, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://azbigmedia.com/lifestyle/experience-arizona/salt-river-open-early-celebrates-35-years/>

She couldn't deal with it anymore – not having any sort of say in the situation, not being listened to at all, and just generally being treated like she was more of a burden than someone who was loved or wanted around. One night, after everyone went to bed, she wrote a note on a Post It and stuck it to the refrigerator door before leaving, not even sure where she was headed, but knowing it should be as far away from here as possible.

It was about 2AM when she started driving her 2020 Toyota Prius east, thinking she might end up somewhere in Montana eventually, or maybe even onward to Canada. Should she continue so far north? Could she take the cold? Maybe Utah would be better, or Arizona. Deciding on the latter, she continued east until she saw the sun start rising on the horizon. She hadn't checked the time since leaving, or her gas gauge. The time was 5:20AM, the gas gauge was

at about 3/4. She decided to continue and pass through Phoenix, heading to Mesa. The Salt River was out that way, if she remembered correctly. Her father had taken her family there on an outing once, she remembered.

It was already starting to get hot out, and she figured she's be in Mesa within about three hours. Check in at hotels wasn't usually until 11AM, but she would still try to find somewhere she could check in early. Finally doing just that, she showered and took a four hour nap before waking up, getting some food, and heading out to catch a basketball game. The Phoenix Suns were playing the San Antonio Spurs.

When she got back, she thought about calling to see if anyone missed her. She'd changed her number when she left, so the only way anyone would know how to reach her was if she reached out first. It was so tempting, she wanted to see if she made an impact by leaving, like she wanted to. She didn't call, though, she just decided to try and get some sleep, even though it was the furthest thing from her mind at the moment.

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Hopping online to find some internet chatrooms to hang out in, Yvette found a local chat app called "Mesa Mingler" and decided to join up, making her profile and choosing her username as WildGirl6969. Within minutes, a local guy named AJTheTickler06 messaged her and they spent most of the night chatting. Before going to bed, Yvette made a promise to AJ that she would meet up online with him the next day.

After she woke up, Yvette went out looking for jobs, getting job applications at every place around where she lived so she could hopefully try to start to set up a life there. When she got an interview, she went home and started messaging AJ. They chatted for a few hours, and finally exchanged private information. She found out his name was Jim, and he was 18. Being 25, she asked him if she was

too old for him. He seemed to be interested despite the age difference, and admitted to it being something that peaked his interest, in fact. Yvette made plans to meet up with Jim at the Salt River that weekend, after her interview, and after she'd had a chance to get to a salon.

Jim seemed quite excited for the date. Yvette certainly was. At the last minute, though, Jim sent Yvette a text message asking if he could bring along a couple of friends. Yvette reluctantly agreed, but decided that in order for her to feel safe, she wanted to meet in a more public place first, so she could get to know his friends. Jim seemed apologetic, and explained that going to the Salt River was a big deal among his friends during the summertime. Yvette felt a little better after he explained, but still wanted to meet at a public place. Jim was completely agreeable.

Yvette met Jim, David, Jake, and Tyler at a 5 and Diner close by. They all had breakfast together and seemed to get along quite well. Yvette didn't seem at all uncomfortable after she had the opportunity to hang out a little bit with all of them. Yvette and Jim were clearly attracted to one another, and the group made fun of their sexual chemistry. Once they all got to the Salt River and got their tubes, they felt like they'd all known each other for much longer than they had.

Yvette and Jim paired off away from the group and agreed to meet up at the end. They tied their tubes together and decided to float down the river, drink some beer, smoke some weed, and just get to know each other. The float down the Salt River was about two hours, and when they got to the end, they could hardly keep their hands off each other.

Tyler drove up to the meet up point where Yvette and Jim were half naked, almost having sex right there next to the river. David and Jake hopped out of the car and coaxed the young lovers back to where Tyler was parked so they could all go somewhere to sleep off all the alcohol. Yvette suggested her hotel, and so they all drove

back to her room, where David and Tyler passed out on the bed, and Jake passed out on the couch.

Jim took Yvette to Tyler's car and they spent the night with one another there.

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“Pretty Mouth”

NOVEMBER 14, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT / EDIT

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Falling asleep after hurried sex, Jim and Yvette woke up with the sun in Tyler's car and realized that they left David, Jake, and Tyler in her room. Frantic, Yvette had forgotten she left her laptop open before she had gone to meet up with them, so she rushed back into her room to find the three all passed out, beer cans all over the floor, laptop seemingly undisturbed. She excused herself to shower and Jim picked up the beer cans and threw them at his friends in an effort to wake them up.

After they woke up and everyone got ready, they decided to take a road trip to the Grand Canyon. Yvette didn't want to at first, but Jim was able to coax her into it, and she let Tyler drive her Prius so she could sit in the back with Jim. David was wedged on the passenger side behind Jake in the front seat. Once the six hour trip was over and they arrived in Grand Canyon Village, and found a hotel for the next two nights. It was Saturday, so their plan was to stay that night, Sunday night, and check out before dawn on Monday since Yvette had a job interview Monday afternoon.

Yvette wanted to hike down to the bottom, but there wasn't enough time, so they just visited the South Rim and took pictures most of the day, stopping at the Grand Canyon museum before heading back to

their adjoined rooms. Once they got back, Tyler surprised them all with an eight ball of cocaine. They all started snorting lines, even Yvette, who was feeling much more comfortable with the boys and less like her responsible self.

It wasn't really clear how it all started, but somehow, they all ended up playing strip poker, and Yvette won most of the hands, so the guys ended up taking most of their clothes off, while Yvette remained fully dressed, gloating and making fun of them. Jim suggested they all hold her down and take her clothes off, to pay her back, and the four guys pushed Yvette on her back, Jim tickling her ribcage, and the others holding down her arms and legs. Yvette, laughing hysterically, begged for them to stop, but Jim kept saying she didn't sound like she meant it. She'd just laugh, and he'd just keep tickling her. She said she understood where he came up with his screen name, and he looked confused.

"AJTheTickler," she laughed, Jim easing up on the tickling.

"Oh yeah!" He seemed to remember. "I forgot about that one." He motioned for the others to take their hands off of Yvette. "Can I ask you something?" He said to Yvette.

She sat up. "Sure, what's up?"

"Do you like being choked?" He looked directly in her eyes, appearing to be genuinely interested in her response. His friends looked at her eagerly as well.

"What are you talking about?" Yvette said slowly, her eyes widening more than they already were.

Jim laughed. "I don't mean like in a bad way, I mean like during sex, have you ever done that before?"

Yvette shook her head, still looking scared. "No, I haven't, why would anyone do that?"

"Wanna see?" Jim smiled widely.

“I don’t want to die, Jesus,” Yvette stood up and started gathering her clothes.

Jim reached out and touched her arm gently. “No, you won’t die, I promise. That’s not how it works. You stop before all that, you just wait until right before you...” he trailed off and smiled, “then you do it. Then let go before you black out.”

Yvette stared at Jim. “What? Are you serious? People actually do that?”

“Yeah! We should try it, just wait, you’ll love it.”

“In front of them?” Yvette motioned to Jim’s friends.

Jim shrugged. “Why not? Or they could leave.”

“They should leave,” Yvette said, giving Jim a weird look.

“Sure,” Jim looked at his friends, and they all left, going into their room. He looked at Yvette with a wicked smile on his face. “You ready?”

For about a half hour, Jim worked to bring Yvette to climax performing different lewd acts and once she was there, he continued to massage her with his left hand while his right hand closed around her throat slowly, his eyes on hers the whole time.

“Just go with it,” he whispered as he brought her to climax, squeezing her throat tighter every time she squirmed. “Just trust it, I won’t hurt you.”

She started to orgasm and he tightened his grip. Her eyes got so wide he thought they would pop out of their sockets and her body started writhing. He smiled down at her and tears welled up in her eyes. Her orgasm became much more powerful, her body convulsing, secretions creating a massive wet spot on the mattress someone renting the room in the future would likely sleep in. Then he saw it in her eyes, her life was starting to leave her. Her eyes were pleading, her hands closed around his wrist holding her throat.

He looked down and saw she was drawing blood, her nails deep in his skin.

He released his grip and Yvette immediately jumped up coughing and rubbing her throat, gasping for air. Staring at her, Jim beamed, and asked her,

“How was it?”

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“Election Day”

NOVEMBER 17, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

>>>IF THE ABOVE LINK ISNT' WORKING, ... TO SEE BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

An alert arrived for Nick Ward with regard to Yvette's death. You don't know yet that she is dead, and that she has been dead since before you left for your mission. You and Yvette exchanged some very hurtful words the last time you spoke, and for all you knew, she was still in Arizona. You hadn't talked to her in years. You still loved her, and wondered if she missed you and your family. Esmeralda tried reaching out to her from time to time, but to no avail. Yvette made it seem like she never wanted to see any of you again, and after the argument you both had, deep down, you really couldn't blame her. You sometimes felt she was too good to be your daughter. Her and Israel. The twins were like little cherubs sent from heaven to you and Esmeralda. They were never as ill behaved as some of your other children, and were always such happy kids. Everything started to change after Hector was born. His handicap demanded more attention and love, and so your other children were neglected so that Hector could receive the care he needed. Everyone always tried to chip in and help Hector, but he was very particular about who he wanted around him. The only people he bonded with were you, Esmeralda and Layla, Hector didn't like

Yvette and Israel because he thought they didn't like him. No matter how many times they tried to show him love and make him believe they did care, Hector rejected them at every turn. Yvette took it personally, and you argued, then she left while you all slept. That was the last time you saw her.

"Should we tell him?" Zapata whispered to Nick, a grave expression on his face.

Nick was at a loss for words. Reading about Yvette's death was devastating to him, because not only did he want to use her to help motivate you, he had other interests in her, ones which would have been beneficial to his plans for you. He shook his head, pursing his lips. "No, absolutely not, he can't know about this," Nick covered his mouth and turned away. "I can't believe it," he said, clearly shocked.

Zapata lowered his gaze to the iPad and tapped Yvette's most recent photo. She had Ruben's eyes, except they were green. Dark, hunter green. Rare, and she would have fit Nick's plan, but if he had found her before she was murdered, she would have ended up distracting you, Zapata knew you would be overly protective of her. Not that dying was better, but it was safer for her, he thought, sadly. Still, Zapata felt a deep anger for what was done to your daughter, and that he couldn't tell you or comfort you about it. No matter what anyone's plans for the world were, Yvette did nothing wrong, and didn't deserve to die.

"What are we going to do about Election Day?" Zapata persisted. "Ruben will never go for this on his own, how are we going to do this now?"

Nick threw his hands up in exasperation. "He has another daughter, doesn't he? At least one other one?"

Zapata nodded. "I know Layla is his youngest, and I believe he has two others, older than Yvette. Eve and Isabella" Zapata responds. "We shouldn't mess with them though, they are not going to be as responsive as Yvette would have been," he paused, "or as open to it." Looking back at her picture, Zapata blinks away tears forming in

his eyes. "I never knew her well, but I remember her. She was always so bright and happy. Ruben is going to be destroyed."

Nick's eyes widened and he turned around looking directly at Zapata with his mouth agape. "She was a twin, wasn't she?"

Zapata thinks for a minute. "I think so, yes, her brother is Israel."

Nick claps his hands together. "Does he have the same eyes?"

Zapata looks at Nick with disapproval.

"Don't look at me like that," Nick glares at Zapata. "Does he have the same eyes or not?"

Zapata shrugged. "I don't know."

"Find out," Nick orders Zapata. "And get everything ready for Election Day, we need to make this look as real as possible."

"What about Ruben's clearance?" Zapata asks Nick. "Will he undergo the operation today?"

Nick chuckled. "It's different now, Fernando," he says with a smile. "There won't be a surgery for Ruben, or Ralph, I should say."

Zapata is confused. "What do you mean? He's not getting the clearance after all that?"

"No, he got it, we're just going to deliver it differently," Nick continues. "It's a new method."

"New method?" Zapata sits down and looks at Nick. "Care to share?"

"Actually, no, because you have loose lips, Fernando," Nick retorts. "Just know it's a lot safer and less invasive."

"Same effects?"

"You're full of questions, aren't you?" Nick laughs. "Don't worry about your friend, Fernando, he's going to be fine, and you'll understand all of this soon enough."

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“The Carrot”

NOVEMBER 27, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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“The trouble with being in the rat race is that even if you win, you’re still a rat.” – Lily Tomlin

Thinking of everything Nick said at dinner, you rode back to your hotel room from the President’s house in silence, alone, after Nick ordered you an Uber. Once you arrived back at your hotel room, Nick instructed you to contact a Dr. Bianchi and have them walk you through your procedure that night. You were incredibly nervous and had a lot of questions, but refrained from asking them, remembering his warning about questions.

Finally arriving at your room, you expected to see Zapata there waiting for you for some reason, but you were alone. You found the number for Dr. Bianchi and dialed it, letting it ring ten times before finally hanging up. Muttering profanity under your breath about Nick’s alleged penis size, you set your phone down on the night stand and peeled off your shirt. After marveling at the odor emitting from your armpit, you hear your phone ringing. Looking down, you see the number is blocked.

“Hello?” You answer.

“Mr. Rodriguez?” A male voice asks.

“Yes, that’s me,” you confirm.

“I’m Dr. Bianchi, have you arrived at your hotel room, sir?”

“Yes, I’m here now,” you scratch your left buttcheek.

“I will be arriving within the hour, please be ready.” The phone clicked.

You looked down at it, then set it down on the nightstand, going into the bathroom to take another shower. When you've finished, you decide you're going to free ball it and just put on a robe. Fuck this guy, it's late.

About 45 minutes after Dr. Bianchi hung up with you, you hear a soft knock at your door. Walking over to answer it, you look out the peep hole and see a tall man with dark bushy eyebrows, a thick moustache and beard, and a receding hairline. He smiles at you, acknowledging you in the peephole. You open the door and are immediately stunned to see Layla standing there, tearstained face, hands bound in front of her.

"Dad?" Layla sobs.

"May I come in, Mr. Rodriguez?" Dr. Bianchi pushes Layla from behind and she walks in, Dr. Bianchi holding a gun with a silencer to her back. He looks at you. "Are you going to close the door?"

You close it and yell, "What the fuck are you doing with my daughter?"

Dr. Bianchi raises the gun to Layla's head. "Say another word and I'll kill her right here, right in front of you," he says, emotionless.

You're shaking. Layla's eyes are wide, tears streaming down as she cries, staring at you. You feel helpless. "What do you want?" You say in a calmer tone.

"Better," Dr. Bianchi sits Layla down at the desk in your room. He hands you a small black box that resembles a jewelry box.

You look at it, then back up at him. "What is this?"

"Open it," Dr. Bianchi says, setting one down on the table next to Layla.

You open the box and see a bright green pill. It's almost glowing. It reminds you of the one you saw in the President's house earlier. The one you thought was a suppository. The one he called "green candy."

“Put it in your mouth and swallow it,” Dr. Bianchi orders, holding the gun to Layla’s head again.

You freeze for a few seconds, then obey his command. Grabbing your nearly empty tumbler of Jim Beam, you wash the pill down with what remained in the glass. “Please don’t hurt her,” you beg.

Dr. Bianchi lowers the gun. “Untie your daughter, Mr. Rodriguez,” he orders you calmly.

You untie Layla, wanting to scoop her up and run out of there. Her little sobs and sniffles made you want to kill Dr. Bianchi. “Now what?” You ask Dr. Bianchi.

Pointing the gun at your head, Dr. Bianchi turns to Layla and says, “Your turn, cutie, tie up Daddy, open the box, and take the pill,” he orders.

You fight the urge to scream at him, knowing if he killed you, he would surely kill Layla. Layla obeys, crying, tying you up loosely. You pretend like it’s tight enough so she doesn’t worry about you. Watching her sit down across from you, you almost break down when you see her sobbing, looking at you in the same position now that she was in just a few minutes prior.

“Take the pill, Layla, or Daddy dies,” Dr. Bianchi says.

Layla looks at you, crying. She opens the box, takes the pill, puts it in her mouth, and swallows it with her spit.

“Did it go all the way down?” Dr. Bianchi motioned for her to drink some of the water out of your water bottle on the nightstand.

Layla drinks the water and swallows, lifting her tongue to show Dr. Bianchi that nothing is in her mouth.

“Good girl,” Dr. Bianchi praises Layla. He then orders Layla to untie you and as she does, he says to you, “I have Esmeralda and Hector, Mr. Rodriguez. You can keep Layla, but if anything happens, if you do anything to defy us at any time, we will kill Esmeralda and

Hector.” Dr. Bianchi opens your hotel room door, then puts the gun in his breast pocket. “Then we’ll kill you.”

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“Gilded Cage”

DECEMBER 5, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

Photo credit: "Gilded Cage Painting," Sara Riches Works, 2017, retrieved from: <https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Painting-Gilded-Cage/519729/3611893/view>

>>>..., ...!<<<

"We should throw them up," Layla says, getting up to head to the bathroom.

Your phone alerts you to an incoming text message with a photo of Esmeralda and Hector tied back to back. The text says, "Your room is rigged, bugged, and under 24-hour surveillance. The door is now locked and you cannot leave until we unlock it. We will be watching you."

"Layla, don't!" You yell, getting up to get her out of the bathroom. When you open the door you find her on the floor, convulsing. Dropping to your knees, you grab her by the shoulders and try calling out her name, her eyes fixed above you, pupils completely dilated. All of a sudden you feel yourself break out into a cold sweat; your body shaking and shivering. Layla snaps out of her convulsions and sits up, shaking her head, looking at the toilet.

"I thought I threw it up," she says, trying to stick her finger down her throat again.

You manage to grab her hand in time so she doesn't gag herself but you're unable to speak to tell her why you want her to stop. Her expression becomes terrified when she looks at your face, reaching over to the towel rack to grab a towel and dry you off, your sweat dripping down into your eyes. As she wipes the sweat from your forehead, the whites of her eyes turn completely black and she looks at you with an expression of disgust on her face. Then, her eyes change back to normal.

You pick up your cell phone and show her the text message. She eyes it closely, then the whites of her eyes turn black again. She stands up and walks out of the bathroom, walking up to the television, standing directly in front of it, staring at it for a few

moments. She waves at it, as though someone is there interacting with her.

“Dad, they’re watching from the TV,” Layla says, walking over to each lamp in the bedroom and turning them on. “They also have bugs in the lamps to record what we say.” She drops down to her knees, moving oddly cat-like, crawling and peering under the bed. “The bed is rigged to catch fire if they trigger it,” she says, getting up and looking over at the couch. “So is the couch.”

The sweating stops and you feel a wave of complete clarity washing over you, like you suddenly understand everything that once befuddled you. You look at Layla and see her as a potential threat, not your daughter. She looks over at you, her eyes still solid black. She speaks to you without saying anything, and you know she thinks you are unworthy of the role of her father because of what you have done to her mother.

“You’re judging me?” You scoff. “You’re a child, you wouldn’t even be here if not for me.”

Layla’s eyes suddenly change back to normal and she looks confused. Bursting into tears she screams that your eyes are weird, and she backs up, pointing at you. Running toward the hotel room door, she tries to open it to no avail.

Feeling like a cloud lifted, you suddenly feel like your normal self again and see Layla struggling with the hotel room door. “Stop, it’s locked, remember the text?”

“What text?” Layla looks back at you. “Your eyes are normal now, what was wrong with you?”

You shake your head. “It’s that pill, I feel like it’s done something to me. You did the same thing too,” you reach up to your eyes. “Your eyes were black all over, even the whites of them.”

Layla looks at your text message again. “Oh my God, they’re still tied up,” she whispers, crying.

“Still?” You’re shaking.

Layla explains that when Dan took them from the diner, he lied and said you had been captured by enemy forces. Dan said you requested to speak to your family before you were executed by them, and they granted the wish. Then, when they all got off the plane, Dan and some other men knocked them out and took them to where Esmeralda and Hector still currently were. She said they were all tied up together in a dark room, watched by masked men and women with guns, fed three tiny meals a day, allowed small bathroom breaks, and staggered naps where they could be untied from the group, but must be restrained while sleeping. Layla says Hector was tranquilized but they weren't beaten, just threatened with violence, but Layla and Esmeralda never spoke out of turn.

"Why did they let you leave?" You ask.

"They said you needed an incentive, and they felt like if they sent Mom, you'd be distracted because both of your kids would be there, so they sent one of the kids," she pointed at herself. "They didn't choose Hector because of his handicap."

You're crying openly. "When? How long ago?"

"After you left," Layla answered. "Like right after."

"Jesus," you mutter under your breath. "We have to try to remember where they are," you insist. "How did you know where the bugs are?"

Layla shrugs. "I don't know, I just did," she gives you a dirty look. "Same way you knew what I was thinking."

"It has to be the pill," you say. "This is what Zapata prepared me for, he said this would happen."

"Who is Zapata?" Layla asks you.

"Someone I really need to talk to," you answer, trying to call him. His voicemail picks up and you leave a short message for him to call you.

"What is he going to do? They can hear us anyway," Layla points out.

“He’s with them,” you shake your head. “He’s with Al.”

“Then he’s not going to help us,” Layla argues. “If he’s with them, then he knows what’s happening right now. Why would you need to talk to him?”

“He’s my friend, you don’t understand,” you put your face in your hands, still seeing Esmeralda and Hector tied up together.

“If he was your friend, he wouldn’t have let this happen to you,” Layla continues to fight you, her eyes changing again. She walks up to you and hands you her phone. “Try calling from mine and see what happens.”

You look up at her, confused, but take her phone and dial Zapata’s number. He answered after the first ring. You look up at her, and disconnect the call.

“See?” Layla says.

“Still, I have to try to talk to him, you don’t understand.” Your stomach is in knots. Why did he ignore your call? Maybe he didn’t ignore it, maybe he just hasn’t called you back? Or maybe, something isn’t right.

“Kill the Boy”

DECEMBER 15, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT / EDIT

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Discussing the fate of your wife and youngest son, Dr. Bianchi and Nick were in the room next to yours. Zapata was supposed to join them there, but Nick ordered that he stay behind at the last minute, sending security guards to ensure he didn't leave his condo. Dr. Bianchi was a proponent of using Esmeralda as bait after murdering Hector on camera and showing you.

Nick staunchly opposed this, as he said this would not motivate you to do what they wanted. Nick insisted your temper and stubbornness would end up taking over and dictating your actions. He didn't want to eventually lose control of you, he explained to Dr. Bianchi. Of course, Nick left out that he just found out your second youngest daughter had been murdered.

“Kill the boy,” Dr. Bianchi insisted, almost with a deep rage in his voice. “He's useless, I can't experiment on him, and I'm wasting resources to tranquilize him so he doesn't make me want to blow my brains out every time he has his episodes.”

“Absolutely not and I won't hear any more about it,” Nick orders. “If you know what's good for you and your wallet, you'll stop suggesting it because it's not something I will consider, and that's final.”

Dr. Bianchi looked at Nick with an expression of disgust followed by a smirk, then he shook his head. “Yes, sir,” he said flatly. “Might I point out that he is a liability, though. I don't know if he's on any medication since his mother won't speak to me, or pretends not to know what I'm saying. I'll have to resort to other methods of tranquilizing him.”

Nick shrugged. "Do whatever you have to but we do not kill him by any means. If he dies, you die, your family dies, and we don't want any of that now do we?"

"Really? You're going to threaten me?"

"It's not a threat, Dr. Bianchi, it's a promise. You work for me, you do what I tell you to do, when I tell you to do it, how I tell you to do it, and you pretend to like it even if every fiber of your being despises it." Nick pulled out his phone and dialed a phone number. After a couple of rings, a young girl answered, background noise indicating she was in a crowded location, like a concert or a party.

Dr. Bianchi stared at the phone, his mouth open and eyes wide. The girl said hello again and Nick hung up the phone.

"How do you have my daughter's number?" Dr. Bianchi asked Nick.

Nick laughed. "Ashley gave it to me when I tutored her in chemistry," he explained. "She'll call me back and I'll say it was a misdial. Then, she'll start sending me little love texts again like before and I'll remind her of the age difference, then she'll stop." Nick smiles widely as he stares into Dr. Bianchi's eyes. "And in a few days, it will happen again."

Dr. Bianchi looks immediately regretful. "I'm sorry," he apologizes. "I just don't trust having the boy around. I feel he's not worth all this trouble."

"I know, and I mostly agree, but it's just not possible," Nick is firm. Hector is not going to die.

At least not right away.

Back in the RV, where Nick and Dr. Bianchi had Esmeralda and Hector tied up, your wife and son were alone, tied together inside, Hector screaming. Esmeralda tried over and over to get him to calm down but he refused to listen to her at all. He kept screaming for you constantly, until his voice would give out or he would be too tired. Unless he was tranquilized. Esmeralda secretly wished they would tranquilize him now, even though she hated it, it was easier to deal

with than seeing him in such pain like this. They had been alone like this for hours, and it would be at least another 10-12 hours before someone would come and check on them. No lights, no way for them to go to the bathroom, Hector sat in his own excrement the entire time. Esmeralda couldn't remember the last time either of them had any water or food, and she was worried sick about Layla, and you. She slept in about 15 minute intervals, when she was able to fall completely asleep she would have nightmares about you and Layla, and would wake up immediately after. She felt like she was losing her mind. She only spoke to Hector, and he never listened to her.

Suddenly, Hector started hitting his head against the inside of the RV, causing it to shake. Both of their bodies tied together, Hector grunts as he continually hits his own head against the inside of the RV, Esmeralda begging him to stop hurting himself. When he finally draws blood, Hector starts screaming as it starts dripping down his cheek. Not knowing he is bleeding, Esmeralda just continues to try to comfort him until he stops screaming. When he finally stops, she is just grateful not to have to hear it any more.

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“Mindfuck”

DECEMBER 27, 2021 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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“Why would you be so concerned with destroying me if I wasn’t a threat to you?” You asked.

“Are you just going through the motions? Because sometimes I do that too,” Layla replied.

You looked down at the screen again, reading the text slowly. Hearing footsteps outside the door, you look at her and she gets up to look out the peephole. You quickly type her reply into the chat box and hit send. She turns around and her eyes flash. “Buenas noches,” she says. You nod. That was code for “nothing to be concerned with.”

Walking back over to you and sitting down Indian style, Layla silently stares at you. You feel her gaze and look up at her, trying not to express the shock you feel at her appearance. She looks like she is changing; her skin is getting paler and her eyes look larger than before. You’re not sure if it is from lack of sleep, or if it is from the pill you both took hours ago. Or was it longer than that? Had you eaten? All you could think about was getting out of there and finding Esmeralda and Hector.

“It seems to be the same for both of us,” Layla’s voice changed ever so slightly and the hair stood up on the back of your neck. “I feel that too, it’s alarming.”

You almost don’t recognize her, she isn’t talking the same way, she doesn’t look the same. “Do you see it?” You ask her.

She shakes her head. “For you, I do.”

Looking in the mirror at yourself, you look normal. Looking at Layla’s reflection, she looks normal as well. Looking back at her sitting Indian style, she looks alien.

“Would you tell me if you knew someone who could have saved us?” Layla suddenly asks you.

“What are you talking about?”

She shakes her head. "I feel like you did this to all of us, but I also feel like there was someone who could have helped us, and you didn't get to them in time. Why didn't you? What was your mistake?"

Your heart sinks. You don't know what she means, but the fact that she seems to be losing respect for you by the second is saddening. "I don't know, sweetheart, but if I could have prevented any of this, I would have." Reaching out to smooth the hair away from her now alien looking face, she recoils. Your throat constricts.

"I don't hate you, I just see you now," Layla says, standing up turning her back to you. "I used to think you were like a God. You were hardly ever around, but when you were, everything was beautiful, fun, happy, you know, like a normal, healthy family." She turns around and her eyes are larger than before. "But then I saw you with Diamond? Something I can't ever unsee. You cheated on Mom, Dad. And I know it's not the only time. Now she's locked up with my big brother and I don't even know if they're alive." She sits down Indian style again, leaning in just inches away from your face. "How does it make you feel to know she is suffering for loving you?"

You break down sobbing. Esmeralda was always too good for you, you thought. From the moment you met her, you knew she was the best thing that would ever happen to you, and you were right. She gave you 10 beautiful children, and she loved you regardless of how you betrayed her time and time again with other women. She never even sought out sexual gratification for herself outside of your marriage, but you did. And she knew. And she accepted you anyway.

Now, you might lose her forever.

"Oh are we crying now?" Layla scoffed. "Why did you get married if you can't keep it in your pants, you fucking pig?"

"You don't understand!" You yell at her, standing up, looking down at her as she slowly rises to meet you, unafraid. "Your mother and I have been married for 30 years, that's almost twice as long as you've been alive! I never loved any other woman, never! Only your mother, always." You put your hands on her shoulders and get right

in her face, staring her in the eyes. “And who I fuck is none of your business, little girl.”

Layla reached up and slapped you across your face, hard. “Fuck you, and fuck your stupid libido. You fucked up our entire family!”

“Watch your mouth!” You scream at her, shocked by the pain from her slap.

“My mouth? Watch my mouth, you say?” She mocks you. “Watch this.”

She puts both of her hands under your arms, thumbs slightly poking into your armpits, and picks you up off the ground, raising you above her head. She holds you there for a second, then takes her hands away, leaving you suspended in mid-air, completely paralyzed except to blink and breathe. A few seconds later, you fall to the floor and black out.

In the RV where Esmeralda and Hector are being held captive, Esmeralda has been trying to wake Hector up over and over again, tickling his fingers, talking and singing to him. Occasionally passing out from pure exhaustion, when she would wake up she would try again, but Hector would never answer her. She couldn't tell if he was sleeping or ignoring her, as he was sometimes apt to do when he was extremely upset. She hoped it was the latter, and that someone would be there soon to feed them and give them water.

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“The Rebel”

JANUARY 13, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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“Tell Hill he must come up! Strike the tent!” – Robert E. Lee's last words

Legend has it the real cause of the third world war was a little girl named Susan, who spread the word about a crime she knew about, a crime her father was involved in. The way the rumor started, her father was being held hostage and trying to be forced to become the next United States President without a proper election being held. He was going to be installed at the head of the Executive branch while the sitting President and his team of liars staged an election that would never actually take place, complete with false news footage of the ballots being cast for her father, who never actually ran for President to begin with.

As the rumor gained momentum, it started to evolve into something else. It became a crime of sex trafficking being committed by the sitting President, and online groups of people who were against President Hamilton ran wild with it, posing theories of children being kidnapped from a nationwide pizza chain named Pauly's Peepers Pizza and sold into sex slavery under the guise of pizza delivery people. The chain suffered massively and triggered what would become an eventual stock market crash.

When Pauly's Peepers Pizza went out of business, so did its sponsors who became ravaged by claims of child prostitution rings. Among Pauly's Peepers Pizzas sponsors was a major housing and finance business by the name of Hole Brothers, which built new homes and provided financing for new homeowners. When Hole Brothers was discovered as a sponsor of the infamous, alleged child sex trafficking cover, Pauly's Peepers Pizza, they filed bankruptcy, and tried transferring ownership of the home loans to another financing company, which in turn raised the interest rates on the home loans they took over. This caused a major economic collapse, as billions of jobs were lost when Hole Brothers closed its doors, and the remaining homeowners who were financed by Hole Brothers in-house financing suffered financially as well when their mortgage payments nearly doubled.

The US Government started sending out tiny stimulus payments again, like they did when the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 occurred.

Despite this, the homeless population soared, and even the safest neighborhoods became infested dens of crime, drug use, and prostitution. People started to rise up in rebellion, many home grown terrorist groups founded based on a collective belief that capitalism and bipartisan politics were the sources of the world's ills, and must be done away with. One major terrorist group that became well known in the months before the historic election of 2036 was called Red Fury, and they were based on something a little different, but had a common theme – oppression.

Red Fury spoke to the deep need for a change in leadership but it was because of systemic racism, sexism, and lack of equality for Native Americans, from the appearance of their original, opening message to the media. Red Fury attacked the media, saying technology and entertainment were the real sources of oppression, and that is why the Hollywood Riots of 2035 and the eventual destruction of the Walk of Fame, occurred. However, Red Fury was moving closer to the White House, and all the other little fledgling terrorist groups were slowly organizing under the Red Fury flag, creating franchises all over the country, completely capable of independent leadership.

What was strange is that they chose one leader, and he was about to throw a wrench into the 2036 election.

The little girl, Susan, was never found. She was assumed to be a part of Red Fury; a decoy; someone who designed the rumor to throw off the US Government's tracks. After the rumor made its way back to the White House, President Hamilton attempted to deflect and distract the media by faking his own death, and his Vice President, oddly named Nancy Reagan, was installed as the sitting President until a new one could be elected.

Conveniently, everyone forgot about the crime that was supposed to have been committed by the sitting President, and instead, started looking for this “usurper” and the little girl, Susan, who was now being hunted by the FBI for crimes against humanity after it was discovered that the moniker of the spokesperson for Red Fury was

named "Lazy Susan." It was assumed that the leader of Red Fury, one only known as "White Horse," was supposed to be this newly installed, fake President, and Red Fury was attempting to stage a coup d'état. Thankfully, the public was no longer concerned with the fact that their very democracy was under direct attack by a homegrown force not completely known or understood by the FBI or the Department of Homeland Security. Russian involvement was suspected after a letter arrived at the White House that is currently being analyzed.

No one yet knows who you or Layla are. While your message continues to be misinterpreted, you try your hardest to attempt to break out of your room where you and Layla continue to devolve mentally, without her seeing exactly what you're doing. Not that she needs to see it, but you feel like someone else can see through her eyes, and you are sure you know who it is.

You're right of course, it's Nick. He has devised a way to control you through the pill you took, but it isn't in the high-tech, invasive way you might think. He's in your head, and you're dependent on the pill now. It's ten times as addictive as heroin, and you are starting to experience the symptoms of coming down. You will feel paranoid, you'll start to sweat profusely, and you will see things again, only more demonic in nature.

Layla won't be throwing you around the room anymore now, as her superhuman strength is a side effect also. Since you both took the pill at around the same time, she is starting to come down as well. As Nick observes you both, he realizes this, and is able to get Dr. Bianchi to both of you in time to provide you with more drugs.

While you and Layla slowly devolve into these drug-dependent creatures in your hotel room, your wife and son have been moved to the room next to yours. Your son is alive, but unconscious, his head wound worse than even he probably expected it to end up being. Esmeralda has gone into shock and is refusing food and water.

It's been almost two days.

“Learn to Swim”

JANUARY 26, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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Thursday, March 10, 2044

AP – Millions dead after massive 10.3 earthquake rocks California coast

At 5:33 AM today, an earthquake measuring 10.3 on the Richter scale caused massive damage to what remains of the California coast. Reports are being received slowly as first responders do their best to find and save as many people as possible, while trying to prepare for what meteorologists are saying will be the worst Tsunami to hit the United States in history.

After the earthquake of 2044, the San Andreas fault line from Eureka to Brawley cracked and separated, creating an island which was soon ravaged by the Tsunami to follow. Millions perished in both the earthquake and Tsunami, including all of San Francisco, Hollywood, Los Angeles, and San Diego. National news didn't report the break away at first, simply framing the event as a natural disaster and nothing more. For the first week, the focus was on trying to rescue as many survivors as possible. Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona had emergency overflow shelters set up for those Californians who were evacuating and could not seek refuge in the state.

Some of the people were cruelly turned away at the border, and forced to return to California, homeless and in a lot of cases, collectively dying alongside their families. Rest stops and camp grounds were littered with displaced Californians all over Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona. Eventually, California was broken up and absorbed by the neighboring three states, and the displaced persons who survived were provided with transitional housing and a government allowance until they were able to find employment and housing of their own.

The United States, still clinging to the American dream even after being destroyed by enemies within and without, declared Puerto Rico the 50th state after California was broken down into thirds. Once Puerto Rico was declared the 50th state, the residents immediately rebelled, calling themselves a sovereign nation, and rejected any support from the US government. Joined by Haiti, Cuba, and Mexico, the Puerto Ricans invaded the Southern United

States, starting in Florida. This was the beginning of the end for the US, as it started the Second Civil War.

While the United States struggled to stay whole, the new President was negotiating its annexation by Canada. While Canada had absolutely no interest in being involved in WWII or the United States' Second Civil War, it was interested in reforming the US, and so was the current President. Having lost a lot of its military, the United States was trying to refrain from any more attacks, and wanted desperately to end the war, since it was clear that Russia would prevail, and if the US was not annexed by Canada, Russian invasion was sure to occur, and that was something the new President could not allow to happen.

When the United States eventually became the Canadian Colonies in 2057, the Russians had already started to invade Guam and Puerto Rico, destroying both islands before returning home. North Korea bombed Hawaii into oblivion, and while some remnants of it still remained, it no longer held the fascination it once did, and turned into a spot in the ocean that was home to the native islanders and survivors of the North Korean bomb of 2058, living much like the Sentinelese. The remnants of Hawaii and its residents were awarded their freedom from the US upon Canadian annexation, and they named their island Jaina, meaning "God is gracious" in Hawaiian.

Negotiating a tense sort of peace with Russia, Canada and the Canadian Colonies ended the third world war in 2059, 23 years after it began.

It was then that a planet was discovered near Delta Corvi, a star more than 2.7 times the mass of the sun (1). The planet was called Algorab, another name for Delta Corvi, Arabic for "The Crow," and NASA was already trying to figure out a way to explore the planet, and see if there was potential for human life there.

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(1) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delta_Corvi

“Trojan Horse”

FEBRUARY 4, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

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>>>See this blog for reference<<<

“Reckless one, my Hector – your own fiery courage will destroy you!

Have you no pity for him, our helpless son?

Or me, and the destiny that weighs me down, your widow, now so soon?

Yes, soon they will kill you off, all the Achaean forces massed for assault, and then, bereft of you, better for me to sink beneath the earth.

What other warmth, what comfort's left for me, once you have met your doom?

Nothing but torment!

I have lost my father. Mother's gone as well.

...You, Hector – you are my father now, my noble mother, a brother too, and you are my husband, young and warm and strong!

Pity me, please! Take your stand on the rampart here, before you orphan your son and make your wife a widow.”

- Homer, “The Iliad,” from Book 6, lines 482-491, 509-512, circa 8th century BC, retrieved from:

<https://www.allgreatquotes.com/authors/the-iliad-hector/>

“What is this?” You ask as Dr. Bianchi holds the gun to your head, instructing Layla to tie you up to the chair. After you are tied up, Layla is locked in the bathroom and Dr. Bianchi puts a set of headphones on you and opens his laptop.

“Shut up,” Dr. Bianchi orders you, as he searches his laptop for something you were sure you didn't want to see. You were starting to sweat, and it felt like the pill was wearing off. You could hear Layla in the bathroom crying, and you knew she was going through withdrawal too.

After locating what he was searching for, Dr. Bianchi turned his laptop to face you and plugged the headphones in. Adjusting the volume, he pressed play and asked if you could hear anything. The picture was completely dark, and you couldn't see anything. You weren't sure what you were supposed to be hearing, but you could hear some shuffling in the background. You shrugged, not sure if that was a part of the video or not, but then, you hear a familiar voice in the video and your heart dropped.

“Daddy?” Hector cried. “Where's Daddy?”

“Hector,” you whispered, your throat constricting. You look at Dr. Bianchi, furious, wanting to rip his throat out.

Dr. Bianchi pops his eyes at you and smiles a wicked smile. “You can hear then?”

“You fucking piece of shit where is my son?!” You scream at Dr. Bianchi. “Where is my wife?!”

Dr. Bianchi laughs and points at the video. A light turns on and you see Hector and Esmeralda tied together, back to back, Esmeralda crying and Hector screaming for you, banging his head against a wall. You see blood spattering against the spot on the wall where Hector was banging his head, and hear Esmeralda begging him to stop hurting himself, trying to get him to calm down. Hector finally stops banging his head, and you can tell he is unconscious. You start crying as you watch for a few minutes longer and see he is still bleeding, drool coming out of his still-opened mouth as Esmeralda sits and cries.

“Why are you doing this to them?” You look up at Dr. Bianchi, your eyes pleading with him to stop. “They didn’t do anything, they’re innocent, please, let them go. Take me instead. Leave my family alone, please. I’ll do anything,” you sob, begging him. You hear Layla start to bang on the bathroom door.

Dr. Bianchi looks at the bathroom door, then back at you. “Keep watching,” he instructs, as he gets up and walks toward the bathroom.

You try frantically to get up from the chair or untie yourself as you see Dr. Bianchi unlock the bathroom door and open it. As soon as it opens, Layla jumps out onto Dr. Bianchi and starts punching him in the head, screaming at the top of her lungs. You’re still struggling to free yourself when you hear Esmeralda screaming in the video and your attention is immediately drawn back to the video on Dr. Bianchi’s laptop.

“Hector!” Esmeralda and Hector are no longer bound to each other and you see someone wearing a hood with eye and nose holes cut in the front of it, holding her arms back behind her to restrain her as another hooded person is tying Hector to what looks like something out of a medieval horror movie. You can’t stop yourself from screaming at the laptop as you see the camera focus in on Hector,

who has blood all over his head and face. Esmeralda is fighting the hooded figure holding her arms back when suddenly she is pushed down into a chair and the camera focuses in on her. The hooded figure whispers something in her ear, and you see there is a knife against her stomach. You look over where Dr. Bianchi and Layla were fighting and see he has her on her back, holding her down by her arms, as she screams at him and spits on him.

“Ruben,” you hear Esmeralda sob, and you look back at the video to see her crying, a knife to her throat now, the hooded figure facing the camera right next to her. “Ruben you have to do what they say. If you don’t they will kill me.” She starts shaking her head and crying harder, and in response, the hooded figure presses the knife to her throat and whispers something else into her ear. She glances off camera at Hector, then looks back at the camera. “Hector is hurt. He needs you here. You have to do what they tell you, Ruben. Please. You have 48 hours.” The video goes black and you hear some scuffling, then Esmeralda screaming. Then it cuts out.

You look back over at where Dr. Bianchi was holding Layla down and see she is unconscious and Dr. Bianchi is tying her hands in front of her.

“Leave my family alone you sick fuck! Take me, you pathetic motherfucker! Leave her alone!” You still struggle with untying yourself, and Dr. Bianchi looks up at you, his face bloodied and bruised from Layla’s assault, stops what he’s doing, and pulls a gun out, pointing it at Layla’s forehead.

“Do you want your family to live, Ralph, Ruben, whoever the fuck you are?” Dr. Bianchi asks you flatly, tracing Layla’s face with the silencer, his finger on the trigger, staring at you the entire time. “I could kill her right now and leave her here to rot in front of you if I wanted to.” He looks down at her, then takes the gun and starts tracing her shoulders, then down her chest. “Or I could do other things,” he says, pointing the gun right at her heart.

“What do you want me to do? I’ll do whatever you want, please,” you beg him, your tears uncontrollable, your nose running. You’d never felt so helpless in your life. “Please don’t hurt her.”

“What if I want to?” Dr. Bianchi is still looking at Layla, as though he is waiting for her to wake up. “What if I want your little cunt daughter to wake up and start to fight me again, so I can kill her right in front of you?”

You’re livid, terrified, and completely immobile. “I’ll do whatever you want, please don’t hurt her!” You scream. “Please!”

Dr. Bianchi gets up, and puts the gun on the coffee table next to the laptop. “Whatever I want?”

You nod emphatically. “Yes,” you sniffle and reply. “I’ll do anything, just please let my family go.”

Dr. Bianchi nods. “That’s what I want to hear, Ralph.” He steps toward you, his back to Layla, and starts to inch closer to you.

In an instant, Dr. Bianchi’s brains are splattered all over your face, and he falls on top of you, causing you to topple over. Layla is standing over Dr. Bianchi, shaking, the gun in her still-tied up hands.

You’re in shock, but you motion for Layla to untie you. She is able to free you and you grab the laptop Dr. Bianchi brought in, as well as the one you were typing on earlier when you and Layla were talking.

“We have to go now,” you untie Layla’s hands, give her the laptops, and take the gun. You shoot the deadbolt on the door, and the bed and couch immediately go up in flames. Dr. Bianchi’s body would be charred in a few minutes.

Kicking open the door, you and Layla run out of the room and find the closest emergency exit.

“What the fuck?” Nick, in his neighboring room, after watching the events unfold, calls Zapata and tells him what you and Layla have done. Indicating he is impressed with Layla, he instructs Zapata to

follow you both and get her away from you as quickly and silently as he can.

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President Rodriguez

FEBRUARY 16, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

“HER NAME WAS SUSAN”

The third world war was not the last war, it was just the last one anyone really made a big deal about because it shaped Earth as it is known in the year 3300. Now, the only culture Earth knows is one of brutality and violence. There are few areas where life exists as it once did many millennia ago, and the ghost of civilization still roams freely. Continents are a sort of forgotten concept as most of them were obliterated or forever altered, and the word itself (along with many other cultural staples) became painful and served as nothing but a reminder of a time when peace was a faint possibility.

A little girl was rumored to have been the real cause of the third world war, because she delivered the wrong message. History says that in 2035, an important political figure was planning to stage a crime to impact a rival's campaign against them. The little girl was the child of the politician's housekeeper and overheard some of the plot. It has been said that this little girl heard the rival's name and repeated part of what she heard to the rival politician's daughter, who was her classmate. Once that happened, the politician's daughter told her father, who raised a big stink in the local news about what had happened.

The spurned politician's story caught the interest of the national news stations, and fairly quickly, most of the country had heard about the little girl who told on her father's plot to eliminate the competition. Many people had strong opinions that this could have been a conspiracy, and felt the little girl was trying to relay a darker message by telling her classmate what she overheard. Reporters swarmed the politician's home and tried to speak with him on many occasions, but failed, as he continually refused to answer questions or even entertain any light discussions. One one occasion, the politician threw what initially looked and smelled strongly like human feces in a crowd of reporters gathered outside his home, but it turned out it was simply a stained pair of boxer briefs with poop streaks that didn't quite come out in the wash.

As the story avalanched its way into international news with dark stories of American politicians and plots involving children, the Russians became involved by broadcasting the story on their news stations, complete with their own propaganda. It was the opinion of most Russians that the Americans had devolved so far that it was necessary to conduct espionage using children. The Russians tried very hard to elevate themselves with this slant, making Americans appear to be much weaker and susceptible to attack. Soon, North Korea even joined forces with Russia, being that they felt slighted by the frequent change in leadership and its resulting favor from the American government.

LET'S PAUSE REALLY FAST.

Pretend you are an international liaison working with American Intelligence. What path would you choose for yourself at this point? (Password protected blogs – enter pathone for Path One, pathtwo for Path Two, and paththree for Path Three).

Path one: Do nothing. These are perilous times and it is imperative to remain cool headed. If you try to intervene in any way and you are discovered, things could go very badly.

Path two: Attempt to influence Russian media by spying on the main international news station in Russia in 2035 – Russian World News Network. Apply for an entry level job there.

Path three: Put out a hit on the politician whose little girl told on him. Locate the girl and isolate her somewhere she can be monitored closely.

-Melissa Starr, July 25, 2021

AP – BREAKING NEWS: Rodriguez Wins Presidential Election, in Historic Landslide Victory

November 5, 2036

Rodriguez rides wave of anti-establishment sentiment to one of the most improbable political victories in modern US history (1)

Ralph Rodriguez, the first Mexican-American president-elect in US history, shocked the country as he won the US presidential election, winning a stunning 383 electoral college votes, well exceeding the 270 needed to win. Mr. Rodriguez declined to speak with reporters after the election, instead opting to be with his family to celebrate the occasion.

THE NEW YORK TIMES: Ralph Rodriguez to be 48th US President after Astonishing Triumph

LOS ANGELES TIMES: California Turns Red for the First Time in History

THE WASHINGTON POST: Stunning Upset as Rodriguez Wins US Presidential Election

News stations all over the globe talked about the new, unlikely president, and were baffled by how he could have won the election. Riots all over the United States broke out after the results were announced the next day, in protest of the election results. Rumors about the election being rigged, just as the election of 2016 was rumored to be, spread far and wide, and it was rumored that England had a hand in manipulating the election results, though there was insufficient evidence of such tampering. England's Prime Minister, Nick Hardwell, vehemently denied any such involvement, calling it "absurd, illogical, and fantastical."

Following former President Hamilton's death, his Vice President, Andre Smith, became President for a short time, but didn't appear to want the presidency as badly as Rodriguez, and the results from November 4, 2036, clearly showed that. Hinging on what felt like echoes of the US election of 2016, Rodriguez managed to wake up the residual toxicity left behind by the Trump presidency. The opposite side wanted to take back the White House in the name of democracy, and many former Democrats were easily swayed into changing their political affiliations to Republican after Rodriguez was able to appeal to many liberals using racist rhetoric, promising to implement policies bordering on socialism, and just appearing to be

the all around nice guy president, with an appeal similar to that of former President Barack Obama in 2008, but with an edge that many felt said he would fix everything the Democrats did wrong after taking back the White House in 2020 with the election of Obama's former Vice President, Joe Biden.

“What all these Presidents did wrong,” Rodriguez said at one of his many rallies around the United States, “is they failed to listen to the heartbeat of America. Yes, I’m quoting Chevy because I drive Chevy. [laughter] But what I’m trying to say is that America needs someone who knows what it’s like to be out there, on the ground, one of the grassroots people they so often like to ask for money but fail to acknowledge when they need to be heard! [applause] Where the Democrats failed you, I will not. I will give you the truth, without sugarcoating it, without the condescending attitude, and with all the genuine sincerity of someone who speaks your language! [applause] I’ve been where you are, I know what you need. How can any billionaire ever understand what it’s like to be poor, to live in poverty? [cheering] They can’t! They don’t! But I do! I raised ten kids in a trailer park in Pahrump, I know what it means to be an average, middle-class American! [cheering, applause] When you cast your votes on November 4, my friends, vote for the one who knows what they’re talking about. Vote for the one who knows who you are, because they’ve walked the same path you have. Vote Ralph Rodriguez!”

Funny thing is though, Ruben, you never said that. So who did?

...

(1) “Donald Trump wins presidential election, plunging US into uncertain future,” The Guardian, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/09/donald-trump-wins-us-election-news>

“One Circle”

FEBRUARY 23, 2022 / ANIMARIUMBLOGASCENT

>>>...<<<

“The Red Nation shall rise again and it shall be a blessing for a sick world; a world filled with broken promises, selfishness, and separations; a world longing for light again.

“I see a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.” – Crazy Horse, saying farewell to a friend, Sitting Bull, retrieved from: <https://www.powwows.com/native-american-quotes-as-meaningful-as-they-were-centuries-ago/>

Rain kept pouring down as the day droned on, you waiting for any word on Esmeralda and Hector, Layla spending most of the day lethargic, sleeping off whatever was in the pill you both took. The day seemed to pass so slowly, and in such a blur, you didn't know what was real anymore. Letting yourself doze off, you fell into such a deep slumber you almost felt like your dreams were real.

In them, you saw yourself as the President of the United States, much like the public thought you were, though you were so distracted with your family's kidnapping, and your own kidnapping, to notice what was going on with the elections, or even what year it actually was. You had no idea how long you had been in captivity, all you knew is that you ached to go home, to leave all of this behind you and move on somehow, though you knew, such a notion was a feeble one. There was no moving on from this, it had gone on too long, gone much too far to turn back and go home to Pahrump now.

When you were the President, in your dream, you met someone you swore you knew before, in another life. A brother, someone you felt immediately close to, someone who you knew now had to fight against you in this war you were thrust into without your knowledge or consent. Why you? It was a question many asked alongside you, though they didn't know the real you, Ruben. No one but Layla did now, and she hated you, too.

The last hope you had for any shred of normalcy was to get back to Esmeralda and Hector, they still believed in you, in the lie. You could bask in their innocence for the remainder of your days, you now realized, as the sand in the hourglass that was your life was slowly dwindling down to the last, final few grains. Esmeralda would never know who you really were, though, so you could take comfort in that. Layla would never tell her, and Hector, well, was who he was now.

Back to your would be friend, though, you couldn't figure out what his name was, just that you thought he was crazy in such a way that made you now feel safe, like if you had met him at some other point in your life, you would have trusted him with it, far more than the buffoons you mistakenly trusted it with in the end. You somehow knew you made a grave mistake, and you didn't know what it was that made you choose this path, although the thought of anything else was hard for you to imagine. You were only true to yourself, you only followed your heart.

Even though your heart led you astray many times, you still always managed to find your way back to the people who mattered the most to you. It just seemed that now, you were losing all of them, one by one.

When you woke up, you were in a bed you didn't remember getting into, a soft blue light next to you, and a note on the nightstand, with the words, "To Ruben, with love," written in scrawled black ink.

Opening the note, you read words which would forever alter your perception of reality, and you immediately wished you could erase the moments you spent with this new knowledge and go back to the

security of the ignorance you knew only moments before. The note said that Esmeralda and Hector had been killed, and Layla was on her way to be imprisoned with the new President, who was a hybrid version of you. Enclosed was a check in the amount of \$500,000, as consolation for your loss. The letter was signed F. Zapata.

Crumpling the letter in your left hand, your right hand covered your mouth as you screamed and howled for God to kill you, to set you free from your pain. You could not bear to be in this world alone, nor could you bear the thought of your family dying, and all because of you. No one should have to die for you, you didn't think this through, you realized, a little too late. You lost everything, and there was nothing you could do about it.

Hearing a knock at the door, you got up from where you were sitting, the crumpled up note still in your hand. Opening the door, you see a man you don't recognize, but you let him in, not caring about anything right now after what you just read.

The man looks at you, thoroughly confused, expecting you to attack him, but you don't. He sees how upset you are, and feels sorry for you for a moment, stopping to lock the door behind him after he was completely inside the home with you. Tuning in to you, he sees why you are upset, and puts his hand on your shoulder.

"Brother, do you know who I am?" He asks you.

You look up at him, he looks friendly, but you somehow know he is there for something else. "No, I don't," you reply.

"My name is White Horse, and I want to tell you, your family is not dead," he reaches behind him and grabs a hold of something.

You look up at him, stunned. "They're not?"

He smiles. "No, they're alive, and well, and I will see that they get this check meant for you," he promises you.

You resign yourself to your fate. You smile, believing him, or at least, wanting to. "Okay, White Horse. Do what you have to do."

In one swift motion, you give your life to White Horse, silently giving him permission to provide you with an exit to some sort of realm where you didn't know the pain of failure, or the sting of loss. You hoped to see Esmeralda there, but if what White Horse said was true, you wanted not to see her yet, to just be there waiting when it was her time, so you could welcome her with open arms. You couldn't wait to see her beautiful smiling face again. You let go to find that it was incredibly easy to do, now that you were left with the vision of something you loved with such fever, such passion, that you knew it was too good for you.

You felt peace at last.

...

Jim the Descent

“Droom van die Cobra”

>>>..., ...!<<<

You were pronounced dead for three minutes. That’s how long it took for you to be revived, but it felt like much longer than that.

When you died, you saw your soul leave your body and float upward, providing you with a birds-eye view of yourself, and you were sorely disappointed with your current physical state. Turning toward what looked like a bright light, you assumed it was the light everyone says to follow when you die, so you try to continue toward it, then find yourself walking and walking with no exit from your jail cell. You see the light, but it’s just the same walk, bars in front of you, your dead body to your right.

“Excuse me, I’m trying to move on to the next dimension?” You call out to nothing.

Just then, you see a shadow appear. It’s the size of a child and it has glowing green eyes, looking directly at you. It seems to want to speak to you but it doesn’t know what language to speak. You don’t know how you know this, but you do.

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“Hello,” you say. “What’s your name?”

The shadow child seems to smile at you, you deduce based on the crinkling in the corner of its eyes. It opens its mouth, and you see it has small teeth, but its tongue slithers out of its mouth and then it morphs into a cobra, coiled and hissing at you.

You try to step back but you’re stuck walking forward perpetually toward the bars of your jail cell. You try to turn your head but you

can't move any more than you already are. You look down at your dead body and see that there are people there trying to revive you.

"No!" You try to shout, but no sound comes out. The shadow child cobra strikes you and you feel its teeth sink into your neck. It slides inside of you; you feel the cold, reptilian skin underneath yours, becoming a part of you. You sense the snake's emotionless will overtaking your own. You feel your body creating a vacuum that sucks your soul back inside of it, with the cobra now completely attached to you.

You open your eyes and you try to move but realize you are being restrained. You try to talk and notice your mouth is being covered by what looks like a muzzle or something. You try to wiggle your hands and sense they are at your biceps, restrained somehow to the front of your body.

You feel your heart start to pound.

"Help!" You scream.

... ..

“Asphyxiophilia”

>>>..., ...!<<<

“In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond; and like the seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring. Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.” – Kahlil Gibran, “On Death,” from “The Prophet,” 1923. Retrieved from: <https://poets.org/poem/death>

Her sexual proclivities weren't something to discuss in mixed company; she wasn't the type of girl you would expect to be into that sort of thing, honestly. She introduced you to a whole new world – an erotic one you never knew existed. You were a little surprised she did, but you've never been the type to look a gift horse in the mouth.

You soon found that not everyone was interested in asphyxiophilia, or choking, and it puzzled you. You wanted everyone to experience the euphoria you experienced when you were with her – now that she was gone. A few came and went who seemed open to the thought of it, but you could never really get anyone into it. No one like her. Sure, you found plenty of girls who looked like her, some enough so that you could even pretend it was her. You tried to get them into you calling them by her name, just to really give it that edge for you. You got mixed reactions on that one, mostly it was a turn off, you found. You really had to get a girl buttered up real nice to want to do that for you. You weren't even sure if she actually wanted to do it, to be honest, but she did it if you knew how to rub her the right way.

You got better at that over time.

Yvette was a rare one. You couldn't forget about her, the time you spent together at the Salt River with your boys and the fun you all had that weekend. The weekend that you never wanted to end. You had to find her again. It became something of an obsession for you. She was the closest thing to Ella you could find right now.

She ended up being in Oklahoma City, and you decided you would try to find her at the address you were able to locate when you searched for her. The last time you saw her, you just knew it wasn't over between you both. There was a strong chemistry between you that just couldn't be ignored any longer. She kept in touch with you over the years, intermittently, on social media. You noticed she hadn't uploaded any photos of herself on her social media profiles in a few months. You hoped she was still as gorgeous as she looked then.

Traveling down from Helena, MT, where you had been hiding out for a few years, you finally reached Oklahoma City, where you found a cheap motel and checked in, trying to find a rental car so you could drive around to locate where Yvette lived now.

The next morning, you picked up your car and drove to the address you located for Yvette online. She still had her Toyota Prius, and there was a motorcycle parked on the lawn. You drove by slowly, trying to see in an open window, but there was no one inside. Slowly creeping down the street, you found a dirt lot to park in and you sat with your lights out after finding a vantage point to watch Yvette's house.

A few hours passed and you saw a man leaving the front door with a woman on his arm. The woman was Yvette, but you didn't recognize the man. You saw them kiss, then he got on the motorcycle and left. Yvette walked toward the edge of her property and picked up a newspaper, then walked inside.

You decide to drive back to your motel room and shower, then check out. After doing so, you drive back to Yvette's house, pull up into the

spot where the motorcycle was parked, and walk up to the door. Taking a deep breath, you knock three times. You'd rehearsed what you would say over and over on the drive down from Helena. You just hoped you'd have the same nerve when she opened the door.

The door opened and there she was. She looked confused and you realized she didn't recognize you. Your heart sank a little bit, but your disappointment was relieved by her beauty. She looked exactly the same as you remembered her.

"Yvette?" You ask.

"Yes? Do I know you?" Yvette responds.

You smile. "Jim, remember?" You push your way inside and close the door behind you with your hands behind your back.

Yvette jumps back and screams. She starts to run off.

"No, wait!" You chase her around the kitchen. "Don't you remember me?"

"Who are you? What do you want?" She fumbles in her robe pockets looking for something.

"Yvette, it's Jim," you walk toward her and grab her by both arms. She looks up at you, terrified, then all of a sudden a wave of recognition on her face. She remembers you.

"What the fuck?" She pushes you back. "I almost killed you just now."

You grab her again and start kissing her, your hands all over her body, taking her robe off and throwing it on the floor. You pick her up and carry her to her bedroom, throwing her face down on the bed and climbing on top of her, shoving her face in the pillow.

"Did you miss me?"

She kicks at you and you rip her panties off. Letting her move her head to the side to breathe, she tells you to stop.

"What did you say?" You ask her to repeat.

“Jim, stop,” Yvette says. You don’t hear fear in her voice though.
Does she mean it?

“You want me to stop?” You confirm.

“Yes!” Yvette screams.

You immediately get off of her. She jumps up and smooths her hair over, looking down at her clothes ripped off then back up at you.

“Where the fuck have you been?” She whispers, pushing you on your back and putting a pillow over your face.

... ..

“Envy”

>>>..., ...!<<<

You wanted to ask her who that guy was, but you didn't want to appear like you cared that much. You wanted Yvette to remember you like you were at 18. At 29, you were far too self-conscious. Plus, Dan told you to remain as normal as possible, as true to how she remembered you as you could. It was crucial to your entry into the program, since your background check revealed many misrepresentations. Dan was your personal friend since you lived in Montana; he knew you through a hunting club you were both members of, and he introduced you to a girl you both had fun with. He made you feel like you were back home with your boys again, in the desert, hunting lizards and pussy.

According to Dan, Yvette Salazar posed a great risk to their operation because she was the daughter of a former Mexican drug cartel boss, who was being hunted by AI. Dan said that the cartel boss had been recruited by another AI member when leadership had been broken, and Yvette hadn't remained as anonymous as she was supposed to. Your mission was to isolate her and eliminate the threat, however you had to. You agreed to the mission because you knew Yvette, and you desperately wanted to see her again.

You explained this to Dan, and made sure to be clear on your desire that Yvette not be harmed, and that you loved her. Dan seemed to be sympathetic to that, and said that you didn't have to hurt her, but if she was a threat and you had the opportunity to kill her yet you didn't take it, you would be the one held responsible for any damage she may do to AI's operation.

The tension was extremely heavy, but you agreed to his terms. Silently, you just thought you would find some way to hide Yvette somewhere, so that she wouldn't be in any kind of danger, or be perceived as a threat.

“Why exactly is she a threat? Is it okay for me to ask that?” You asked Dan.

Dan looked at you with an expression of disapproval. “I’d appreciate no questions, but since you know her, I’ll just say that because she hasn’t remained as anonymous as she should have, she’s been discovered by another member of AI who has gone AWOL.” Dan put his hand on your shoulder and looked at you with an expression of stern resolve. “She’s not going to help us if she’s alive, is what I’m trying to say here, Jon.”

It still sounds weird for him to call you Jon, but you nod in acknowledgement of what he said, still feeling that nagging in your gut. You wanted this gig with AI, but you loved Yvette. You’d have to find a way to get her to safety.

When you finally found each other again, it had been a rough beginning, but the love you once felt for each other blossomed. You spent quite some time stalking her, making sure the man on the motorcycle never returned. You never saw him after that. There were times you couldn’t be there, though, of course, but for those times, you got in the habit of searching her trash after she would take it out on Tuesday mornings.

Once, you found what you thought must have been a pair of his underwear. Thinking to yourself that she must have had these before you came back into her life, you put aside any jealous urges. After a few weeks had passed, you completely trusted Yvette, and your love for her made you feel like life was worth living again, even without Ella.

You still couldn’t get over Ella, though. Your conscience wouldn’t let you – you knew you did something wrong to make her leave. It was either you or your stupid family, you thought. Why did you have to come from such white trash? Why did you have to be so awkward in front of people? Why this, why that. It was too much for you at times. Ella made you feel like you had some kind of tie to an old version of yourself that wasn’t fucked up. Ella was you, in a way.

Deciding to try and ask Yvette if she would be willing to let you call her Ella, you waited until one night when she least expected it. As

she sat upright in her bed, her reading glasses on, candle burning on the nightstand with her reading lamp lighting up “Cujo,” by Stephen King, Yvette looked like a goddess. She had a perfect, natural olive tone to her skin, shoulder-length chestnut brown hair with icy blonde highlights, thick, beautifully groomed black eyebrows, and dark hazel-green eyes. Her left breast had a small tattoo of her astrological symbol – a Gemini. Being a Capricorn male, you felt like you were naturally attracted to Gemini females, since they were usually so open-minded and friendly. Yvette was definitely not the exception, but she wasn’t Ella.

That night, though, you decided to pretend she was. Walking your fingers up her legs as she read her book, she looked down at you and smiled, removing her reading glasses to ask you what you were doing. You spread her legs open and pulled her panties to the side, diving in between her legs to enjoy her and pretend she was who you really wanted, deep down.

When Yvette came, you got up on top of her and kissed her deeply. You asked her what she thought about role-playing. She said she was interested. You told her a story you made up about a girl named Ella you saw on a porno once. You said she was African, and you always had fantasies about her because your family forbade you to associate with anyone who wasn’t white. Yvette seemed open to the idea, and so you had sex with her, telling her how much you loved her, how good she felt, and how badly you wanted her, all the while using Ella’s name until you eventually had a mind-blowing orgasm inside of Yvette.

Everything went perfectly for the next couple of months. You and Yvette had wild sex while you pretended she was Ella, and Yvette never once mentioned anything about any sort of Mexican drug cartel. You also tried to remain vigilant about who was in the neighborhood, to better determine whether or not she was being watched. From what you could see, there was no one unusual around at all. Dan hadn’t called you yet about the mission, and you hadn’t received any text message from Al, so you thought all was

good, until one day you got an anonymous text message that made your entire world crash down around you.

It read:

Jim – Ella is dead. Her body is in Shreveport waiting for you to identify her. You need to leave immediately to get there in time.

You try calling Yvette and get her voicemail. “That’s odd,” you think to yourself, trying again and getting the same thing. You always get a hold of her.

Deciding to hide out in the dirt lot by Yvette’s house during a time you were normally not there, you were horrified to find the motorcycle parked in the driveway. You sat in the dirt lot for the remainder of the night, waiting to see how long the motorcycle stayed parked, and what happened when the man left. You were livid, but you did your best not to let your anger get the best of you. You cursed yourself for forgetting binoculars, but reminded yourself that if Yvette was cheating on you, you didn’t want to actually see it.

At the break of dawn, you felt yourself wake up from a deep sleep. “Fuck!” You shout, looking over at Yvette’s house. The motorcycle was gone, which meant, whatever happened last night didn’t result in any sort of emotional attachment on his part. Was Yvette a fuck bag, you thought? You didn’t want to believe it, but it would make it a lot easier to kill her.

You looked at your phone. It was Tuesday morning. You remembered Yvette’s routine of taking out the trash on Tuesday morning. Waiting patiently, you ducked down so she wouldn’t see you as she came out of her house with her trash bag. Putting it in the dumpster, she wheeled the dumpster to the edge of the curb, then walked back inside.

Setting the timer for fifteen minutes, you dozed off until it woke you up, alerting you to grab Yvette’s trash. Running and retrieving it quickly, you put it in the trunk of your car and drive to the closest Walmart parking lot so you can go through it without Yvette seeing

you. When you sift through the newspapers, old mail, tissues, and uneaten dinner, you find a used condom, filled with cum, stuck to a turkey leg bone in Yvette's trash.

Your heart starts pounding. You're furious. She fucked the motorcycle guy while you were sitting in the dirt lot. She might as well have fucked him in front of you. She had to die.

Walking up to her house, you knocked on the door. When Yvette answered, you grabbed her by the throat, holding the used condom in your left hand with your right hand squeezing around her esophagus. Kicking the door closed behind you, you yell at Yvette, "Who the fuck is he?"

"What are you talking about, Jim?" Yvette gasps as you loosen your grip just enough for her to whisper.

"Don't fucking give me that you whore!" You scream at Yvette. Her eyes start to tear up.

"He's my husband, Jim, please," Yvette cries.

You're beyond furious. "Your husband? You were married this whole fucking time?" You squeeze Yvette's throat and her hands claw at your arm. She reaches out and tries to pull your nipple but you move, so she scratches and claws at your chest. You squeeze harder and feel a pop, Yvette's eyes bulging and her expression changing to one of horror. You let go, shocked that it went that far and she fell to the floor, writhing for a moment, then stopping, a long death rattle escaping her throat.

You gulp. "Yvette?" You say in a voice barely louder than a squeak.

... ..

“The Hole”

>>>... FOR ...<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

“I’m treading the backward path. Mostly, I just waste my time.” – Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd

You spent about a week in solitary confinement after you were eventually released from suicide watch. You didn’t want to be alive, that’s all you knew. Over and over in your head was the song, “Fearless,” by Pink Floyd. You never even listened to them that much, the only reason you knew the song was because your dad loved the album it was on. The entire time you were in the hole, you had that song on an infinite loop in your head. You eventually started

humming it until the words in your head came clearer. Then you started to sing.

Your arraignment had to be rescheduled because of your suicide attempt. Necy had been making attempts to visit you, but was turned away by prison staff every time. Once you got out of the hole and were put back in general population, you were finally able to meet with her.

She was mortified that you attempted suicide, and said she had been making arrangements for you to see the psychiatrist at the jail. She kept talking on and on, but all you could hear was “Fearless.”

“Fearlessly, the idiot faced the crowd...smiling.” (1)

“Do you like Pink Floyd?” You blurt out, interrupting Necy as she is making a recommendation for your plea.

Necy’s face changes into the most adorable puzzled look you’ve ever seen. “P-pink Floyd?” she stammers.

You’re getting a crush. “Yeah,” you smile at her. You know you look disgusting right now but Jesus Christ you needed a woman.

Necy blushes and shakes her head. “I’m not sure if I know their music,” she responds, smoothing her blouse.

You catch a glimpse of her cleavage and you can’t control the urge it gives you. You reach out and touch her hand. She looks down at your hand and looks scared, then looks at your face.

She still looks scared, Jim. What are you doing?

“Nothing?” You ask her, almost expecting her to act like she did the other day. Or at least what you thought she acted like. She was flirting with you, right? You did kiss, didn’t you?

Necy stood up from her seat. “I think I’ll come back tomorrow? Your arraignment has been postponed until Friday.”

“What day is it?” You’re humiliated.

“It’s Tuesday, Jim,” Necy replies.

You look back up at her and you swear you see it again. A hint of a flirting smile. You're probably seeing things.

Necy says her goodbyes and you are escorted back to your cell, where you have a new cell mate.

"Hey man," you start. "I'm Jim, what's your name?"

"Frank," a young African man responds from the bottom bunk, not moving or sounding very excited to talk to you.

"Nice to meet you, if you need anything, holler," you tell him as you climb up on to your bunk and lie down.

"I'm good," you hear him respond.

You furrow your brow. Did you stink? Or are you reading too much into his response? Oh well, it was late and you were tired. You reached back to your headboard and retrieved a book you had stashed there. It was called, "Tuesdays with Morrie," by Mitch Albom.

"You see, you closed your eyes. That was the difference. Sometimes you cannot believe what you see, you have to believe what you feel. And if you are ever going to have other people trust you, you must feel that you can trust them too — even when you're in the dark. Even when you're falling." (2)

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(1) "Fearless," written by Roger Waters & David Gilmore of Pink Floyd, 1971

(2) "Tuesdays with Morrie," written by Mitch Albom, 1997

“An Easy Decision”

>>>..., ...!<<<

When Neecy arrived the next day, she had a plea agreement with her. You stared off in the distance as she talked about it, nodding occasionally to make it seem like you were engrossed in what she was saying. Your mind was on a dream you'd had the night before, another one about Zara, the girl you didn't murder. This time, she looked different than the first dream you had about her, different than what she looked like in the photos also. She looked like someone you had seen before, but you couldn't remember the girl's name.

In your dream, you were lying in a bed, dozing off listening to the birds chirping outside. Your window was open, a cool breeze softly caressing your skin as you lazily faded in and out of consciousness, completely comfortable and serene. You saw Zara floating toward you, nude, and you stared at her body, memorizing every curve, dimple and detail. You sat up and you were on a hammock outside of a log cabin in a wooded area next to a small pond. The air suddenly grew cold and damp, and as Zara moved closer to you, she changed into a dark-haired girl. The girl grew smaller as she drew nearer, and her face became more familiar as you stared at her.

Finally getting close enough to you to touch you, the little girl reached out her hand and took your left one, then turned it over so your palm faced up. She drew a shape on your hand, an angle followed by another motion you couldn't discern. After finishing, she kissed the finger she used to draw the shape on your hand then put her finger to your lips, saying “Shh!” The little girl smiled, then her eyes changed from deep blue to pale grey, and she grew three times in size.

Looking up at the figure that was now in front of you, you saw the face of a man you've never met before, who didn't have eyes, but you felt him looking at you. His arms outstretched, you felt compelled

to rise and meet him, allowing him to embrace you. As he did, you felt him enter your body, becoming you, every molecule belonging to you absorbing his essence. When he completely saturated you with his soul, you felt his deep sadness and pain lift like a veil as he was able to finally see through your eyes. You looked around at everything in your dream knowing he was using you as his vessel; he was now your passenger, living vicariously through you.

“This should be an easy decision, Jim, what do you think?” Neecy asked you after completely explaining the plea deal offered by the prosecution.

Turning to look at Neecy, you notice she isn’t wearing the thick glasses anymore and you can see her eyes. They’re black, like Zara’s, and you feel the spirit inside you trembling in fear, but you are not afraid. You know Neecy isn’t who she says she is, but Zara is dead. “You have pretty eyes, Neecy,” you say flatly, smiling at Neecy.

Neecy smiles back. “Thanks,” she says. “What do you think about this plea deal?”

You look at her, staring at her, really trying to grasp what it is about her that keeps pulling you to her. She looks up at you and you suddenly know. You feel what she thinks and you can’t deny it, you can’t change the fact that you know, even if you wanted to. “I think there’s a spirit inside me, Neecy,” you say to her, putting your right hand down your pants.

Neecy pushes the plea agreement toward you. “Jim, the plea deal.”

You slide your hand inside your jumpsuit and start massaging yourself, looking right at her. “It’s an easy decision, you say?”

She nods, refusing to make eye contact with you. “I’d say so, 40 years and you’re released versus going to trial and getting the needle,” she laughs. “But that’s up to you.”

That’s why he’s afraid of her. “He’s afraid of you.”

“Who is?” Neecy asks.

“The spirit,” you say, starting to masturbate faster, knowing she knows what you’re doing, and she doesn’t care.

“Are you going to take the plea, Jim?” Neecy persists.

You shrug. Taking the pen and signing your name on the plea agreement, you push it back across the table toward her. “I guess so,” you say.

“It’s better than going to trial,” Neecy gathers the plea agreement and looks at you in your eyes. Your spine twitches and you have an explosive orgasm inside your jumpsuit. Neecy turns away and calls the guard, leaving you there to be escorted back to your cell, soaked in cum.

Arriving back to your cell you climb up to your top bunk to find Frank sitting on your pillow, Indian style, staring blankly off in the distance. You wave your hand at him and he doesn’t blink. You look off at what he seems to be staring at and see a symbol on the wall. It seems like it’s the same symbol the little girl drew on your hand in your dream. Walking closer to the wall to get a better look at it, you notice it was drawn in blood. You look down at yourself and don’t see yourself bleeding. You look back over at Frank and see he isn’t on your bunk any longer. Looking at Frank’s bunk, you notice someone there but it isn’t Frank.

Inching closer to the person in Frank’s bunk, they suddenly jump up and stare at you, starting to shout. You’re completely blindsided, confused and unable to hear or understand what they are saying. All that keeps resounding in your ears is Neecy’s voice saying, “an easy decision.”

“It’s an easy decision,” you say to the shouting person in Frank’s bunk.

“What the fuck are you talking about man, I’m just trying to sleep, I don’t know what kind of drugs you’re on but leave me the fuck alone!” Frank screams at you.

All you hear are muffled sounds, and all you see is someone else in Frank's bunk. You lunge toward this stranger with the intent to kill them. Your hand encloses around their throat and you see Yvette's face all of a sudden.

"Fuck," you whisper, jumping off of Frank.

Frank starts punching you, kicking you, and choking you. Guards are called to break it up, and both you and Frank are shipped off to the hole, to serve a week in separate isolation tanks.

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“The Day She Went Away”

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Momma, wait!” You cried after her, running down the driveway, tears running down your face. Your sister was in the front seat with her, and they drove away from your Dad’s trailer so fast, they left a cloud of dust behind them large enough to completely hide they were even driving away, down the road.

Why couldn’t you go too? You wanted to go. You were being good. You didn’t hit Sissy in the arm anymore, well, not for a couple of days anyway. She didn’t have any bruises, and she actually hung out with you again. She seemed like she was finally starting to like you, and it made you happy for the first time in your life.

Now Momma and Sissy were driving somewhere without you, somewhere you didn’t even know about, and you weren’t sure if you’d ever see them again. Your heart broke in a million pieces, and your Dad didn’t help matters when he told you crying was for pussies, and you were better off without “that trash” in your life, referring to Momma and Sissy.

You were furious. How dare Dad say that about Momma and Sissy? You told him exactly what you thought, crying and shaking the whole time.

That was the first time he raised his hand to you, that you remember. There had been many other times, and it wasn’t just you like you always thought. Momma got some of it, so did Sissy. Your Dad was just a drunken, abusive person, and sadly, your Momma thought you were turning into him, so she left you behind. You didn’t know that, it took you a while to figure it out. She was right, of course, you knew that all along. Still didn’t mean it stung any less. You couldn’t ever find her. You always assumed she changed her name. You were right, but she was incredibly astute, and eluded you completely. She knew you, and no one else ever made you feel that way. No one until Ella, then Yvette.

“That must be it,” you mutter to yourself aloud, unaware of your surroundings.

“Cartwright, stand up,” a guard yelled at you, inching closer to you. You knew what he would do if you didn’t. In a way, you wanted him to. Part of you wanted to feel him hit and kick you till you threw up. It was better than feeling nothing; no human contact at all. No hugs, no kisses, no gentle taps on the arm or shoulder, no handshakes, no arm interlocking. Just cold, hard steel and concrete.

“Fuck you, goon,” you sneer, covering your head up with your right arm. The guard laughs and you look up at him.

“Believe me,” he growls at you, his thick Louisiana accent complimenting the smell of BBQ sauce on his breath, “there’s nothing I’d like more than to beat the ever-lovin’ shit out of your scrawny, inbred, rapist ass, but you’re fixin’ to head to Arizona, son,” the guard starts laughing again. “Come on, get up or I’ll just taze you.”

Arizona? “Why the fuck am I going to Arizona?” You say, a certain urgency in your voice. Quite frankly, Jim, it’s the first time you’ve paid attention to your circumstances in a while. How is it on Planet Oblivious? Do they have nice weather there?

The guard laughs even more loudly and you stand up, turning around so he can cuff you. After he walks you out to be processed, you remember Grandpa.

You’d dug so far down you didn’t think you could dig any more without digging to China or some sort of gas line. Plus, it was getting dark out. By the time you put the plastic container you fit Grandpa’s corpse into down into the grave you dug for him, you were positive that no one would ever find him, there was no way. It was in the middle of nowhere, and even if they decided to build houses there, there’s no way any house would go that far down, you just knew it.

The whole time you were being processed you tried asking guard after guard what was going on and they just kept making fun of you,

calling you Jerk Off Jim, making hand motions of masturbating, mimicking the noises you make when you cum. How did they know that? Oh that's right, you masturbated furiously every day and night, in front of everyone.

You demand to speak with a lawyer. You insist you have rights and you demand a phone call. Your demands are met with more laughter, and one guard even pulls his penis out and urinates on the floor in front of you and three others sequestered with you. Blaming you for the mess, the guard leaves and the three others jump you, pushing you down to the ground, shoving your face in the guard's still-warm piss.

Closing your eyes and mouth, you breathe through your nose in shallow breaths, trying desperately to ignore the gurgling in your stomach as you felt your supper starting to re-emerge. You didn't want to vomit in the puddle of piss and risk any back splash. The trio started kicking you, trying to get you to fight them. When you refused, one of them pushed you on your back and the other two held your arms down.

Your eyes and mouth were still closed when the fellow prisoner started rubbing his cock all over your face, talking about how he could push it through your closed mouth and make you suck it. Your stomach gurgling again, you were ever so grateful to hear the guard come storming in and removing the exposed penis guy. That was a little too much for you to handle.

Traveling by plane from Texarkana to Phoenix, you were restrained with a muzzle over your mouth. Guards from Louisiana told guards from Arizona that you were threatening other inmates, thus, the restraints. When you finally arrived at the jail in Phoenix, your muzzle was removed, and you asked again why you were there. A guard provided you with a large index card with your charges printed on it. Your blood ran cold when you saw them.

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“Shadowgazing”

>>>...<<<

“If you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.” –
Friedrich Nietzsche

Deep slumber wasn't natural in your state, but when it came, you were its slave, and it was then you were able to visualize something you felt was coming, and was bigger than anyone anticipated it would be. No one fully understood but you and him; you knew this because you were able to completely immerse yourself in it. You could see it in your dreams. Sometimes, when you would focus, you would see it while you were awake, alarming those around you when you would enter a trance-like state.

There were several numbers you couldn't explain – 9, 136, 52, 7, 812, 43, 39, 13, 64, and 84. They were important, though, so you had to find a way to remember them. In your dream, you started repeating them over and over again.

9, 136, 52, 7, 812, 43, 39, 13, 64, 84.

Over and over. It wasn't really doing much to repeat them, so you visualized yourself engraving them on your arm, using tally marks. When you woke, you would surely remember, and it would come to you when the time was right what exactly the numbers meant, you were sure.

The Theban alphabet kept coming up in your dream journey, showing up on walls or just in your mind's eye. Certain phrases would flash before you, but you couldn't see them long enough to be able to visually memorize them to transfer them onto your body when you were fully awake. You knew it was important, but you were sure you'd see it later. There was something leading you somewhere else.

Entering a fog-filled room, you suddenly felt intense cold, chilling you to your bones, your body unable to provide enough heat naturally to match the pace of the temperature drop from the previous area you projected from. Looking around the room, you seem to be comforted

by the unknown assurance that something will provide warmth in the area you are searching with your eyes, too afraid to venture closely without ensuring you were safe. You felt a strange eye on you, and you had goosebumps at the thought of someone watching you. They were, though, you were sure of it. You went toward your instinct and sure enough, a large fire pit suddenly appeared in front of you, the smoke billowing up into the night sky, filled with glittering stars and red dots you were sure were undiscovered planets.

In the smoke, you see your name, but it's in Theban. You don't know how you know this, but you do. The letters suddenly change to Roman, then French, then English. You fall to your knees involuntarily, and you see him in the smoke. He has complete control of your body, and you fill with fear at the sight and scent of him. He is the personification of evil, his will so strong you are powerless against it, feeling woe as it overtakes your very spirit. Darkness envelops you as you fall to the ground, listless, overcome by this evil.

Lifting you above him, you hear him speaking Russian, holding you above the flames, saying your name, and repeating a sort of mantra or chant that a group of people repeat after him with more fervor each time it is said. As he lay you down on the flame, you didn't feel it burn your skin, you simply felt that it was caressing you. Looking down at your charred body, you didn't feel pain, but gratitude that you were being released from your chains. You knew this was a dream, though, and you looked back down to see yourself in a bath tub instead of in a fire pit. The room was warm all of a sudden, and the window was open, a sheer curtain all that stood between you and the glittering, icy night sky.

Reality pulled you, and you felt its dull grasp on your dream state but you were able to resist the urge to obediently return to its slavery. You were making discoveries in your astral state, and you would return when you were ready. Moving forward, you are walking toward a tall, grey high rise building. You float weightlessly to the top, where you see the little girl again, only this time, she is much taller, and

older. She is standing at the top of the building, looking over the edge at something, crying. You can hear her talking to herself, but you can't hear what she's saying.

You call out to her, to see if there is some way you can help her. She doesn't seem to hear you, and continues to cry incessantly as though something has happened that has forever altered her life. Walking closer to her, fog starts to obstruct your vision and your path. You still try to get closer, but see her seemingly getting further away. Still walking closer, you all of a sudden feel your foot against thin air and remember you are on the top of a 50 floor building for a split second before falling down at lightening speed.

When you landed, you found yourself on the ground next to the girl you saw at the top, but she was different. She seemed to have shed her humanity, you could see a shell of her, it was almost like a clear fleshy substance in the same shape as her body and deep inside, you knew it was what once made her human. By getting rid of this, she was able to become something else. You didn't know what she became, but somehow you were able to avoid this fate. You looked all around your area and didn't see anything like this around you, so you assumed you still retained your humanity.

The girl got up, and you saw her eyes were completely black. She looked at her hands, though she was looking at them for the first time, through brand new eyes. Though she gained a new sort of life by losing her old one, and the life she had now enabled her to use this skin for far longer than a human would be able to. She was more like a feline, you thought, her moves, her mannerisms. You called out to her and she seemed to look through you.

You knew her, but you didn't know how.

When she disappeared a few seconds later, in her place was Zara. Her eyes were similar and you saw in them a hatred for you for failing her. She looked at you with some sort of plea, though, and you felt like this was something you were supposed to know, but you didn't, and you didn't want to waste any time thinking about it

considering everything you'd gone through for her sake, and you'd never even met the woman before.

Then, when Zara disappeared, a man, shorter than you, but his aura was larger than life. Your fear was amplified when he came toward you and reached into your chest, pulling your still-beating heart from your rib cage, and holding it in front of you. Ripping it open, he reveals a computer chip inside of it, and says something to you in Russian that you don't understand, but you know means something sinister.

“Отправить”

...

“Capital Murder”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

“Sometimes I think evil is a tangible thing – with wave lengths, just as sound and light have.” – Richard Connell, “The Most Dangerous Game,” 1932

When the housing subdivision, Buckeye Sunrise Estates, was built in 2033, they broke ground right where you buried Grandpa in the storage container, and found him within just a few minutes of getting started on the project. The medical examiner ruled Grandpa’s death a homicide, and a forensic team was analyzing Grandpa, discovering strands of your hair and partial fingerprints on the storage container.

More focused on identifying the body they discovered, Phoenix Homicide was successful in doing so, and within 48 hours of discovery, also discovered his trailer was burned down on what was looking to be the likely date of his disappearance or death. When the coroner was able to narrow down the time of death, it made the investigation into Grandpa’s murder much easier, and the police were looking for you in Arizona, California, and Nevada, but had no idea you were in Montana at that time.

No one knew where to find you until you were arrested for Zara’s murder in Louisiana. Now that you pled guilty in exchange for a reduced sentence, it gave much more credence to the prosecution’s case, and they were pushing for a fast conviction. The death penalty was the only option, and the state of Arizona did not offer a plea deal at the time you were extradited. It was highly unlikely it would be offered at any time, your public defender, Oral Bumgartner, was currently explaining to you. You could plead guilty, though, he said, and you would assuredly get life in prison if a trial could be avoided. Oral suggested he would attempt to negotiate a deal based on this so you could avoid execution.

Digesting most of what Oral was saying, you kept remembering the day you murdered Grandpa. You couldn’t believe you actually thought you would get away with it now, it just seemed so stupid.

You murdered him in the heat of the moment, it wasn't premeditated, so you mention this to Oral, hoping he can find some way to factor it in to your defense, as you start to accept the fact that you will most likely be in prison for the rest of your life. Your stomach starts to turn, and you feel yourself getting ready to vomit. Motioning to Oral to hand you the trash can, he sees your face go pale, and grabs the metal trash bin, holding it as you heave and vomit stomach bile.

A guard enters and removes the bin, providing Oral with a fresh one. Oral suggests you are dehydrated, and asks the guard to bring some water. Oral says he will discuss your health with the prison staff, and try to get you into medical to at least hydrate and have a solid meal. You agree weakly and ask him if he can put some money on your books for commissary. He says he will put \$200 on for snacks, and will mail you some books he just finished reading. You thank him, and he leaves you to be escorted back to your cell, awaiting your arraignment.

The irony was not lost on you, however the timing was just too odd. It was as though this was something that was meticulously planned, and you were just falling right in line with whoever wanted this to be happening. You thought back to your treatment as you were being extradited, and struggled to remember why you just suddenly became psychotic in Louisiana. Was it a defense mechanism? Why did it happen? It wasn't something you normally did, or ever did for that matter. Was it a visceral response to your circumstances?

Better yet, could you exploit it? You'll need all the help you can get.

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“Jerk Off Jim”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

There was no way you were pleading guilty to capital murder. You had to figure out a defense. If the prosecution isn't offering a plea deal, that means they think they can convict you, you think to yourself. You have to find some way to at least make them work for it. What possible defense could you have? You're not a lawyer, you never even went to college like you told everyone. Your transcripts and basically everything about you, other than your name, was fake. The only thing you knew was how to survive, and this was one of those times where you had to get creative and pull something clever out of your ass to make sure you didn't get the needle.

Are you crazy? Could you use that as a defense? Maybe, but how can you prove you didn't just act like that to use it as a defense? Why did you ever plead guilty to Zara's rape and murder to begin with? You never would have if you had been in your right mind, which you knew you weren't, but no one else did.

What about that time you spent in Charter Hospital as an inpatient, Jim? Remember when you tried to kill yourself after your Mom left and Dad had you committed? Would that count as crazy? You did try to kill yourself again when you were in Louisiana. You could plead insanity. That's what you were going to do until you could figure out how to get the fuck out of this hellhole.

The inmates at the Fourth Avenue Jail seemed to welcome you, and no one knew why you were there. You were grateful they didn't know because you were very afraid of other inmates discovering you pled guilty to rape and murder in Louisiana. If they found out, you were positive you would be enslaved by someone or worse. Killing your grandfather was awful, but rape and murder of someone random was worse, especially a woman, and though it was not regarded as being worse than a crime against a child, it was still pretty bad. You'd be a prison bitch before long, unless you made friends and made your bones quickly.

You didn't plan on staying there long enough for all that, but making friends for now was a good idea. Making sure to be friendly with some of the inmates who were on work release, you started to talk to some of the guards, hopefully putting them at ease. They knew why you were there, after all, and if you kept them on your good side, they might not tell the other inmates what you did in Louisiana. Plus, you wanted to get as close to anyone you could who might have a way for you to try to escape. That was in the back of your mind the whole time.

By the time you spoke with Oral again, you had decided to plead not guilty to all charges. He was taken aback by your plea, and almost begged you to reconsider. Pitching the no contest plea like he was trying to sell you a used car, Oral basically said there was enough evidence to convict you, and he didn't feel like you had the type of personality or looks necessary to win over a jury.

You looked at Oral, furrowing your brow at his rudeness. "Look man, you try sitting in a dark hole in your own shit for a week and come out of it looking like a Greek god," you retorted, your pride wounded.

“I’m pleading not guilty and if you don’t think you’re a good enough lawyer to pull off my defense, then you’re fired.”

Oral looked shocked. Staring at you a moment, he mouthed, “You sure?”

“Did I stutter?”

“Jim who are you going to get to defend you?”

“Maybe I’ll invoke my inner Ted Bundy and defend myself,” you stand up from the chair you’re sitting in, motioning to a guard that you were ready to go. “Don’t worry about me, just enter my plea and if you can defend me, great. If not, I’ll be hiring another attorney to get the job done.”

Oral shook his head. “Jim, I’ll enter your plea and I’m willing to work with whoever you hire, but please, think about this tonight.” Oral stood up and looked at you with genuine concern on his face. “I don’t think you really want to die.” Gathering his papers, he turned and left. The guard cuffed you and took you back to your cell, which you currently occupied by yourself.

When the lights went out for the night, you were just finishing up “The Unabomber Manifesto, Industrial Society and its Future,” by Ted Kaczynski, and you heard a small cry for help.

Peeking up over your bunk and looking to see where the crying came from, you noticed a small figure huddled in the corner of your cell. You got up off your bunk and stared at it, knowing it wasn’t real. It was like what you saw in Louisiana, only it was while you were awake. You were awake, weren’t you? Pinching yourself, you wince from the pain.

“Who are you?” You ask the shadow figure.

“Help me,” it responds, in a raspy, far away sounding voice.

When you try to move closer to this shadow figure, you feel yourself unable to move. You can only blink and breathe. You’re frozen, hunkered down on the ground of your cell, stuck there like you’re

made of marble. The figure turns around and you see its face, transparent and smoky black, no nose or mouth, just glittering green slits in the center of a shadow face, The slits blink. You try to scream but you can't make a sound. The shadow moves closer to you and you smell a familiar lavender scent, one that makes you feel instant nostalgia for your mother.

All of a sudden the shadow disappears and you are able to move again. Losing your balance you fall to the cold ground, shaken, the scent of lavender still in your nostrils. You could hear her voice, and all of a sudden you remember the last thing she said to you before she left.

“Jimmy, when you grow up to be a man, I want you to always remember that you're strong. Scary strong. You aren't like most people, and you won't ever really fit in. You're not a bad person, though, but you're capable of bad things. When you do these bad things, and when you get caught for them, just remember one thing – pick your battles, but never give up. And if you can't win, run.”

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“Hello, Eric”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>See this blog for reference too pls<<<

After your arraignment, Oral put up the money for your bond so that you wouldn't be stuck in jail during the months before your trial. He said he did it because if you wanted to plead not guilty, he would need access to you at a moment's notice, and he didn't want to have to go through the jail systems to do that. It was much easier to just have you out than waste time at visitations. The fact that he had all this money he was willing to spend on you was perplexing, given that he was just a public defender. Oral explained that your case was the once in a lifetime one he'd been waiting for, and he was willing to invest in you. Plus, according to Oral, his father left him a huge sum of money after he died, which he invested, and made himself a billionaire. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, you trusted him when he said he didn't expect you to pay him back, he just wanted the opportunity to defend you because the publicity would work wonders for his career.

You agreed, it wasn't a difficult decision at all. Especially since he was willing to put you up in an apartment and pay your living expenses while you were out. The court required you to wear an ankle monitor and check in with a parole officer, even though you hadn't even gone to trial yet. Oral gave you an allowance per week on a prepaid debit card that you would use to get rides around Phoenix while you were there. It had been so very long since you had been home, and you'd forgotten how much you missed it. You purchased a cell phone with some of the money Oral gave you, and called Dan from AI to let him know what was going on, and because you wanted him to find someone for you.

After you finally got in contact with Dan, he was thrilled to hear from you, and agreed he would find you the best legal team Phoenix had to offer, to work alongside Oral in your defense. Dan assured you that you wouldn't do time, and he would personally see to it that any 'complications' in your trial would be handled with discretion.

"What about Louisiana?" You asked Dan, filling him in on the frame job and explaining that you pled guilty to avoid getting the death penalty, and because of that, Arizona wasn't offering you a plea deal. "I was lucky to even get bond," you explain, telling Dan about the ankle monitor. You wanted to get that case reopened, request a new trial, something, but you would have to find that evidence that Eric Holmes supposedly gave the prosecution. "It's a recording of me saying something, I have no idea, I feel like I was drugged the whole time I was in Louisiana. Can you find Eric Holmes?" You ask Dan. "He said something about working for a Volvo dealership."

Dan agreed to find Eric for you. "What do you want me to do with him when I find him?"

You mulled the question over for a minute. "Can you send him out here somehow? I need to see that motherfucker in person."

After making arrangements to kidnap Eric and ship him out to Arizona to face you, Dan hung up and you sat in silence in your apartment, a smirk on your face as you imagined how you would

love to see the shock on Eric's face when he saw who summoned him. Good ole Dan, you thought, always there to bail you out when you really needed it. You wondered how long it would take to get Eric to you, as you turned on the TV and flipped through the channels.

Your trial would be in two weeks, right before Valentine's Day, but Oral was going to request a continuance, based on needing time to get your new legal team up to speed. He was confident he would get the continuance, and was excited to meet your new legal team – a young ASU law graduate named Akshamaala Burns, and a seasoned criminal trial attorney, Slade McVickers. Oral was very familiar with Slade, and was working closely with both him and Ms. Burns to put together a defense based on temporary insanity, and the fact that you were a minor when the murder was committed.

Dan came through as promised, and after your continuance was granted, sent you a text telling you that someone would be dropping Eric off at your apartment that night. At about 9:00 PM, you heard a knock at your front door.

Opening the door, you saw a man who looked like a body builder, his arm hooked inside of Eric's, presenting you with your request. Eric's face had cuts on it, and he was wearing sunglasses, but you recognized his face, and the way he smelled. You nodded and let the man lead Eric into your apartment, sit him down on a dining room chair you'd prepared, and tie him up. The body builder left, and you closed the front door, locking the two deadbolts behind you.

"Hello, Eric," you say slowly, picking up a dining room chair to set across from him.

Eric says nothing. He's shaking, his hands bound together with zip ties. He looks toward the television as the beginning of "Ghost Adventures" starts to play. You snicker at the irony, remembering when you woke up in the hotel with him. It was all you could think about when you were locked up in Louisiana, after you found out it was him who put you there.

"What do you want, man?" Eric turns away from the TV.

You want to see his eyes so you pull his sunglasses off of him. He tries to avoid it, but you manage to grab them and yank them off, throwing them to the side of the room. "Look at me," you say quietly.

Eric turns and looks at you in your eyes. You feel that twitch in your spine again. "You feel that?" Eric sneers. "That's my way of saying fuck you."

You grab Eric's throat and squeeze, looking in his eyes the whole time he struggles to breathe. You squeeze tighter, until you feel a popping in his throat. Instead of the light going out of his eyes, though, when you let go, he just coughs, then laughs.

"You can't kill me, idiot," Eric laughs. "That's what I meant. That twitch in your spine, you know what it is, but you don't."

You look hard at Eric. What was he talking about? You text Dan telling him about this problem, and asking him what he could have meant.

"Spinal," was Dan's response. "Check in sacrum."

"Sacrum?" You mutter out loud. Did he mean scrotum?

Eric jumps in his seat, his eyes widening. He starts wriggling around. "Who are you talking to?" He says, his voice getting higher pitched. "Help!" He screams. "Someone help me!"

You quickly knock him to the ground, him still tied to the chair, his hands bound with zip ties, and take your belt off, wrapping it around his mouth, forcing his mouth open around it. "Bite it," you say softly, knowing what you had to do now.

Eric started crying, tears streaming down his cheeks, knowing what was going to happen. There was only one way to get to someone's sacrum, well maybe more than one, but in any event, none of them were clean. All were gory, and he could read the intent in your eyes. He knew what you were about to do to him.

You didn't know what a sacrum was. You initially thought Dan meant scrotum and auto correct did a number on him. You removed Eric's

clothing by cutting it off of him, covering your nose as he continually farted from fear, and shit a little on your carpet. "There goes my security deposit," you thought to yourself, as you pulled Eric, still tied to the chair, and sat him upright so that you could first hogtie him, then untie him from the chair, so that he was still bound with rope when you separated him from it. Throwing him over your shoulder and gagging at the smell emitting from his ass, you carried him to your bathroom to put him in your tub.

Once there, you rinsed the shit off of him, not to clean him but to keep the smell from wafting into your nose. It was throwing you off and you needed to focus. "What's a sacrum?" You looked at Eric and asked him earnestly. "Because I feel like that's a typo, and Dan really meant to type scrotum." Looking down at the small pillar and stones between Eric's legs, you hear him whimper and cry, then look back up at his face as he shakes his head and tries to speak with your belt between his teeth.

"What?" You ask him, cupping your right ear and leaning in toward him.

Eric continued to struggle, and wept for his life. You decided to look up sacrum on Google and found out where it was.

"Oh wow," you say to Eric. "It's in your back. Well, almost like up your ass, really."

Eric tries to scream as you turn him over on his stomach in your bathtub, and rub down his lower back with Orajel.

"It's Orajel," you say, laughing. "If it works on rotted wisdom teeth, it should work for this."

Eric screams and flails as you search for something to cut him open with. Tired of hearing the noise he's making, you elbow him in the back of the head to knock him out. You didn't have anything to cut him open with. You texted Dan and asked him if could send the body builder guy back over, and after he arrived, you had him go out for supplies.

About an hour later, the body builder returned with a hacksaw, trash bags, hydrofluoric acid, a plastic storage bin, and some hedge clippers. You looked confused about the hedge clippers and the body builder handed you a diagram he said Dan sent him, showing where to locate Eric's life source, and what was apparently the cause of the spinal twitch.

"Huh?" You marveled at how something in Eric's spine could impact your own that way, but you didn't have time for science right now. You wanted to exact your revenge on Eric. It was high time.

Going back into the bathroom where Eric was crying softly, you closed the door behind you and got to work. Apparently, even though it wasn't killing him for you to saw through the flesh in his back and cut him in half, it still hurt just as much as it would if he didn't have that thing in there. He screamed and screamed and screamed, making noises you'd never heard in your life. You hoped your neighbors didn't complain. When you finally had him cut in half, you took the hedge clippers and snipped off the last bone in his spine, then looked at it closely, seeing a glittering green light in the center that blinked a few times, then dimmed completely.

Looking back down at Eric's mutilated, bloody body, intestines forming a flower shape at the bottom of your tub, you made sure he was dead. Afterward, you decided to destroy his body with hydrofluoric acid in a plastic storage container, much like the one you buried Grandpa in. You weren't letting this one come back to haunt you later. You scooped up Eric's remains using a bucket and dumped them into the storage container. Once he was completely inside, you put the container in the tub, affixed the lid on top, and cut a hole big enough for you to dump the acid in, careful to cover your face with an N95 mask so you didn't accidentally breathe any of the acid, or Eric, in.

His body would be completely dissolved into hazardous waste material in a few hours. You decided to wash up in the kitchen sink and get some sleep. You scrubbed your face and hands, and washed your hair in the sink. When you felt sufficiently cleaned off,

you changed your clothes, putting the clothes you used to murder Eric in a plastic bag you'd throw away with the storage container in the morning.

Climbing into bed, you turn on the TV and it flickers on and off, then the cable goes out, white static on the screen. You smile to yourself, thinking of the movie *Poltergeist*, and turn off the TV, opting for sleep instead. You were exhausted.

...

“Awake”

>>>...<<<

“Indians scattered, on dawn’s highway bleeding. Ghosts crowd the young child’s fragile eggshell mind. We have assembled inside this ancient and insane theater to propagate our lust for life, and flee the swarming wisdom of the streets.” – Jim Morrison, “The Ghost Song,” from “An American Prayer,” 1978

“Cartwright, on your feet,” a guard yelled loudly, waking you up with a jolt. You sat up in your bunk and looked around you, amazed you were back in your cell. That seemed so real, except for the bail part. Oral looked like he could barely afford to put the \$200 on your books for commissary, and you figured he probably wouldn’t be able to afford your bail, and you didn’t think he would agree to it anyway, even if you asked him.

But Dan might. You were grateful for the vision, because if you could get out, you could flee, and that’s exactly what you intended to do. Dan would be a perfect person to contact, but how would you be able to manage doing that? You didn’t memorize his number, it was only saved in your phone and you didn’t have access to your phone.

Standing up with your back to the bars between you and the rest of the jail, you let the guard cuff you, then you stepped back and turned around to face the guard as he opened up your cell door. He led you

out to the courtroom for your arraignment, where you were seated in the back behind what looked like at least 50 people waiting to enter their own pleas.

“Where’s my lawyer?” You ask the guard, noticing Oral isn’t there. You knew what he wanted you to plea, but you didn’t know if you should say anything without him there.

The guard ignored you and left the room. You rolled your eyes, and prepared to wait for at least two to three hours before you’d have the opportunity to go before the judge and enter your plea. You’d ask about Oral again then.

When your turn finally came, you approached the bench, Oral nowhere to be found. What the fuck, you think to yourself, why isn’t he here? You had to figure out a way to call Dan, and Oral seemed like the only one who could help you in that regard. Where was your property anyway? Oral would be able to access it, of that you were sure, unless the cops had it locked away in evidence or something. Still, though, there had to be a way to get a hold of Dan.

“Allen James Cartwright, Jr., please approach the bench,” the judge ordered you, the bailiff escorting you, in chains, to the podium before the judge.

“Mr. Cartwright, you stand accused of capital murder, arson, and abuse of a corpse. Do you understand these charges?”

You nodded.

“Nodding is not an answer, Mr. Cartwright.”

Your buttock clenches. “Yes, your Honor, I understand these charges.”

The judge looks satisfied. “Do you wish to enter your plea, Mr. Cartwright?”

“Yes, your Honor, I do.”

“Very good. Has anyone paid you or coerced you in any way, not including advice from legal council, to enter any particular plea, Mr.

Cartwright?"

You shake your head, and reply, "No, your Honor."

"How do you plea to the charge of capital murder?"

You pause. "Not guilty, your Honor."

"Arson?"

You pause. Fuck. Oh well, got to go all the way now. "Not guilty, your Honor."

"Abuse of a corpse?"

"Not guilty, your Honor."

"Your trial date will be set and your public defender, Mr...uh," the judge looks over some papers and then back at you, "Mr. Bumgartner will inform you of your next steps." Looking above your head, the judge hollers out, "Eric Thaddeus Holmes?"

What...the...fuck...?

You turn and it's him, that asshole who framed you in Louisiana, the used car salesman. He was in Arizona after all. What was that dream? A premonition?

You look at Eric and he looks back at you as the bailiff escorts you toward the courtroom doors. Passing by him on the way, you look deep in his eyes, feeling the intense twitching in your spine and ignoring it.

"What's up, man?" Eric smiles at you.

You continue to stare at him. "Not a lot, dude, how the fuck did you get to Arizona?"

Eric laughs.

"Mr. Holmes," the judge calls out. "This is not a social gathering."

Turning away from Eric and proceeding toward the door, the bailiff holding your left arm, you heard the judge listing off Eric's charges.

They were the same as yours. Every single one.

Not a coincidence, you were certain of that. What the fuck was that dream, though? Was that what you were supposed to do?

As soon as the bailiff gets you to the courtroom doors, they fly open and there is Oral, obviously disheveled, apologetic and disorganized, but you were glad to see him. Asking for a few minutes to meet with you, the bailiff led you and Oral to a visiting room where you could talk privately.

“I’m sorry, I got a new client and it took a little longer than I thought, I was hoping I’d get there in time,” Oral seemed sincere.

You shrugged. “It’s alright man, I pled not guilty to everything.”

Oral looks at you like you’re insane, then shakes his head. “Well, I guess we have our work cut out for us.” He looks around the room. “Where’s this legal dream team you were talking about?”

You smile. “So, I need your help with that, actually,” you start, explaining to him that you needed to get in touch with a friend, and asked him for his help contacting Dan. Oral told you he could probably get access to your phone records, but your phone was locked up in evidence, and until the discovery phase of the trial, he wouldn’t have access to it. You weren’t sure if you believed him, but you accepted that answer, because your phone records would at least have his number.

“What’s his name?” Oral asked you. “If we can’t get his number from your phone records, I can try to look him up for you.”

“Dan. Daniel Thipp. He’s in Texas, San Antonio I believe, but he might be closer to Austin, I’m not sure. He has friends in Austin, but he is from San Antonio.”

Oral writes all of this down. “Okay, and you want me to call him? Put him in touch with you?”

“Yeah, let him know what’s going on down here. He’s a good guy, he’ll work with you if he knows you’re helping me out.”

“You got it,” Oral knocks on the door and the guard opens it. Promising to be by tomorrow to let you know what to expect for your trial, Oral bid you farewell and left, the guard escorting you back to your cell.

Your trial. Jesus Christ, it was really happening. Please, if there was a God, let Dan get you out of this.

...

“Ghosts from the Past”

>>>...<<<

Oral found out your bail was set at \$1M, and true to his word, was able to locate and contact Dan, who promptly flew out to Arizona to post your bail. As a condition of bond, you were not to leave Maricopa County, and would be wearing an ankle monitor. You were required to check in with a parole officer once a week and submit to a drug test, but since you were not deemed to be a flight risk, you were allowed to stay with Dan in an efficiency apartment he rented for you in south Scottsdale.

Though your primary goal was to leave the country, Dan urged you to stay for your trial. Confident that your chance to flee would most definitely come, Dan assured you he would be right there to help you do it. Standing trial would be better, in his opinion, because he felt you would have the opportunity to be exonerated, no matter how unlikely Oral felt that was. After paying Oral nicely, Dan put him to work putting together a legal team for you.

In the weeks before your trial, you were hired at a cafe in Scottsdale, where you spent your days washing dishes and cleaning toilets. It was good to earn some money, at least, and you were sure it would give the judge a good impression of you to see that you used your

time to be productive, instead of just loafing around your apartment. You hated the people in Scottsdale, though, and the feeling was mutual. Still, the paycheck was decent and you needed something to do while you were waiting to stand trial. Oral put in a motion to continue when the trial date was set, and it had been granted, giving you another month to work on your insanity defense.

It was getting close to quitting time when you started cleaning yourself up, putting away your apron and clocking out for the day. Walking out to catch the 5:00 PM bus across the street, you saw someone familiar looking, and you couldn't stop yourself from staring.

Her hair, her laugh, the way she moved. Everything. There was no way it could be her, could it? After all these years?

You couldn't stop yourself from inching closer to the woman sitting at the table, talking to someone you couldn't see. As you got closer, you saw she was having a FaceTime conversation with someone. Trying to appear inconspicuous, you walked past her table so that you could get a better look at her face rather than her back.

When you got to the side exit, you turned casually, leaning against the glass door, and looked right at her.

Impossible. There was no way that was Ella. Was it?

She looked up all of a sudden as though she could read your mind. Your eyes locked, and instantly, you knew it was her. All those other women you tried to replace her with faded from memory and you felt like you were home for the first time in almost half your life.

She knew it was you, you could tell by her expression. You were both speechless for a second, when you decided to make the first move. Walking slowly toward the table where she sat, you smiled and waved, gesturing at the empty seat across from her as though asking for permission to sit with her.

Failing to respond to you, she simply stared, her face frozen, her eyes wide. "Do...do I know you?" she stammered, hanging up her

phone and putting it in her purse, never taking her eyes off you.

You suddenly didn't know how to respond. Your mind played tricks on you before, it could be doing it again now. "My name is Jim, you look very familiar, I'm sorry, I must be mistaken." You couldn't bear to face what you were afraid would be her rejection, so you turned away and left through the side door.

Watching you run across the street, Ella sat in her seat inside the small dining area of the cafe, shaking. Picking her phone back up, she called the person she had been talking to before.

"Hey Mom," a teenage boy responded.

"Jimmy," Ella whispered. "Send your Dad up here to pick me up please, I suddenly don't feel like I can drive."

"Are you okay?"

Ella wiped tears away from her face, her hands shaking. "Yeah, I'm okay, just have Daddy come pick me up, please." Blowing a kiss into the phone, she told Jimmy she loved him and hung up.

While you waited for the bus, you watched as Ella climbed into a 2036 Cadillac XTS and sped off, your heart pounding. Wiping sweat from your brow, you told yourself you'd see her again, somehow you just knew it. As the bus pulled up, you popped in your earbuds and turned up the music, in complete disbelief.

Cassie the Descent

“Little Lies”

>>>..., ...!<<<

A few days passed since Dr. Popov held you up to let you look out the window. You'd had some great conversations with him in that time, learning more about his interest in medicine, and his motivation for becoming a doctor in the first place. You found him mysterious and wanted to know more, but he had a stand-offish aura that had you feeling like if you pressed, you'd offend him. He was the absolute last person you wanted to offend. You knew there was another man there, but you didn't know who he was, and you hadn't seen anyone other than Dr. Popov, so you wanted to keep this relationship between the both of you blossoming. You actually enjoyed his company, anyway. He had a pleasant demeanor, and could talk your ear off if you got him on a topic he was interested in. You developed quite a crush on him, and you were positive he had one on you too, but he didn't try to kiss you again, which you were grateful for. Though it would be much more welcome now, it was a little weird when it first happened. It could have definitely been under better circumstances.

“Do you like music?” Dr. Popov asked you.

You nodded, smiling widely. “I love music. I used to love dancing when I...” you trailed off. You almost said when you were married to Mark.

“Dancing?” Dr. Popov sensed you felt uncomfortable and didn't press.

“Yeah,” you smile. He's so nice to you, you think. You love it. “What kind of music do you like?”

“I love old music, like from the 1980s decade, and 1990s,” Dr. Popov says, standing up to retrieve an iPod from his jacket pocket. He offers it to you, along with some earbuds.

Your eyes widen. “Really?” You ask excitedly. It had been so long since you’d heard any music.

“Sure! I’m sure you’d like something to do while I’m away,” he laughed. “I wish I could be here all the time, though, honestly,” he smiled knowingly.

This is weird, you think to yourself, as you smile back at him, looking directly in his eyes.

The hours go by and Dr. Popov ends up lying next to you in bed bingeing Netflix shows. You doze off before you realize it and when you wake up, he is fast asleep next to you, curled up facing you, his mouth slightly open, glasses still on.

“Dr. Popov,” you whisper, reaching out to softly poke his shoulder and wake him up.

He stirs, “Hmm?”

You smile. “We passed out watching Netflix,” you whisper and laugh.

He smiles back at you. “Well, I guess I should be going,” he runs his fingers through his hair and starts to get up. He pauses and looks at you.

Should you?

You look up at him and then down at his mouth. He starts to kneel in closer and you take his face in your hands and close your eyes as his lips meet yours. Starting to feel hornier than you have the ability to endure currently, you softly pull back, looking in his eyes briefly before looking away and whispering, “thanks, I had fun.”

He laughs. “Yeah, me too, Cassie.” Kissing your forehead, he gets up and leaves the room.

You can’t believe what just happened. Here you are, lusting over the man who probably kidnapped you and who definitely put some kind of object in your spine. Basically, you can’t walk because of him, and yet you want to fuck him.

His earbuds were still on your nightstand next to the iPod he gave you. You popped them in and pressed play.

... ..

Пчела

>>>..., ...!<<<

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Sensitivity was beginning to return to your legs, though slowly. In the weeks following your surgery, you noticed that you had intermittent feelings of shocking under your skin, as though you were being electrocuted in brief intervals. You also felt much more anxious than normal, and Dr. Popov had been doing yoga exercises with you regularly, to help with your breathing and physical therapy. You did what you could manage, which wasn't much, but your mobility was steadily increasing. Dr. Popov said that if you continued to improve

at the rate you had been, that you should be able to walk again by Christmas.

Dr. Popov continued to insist you were to be prepped for your job at the news station, but he didn't tell you what job that would be, amongst other matters in which he remained evasive. Your romantic relationship was growing, but he was more of a strong, steady hand for you at this time. Your sexual desire for him was strong, but you still lacked the confidence you were used to having in these sort of circumstances. He was very patient with you, and you still basically trusted him.

Late one night, after he had said good night to you, he came to your room and asked you if you wanted to sit up and talk to him. He said he was having trouble sleeping, and for once, you felt like he was the one who needed someone strong to lean on. You agreed, and he climbed up in your bed with you.

Until the sun started to peek in through the window, he told you of his experimental operations and the disease caused by a rare amoeba in Lake Mead. You knew of this disease, but when he told you what he did to unsuspecting people, people who were trusting him with their lives and left themselves completely vulnerable to him, you felt a terror so deep it caused your heart to start beating irregularly. You felt yourself start to have heart palpitations, and while you desperately needed his help, you didn't want to alert Dr. Popov to your current condition. You tried breathing through it, doing your best to take what he was telling you and write it off as something you didn't understand, nor did you want to. He was your friend, the only one you had right now, and whatever he did to you, you didn't want to believe it would end up badly. You were starting to regain feeling, and you would walk again, you were sure of it.

Dr. Popov continued to talk about how he was concerned because an unknown illness had emerged among some of his former patients. He described their symptoms and said it was quite possibly a disease or virus resulting from his experiments. He was torn, because he wanted to keep silent in compliance with the agreement

he made with the hospital when he lost his medical license. On the other hand, he felt a civic duty to at least attempt to contact them and share his knowledge, offering assistance if possible to some how repent. He seemed honestly torn, looking to you to help him make the decision. He gets quiet for a moment, then looks at you. His eyes are glossed over with love, but then they change briefly. He blinks, looks down, then back at you, with a hint of regret in his eyes now.

“Have you heard the legend of the honeybee, Cassie?” He starts.

“The honeybee?” You ask.

Dr. Popov nods. “Yes, in Greek mythology. According to legend, the nymph Melissa was turned into a bee and at her behest, granted a stinger,” he paused, looking into your eyes, “but it came with a great cost.”

You blinked. “What was it?”

Dr. Popov smoothed your hair away from your face, tracing your cheekbones, then down the bridge of your nose before stopping at your lips, putting his fingertips against them as though shushing you.

“The cost of her stinger was her life, Cassie,” Dr. Popov continues. “Zeus granted her the stinger to aid her in defending her wealth of honey, but instead of allowing her unlimited use of it, he gave her only one, and with it, she would pay with her life.” He moved his fingertips away from your mouth, still looking at you.

You nod. “I think I may have heard that before.” You get it.

Dr. Popov kisses your forehead. “I’ve kept you up far too late, Cassie. Do you forgive me?” He takes your hand in his, looking down at it with a forlorn expression on his face.

You do, surprisingly. “Yes, I forgive you,” you whisper, barely able to get the words out. You are more terrified of him now than you were before, but you still can’t get rid of that feeling growing inside of you for him.

He's all you can think about.

... ..

"Euphemism"

>>>..., ...!<<<

It was dark, you were restrained, and you couldn't hear anything. You tried to shout, but no sound came out. Your heart started pounding, and she was there again.

"Cassie, breathe," she said in your ear. "Slowly, in through the nose, out through the mouth."

Then, the door opened, shoes clacking against concrete, and the door closing with a loud thud. You hear keys jangling. The box is unlocked and removed from your head slowly. You are blinded by a light above you and try to move your arm to block it but can't because you are restrained.

"Why am I restrained?" You shout. "Where is Dr. Popov?"

You feel a sting on your cheek and realize you've been slapped.

"He isn't here, Iva," you hear him whisper. Your blood runs cold, you feel his breath against your cheek, his hand tracing the heart tattoo on your arm.

"Who are you?" You cry weakly, knowing full well who he is.

He laughs. "You would know who I am, Iva," he says, dimming the light above you. He looks down and you get a good look at his face;

the deep lines in his cheeks, his bulging grey eyes set deep in his large skull. His stocky body looming over you, his mouth curled up in a sort of satisfied smirk. "I am Sergei, and you should not have screamed," he wags his forefinger at you. "You caused Boris to have problem understanding vy he hurt you vith needle. Dr. Popov take care of him now," Sergei sits down next to you, inching in closer to your face, "and I take care of you."

You're fighting back tears. You look down at your body and see you are naked on a rack, it's the same one you were on when you first met Dr. Popov. Where is he? Why isn't he helping you? Does he even know you're here?

Sergei starts to trace the heart tattoo on your arm again. "Don't worry, Iva, I not rape you, I just vant to know vat this is on your arm," he grabs you right underneath where your tattoo is, and pushes his thumb deep in between the bones in your forearm. You wince and he smiles at you, with an expression of genuine pleasure at the sight of your pain.

Tears start falling from your eyes as you think of Paul again. You hadn't thought of him since you'd been with Dr. Popov. To think of him now was triggering a lot of pain for you and you were starting to feel helpless.

"It's okay, Cassie," she whispered. "Lie to him."

You blink. "It's for my mom," you lie. "We had a song we both liked and before she died, we went to get matching tattoos with Chinese symbols of the word "Dream" inside of a heart."

Sergei looked confused. "How is it for your mom? She is dead? Tattoo is not on her?" He waves his hands around. "Vat?"

You feel the lump in your throat growing. "It's like a euphemism," you try to explain, your voice cracking. "The song lyrics say that if I want to see you, all I have to do is dream." You break down in tears. Please make Dr. Popov come save you. This is too much.

“Vat is euphemism?” Sergei continues to mock you. “Tattoo is euphemism for your mother dying?”

“Please,” you start to sob uncontrollably. “Where is Dr. Popov?”

Sergei slaps you again. “He is gone! I tell you this already! Vy you make me repeat myself Iva?”

“I’m sorry,” you whisper, barely audible, barely able to mouth the words from crying so hard. Why is this happening?

“Iva, vat is euphemism? I still do not know vat you mean,” Sergei sits down and covers you up with a blanket, making a disgusted face as he looks over your naked body. Once you’re covered, he smiles and says, “better,” under his breath.

Ignoring Sergei, you try to get your tears under control. “Euphemism just means a symbol or metaphor to describe something more pleasantly than what it really is,” you explain. “My mother knew she was going to die, so we both got these to remind each other that when she did, we’d only be together in our dreams,” you start to stutter. You can’t keep up the lie, this is too painful for you.

“She knew she would die, your mother?” Sergei persisted.

You nod. You can’t stop the tears. You let them fall freely.

Sergei got up from his seat. “Dr. Popov take chains off you soon,” he opens the door. “Did you know you would die, Iva?” he says to you before closing the door.

... ..

“Reflection”

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Do you see why it’s important now, Cassie?”

Your eyes open and you find yourself back in your room. The voice, you look around to find the source of it but no one is there.

Wondering what it meant for a second, you move your arms to find you are no longer restrained. Was that real? You touch your face and feel where Sergei hit you. Your face is swollen and quite sore. “Ugh,” you grimace, wondering how awful you must look, and why that happened at all.

Trying to wiggle your toes, you find that you are able to with some effort. Taking a deep breath and hoping for the impossible, you try to muster the strength to move your legs. They are starting to budge, but you know you’re definitely not strong enough to walk. Progress, you think to yourself. But where is Dr. Popov?

And why did Sergei ask you if you knew you would die?

Your heart starts pounding again and you try breathing through it. Wishing with all your might to move your legs you feel your left leg start to budge a little more. Pushing it you make it over the edge of the bed, feeling your bare foot hit the ceramic floor. Wiggling your toes, you try to gauge whether or not you can stand. It seems shaky, but you have to try. Your walker is across the room and you want to try and find Dr. Popov. You push your right leg and try moving it on your own, without pushing with your hand.

Finally able to get both legs over the edge of the bed, you hold yourself up and try to sit up straight. Wiggling your feet back and forth, then heel to toe, you try to muster up the courage to stand. Gripping the side of your bed, you push up with your right hand until you are on your feet, wobbling, feeling like a baby deer. Your balance is off, but you look over to the side of the room and feel like you can make it to your walker in 20 steps.

“Let’s do this,” you say aloud to yourself, taking your first step, balancing your weight between both of your legs and leaning against

the side of the bed. Taking the second step you decide to hunker down a little bit, to try and alleviate some of the stress from your weak, atrophied muscles. Your calves start shaking. You decide to just crawl.

The floor is cold and hard against your knees as you crawl as fast as you can to the walker. Finally getting there, you take another 15 minutes to pull yourself up so you can stand. Making your way to the window, you open the blinds and look out to see the empty field, but snow is falling. The sky is a dark, gloomy grey and the pond looks like it is starting to freeze. You look back to the other side of the room to see the door opening.

Stunned, you can't move as you wait to see who walks in. The door slowly creaks open, and a few long seconds pass, but no one comes in.

"Is anyone there?" You call out softly, scared.

The lights suddenly go out and the only thing lighting up your room is the dull sunset behind the thick grey clouds outside. The door slams shut and a shutter starts to lower over the window. The shutter is a mirror, and as it slowly closes in front of you, you see a ghostly reflection of yourself as the light coming in from below the shutter dwindles. You feel the blood draining from your face as you see what you look like now, after who knows how long in captivity.

Your face is completely bruised, the right side so much so that it looks like a golf ball is under your skin instead of your cheekbone. A dark red circle around your neck just above your shoulders where you presume the box rested; your nose was bleeding, and there was a deep cut under your right eye that you assumed was left by Sergei.

The most shocking thing about your reflection to you was your hair, though. You couldn't tell as the shutter closed completely whether or not it had changed from brown to white or platinum blonde.

"Cassie?" Dr. Popov calls out.

... ..

“Ostashkov”

>>>..., ...!<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

He rushed over to you as fast as he could, but by the time Dr. Popov got to you, you collapsed onto the floor. You passed out, and he looked you over, livid after seeing the bruises and cuts on your face. Picking you up and putting you back in your bed, he decides to take you away and put you in hiding after Sergei goes to sleep.

While Sergei had you on the rack, Dr. Popov contacted the hospital where he was discovered conducting experiments on patients who were completely unaware that he was doing so. After collecting more hush money, he returned to Moscow and informed Sergei of what happened, but refrained to tell him about the payment he received for offering assistance. Dr. Popov also did not tell Sergei that he told you anything about the experiments, and was afraid that you might

have said something, but you were completely unconscious, so he couldn't ask you what happened.

Once Sergei had gone to his home to go to bed, Dr. Popov packed you up in his car and started the drive to his home town. You slept for two of the four hours it took for him to drive there, and when you woke up, you were shocked to find you were in a moving vehicle.

Looking over to see Dr. Popov driving, you were overwhelmingly relieved to see him and not Sergei. Reaching out to touch his arm, you gasp, and he looks over at you quickly, grabbing your hand and squeezing it.

"What did he do to you?" Dr. Popov said in a low voice, you could feel his anger.

You close your eyes and shake your head. "He wanted to know about the tattoo on my arm, he hit me a couple of times, that's all I remember," you say. "He had me on the rack with my head in the box. I don't know how long I was there." Staring at Dr. Popov intently to see his body language when he answered, you asked, "Where were you?"

"I was at the hospital I worked at before, dealing with what I told you about," he says. You believe him.

"Where are we going now?"

"Where I'm from, Ostaskov," Dr. Popov answered. "My uncle passed away and left me a farm, I was surprised to get anything."

Your eyes widen and a dull ache throbs them, your head starting to feel like it's spinning. You roll down the window and let the cold air blast over your face. "Wow, it's really getting cold," you observe aloud.

"Snow will be falling soon," Dr. Popov says. "The farm where we are going is very pretty in the winter."

"How long are we going to stay there?" You're actually thrilled about the idea, and feel like you're being whisked away by a knight in

shining armor. Your better judgment tells you he's got more ideas in mind than just being your hero, but for now at least, you felt a lot safer than you did in Sergei's grasp.

"What's the deal with Sergei, anyway?" You ask Dr. Popov. "Why is he like that?"

Dr. Popov shudders. "He's just a hideous person, let's wait until we get settled to talk more about him, please, he just unnerves me," he pleads. "I apologize, but I've known him for a long time and I've always had this bad feeling about him," he sighs. "Call it intuition."

You don't persist. You roll up the window, getting chills from the cold. Looking over at Dr. Popov, you notice a small tattoo on his neck peeking out from under his collar. You gingerly put your fingertip on it and ask him what it is. He looks over you and smiles.

"I'll show it to you when we get to the farm," he says.

"You will, huh?" You smile.

He laughs. "It's ugly, really. You'll hate it, I promise."

"I'll be the judge of that, mister."

"Excuse me, it's doctor," Dr. Popov teases you with a straight face.

You start laughing. "I don't even remember your first name."

He laughs. "It's forgettable, no worries. My name is Xzavier."

"Forgettable," you scoff. "That's a gorgeous name."

"Please, flattery will get you nowhere in your condition," Xzavier teases you.

“Xzavier”

>>>...<<<

As though you had never known another love in your life, you felt like you only saw Dr. Popov, like he was the only man in the world.

“Xzavier,” you say his name slowly, like he said yours the first time you met. “Remember when you said you like Cassandra better than Cassie?”

Dr. Popov laughs. “I do remember, and it’s true, Cassandra is a beautiful name, it rolls off the tongue,” he looks away from the road for a moment to see if you’re upset. Satisfied that you’re not, he looks back at the road and you see a small hint of a smile on the corners of his mouth.

“You can call me Cassandra if you want,” you say, feeling safe with him. Regardless of what happened now, he saved you from that hell hole. You don’t know much about Sergei, but what you do know is enough. Even though you didn’t know how deep their relationship actually went, you knew he was taking a risk by basically kidnapping you, again. You wanted to ask him more about that, but you didn’t want to seem ungrateful. You were just really happy he saved you. You tried to keep telling yourself you were probably suffering from Stockholm Syndrome, and he from Lima Syndrome, but what mattered more was that you felt safe now.

“I’m used to calling you Cassie, though,” Xzavier smiled. “I mean I’ll call you both if that’s what you like.”

You blush and look at your hands. “Sorry I’m a terrible flirt,” you apologize.

“You were flirting?” You see him smile widely and your heart beats a little faster. “Wow, you really are a terrible flirt.”

Giggling like a teenager, you are at a loss for words when he puts his hand on your leg, staring straight at the road. As if on cue, "Drive," by the Cars, starts playing. You put your hand on top of his, looking at him the whole time to see what he does. He doesn't look at you, just stares at the road ahead, a small smile on the corners of his mouth, his thumb starting to caress your inner thigh. You start caressing his fingers with yours and interlocking them, while gently guiding his hand up your thigh. He looks at you for a second, your eyes lock with his, giving him permission to go further.

"Not yet," he whispers, taking your hand. "If I do that now, I'll get us in an accident."

"Pussy," you tease him, taking your seatbelt off and lowering yourself into his lap.

"Cassie what are you – "

You unzipped his pants and were pleasantly surprised by his girthy, uncircumsised penis. Taking it into your mouth, you listened as he moaned softly, quietly chastising you for your unsafe behavior as you feel his hand on the back of your head, stroking your hair, gentle coaxing to take it down a little bit further.

Without much effort, Xzavier let go and you took all of it, hungrier for him than you'd had the confidence to let on in the prior days, or weeks, or however long it had been. When you swallowed it all, you rose up and looked at his face, yours just inches away, licked your lips and kissed his cheek.

"Where did that come from?" Xzavier said, his voice sounding giddy.

You snuggle up to him and he wraps his arm around you tightly. "I was hungry."

...

“There is No Fear in Love”

>>> ...<<<

“Are you okay to walk from here?” He asked you, his hand at the small of your back ready to prop you up again if you should falter. You still felt a little wobbly, but you were determined to walk again, and you did before you collapsed, so you know it’s possible.

“I can do it,” you say, mustering up your strength to walk up to the bathroom door and open it so you can go in to take your first shower by yourself. You were positive Xzavier wouldn’t let you be alone in the bathroom, though, but it was a start. At least you were starting to feel less dependent on him, even if you weren’t actually less dependent on him yet. Even though you didn’t mind relying on him since you were pretty much completely smitten with him, you didn’t want to be completely dependent, it wasn’t something you were comfortable with. Though you felt Xzavier took it as a mild insult, you

also could sense he was trying to understand why, and seemed to respect it, but you still felt like he was hurt over it. "You can help me, though," you smiled at him, noticing his eyes perking up a little. He just wants to do everything for you, you thought, extremely happy. You weren't used to someone being that present in your life.

After a struggle to get in the tub, you decided you weren't ready for the shower after all, and let Xzavier give you a bath instead, giving in to his puppy dog eyes and pleading face. He seems so happy when he's taking care of you, it makes you happy too but you miss being able to depend on yourself for the simple things. At least you were walking again, though, you thought. That was something you weren't sure you'd ever do again, if you were being completely honest with yourself. You felt like your trust in Xzavier was being rewarded, finally.

After your bath, he dried you off like always and carried you to a little bedroom with a full size bed there for the both of you. A small nightstand next to one side of the bed had a candle, and a bottle of lotion next to a cup of water. He gestured to you saying that was your side. You smiled and crawled slowly up into bed.

"It's small, I know," he said apologetically. "I didn't have a lot of time to furnish the place, and I wasn't expecting company," he laughed. "I hope it's okay."

You smiled from ear to ear. "Are you serious? It's perfect," you reassure him, patting the bed next to you so he will come join you.

He smiles and turns away. "Wait, I need to get something first," he says as he jogs out of the room.

A minute or two later he returns, something in his hand, you can't tell what it is but it looks like a small box. He gets up in the bed with you, doing his best to conceal what he has in his hand.

"What is that?" You ask him.

He scoots in closer to you, and pulls you into him, kissing your lips deeply, his hand against your right cheek, gently caressing your

jawbone then pulling your chin down softly, opening your mouth. Pulling away, he whispers, "Cassie, I have to tell you something."

You're dizzy. "Okay, what is it?"

He motions for you to scoot over to the middle of the bed. Once you do, he crawls up in between your legs and lays his head on your belly, snuggling you. He starts to tell you how he feels about you, and that he knows it's really sudden and strange. You're giddy, because you feel the same way, but inside, you agree that it didn't seem natural at first, but it does now. You say this to him, interrupting him because you are anxious for him to know you return his feelings.

He looks up at you, surprised at the urgency in your voice. You explain that you guessed it just always seemed like it didn't need to be said between you, so you felt like you had to confirm his feelings, since he was now speaking about it. It was a weak explanation, but you really meant it, it was like he was validating the feelings growing inside of you all this time.

"I'm in love with you, I think, Cassie," he says, looking down at the little black box in his hand.

You're blushing. You don't know what to say anymore. You just look at him, staring as he looks at you then looks away, a huge smile on his face. All of a sudden, he opens the box and turns it to face you. It's a necklace shaped like a heart with an emerald in the center of it.

"Oh my gosh it's so pretty," you gasp, not believing he has a present for you. "I love emeralds."

He reaches up and moves your hair, still not mentioning the color change, and puts the necklace on you. "I know amethyst is your birthstone, but I thought this would look pretty against your skin," he touches the heart, gently pressing it against your chest.

You take his hand in yours and look into his eyes. "You really love me?" You whisper. It's so hard for you to believe this could be real. You had just been through the lowest time in your entire life, a time you almost thought about ending your life in fact, and even though

Xzavier was involved, and helped to cause some of it, you were madly in love with him. It was like you'd known him all your life, and as soon as you both started spending time together, nothing else mattered except being with him.

If this is real, it's the most beautiful thing you have ever experienced, and you wanted it more than you could ever express in words.

The look in Xzavier's eyes as he looked back at you, your face confused and happy at the same time, he smooths little wisps of hair away from your face and nods, tears forming in his eyes as he looks at where Sergei hit you and is careful not to touch it. "Yes, I really love you," he says, a tear falling from his eye as he traces your face, angry at the bruises and cuts. "I'm so sorry I let this happen to you, but no one will ever hurt you again, Cassie, I promise."

You feel your throat constricting as you absorb the energy behind his words. You believe him. He really does love you. He's the reason this is all happening; if it wasn't for the Mark's death to begin with, you would have never met Xzavier, never known true love. And that's what this is, it has to be.

Yes, it has to be, you think to yourself as you both start getting undressed to make love for the first time.

...

“A Time for War, a Time for Peace”

>>>...<<<

His little face crumpled up like a paper bag and he started wailing at the top of his wee little lungs, there in your shaking arms, crying for your mother. She encouraged you to continue to try holding him, it was good practice for when you eventually became a mother yourself. You asked her if she thought you'd be a good mom, like she was, and she nodded emphatically, unable to understand why you would even entertain the idea that you were capable of anything less. You didn't like the idea of a little person who did this all the time, though, he was very stinky and loud, but he was pretty cute when he was asleep, or crawling, or laughing. You decided it might not be that bad, but still, you were leery of the idea.

Later that afternoon, when Momma was able to get Jimmy to sleep, you ventured outside, trying to find something to do away from the house. You were tired of hearing your parents fighting all the time, and Jimmy screaming. You wandered over to your friend Jennifer's house, who suggested you visit your cousin Kelly and play cards. You didn't want to at first, because the kind of cards Kelly played

were the ones that told you your fortune, and you didn't like how yours came true sometimes. You told Jennifer you'd go but you didn't want to play cards, you'd just hang out. Both of you walked over and found Kelly at home, excited to have visitors.

A couple hours into the night and Momma started texting you, telling you you better come home before Dad found out you were gone, or who knew what would happen. You told Jennifer and Kelly you had to go. Saying your hurried goodbyes, you and Jennifer rushed back to her house first, then you ran all the way home to find your Dad in the front yard, waiting for you. Momma ran out and yelled at him to distract him long enough for you to run inside before he exacted any sort of punishment.

Once you got into your room, you locked the door behind you just in time to hear Jimmy start to scream again as Momma yelled at Dad for something. Your bedroom phone rang and you picked it up quickly. It was Kelly saying she had a weird reading with Jennifer that she felt was clearly related to you. You told her you didn't want to know but Kelly thought it was funny and said she wanted to tell you anyway. You hung up the phone and unplugged it, then put in your headphones to watch cartoons on your laptop.

Years later, when you were in high school, you ran into Kelly again, after your Mom and Dad divorced. She brought up the tarot reading all those years ago when Jimmy was a baby. You'd forgotten all about it, but in your teenage years, had developed a keen interest in the occult and had started reading books about numerology and reading tarot cards. Kelly asked you if you wanted her to do a reading for you, and while, inside, something told you that you didn't really want to know what the cards had to say about your life, your curiosity was really eating away at you, and you agreed, accepting Kelly's invitation for a tarot reading. She was going to come by the apartment you shared with your Mom after you both got out of school that day.

After she did the Celtic Cross spread, she told you she was really creeped out that three cards kept showing up in every reading she

ever did where she thought about you at all. You looked at her, perplexed, asking her to explain, and to show you which tarot cards she was referring to. She organized the tarot deck, and as she did so, told you that she frequently did tarot readings, as you knew, and sometimes would have flashes of thoughts come at random during her readings. At times, those thoughts would be of you, and when that happened, the same three cards always showed up in the reading she was doing, no matter who the person querying was, or that the query had nothing at all to do with you. Just the fact that you came into her mind when she was doing a tarot reading was enough to trigger the recurring appearances of these three cards.

Removing the three cards from the deck after locating them, she shows you they are The Wheel of Fortune, the Six of Swords, and The Devil. You don't know very much yet about the meanings of these cards, but you know The Devil card can mean negative things, but it doesn't always. You ask Kelly to elaborate, trying to hide the fact that this is scaring the shit out of you.

Kelly shrugs, her eyes widening. "The way I interpret it, is that you have a choice, it's coming in your live very soon. It's so important you make the right choice, Cassie. You'll arrive at the same fate either way, though, I think, but if you make the wrong choice..." she trails off.

"Yes?" You push her.

Kelly shakes her head. "If you make the wrong choice you will be trapped by someone horrible, someone who will make you love him for all the wrong reasons, who will control every aspect of you and turn you into someone else. You'll cause him to do terrible things."

"Holy shit, I don't believe you can see any of that, come on now," you instantly become defensive, but inside, you feel there is some truth to what she is saying. After all, she's never lied to you or tried to mislead you before, she just tried to tell you things you weren't ready to hear. She looks apologetic, though, and you calm down a little bit,

but you don't like what she's saying at all. It makes you feel like you're in danger.

"I'm telling you, I've had nightmares about this," she goes on. "He's someone you would never suspect, but he's not who you think he is." She looks more scared than you feel right now. "Just be careful, Cassie."

"Be careful of what?"

When your mother left your father, you remembered Jimmy's face. He was crying just like he did that day you held him. All of a sudden, his face appeared in your mind as you dozed off in the chair next to Mark's hospital bed. You had no idea how long you'd been asleep, but when you woke up, you heard what sounded like "Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season)" by the Byrds playing softly in the background. Looking up at the television, you see what appears to be an oldies music streaming station playing. Looking back at Mark, you see Jimmy's baby face, crumpled up crying, and hear Kelly's voice, "He's someone you'd never suspect, but he's not who you think he is."

Jumping up from your seat, you take off out of the room down the hall toward the bathroom. When you get there, you wash your face and just stare at yourself in the mirror, horrified at how tired you look. Your eyes sunken into your face, your cheeks hollowed, you decide it's time for you to head home and take a shower, get something to eat, and try to get some sleep in an actual bed.

After you get out of the shower, your phone buzzes, and it's Paul. He wants to come over. You really want him to, but you also just want to hang out at home and relax, and you know if Paul comes over, the last thing you'll do is relax. Although, afterward, you'd sleep like a baby. On second thought, maybe it would be a great idea for Paul to come over. You relent, and he is on his way shortly thereafter.

The next morning, Paul leaves and you go for your morning run, listening to a random station playing 80s music. When you get to your usual stretching spot at the beginning of the park you jogged in

every morning, you look up and see someone lying on the ground, appearing like they had just been hurt, or attacked.

Looking around, you don't see anyone else, but the sun is barely coming up. You all of a sudden don't feel very safe, which made you a little angry since this was typically the best part of your morning. The person in front of you said something inaudible, seemingly trying to speak to you. You call out to them and they motion for you to come over to help them. When you get over to them, you see they are bleeding, and that they have been shot. You immediately get on the phone with the police, and stay with the small man who didn't speak English very fluently.

Managing you to tell you his name was Im, and he was a foreign exchange student from North Korea, he explains he was trying to break into his apartment because he accidentally locked himself out. Someone thought he was an intruder and shot him. Something about his story doesn't ring true to you, but you listen as he continues, telling you that this person might still be out there, that they were a master of disguise.

"He isn't what he seems," Im says to you.

You stare at Im for a second, and his eyes flash, almost glittering, before they look almost matte, then fixed, and he falls down on the ground in front of you, dead after losing too much blood. Police arrive and question you for a couple of hours, then release you after eliminating you as a suspect. You finally get to start your morning jog, with an unsettling feeling in your stomach.

His face looked so perfect sleeping sweetly next to yours, little breaths coming out of the small opening in his mouth just on your hand which was laid down right in front of him on the pillow. When you met him, you were afraid he would be cruel to you, torturing you while you were on the rack. Instead, he became your friend, helping you to walk again, giving you life-saving surgery, and taking you away from a horribly abusive kidnapper who assaulted you and drugged you.

Tracing the contours of his face as he slept, you silently hoped you never knew what life was like without him. You didn't know what you did to deserve someone like him, but your life had been so hard up till now, so many losses, so much struggling, so much pain. It feels so right, like it was all worth it. You just wanted some kind of stability in your life, someone to love you and never leave you. You didn't want to feel like you were all alone in the world. You wanted someone who was all yours.

It seems like you might have what you want now. It seems like Xzavier is your own, personal, self-appointed white-knight.

...

“I Wonder Why”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>Also see this blog for reference<<<

>>>And this one for reference too<<<

“Killing You Was Fun”

‘Your heart was ripe for the plucking

Waiting with baited breath

Like a whore all used up from fucking

I stole your innocence, and all that’s left

Is a carcass, a broken shell of a being

It was never supposed to end this way

Although I can’t stop thinking of reliving

Just to imagine what you might say

You wore your heart like a noose

So innocent and so very naive

If I didn’t know better, I’d say you liked being used

But killing you was the only way I could grieve

You see, your death was just the beginning

Of the end of weakness within me

Killing you made me feel like I was winning

Finally able to alleviate my pain and be free

Let me kill you again, oh my lost love

Allow me those moments to feel you dying

I’ll keep you happy and fool you again, my bloated dove

A second time you'd never know I was lying
Can I kill you?
Oh please, let's just pretend
May I kill you?
I'll only ask to do it again
It won't hurt once I've pierced your skin
I'm only lying again
Can I take your life over and over?
May I use you to end my own?
And when your soul departs, sweet lover,
Look down on me and see I'm not alone
Your body serves its final purpose
I will desecrate you lovingly
Remains of what I couldn't give your stiffened carcass
Come through me, unto you, so easily
Just live through me
Can I kill you again?
Just for fun
Once more, then I'll be done

There can never be only one' – Melissa Starr, 10/15/2014, from "The Route 86 Slayer," unpublished manuscript

"Where am I?"

Darkness surrounded you, Xzavier was no where to be found. You shouted for him, but were met with echoes of your own voice. You tried shouting more loudly, but found that no noise came out. Did you

lose your voice again, you thought? Trying once more, you suddenly feel her again.

The black eyed girl from the cherry forest, the one you heard talking to you when your head was locked in a box.

She walked toward you, all you could see of her was the shape of her body, the color of her skin and hair, and her eyes. You felt a sense of danger, and the hair stands up on the back of your neck as she gets closer. She starts floating toward you and as she does, she starts to change. Her skin starts to turn translucent, and her body turns into one singular shape, similar to the shape of a female but without definition in her extremities, making them appear to dangle beneath her torso as she started to levitate, then float more closely to you, her face completely disappeared except for her eyes.

Climbing on top of you, she hovers over you for what felt like eons, the terror in your heart causing palpitations, you feel yourself starting to sweat and again, you can't scream. She gets closer to you, almost kissing you, and you feel her essence enter your body. You absorb all of her, and it feels like she completely takes over your entire being. You know what she knows, you feel what she feels. You still feel yourself, though – your thoughts, memories, everything seems to still be you but with someone extra inside. You open your eyes and see nothing but green above you. You look around at the room you're in and you start to see shapes, coming into focus.

At one end, there is a table, a chair, and a lamp. As your vision starts to come into focus, you determine it's a desk, with a clipboard and file folders on top of it. You look over to the middle of the room and see a man with a hacksaw, standing with his back to you, holding the hacksaw in his left hand, his right hand holding something else.

You struggle to focus on what he is holding in his right hand. As it starts slowly coming into focus, there is a loud clanging noise in your ears followed by a high-pitched ringing sound that causes you to immediately try to put your hands over your ears, but you realize you can't. You're restrained. You can't move.

“Cassie,” a familiar whisper in your ear. Paul’s bedroom voice. You’d heard it a million times.

In an instant, you were with Paul again, making love in his bedroom. His hot breath on your neck, your body convulsing from the intensity of the orgasm you were having. When Paul finished, he leaned down to kiss you like he normally does, but his face was different. You stopped him from kissing you, staring at his face. What is different about it? You can’t put your finger on it. It’s something sinister, though.

Suddenly you’re back on the rack again. That smell, that horrible, rotten smell. What was that? It smelled dead.

“He tried running away,” Sergei said.

“I wonder why,” Xzavier answered. “We have her now, he could have seen her again and been whole.”

Sergei shrugged. “He’ll see her zis way, or he’ll not see her.” Dropping the hacksaw on the floor, Sergei turned and saw your eyes were open. You see his lips curl in the most twisted smile as he walks toward you, and knocks you out with a blow to your head.

You’re back at the beginning again, in darkness, wondering where you are. You try shouting again, and this time, you hear your voice. You try moving your arms, and you are able, so you get up and immediately start falling into what seems like a bottomless pit. Closing your eyes, you realize you must be dreaming, and try to wake yourself up.

“It’s not a dream, Cassie,” Paul says.

“Cassie?” Xzavier calls out. “Cassie, are you okay?”

...

“Hello, Paul”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

“The Gift”

There is something you left behind

A moment spiraling infinitely in time

The day I saw your face again I knew

I should never have said yes to you

When it all came together, I felt nothing

When it all fell apart, I took off running
Your love meant everything only to you
My love was something empty and untrue
The time comes now and then when I wonder
If I could turn back time, would I avoid going under?
Because now, it's like I live in a cave
Waiting, hunting for another slave
But that's not what I truly crave, you know?
Just seems like I got addicted to it, though
So fuck you and the emptiness you left
Sorry
Just cold and hopelessly bereft

-Melissa Starr, 01/28/2015

Xzavier comforted you after your nightmare about Paul. You told him everything, and said it was almost like you were having flashbacks of repressed memories or something, you weren't sure, but you said you saw Sergei hurting someone, refraining from telling Xzavier who Sergei was hurting, and what he meant to you.

Listening to yourself as you spoke about your dream aloud, you started thinking it sounded ridiculous, and you just trailed off while Xzavier comforted you and accused you of being silly, saying you were probably just traumatized and it was manifesting itself in your dreams. Of course you were traumatized, you thought, almost feeling like he was minimizing your concerns, but also thinking that maybe they weren't really valid concerns, given that they arose from a dream.

Still, though, the memories you had of your experience on the rack were vivid, and you knew that you were reliving part of what you experienced in your dream. Xzavier was able to calm you completely

with his touch, though, and the power of your love for him was undeniable. Omnipotent as your feelings were for Xzavier, you still had the nagging feeling that there was something he wasn't telling you, and you couldn't bring yourself to ask because he was just always so sweet and doting. You didn't want to make him angry.

You'd never seen him angry.

As the days passed in Xzavier's cabin, you both spent time discussing your role at Russian World News Network, and your mission from American Intelligence. He no longer considered it a priority for you to prepare for your mission after what Sergei did to you, and suggested that you put it out of your mind for now, bringing up the experiments he conducted at the hospital, saying it was more important to try and find out more about this disease first. You were interested, but horrified and disgusted by what he did to those people, and said so, without thinking about it.

Xzavier's eyes changed and you felt terror. He seemed to take notice of your reaction to him and his expression immediately became benevolent, almost rehearsed. He then looked confused as you perceived his expressions, and you felt like he was reading your mind again.

"What are you doing?" You whispered, eyes wide.

Xzavier cupped your face in his hands and kissed you deeply. You melted, forgetting you were ever afraid of him in the first place. Suddenly, you wanted nothing more than to please him, to do whatever he wanted you to do.

"What am I doing?" he whispered in your ear as he gently kissed your earlobe, the five-o'clock stubble on his face tickling your cheek, making your nipples hard. "Don't ever ask me that again, Cassie, okay? Just trust me," he ran his finger down your spine and you instantly became wet, your legs starting to shake.

Unable to resist him any longer, you started to take off your clothes until he stopped you, putting his finger on the tip of your nose,

rendering you unable to move. You blinked, and looked in his eyes, completely frozen. You tried to speak but you couldn't make a sound. You tried to move but could only blink and breathe. Xzavier blinked his eyes and you were able to move again.

"What was that?" You asked, breathing heavily.

Xzavier looked confused. "What do you mean, love?"

You suddenly didn't know what you meant. You were hungry. Ravenous, you needed food immediately. Your stomach started growling. "I'm hungry," you say, confused because you knew you felt something else just a few seconds ago, but you couldn't remember what it was, and you knew it was important.

"Of course, I'll get you some soup I made for you earlier," Xzavier left the room and you stood up, looking down at yourself and feeling like you were in a foreigner's body. Like you were you but you were someone else at the same time.

You followed Xzavier, something you rarely did when he left the room, mainly because before, you knew Sergei was around, so you didn't feel safe. You decided you wanted to look around Xzavier's cabin while he was getting your soup. You wanted to feel comfortable there, and see more than just the same four walls all the time.

Just outside the bedroom you were in was a long, dimly lit hallway with two doors on the right, and one on the left at the end of the hall. You tried opening the first door and saw it was a bathroom. Going inside and turning on the light, you take a long look at yourself in the mirror, not able to believe that your hair had turned completely white. You try to find any strands of brown left and there are none, except on your eyebrows. Chalking it up to extreme stress, you sit down on the toilet to pee, and pick up a magazine from the rack in front of the toilet.

It's a magazine in Russian, called "Современная медицина," or "Modern Medicine" in English. You found yourself able to translate

some words more easily without the use of the internet, and that excited you. You decided to sit a little longer and look at the magazine, seeing how much of it you could actually read and comprehend.

After a few moments, you decided it was time to finish up and see what Xzavier was doing. Not paying any mind to the date on the magazine, you put it back on the magazine rack and finished your bathroom business, leaving the door slightly ajar behind you.

Going up to the second door down the hallway, you try to open it and discover it's locked.

"Hmm," your curiosity almost getting the better of you, you refrain from trying to break into the room, because you were sure if you asked Xzavier to show you what was in there, he would.

Turning your attention to the last door at the end of the hall, on the left, you start to make your way toward it when you hear dull thudding noises coming from below. Was the kitchen downstairs, you thought? You didn't realize the cabin had a basement, but you supposed it would be customary in this area, or maybe not, you didn't really know. In any case, you proceeded to walk toward the door at the end of the hall. Once you got there, you could smell the soup Xzavier was heating up, and it smelled delicious.

It wasn't coming from downstairs, though. You could see the kitchen to your right as you got to the end of the hall in front of the door. There was Xzavier in front of the stove, happily stirring your soup.

Turning to look at the door, you got butterflies in your stomach as you started to feel like you were spying, but he wouldn't mind. At least, you didn't think he would. Oh well, you were there, you were going to open that door, or at least try.

Turning the knob slowly, it opened, and you pushed ever so slightly to peek inside and see what was there. You saw a staircase leading down to what you assumed was the basement. You pushed the door open a little further, and it creaked, then something ran across the

bottom of the stairs quickly. You heard a clanging in the kitchen behind you, but you stood, frozen, staring at whatever moved at the bottom of the stairs.

It was still there, you could see its shadow. It wasn't moving either, and it somehow knew you were there, you could feel it. Hearing Xzavier's footsteps behind you, you started to back away from the door, unable to stop staring to close it. As soon as Xzavier reached you, he started to slam the door, but not before the thing at the bottom of the stairs turned to look up at you, its white eyes glistening in the darkness below.

The door slammed and you heard it running up and down the stairs, stopping to jiggle the doorknob when it got to the top, then running back to the bottom again. You looked at Xzavier and that expression he had on his face earlier returned. He was angry, and you could feel the hair on the back of your neck stand up.

"Don't do that again," Xzavier ordered you, his voice low, ominous, absent any affection he normally had in it.

"What was that?" You asked, your voice shrill, your heart pounding furiously. The thing kept running up the stairs, jiggling the doorknob, then running back down.

Xzavier smiled at you, his expression returning to one you had come to know as normal for him. "Those are our subjects, we will talk about them later, once you've eaten your soup." He takes you by your arm gently to lead you to the kitchen table.

He isn't locking the door, and this troubles you greatly. What if that thing opens the door and attacks you?

"It won't, Cassie," Xzavier takes your hand in his and squeezes it a little too hard, his eyes never betraying him, though. He smiles at you. "It's trained to do as I tell it to do."

You gulp. This doesn't seem like Xzavier. This seems like Sergei. You don't like this side of Xzavier.

"Why are you acting different?" You ask him.

Xzavier pushes your bowl of steaming hot French onion soup closer to you, handing you a soup spoon. "Eat, you need food."

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3300

>>>...<<<

"Her Name Was Susan"

The third world war was not the last war, it was just the last one anyone really made a big deal about because it shaped Earth as it is known in the year 3300. Now, the only culture Earth knows is one of brutality and violence. There are few areas where life exists as it once did many millennia ago, and the ghost of civilization still roams freely. Continents are a sort of forgotten concept as most of them were obliterated or forever altered, and the word itself (along with many other cultural staples) became painful and served as nothing but a reminder of a time when peace was a faint possibility.

A little girl was rumored to have been the real cause of the third world war, because she delivered the wrong message. History says that in 2035, an important political figure was planning to stage a crime to impact a rival's campaign against them. The little girl was the child of the politician's housekeeper and overheard some of the plot. It has been said that this little girl heard the rival's name and repeated part of what she heard to the rival politician's daughter, who was her classmate. Once that happened, the politician's daughter told her father, who raised a big stink in the local news about what had happened.

The spurned politician's story caught the interest of the national news stations, and fairly quickly, most of the country had heard about the little girl who told on her father's plot to eliminate the competition. Many people had strong opinions that this could have been a conspiracy, and felt the little girl was trying to relay a darker message by telling her classmate what she overheard. Reporters

swarmed the politician's home and tried to speak with him on many occasions, but failed, as he continually refused to answer questions or even entertain any light discussions. One one occasion, the politician threw what initially looked and smelled strongly like human feces in a crowd of reporters gathered outside his home, but it turned out it was simply a stained pair of boxer briefs with poop streaks that didn't quite come out in the wash.

As the story avalanched its way into international news with dark stories of American politicians and plots involving children, the Russians became involved by broadcasting the story on their news stations, complete with their own propaganda. It was the opinion of most Russians that the Americans had devolved so far that it was necessary to conduct espionage using children. The Russians tried very hard to elevate themselves with this slant, making Americans appear to be much weaker and susceptible to attack. Soon, North Korea even joined forces with Russia, being that they felt slighted by the frequent change in leadership and its resulting favor from the American government.

LET'S PAUSE REALLY FAST.

Pretend you are an international liaison working with American Intelligence. What path would you choose for yourself at this point? (Password protected blogs – enter pathone for Path One, pathtwo for Path Two, and paththree for Path Three).

Path one: Do nothing. These are perilous times and it is imperative to remain cool headed. If you try to intervene in any way and you are discovered, things could go very badly.

Path two: Attempt to influence Russian media by spying on the main international news station in Russia in 2035 – Russian World News Network. Apply for an entry level job there.

Path three: Put out a hit on the politician whose little girl told on him. Locate the girl and isolate her somewhere she can be monitored closely.

-Melissa Starr, July 25, 2021

Encapsulated within the confines of the transport vehicle, your mind wandered and you felt as though you were reliving every moment of your life, outside of yourself, watching. You saw your mother again, smelled her hair, felt her warm embrace after you endured all the horrors of school every day. You saw as she wilted away and died, you by her side, holding her left knee. You remembered the feeling of her essence floating through you, from your head to your toes, as she said her last goodbye and went wherever she went; you wishing desperately you could go with her.

“Cassie, you will be more than I could ever be in life, and you will have more than I will ever have. I wish I could have prepared you for this, I wish I could have told you everything I saw for your future, but you wouldn’t have understood. It would have scared you, and you didn’t need that. You needed to enjoy your life, you needed to just be a little girl for as long as you could, before the world made you into who you are today.

“No matter how long it takes, no matter how far away we both end up, I will always be with you, I will always love you, and I will be waiting for you to cross over and be with me here. It’s a beautiful place, and you will come here to be with me when you are finished with your mission. Where you’re going for a little while is not a nice place, it’s not a pretty place, but you have to go. You have to do this because you are the only one who can bring beauty to this place. You have to be yourself because you will be the reason life will go on. Otherwise, human life will become something of a faint memory, a faint scratch in the history books, nothing beautiful to be remembered of it.

“You have to be the one. You have to be the light in the dark, Cassie. You’re the only person in the world who can be. That’s why they took you from me. That’s why they need you.”

Her voice faded and you were left wondering why you, why this burden had to be yours. What was it about you that made you so

special? You remembered what Xzavier said to you before you died, and you wondered if you'd ever see him again. Even as psychotic as he was, you were in love with him, and he was the father of your children. You'd never love anyone as much as you loved him, even if it was manufactured. It felt more real than any love you'd ever known.

"You love me, Cassie?" Xzavier said, his voice breaking.

Tears streamed down your face. You nodded, unable to speak.

"Remember me, and I will be there when you wake up, I promise," Xzavier kissed your forehead.

"Why do we have to do this?" You heard yourself ask in your memory, your dream. "Why does this have to be the way?"

Then, Xzavier's image faded, and you saw Paul again, as he was. His smiling face, his sparkling eyes. Your heart broke, and you felt all those feelings you felt for him before, forgetting Xzavier entirely.

"I'd do it all again for you," he whispered, his eyes filling with tears as you watched him disintegrate into what Xzavier made him, and you felt yourself start to scream.

Darkness surrounded you. It was cold, freezing cold, and you were alone, walking toward something, someone. A shape in the distance came closer until you could see the details of his face. His smile was so familiar and serene, his eyes so friendly with just a hint of mischief in them.

"Who are you?"

His face fell and he looked sad. "I'm sorry I hurt you, Cassie. I never meant to. I only wanted to play with you and have fun," he looked down at his feet. "I always loved you, and I cried every day after you and Momma left. I wanted you to come back so badly. I couldn't ever find you, though, so I just gave up."

You stared at him, waiting for him to tell you who he was. "Tell me who you are," you whispered.

He looked up at you again, his eyes changed to solid green slits, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“I’m your brother. I’m Jimmy. Don’t you remember me?”

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“Indulgence”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>See this blog for reference too, pls<<<

“I do know that for the sympathy of one living being, I would make peace with all. I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other.” – Mary Shelley, “Frankenstein,” 1818. Retrieved from: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/4836639-frankenste-in-or-the-modern-prometheus>

Dr. Popov finished editing the recording for your mission after he murdered you. He could barely contain his tears as he watched the video over and over again, touching the screen, still not sure if he would be able to join you when you went to where you were finally going.

Keeping you perfectly preserved, he would spend quite a bit of time with you, posthumously, talking to you, fondling you. He wanted so much for you to be alive again, but to do that would violate your wishes, and though he didn’t know if he would ever see you again,

he couldn't bear the thought of betraying you now that you were gone. His only hope was that Sergei would be able to make the flight to deposit the zombies he had in his basement, and get back alive, because in order for all of them to get to space safely, Sergei had to perform surgery on him, and Dr. Popov needed him to do it quickly, before he lost his nerve.

Near the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Northwestern Montana, Sergei was to fly and drop off the crate of the sub humans Dr. Popov created with his experiment gone awry. Paul was among them, but retained some of his consciousness, so he wasn't entirely lost as this drop off in Montana provided him with a means to escape.

The rest of the zombies were trained to infect and eat people, the same basic formula as in all the post-apocalyptic stories of the 20th centuries and onward. It was the same, and the Russian scientist predicted by Nostradamus was real (1). His name was Dr. Xzavier Popov – mad scientist, terrorist, kidnapper, and murderer.

As Sergei made the deposit, he encountered a group he suspected was law enforcement, but it turned out it was a local militant group that seemed to be supportive of his cause. It was someone who claimed affiliation with American Intelligence, and though Sergei was fully aware that AI didn't actually exist, he created it, his curiosity got the better of him, and he found himself talking to someone who claimed to know a person named Daniel Thipp, a name Sergei knew very well. Making arrangements to meet Dan later, Sergei returned to Russia to give Dr. Popov his operation, to complete his own transition so when the time came, Boris would fulfill his final mission.

Boris, the little boy who stuck you full of needles when you screamed on the plane. Subdued, he underwent another of Dr. Popov's successful experiments and is now entirely a computer, to be left behind on Earth when eventually everyone chosen to relocate to space has left the planet. Boris will not age, and will not die, he will serve as eyes and ears to the command center inside the space vehicle, which was near its construction completion.

Boris' final mission was to implant Dr. Popov, Sergei, and everyone else deemed worthy enough to make it to space inside the computer chip in your heart. Once this was done, you would be put to rest until which time you were programmed to reawaken; in space, to give birth to thousands of souls.

There would, of course be someone chosen to assist you with creating a species of capable vessels for the essences of all these chosen, expired, transformed humans to then take over. That process of selection still remained a small task that Dr. Popov and Sergei would both make the final decision on for you. Paul would have been a likely contender, had he not put up a fight. Sergei was aware of your brother, Jim, and suggested it to Dr. Popov, but the idea died a swift death after discovering the horrors your brother committed throughout his life, after your family fell apart.

The next likely choice would be someone they already had their eyes on, but they would not be able to make that choice just yet, it had to be done at the last minute, as the one they chose would have to be the perfect example of an imperfect human; one who believes blindly in their passion and follows their heart. A person like that couldn't know what fate would behold them, because if they did, they would surely be an opponent instead of an ally.

But where would they find such an unlikely friend?

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(1) <https://7news.com.au/news/nostradamus-predicts-asteroids-famine-and-zombies-for-a-very-grim-2021-c-1853464>

Ruben the Descent

“Red Fury”

>>>..., ...!<<<

“Are you crazy?” Esmeralda looked at you like you asked her to chop her own hand off. “We can’t go back to our old life after what you did, Ruben. What do these people want us to do, work miracles?”

You’re beside yourself, you’ve tried explaining everything to Esmeralda but she doesn’t seem to understand why you are so invested in White Horse and his cause. She’s making you start to doubt it’s even a good idea, but if it wasn’t for him, you wouldn’t have been able to get to her in time, and as much as you wanted to emphasize how important White Horse was to you at this time, but you didn’t think she’d listen.

You hear a soft knock at the guest bedroom door. “Come in,” you say, assuming it’s Victor or Vanessa.

Layla comes in with a notebook. “Can I say something?”

You and Esmeralda look at each other, puzzled. “Sure, sweetie, come in,” you say.

She closes the door behind her. “So, I’ve been listening to you argue about this, and I’m pretty sure they know you’re not happy, so I thought of something that might work,” she smiles sheepishly.

Esmeralda rolls her eyes. “See what you’re doing? You’re getting your daughter into this mess now,” she chastises you.

“Wait, Mom, this is kind of cool,” Layla starts. She sets the notebook down and starts explaining everything to you. Her plan doesn’t involve anything having to do with an army, though, she’s suggesting cyber terrorism, and she says White Horse approves. Going into further detail, she shows you how she thinks you can gain notoriety this way, and it would be much safer because you could remain

anonymous. She shows you an article about the group Anonymous, and you say you remember hearing about them before she was born. You are surprised and impressed with her ideas, but the fact that your 17-year-old daughter thinks this way is a little hard to swallow.

Advertisements

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When Layla finishes and leaves the room, Esmeralda yells at you for a solid half hour about how this is affecting your children now, and you were supposed to leave this lifestyle behind years ago. She is furious that you are even considering going back to it, and wants nothing to do with this war you're starting.

"What are you going to do then?" You ask her, feeling a little anxious because she never yells at you, and she was doing it within earshot of people. You farted.

Esmeralda waves the horrid smell of your fart away. "I should divorce you, Ruben, your farts smell like Pork n' Beans and you're a horrible influence on your children." She stands up and opens the window, gagging.

"Okay, let's get divorced then," you tease her.

She laughs. "Fuck you, I don't like this but when have you ever listened to me? Do what you want."

And so, the domestic terrorist group named Red Fury was born. Layla spent the rest of the night designing the flag.

... ..

“Learn the Language”

>>>..., ...!<<<

Photo Credit: The World of Feathers, retrieved from:
<https://theworldoffeathers.com/collections/summer-2018/products/n80-medium-red-headress-native-american-style-warbonnet>

WHO WE ARE: We are Red Fury

WHAT WE WANT: Our Rightful Home

HOW WE PLAN TO GET WHAT WE WANT: We will use force where necessary, but we wish to peaceably attain our rightful place at the forefront of the country currently known as the United States of America.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: Start by learning the language:

Photo credit: Omniglot, retrieved from:
<https://omniglot.com/writing/apache.htm>

We've been ignored and pushed aside for far too long. We've been discriminated against and blamed for the sins of men we've bled for over hundreds of years, and we've had enough. We've paid our dues, we've given our lives for our country to be rewarded with

nothing but genocide, racism, segregation, destruction, and violence from people who once professed their loyalty.

We are Red Fury, and we don't just want things to change, we want recognition. We want respect, we want equal opportunity and treatment. We want an end to your version of civilization.

We want you to learn OUR language. After all, YOU CAME HERE. Not the other way around.

"I'm Mexican, though," You say to White Horse after reading his efforts for an introductory speech. "I don't think I have any Native American ancestry, I'd have to really look, I mean, I might, but I don't think so."

White Horse shook his head, laughing. "It doesn't matter, it's the point. It's a surprise, no one will expect this. What do you think? Seriously?"

You look at it again. "I think there's no way I will ever be able to learn this language," you start laughing loudly.

White Horse seems amused, and you both discuss how you want to get this message out there. Layla has become more involved, to Esmeralda's great dismay, but she is proving herself to be quite valuable. You and White Horse are not very tech savvy, but she knows quite a bit, and she suggests a video. She basically wants to copy Anonymous, according to what she shows you. You really don't follow what she plans to do, and White Horse is full of questions, but he loves it, and as long as he's happy, you're happy.

Even though Esmeralda currently hates you. Especially since she hates you right now, actually.

She brought up a divorce a couple more times to you, and you really didn't know what to make of it. What would you do without her? How would you live? Sure, you saw other women, very frequently, but you still knew Esmeralda would always be waiting at home for you with your children. Now that Layla was getting ready to turn 18, she

would be moving soon, and Esmeralda had the means to leave you and live quite comfortably without you.

You love her though, and she loves you. You don't want to get a divorce, and you tell her this. You ask her to wait until the war is over to make her final decision.

She reluctantly agreed, but you still feel like this is going to come up again. It makes planning attacks difficult, so Layla has really been a big help to White Horse as far as that goes, and that is why you have placed his happiness above your own wife's for the current time. It's not that you don't love her, you just know if you hadn't met White Horse, you wouldn't even be discussing divorce right now. You were grateful to even have the opportunity to have her with you, even if she was unhappy. You had no idea what would have happened to her and your family if you hadn't gotten to her in time.

When will the war be over though? When will it begin? White Horse wasn't the only one full of questions, but even he didn't have the answer to this war he was so insistent on starting.

He did have some cryptic visions he shared with everyone one night. One of the visions he had really stuck with you. It was of a man who created a new race which cannot now be destroyed without it being considered a crime of moral turpitude. White Horse says this man is someone who will be responsible for the eventual destruction of the planet if this new race isn't eradicated, but to do that would involve a lot more than just internet terrorism.

It crossed your mind at times whether or not you were on the right side of this war, honestly. Not that you distrusted White Horse, but according to him, the people you would be fighting were similar to Nazis, and what he was describing was similar to the holocaust. You asked him to elaborate, and told him exactly what you thought. If you weren't honest with him, it was going to impact your family, and you knew, at the very least, White Horse cares about family. It was what bonded you to him immediately.

“I don’t believe this race is one which can or should be eradicated,” White Horse explained. “Life finds a way, and this is something that we will learn from as humans.”

“This race isn’t human?”

White Horse looks at you, his eyes wide. “No, brother, this race is hybrid. I don’t know how, I just know that it is true.”

You’re baffled. “Hybrid?”

“Yes,” White Horse replied. “It’s not clear to me how, but I know they started as human.”

“Aliens?” You laugh. “Are you sure the hybrid race isn’t a euphemism?”

“I’m quite sure,” White Horse raised his voice. “Sorry, Ruben, I don’t mean to yell, but this race is not one you should joke about, they are the first of many to spawn in the coming years.”

“I’m sorry,” you touch White Horse’s arm. “I meant no offense truly.”

He smiles winsomely. “It’s okay, I’m just not ready for the apocalypse,” he almost whispers. You see a tear slip down his cheek.

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“Hollywood”

Photo credit: LAPD, Los Angeles Riots, 1992. Retrieved from:
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-st-la-riot-documentaries-20170418-story.html>

>>>..., ...!<<<

>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

You hear the news station in the background as you finish up your bowel movement. You hadn't had much privacy in the last few days, and you were taking your time on the toilet, easing it out, not straining, reading a most excellent article in an old issue of Time Magazine about Barack Obama. You missed the days when he was President. Good times, you think to yourself.

A soft knock at the door and you close the magazine instinctively, putting it over Ruben Jr. “What?” You shout.

“Dad, come here!” Layla beckons you.

“I'm pooping!” You declare loudly, hoping everyone hears you.

“Gross! Hurry up and come out here!” Layla shouts back. You hear her announce to the room not to use the bathroom for the rest of the

night because you were pooping in there. A mixture of groans of disgust and laughter irritated the rest of the poop out of your colon.

Wiping thoroughly, you flush twice and wash your hands. “Kids,” you mutter to yourself, walking out of the bathroom door.

“Dad look!” Layla shouts excitedly. Layla, White Horse, Sitting Bull, and everyone else, with the exception of Esmeralda and Hector, were sitting in the living room of Victor & Vanessa’s house, popcorn bowls sitting out on the coffee table, an ice chest full of beer in the center of the floor.

“What’s going on out here?” You smile, taking a seat next to Layla on the floor. You look up at the television and see the flag she designed, with the words, “Local Thugs Terrorize Downtown Hollywood.”

Your jaw drops. You’re speechless as you listen to the newscaster describe what Layla and the others are so excited about. You turn to look at her, your heart sinking as she laughs and high-fives White Horse and the others. White Horse looks at you, smiling widely, and grabs your shoulder.

“We did it, brother, we made the news on the first shot!” He exclaims. You just stare at him, then look back at the television.

“Rioters have been looting Downtown Hollywood south of the 101 since about 6PM this evening, starting at Hollywood and Vine. Police have closed off everything south of the 101 to Sunset Blvd, from Cahuenga Blvd to Gower St to try and control the crowds.

“This afternoon, a video surfaced on a website known as 2knots.com, well known to the FBI as being a high traffic zone for criminal enterprises. The video is being analyzed by the FBI, and will likely be released to the media within the next few days.

“In other news...” you looked at Layla after the newscaster moved on to the next story.

“What did you do?” You asked Layla, not expecting the reality of this to be so hard for you to take. You really don’t want to go to war,

Ruben. White Horse talked you into all this and now you're stuck. Esmeralda is right.

Layla is laughing excitedly as she describes her video. She says she will show you the actual one she uploaded when she sees how the news butchers the one she made first. She's taking a lot of pleasure in this and it's breaking your heart. Layla continues and says she issued a challenge to her following asking them to cyber-attack the Hollywood Police Department, shutting down any access they may have to the web, their records, and any cameras they may have around the city. During this attack, Layla hacked into their website. You couldn't listen anymore.

"I can't do this," you shout. "White Horse, this is not going to work, we don't want to be involved in this war, you're going to turn my daughter into a criminal!"

White Horse looks at you and stands up slowly. You wait for him to say or do something to you, but he just looks at you, a blank expression on his face. Out of the corner of your eye, you see Sitting Bull start to stand up, and you suddenly feel afraid of White Horse.

Still looking at you, White Horse asks Layla if she wants to do this, be involved in this war. White Horse asks her if she believes in this cause.

Layla looks at White Horse as though he's crazy. "Of course I want to be involved, this is the most important thing I've ever done in my life," she confirms.

White Horse, still looking into your eyes, a blank stare in his, smiles. "Ruben, your daughter wants to be involved, I am not turning her into a criminal."

"She's seventeen," you say, losing your confidence. Sitting Bull is staring at you, almost waiting.

"He's just protective of his daughter, White Horse," Sitting Bull defends you. "He means no offense."

White Horse doesn't stop staring at you. "I know this," he says slowly. "Ruben is just getting used to this idea. He knows this is the way." He walks up to you and stands just a little closer than he normally would, looking down at you. He takes your hand and puts it on his heart.

"Do you feel my heart, Ruben?" He says.

You feel it beating slowly. "I do, yes," you reply. He doesn't seem angry, his heart rate seems normal.

He lets go of your hand and puts his on your heart. Your heart is racing.

"You still don't trust me," he says, sadly.

You shake your head, "It's not that at all," you say.

"He's just worried about his family, White Horse, he doesn't mean to upset you," Sitting Bull persists.

White Horse looks at Sitting Bull for a long moment. "Okay," he says quietly. Looking back at you, he says, "Ruben, will you apologize for saying I'm turning Layla into a criminal?"

Layla is paying close attention to both of you. "I'd appreciate that too, Dad," she says.

What else can you do? "I apologize," you say, still not feeling good about it. "What's next?"

White Horse looks at you and squints his eyes. "Next, we talk about why you don't trust me all of a sudden."

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“Tabula Rasa”

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“Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you yet they belong not to you.” – Kahlil Gibran, “On Children,” from “The Prophet,” 1923. Retrieved from: <https://poets.org/poem/children-1>

After hours of convincing, Esmeralda finally agreed to talk to White Horse, alone. Unable to grasp why you placed so much faith in a man you barely knew, she was starting to lose respect for you and it was creating a big problem between you and White Horse. Additionally, you were completely left in the dark about the cyber attack on Hollywood, and if you were going to be involved the way you pledged, you would need much more input and awareness than just looking like an idiot after hearing the aftershocks resulting from what your daughter did. You explained this to White Horse, and he was understanding. Agreeing that Esmeralda needed to decide to either be fully on board or move on; straddling the fence wasn’t a viable option and could create more trouble in the future, you tried to occupy yourself as your wife and new partner in crime discussed matters which would forever impact the course of your life.

Once what you assumed an agreement had been reached between White Horse and Esmeralda, they emerged from a private room in Victor and Vanessa's house. Both had fixed expressions on their faces, not betraying any emotion behind either one. You struggled to read their body language, but were only able to deduce that they may have spent time together communicating, their ideas were too stark in contrast to one another, and you felt like this was going to be the end for your 30-year marriage.

Esmeralda motioned for you to join her outside. Getting up from your seat on the couch, you join her on the back patio, where she lights up a cigarette, something she hasn't done since before you were married.

"I want a divorce," Esmeralda says, again, but this time with a tone of finality in her voice you are unfamiliar with. You feel it, you know its over, but you really don't know how to move on.

"Please," you almost beg her. "This isn't the right time for that. Where would you go?"

Esmeralda stares off in the distance and puffs her cigarette. "I haven't figured that part out yet, but it would need to be in a country where I couldn't be extradited as an accessory for whatever crimes you and Layla have committed," she blows a big puff of smoke off to the other side. "This is no place for Hector," she continues. "I need to think of him too."

You look down at your hands. You notice a small reflection of your face in your wedding ring. "Hector?" You whisper. "You're going to take him with you?"

"You don't expect me to leave him here with you, do you?"

In disbelief, you shake your head and put your face in your hands, just tired and wanting to sleep. "Can we talk about this tomorrow?"

Esmeralda throws her cigarette on the ground, angrily, standing up to stomp it out. "No, Ruben, we're going to talk about it now." Folding her arms across her chest, she stared at you with a determined look,

and you knew she was serious. She never talked to you this way, she was done.

“What did you and White Horse talk about?” You ask, trying to divert the attention away from her taking Hector and leaving you.

“He wanted to know where I stood, and I told him exactly that,” she reaches into her pocket for another cigarette and lights it. “He didn’t like it, but we did agree that if I didn’t want to be a part of this, I need to leave. He seemed to think Hector coming with me was a good idea too.” Puffing her cigarette, she looked at you and smiled. “He’s a nice guy, I just don’t want anything to do with this war or this lifestyle. I’m furious you’ve ruined Layla’s future, and basically torn our family apart,” she pauses, looking off in the distance, “twice.”

“You make me feel like a failure,” you say, trying to muster up a laugh, hoping she can find some humor in the situation, even though you’re broken inside.

“You are a failure, Ruben!” Esmeralda shouts at you. “You’ve failed me, you’ve failed your family, and you’ll fail all of them, you wait,” she threw her cigarette out. “You’ll fail yourself in the end, Ruben. It’s just what you do.” Turning around and walking away from you, she doesn’t look back as she makes her way back inside your son’s house.

Sitting outside at the table for a few minutes, just thinking about what just happened, you hear thunder off in the distance and look at the gathering storm clouds you didn’t notice before. You normally loved thunderstorms, and looked forward to them. You remembered when Hector was a baby, taking Israel and Yvette with Hector and Esmeralda out to the desert and trying to set up camp during a thunderstorm. Hector screamed the whole time, so you had to leave as soon as the rain stopped, but for a few minutes, you and Esmeralda were able to enjoy the lightening show with Israel and Yvette. You were sure there were more opportunities to do that as a family after Hector was born, but you just never seemed to notice them.

Layla came out to the table and sat next to you. “Mom’s leaving with Hector?”

You can’t answer her. You feel like if you open your mouth, you’ll start crying and you won’t be able to stop. It’s a feeling of being more out of control than you’ve ever had experience dealing with. You feel like someone yanked the rug out from underneath your whole life, and all your memories were like knives stabbing you in the gut with every fleeting one. You nod your head, still focusing on the ground, where you see a small earthworm emerge from the dirt in the yard. You watch as it comes out and crawls on the concrete for a moment, then turns around to go back in its hole. If only, you think to yourself.

Layla puts her hand on your arm. “I’ll stay if you do, Dad,” she says, an even tone in her voice.

You look at her, amazed. “You will?”

“Duh, I kind of have to now,” she rolls her eyes at you and laughs.

“True,” you laugh with her. Even though it seems like your life is completely in shambles, at least Layla is going to stand by you. “I’m so sorry you’re getting involved in this, though, I never wanted you to have this kind of life, I wanted you to have better, like your brothers and sisters.”

Layla smiles. “I know, Dad. I just think that you want me to be what you never could be, and maybe I don’t want to be that,” she doesn’t make sense to you but you’re just grateful to have her on your side. “I just want to be happy, and I hate that Mom’s leaving, but it’s for the best. We’ll still see each other, and Hector shouldn’t be here anyway, what if we had to talk to the cops or something?”

You shudder, imagining seeing her in handcuffs. “Please, let’s not talk about that right now, I’ve just found out I’m getting a divorce,” you plead. “One crisis at a time.”

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“Fade to Black”

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>>>SEE THIS BLOG FOR REFERENCE<<<

“They are not dead who live in the hearts they leave behind.” –
Tuscarora

Packing up the bus, your rental car, and Victor’s 2036 Chevy Tahoe, you all decided to go to Quartzsite, planning to drop the cars off after you were able to find an RV. Esmeralda took Hector on an Uber ride headed back to Pahrump to gather what she could and said she would be in touch with more details on where she would be going in a few days.

Layla was taking a leadership role in Red Fury, which was becoming much more than just a pretty flag and fiery words of introduction. The next location on the list was Silicon Valley, CA, but it was more in theory than anything when White Horse originally composed the list

of cities Red Fury planned to attack. White Horse wanted to attack the technology capital of the world, and told you he originally planned on some sort of protest at a major social media network headquarters, or something along those lines. Revisiting this idea with Layla on board, she had much bigger ideas for a powerful impact.

“We need to shut some of these services down and access their records,” Layla suggested. “If we can do that, we can exploit the company and sue for ransom. Once we get their money, we can expose them anyway.”

“What services would cause the most panic?” White Horse asks.

Layla shrugs. “Any of the ones people use every day, the ones people depend on. Food delivery, medical delivery, ride sharing, grocery delivery, social media networking.” She shows White Horse a food delivery app on her phone called FoodBuggy. “If we were able to shut this down for like, a half a day, they’d lose so much business, and people would get so angry. Customers would go to the other one, HungryHopper, and they’d get overloaded. It would be mayhem.”

White Horse laughs, finding this highly amusing. You are doing your best to not give into your negative emotions about the situation with Esmeralda. It’s tense, to say the least, and while Layla isn’t saying it, you sense she blames you a little bit for the absence of her mother and big brother, even though she decided to stay with you anyway.

“What do you think, Dad?” Layla tries to get you involved in the conversation. You look at her and smile. “I’m not really sure what to think, but if it seems like a good idea to you, I’m in,” you reply.

White Horse looks hard at you. “You’re still upset, I get it, but we need you here,” he puts his hand on your shoulder. “Want to talk about this? I could ride with you to Quartzsite.”

“Honestly I don’t want to talk about it, but I should,” you laugh. “It would be good to get some things off my chest. Sure, we can ride

together.”

Talking for two hours to White Horse, without interruption from him, you confide in him about everything you and Esmeralda had endured throughout your marriage, what she said to you, how you felt about the whole thing, how sick you were that she couldn't just understand that White Horse was the reason he got to her – all of it. White Horse just listened and waited for you to finish, answering questions when you'd ask, giving his advice and basically just being the shoulder you needed to lean on. Validating most of what you said to him, he only disagreed with you when you said that Esmeralda should have stayed with you.

“Having her stay here if she didn't want to be part of it would be more of a distraction to all of us than this is right now,” White Horse explained. “I know she doesn't understand why we are doing this, but she does understand that AI isn't what she originally thought it was, and admits that she thinks someone needs to do what we are doing, but she doesn't want it to be her family. You have to respect it, I know her leaving isn't what you wanted, but she's alive, and so are Layla and Hector. That is something that might not have been if we hadn't returned. That's the price you pay for loving someone – you can love them, but you can never control them, you must let them do what they need to do because they have to follow their own path.” He looked down for a moment, preparing himself for your reaction to what he was about to say. “Esmeralda's path intersected with yours for many years, and now, she has the ability to create her own path. If you love her, you will celebrate that she is doing that now, even though it may take you some time to see it like that.”

You blink away tears and look at White Horse. “I always imagined that when I died, Esmeralda would be there with me, holding my hand as I just fade to black.”

“Is that what you think happens when you die, Ruben?” White Horse asks you.

“No idea,” you answer. “I’d like to think there is some sort of heaven, and maybe some pearly gates, angels, and who knows? Unlimited blow jobs?”

White Horse laughs for a minute. “Ruben, I believe that when we die, we are propelled out of our bodies, our spirits weightless and magnetically drawn upward to the center of the universe. When we arrive there, we mesh with everything that is anything, then we are chosen for our new lives. That process can take many years, but when we are chosen, we are then ejected into our new bodies. We have broken memories of our previous lifetimes, just puzzle pieces we collect throughout time to piece together the great puzzle; the secret of life.”

“Wow, that’s pretty crazy,” you say, marveling at it. “I think I’d be okay with that. There’s probably nothing, though. What if when we die, it just turns off? What if nothing comes after that?”

White Horse looks at you like you’re smoking crack. “That is just not the case, brother. I will prove it to you, since you need to see to believe, but not in the car, that’s dangerous.”

“How can you prove it?”

“I’ll show you,” he replies. “I will call the spirit of my Grandfather, John Silverwolf. He will appear before you.”

“Ghosts?” you scoff.

“Spirits,” White Horse corrects you.

“I’ll have whiskey with you when we get to Quartzsite, all you had to do is ask,” you laugh.

“Lazy Susan”

>>>...<<<

Lights blazing in her face, the newscaster read from the teleprompter with purpose and urgency, her stoic expression emotionless and unchanging as she aired the video Layla published on the internet, and described who police were looking for. You looked at Layla for a second and shook your head as she laughed, then looked back at your phone to watch.

“Suppression starts with us. We either take it lying down and enable it, or we get up and fight them.” Layla was wearing a red feather Mardi Gras costume mask over her eyes and her mouth was covered by a black N95 mask, but you recognized her. She was using some sort of voice distorter, but you understood her manner of speaking, the way she strung a sentence together. You knew her.

“FBI are looking for this girl,” a still photo of Layla stayed on the screen as the newscaster continued to describe her. “Her internet handle is Lazy Susan, and this might be her real name or a name that means something important to her. She is believed to be in her early to mid-twenties, and IP addresses uncovered by the FBI revealed that the person who posted this is from Cheyenne, Wyoming. If you have any information on the identity or whereabouts of this Lazy Susan, please contact the FBI.”

The newscaster went on to discuss other events in the news that day, an auto accident near Pahrump involving a pedestrian, a puppy found in a mailbox and rescued, the weather. All of it fell on deaf ears as the TV droned on inside Victor and Vanessa’s home. The front door unlocked, the lights were all on, as though someone just stepped out for a minute.

The hallway showed a little sign of a struggle, though, photos that once hung on the walls of family events and special moments littered the floor in a sick pattern of rushed shoving, broken glass, and panic. A small crimson stain started on the door jam where the hallway turned to the left, leading into the master bathroom. The bathroom door was open, and small droplets of blood grew larger going toward the garden style tub, the tub itself obviously recently cleaned of a large amount of it, apparent by the smear marks inside.

A small whistle came through the open window in the bloody bathroom as the wind started to pick up outside, blowing through the open door into the hallway, disbursing the iron odor throughout the house. In the master bedroom across the hall, the door was locked, small sounds coming from inside that could have been the radio turned down low, or something far more sinister.

Down the hall further, going toward the garage, the door was slightly opened, looking as though someone left in a hurry, a bloody handprint smeared on the front of the door showing where the person pushed the door frantically trying to get away. Did they make it?

Inside the garage was a plastic, kids size, inflatable pool filled to the brim with blood and gunky, thick substances that appeared to be organs. A hose was inside the pool, and ran under the garage door, which was slightly opened so that it didn't kink the hose. The faint sound of a motor and whimpering just beyond the door.

In the driveway, a storage container with a locked door and a hole perfectly sized for the hose to fit through, someone was inside being force-fed whatever was in the kiddie pool in the garage. In front of the storage container was a dark SUV, its parking lights on, dark window tint. Someone sat in the driver's seat vaping. After a loud whimper and sobs, a gunshot, and a thud, then someone coming out of the storage container. They open the door of the SUV, interior light turned off so no detail could be revealed about their appearance other than their height, and the SUV sped away, into the night.

Inside the storage container, the person they thought was dead was still hanging on for dear life. The storage container door was open, and he was trying to crawl out of it when someone came up and locked it from the outside.

Hearing the chains and heavy padlock, the man inside threw up. Waiting and listening to determine what was going on now, he heard people talking but couldn't make out the words. Fading in and out of consciousness, he realized what was happening and started to panic, looking for any way to get out, too weak to move.

The smoke started billowing into the storage container and the heat became so much that he felt all the moisture in his body start to pour out of him from every orifice. Barely able to cough, he realized this was it. It was over for him.

The flames completely engulfed the storage container and though the trapped man inside was shot and mortally wounded, hardly able to move, he managed to let out a bloodcurdling scream that pierced the silent night and alarmed the neighbors two miles down the road, who originally told police they thought the flames were coming from a bonfire.

After firefighters were able to put out the fire at Victor and Vanessa's house, they called in the medical examiner to collect the charred remains in the burned storage unit.

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"The Sweet Sound of Ripping a Throat Out"

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

It didn't mean anything at the time, but when looking back, he saw the symbolism behind the gesture, and realized it meant much more than what would likely be interpreted on the surface by simple observation. It was much deeper than that, and he understood it was something that was meant as a warning, but he didn't take it as seriously as he should have.

Michael's eyes grew wide as he watched his companion flailing beneath his attacker's grip against him. Unable to turn away and avoid the free-flowing blood spray coming from his friend, Michael was drenched in his friend's life-blood as he fell in front of him. Finally able to catch his breath and react appropriately, Michael tried to run away, only to be stopped in his tracks by a bullet in his thigh, narrowly missing his carotid artery. When he dropped, his head was covered by a canvas bag, and his hands were tied.

Being held captive, blindfolded and tied to a pole, Michael was being force-fed something that he was certain he wouldn't normally eat. He was vomiting at the same time they were force-feeding him, and the pain in his leg was so unbearable, he would periodically black out.

Losing a dangerous amount of blood, he sat there, crying, wondering what was going on.

White Horse encouraged you to clear your mind as he attempted to manifest the spirit of his grandfather. He used a method of necromancy referred to as automatic writing, where he would become trance-like, and using a pen and paper, write what came to him without looking at the paper. He said it was the spirits speaking through him, using his hand to convey their messages to the living. Sometimes, the writing would be illegible, and he would say that it was because of emotional trauma a spirit endured while they were alive. He would say a prayer for that spirit and try to get their message again, once he felt they were calm enough to trust him with it. Able to discern some messages after trying that method, he felt himself successful, even though there were times the spirits would become agitated when White Horse would try empathizing with them. He attributed this to either a predisposed feeling or fear of Native Americans, or simply the fact that they were irreparably traumatized by the fact that they were no longer among the living.

Unable to make contact with his grandfather, White Horse became concerned that there was something wrong, and his grandfather wasn't able to connect because of some sort of spiritual blockage or wall. You didn't really know what he meant by that, but assumed it to be some sort of boundary, and White Horse affirmed that this would be an accurate description of it to someone who was unfamiliar with the spirit realm. You said you were a little intimidated by this, and didn't feel comfortable knowing spirits were there. White Horse reminded you that you had a demon attached to you, and you were right to be afraid of spirits, but the fact that you were still walking around with an evil spirit attached, you should try to conjure up a bit more bravery. After all, these were spirits, not humans. Even though spirits had influence, White Horse explained, and could provoke you or manipulate you to serve their own means, against your best interests, the most dangerous enemy of all is humanity. You had to agree with his logic, but with your Catholic upbringing, you were

incredibly uncomfortable with the whole ritualistic nature of this situation, and could sense the spirits there with you.

Once the séance was over, White Horse ended his automatic writing session and closed his notebook, muttering inaudible words he later explained were blessings to the spirits and thanks for their messages to the living. He handed you the notebook, and said you should read it as a lot of the messages were for you. He warned you to be careful when you read it, because you may misinterpret the messages.

“Just keep an open mind, don’t read too much into it or you will drive yourself crazy. The spirit realm is simpler, yet more complex. We do not understand it yet because we are not a part of it yet. These spirits have been trapped here as they have unfinished missions. You are the main focus of some of the spirits here today, and I feel that is one main reason I have been unsuccessful with making attempts at contact with my grandfather.”

You take the notebook, your hands shaking, and look down at it, seemingly innocuous, your curiosity boiling over inside of you.

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“Charlie”

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>>>See this blog for reference<<<

Amid the barren wasteland where the city once thrived, a lone traveler crawled down Pennsylvania avenue, bloodied and weary from battle after the attack from above. His pants echoed down the war-tattered asphalt as he grew yet closer to his goal. Not stopping until someone stepped on what remained of his right leg, the man turned around to see who it was.

Holding his arm up over his eyes to shield them from the setting sunlight shining down, he saw a man with semi-long hair, dark glasses, and what looked like some sort of form-fitting suit of indeterminate material. His body was shaped as though human, but he was just too chiseled, and it was unclear whether that was a feature of the clothing or what he actually looked like.

The man with dark glasses knelt down to the man on the ground, now unable to move from the pain coming from his right leg. His blood seeped into the asphalt below, which grew hotter on his skin by the passing minute. The man with dark glasses flashed a badge at the man on the ground, and for an instant, he saw the name Allen on it.

“What’s your name, friend?” Allen asked the soldier, offering his hand as a gesture of peace, since it was now obvious they fought for opposing sides.

The man looked at Allen’s hand, then reached up to take it. Trying to sit up, he lost his balance and fell back down on the ground. Allen tried scooping him up and was able to place him gingerly on his lap, almost cradling him as he took his last few, jagged breaths.

“Charlie,” the man whispered, his kind, beady eyes opening as he smiled gently.

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The notebook held secrets you didn't even realize you still remembered. The question of Victor's paternity, and the fact that you had a son out there that Esmeralda still doesn't know about. Feeling like you were on the verge of a complete mental breakdown with the succession of events that were continuing for you, you decided you wanted to be alone for a day or two, and just drive.

You drove by yourself for hours, just going nowhere, not having any sort of destination in mind, tears streaming down your face. You could hardly believe any of this was happening, and you just didn't know if you even wanted to be a part of it anymore. This wasn't anything you planned for, and you knew you did a lot of things that most people wouldn't be very proud of, and you were lucky to have your family at all. Esmeralda leaving you was too much, though. That was the last straw. What would you do without her now? What would she do without you?

How was it so easy for her to just leave?

Layla refused to listen to you, but at least she was still by your side. You didn't know if any of your other children knew about it yet, you were too embarrassed to admit it to yourself, much less anyone else. It was humiliating that everyone you were with experienced it alongside you also, like you not only had your entire family ripped apart, but you lost every ounce of dignity you had. What kind of father were you?

When would you see Hector again? You couldn't stop the tears from streaming down your face. Everything in your heart wanted to call Esmeralda and beg her not to divorce you, to come back, that you'd do anything. You didn't though, because you knew she's say no.

It just baffled you how she could just leave you like that. She had to have planned it, it just wasn't an easy, fly by night decision to leave your husband of almost your entire life. Had she even known another man? She said she didn't, and you believed her, even though Victor didn't look like you until he was older. She insisted Victor was your

son, and you always treated him like one. Even when you had your doubts, and you hated that you thought that, but it was something that you couldn't get out of your head after it was suggested to you by a woman who later ended up just wanting to cause trouble because she had a crush on you. The woman succeeded, and Esmeralda never fully forgave you for doubting her fidelity.

Maybe that was why it was so easy for her to leave you, to take Hector and abandon the rest of your family. What would Hector do without Layla? He wouldn't last very long without her, and Esmeralda was getting too old to manage him by herself. It was a terrible situation, and she needed you, why was she doing this? It just didn't make sense, and yet you couldn't blame her for leaving, you just think it would have been better if she had done it sooner. That way, you wouldn't have a lifetime of memories with her, ten children, and a completely shattered heart right now.

You hung your head and sobbed. Sobbed so hard you didn't see the 18-wheeler just five miles ahead, in the same lane as you since you drifted over.

Ruben, get the fuck out of the way!

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"Remember the Alamo"

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>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>Also this blog for reference<<<

After starting riots in Hollywood and wreaking havoc in Silicon Valley by hacking major rideshare and food delivery apps, Red Fury made its way down the list of target locations. Next, was San Antonio, TX, which was where the Alamo was located.

White Horse explained he chose the Alamo strategically because of the Battle of the Alamo (1) and how it impacted the Texas Revolution. White Horse said the underlying message was to beware of the enemies within, and that the government doesn't always get its way. You sort of found this comical, and were able to lead a small group of new people into the invasion and ultimate destruction of the Alamo.

Mimicking the 13-day siege as it took place in 1836, you instructed the group to hide out inside the Alamo; one of them was to pretend to be holding the others hostage. The story was that the vigilantes were actually a traveling group of students, and they were on an archaeological mission for a group assignment at University. In December of 2035, the group of 10 vigilantes entered the Alamo at night, illegally, and meant to camp there, or so they said. One of their classmates, William, who broke into the Alamo with them went crazy, and revealed he was carrying a Colt AR-15, with a full magazine. After shooting one of the vigilantes in the leg, another boy named Julio contacted the police, saying they were being held hostage and one of the hostages needed medical attention. William negotiated with police, then eventually the FBI, attempting to lure them inside. When SWAT was called, the vigilantes all hid inside an underground crawlspace they constructed beneath the Alamo in the weeks preceding the siege. The crawlspace led to an underground tunnel that spanned 15-miles long, allowing the remaining vigilantes to escape. When the FBI finally entered the Alamo, after a week-long stand off, they found the vigilante who was shot in the leg, barely alive, laughing as the medics removed him from the location and air lifted him to safety, an FBI agent arresting him and reading him his Miranda rights in the helicopter.

Searching the structure carefully, the police located a note left by Julio saying they had just missed them, and the group was on their way to Salt Lake City to attack the airport. They were not, of course, but it helped throw the FBI off their trail. At this point, they were among the FBI's 10-most-wanted, and were being actively hunted in every state across the US. The vigilantes were unknowns, and were not privy to what White Horse, Layla, and you were planning. Even if any of them were captured, it wouldn't hurt the plan.

What the FBI missed were the 2 pounds of C4 rigged to explode one hour after the vigilantes made their escape in the tunnel. When it went off, the entire Alamo collapsed, killing the FBI agents still inside, and destroying the tunnel the vigilantes used to escape.

Now, Red Fury was wanted for multiple counts of capital murder, crimes against humanity, and a plethora of federal terrorism charges.

White Horse and Layla were also becoming really close, and you were not very comfortable with their relationship, even though he seemed like a good influence on her. You didn't like that she looked up to him more than it seemed like she looked up to you. Your only comfort was at least White Horse didn't seem like he was trying to romance her, you were worried that Layla was getting a crush on him though.

(1) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Alamo

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“The Protocol Murders”

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>>>See this blog for reference<<<

A wave of strange and brutal murders occurred in Pahrump and Las Vegas beginning in late 2035 and lasting until early 2037. The modus operandi was the same – a storage container would be set on fire, and when the fire department arrived to put it out, a charred body would be found inside, often shot and mortally wounded, but found to be alive at the time of the fire. Every cause of death reported by the Clark County medical examiner was smoke inhalation, meaning every victim was still alive when the storage containers were set on fire.

The names of the victims had not yet been released to the public, nor had the strange detail about the kiddie pools filled with what appeared to be pureed human remains. Making the connection to the terrorist group Red Fury, the FBI was calling this series of killings the Protocol Murders, as it appeared the deaths were orchestrated as part of a ritualistic process, and each victim had the same injuries in the same places, each storage container was located in the driveway of someone related to the Salazars of Pahrump, who were all now at least considered persons of interest by the FBI, and wanted for questioning about the terrorist attacks taking place across the United States during the same time.

The FBI was positive you were at the head of this organization, and assumed you were White Horse, and that Lazy Susan was actually Vanessa, your son Victor's girlfriend. Layla was suspected also, but after obtaining search warrants and accessing Vanessa's internet search history, the FBI was able to determine that the first attack on Hollywood was organized in Victor and Vanessa's living room, and that searches pertaining to Quartzsite rentals and RV parks located in that area of Arizona were also conducted by Vanessa, on her computer.

While the FBI was still unable to locate anyone in your family, they continued to find charred bodies in storage containers in locations that were connected to your family somehow. After the one at Victor and Vanessa's house, another was located at your son Michael's house, then at your son Israel's house. Others were located at the homes of acquaintances of yours, and the FBI was certain you were who they were now calling the Protocol Murderer, and you were executing anyone who stood in the way of you and your ultimate goal of overthrowing the United States government.

A total of 10 charred bodies were found across Clark County in storage containers, complete with kiddie pools filled with additional human remains. It was never determined by authorities whether or not the kiddie pools contained the remains of the person who was in the storage container, or if there was always a second victim, and this information was kept from the media.

One afternoon in early February 2065, an old Hispanic man came into a Pahrump police station, hobbling in on a walker that looked about ready to fall apart. Not speaking very much English, the man asked for a translator, and when he was provided with one, confessed that he knew who these victims were, the Protocol Murders, and he knew who the unknown remains in the kiddie pools belonged to.

The man continued saying he knew the identities of all 10 victims, and that each kiddie pool contained the remains of at least two other people in every case, raising the total of victims to at least 30 or

more people. While the man didn't know the names of every victim in the kiddie pools, he claimed he would be able to assist authorities in finding them.

He requested immunity from prosecution, and said he would speak freely with authorities if he was granted immunity, which he was a few weeks after first coming in to the Pahrump police station. The FBI had taken over the case, and granted the man immunity, ordering nothing be released to the media until after this man had given his statement, and they had the opportunity to validate what he was saying.

At the beginning of the interview with FBI agents, the man requested another translator, one completely different from the original one he spoke with, citing bias as his reasoning behind it. The FBI agreed, and brought in another interpreter from neighboring Montgomery County, Nevada.

When the interview finally began, the FBI agent asked for the Hispanic man's name, the interpreter repeated, in Spanish. "¿Cómo te llamas?"

The Hispanic man cleared his throat dramatically, looking directly into the camera that was in the interview room. Smiling, he replied, "My name is Hector Salazar, and I am the son of Ruben Salazar. Brother to Victor Salazar. I would like to not only shed light on the Protocol Murders, but also clear my father and brother's names," Hector laughed, and started coughing. When he stopped, he looked back up at the camera, and continued speaking.

"While my father was involved in Red Fury, he was not the leader. Victor was never involved more than just to assist Red Fury with relocating. However, the Protocol Murders are completely unrelated to Red Fury," Hector paused, coughing again.

A male FBI agent looked perplexed. "All the evidence points to the fact that Red Fury is responsible for at least some of the Protocol Murders. You're saying that's not true?"

Hector nodded. "That's what I'm saying, yes."

"Please continue."

"When Red Fury started, after their attack on Hollywood, my mother left my father, and returned to Pahrump. I haven't seen him since then, or most of my family who joined him on his journey to the capitol."

The male FBI agent looked long and hard at Hector's face, thinking he was lying. "What do you know about the Protocol Murders then, Mr. Salazar?"

Hector smiled at the FBI agent, his eyes sparkling. "I know everything about them. I committed them."

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“White Horse”

>>>...<<<

>>>See this blog for reference<<<

>>>See this blog for reference also<<<

“No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus! By god, I’d rather slave on earth for another man – some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive – than rule down here over all the breathless dead.” – Achilles as written by Homer, “The Odyssey,” circa 8th century BC. Retrieved from: 27 Important ‘The Odyssey’ Quotes By Homer (kidadl.com)

Swerving to the right just in the nick of time, you narrowly missed the semi truck barreling at you going 75 mph down the highway. Losing control of the Chevy Impala, you overcorrected when you started to skid toward the right shoulder and began spinning in the middle of the highway until you were able to come to a complete stop.

Thoroughly shaken, you peeled your fingers away from the steering wheel and looked up to see a vehicle coming at you, their headlights flashing. You realized you were facing oncoming traffic, and started the car quickly to try and avoid the second head on collision you almost got yourself into. Backing up the car as quickly as you could onto the right shoulder, you watched as the vehicle passed by, noticing it was a Toyota Tundra, and remembering the accident you saw on your way to Albuquerque.

Feeling the back wheels start to roll over the asphalt, you slam on the brakes, stopping the car. Putting it in park and pulling the parking brake, you stop to take a sigh of relief, and release a pent up fart that had been building. Rolling down the window to let the stench out, you started laughing out of nowhere, side-splitting, belly-aching laughter just because it felt so good to do it. You hadn't had a good laugh in you didn't remember how long, and you almost just died twice, so you felt like you deserved to feel good for a little bit. Pulling the car up onto the shoulder and parking it, you turned on your hazards and pulled out your phone, wanting desperately to call Esmeralda, but instead seeing a text from Layla.

"You need to come back now." It read.

You tried texting her back asking her why, but she didn't look at the text, you could tell by the indicator next to the message. Trying to call her, you reached her voicemail.

"Layla, I got your text, answer your phone."

Hanging up, you decided to head back, and made your way back to the highway. About 15 minutes later, your phone rang and it was Layla.

"Dad!"

"What is it?" The service was bad and you could hear the urgency in her voice.

"We almost got arrested, we're going to Quartzsite now, meet us there!"

Arrested? "Are you okay? Where's White Horse?"

"He's here, let me get him," you could hear Layla running and yelling for White Horse. You heard him talking in the background, and Layla suddenly covered up the phone.

"Ruben!" White Horse greeted you warmly. "We're driving to Quartzsite now, we had a run in with some people who figured out

who we were, so we have to go. Can we stop somewhere and meet up on the way?"

Your mind was racing. "What happened exactly? Who did you run into?"

"It was someone named Zapata, I can't remember his first name, but he was looking for you. When he found Layla and I he started to put together who I was, and left pretty quickly."

You feel the blood drain from your face. "Zapata? Was his first name Fernando by chance?"

"Yeah, that's it! He said he knew you from a long time ago and he wanted to see you again about an assignment."

"You know who he is, don't you?"

"No, I have no idea, but he seemed nice, I just didn't want to get us arrested," White Horse responded.

"So you didn't have a run in with the cops then?" You ask, a little relieved, just slightly, because you knew Zapata would likely want to kill you since he was the lieutenant in the drug cartel you ratted out. He wasn't the police, though.

"No, man, he just gave me the creeps when he started looking at me weird, my spine did this weird vibrating thing and I told Layla and Sitting Bull that we had to leave."

"I'm on my way," you say, "meet me in Nipton, CA, it's a tiny little town just across the border of Nevada, there's a rest area there."

"Nipton?" White Horse asks Layla who you hear asking Vanessa. Vanessa takes the phone from White Horse.

"Ruben?"

"Hey Vanessa, yes you know where the rest stop is in Nipton? You know where I'm talking about?"

"Yes, we're going to head there now, we'll meet you there."

The phone clicks and you're left in silence.

White Horse travels in the school bus with Layla, Sitting Bull, and the rest of his companions. As they ride to Nipton to meet you, White Horse thinks about the vision of his death, and wonders if he should have told you about it. It isn't sitting well with him because it would mean he failed, and if he failed, you would all fail. Looking at Layla as she slept in one of the bench seats, he wondered if it would be better to put her at the forefront of his plan, since she seemed to be able to outsmart the entire group.

It was a huge risk, though, and he was sure you would take issue. He wasn't willing to sacrifice his friendship with you, and more importantly, the life of such a young girl. The last thing he wanted to do was have that be her fate instead of his; if that was what meant to happen, he just had to figure out a way to get to the White House before this Allen found him.

And he somehow knew Allen was going to be there, because White Horse had a vision about that too, another one he kept secret from you because he knew it would destroy you.

Vanessa sat down next to White Horse and opened up her laptop to show him something. "I don't know if this is real, but I just found it and I didn't want to say anything to anyone else," she whispered.

White Horse looked at her laptop, seeing a photo of Yvette, and reading about her murder. Looking back at Vanessa with an expression of horror on his face, he said, "Yvette Salazar? Is that – "
Layla's head popped up. "Yvette's my sister," she said, noticing the expressions on your faces, her own turning into one of worry. "Why?"

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“Red Sunset”

>>>...<<<

As the days went on and the truth was discovered, you decided you could no longer be a part of Red Fury, and left the group with Sitting Bull to return to Albuquerque and hopefully live out your days privately with Omar on the reservation. Layla decided to continue on with the group, and since she was getting closer to her eighteenth birthday, you decided to let her make this final decision about the trajectory of her life. There was nothing you could do to stop her now, after finding out the truth about Yvette.

Victor and Vanessa stayed with Layla to protect her, even though she was clearly able to protect herself. The group made it all the way to Washington DC, and were able to take over the White House for a very short time. White Horse made international headlines with his mission, and showed his face on television for the first time as the entire group was surrounded after taking over the White House by force. SWAT was called in but the group managed to escape, yet again, thanks to tunnels they had other chapters of Red Fury construct in the weeks prior to the attack.

The members of Red Fury spent the rest of their days quietly in Canada, in an undisclosed location, rumored to be on an Indian reservation. Not long after the attack on the capitol, a strange epidemic broke out in Montana, and started filtering its way southwest. Before long, the entire northwestern region of the United

States had to be closed off due to the outbreak of what were being called flesh eating zombies. You were grateful to be in New Mexico, but you knew the time was coming for you to move.

Hopeful that Esmeralda would consider a reunion, you contacted her to see if she and Hector would want to join you in Mexico, where you could live out your days in hiding somewhere no one could ever find you. She still had a lot of that money left that AI gave her when they tried to get her to believe you were dead, and at the very least, if she didn't want to join you, maybe she would take pity on you and share some of the money so you could start a new life, far away from any zombies. Esmeralda did take pity, but refused to join you, so you were \$50,000 richer, but still alone.

Omar agreed to join you in your venture to Mexico, but Sitting Bull refused, saying he was too old. Saying your goodbyes, you and Omar bought an RV, and took a trip down south, never to return.

Some said you were killed by Fernando Zapata soon after crossing into Mexico, and that Omar was secretly working behind your back as an AI informant. Some also say you actually joined Red Fury during the White House takeover and were killed by the SWAT team. No one really knows what became of you after you said goodbye to Sitting Bull, really.

No one but you and Omar.

The End

>>>Jim's Ascent, ...<<<

>>>Jim's Descent, ...<<<

>>>Cassie's Ascent, ...<<<

>>>Cassie's Descent, ...<<<

>>>Ruben's Ascent, ...<<<

>>>Ruben's Descent, ...<<<

"If a coin comes down heads, that means that the possibility of its coming down tails has collapsed. Until that moment the two possibilities were equal. But on another world, it does come down tails. And when that happens, the two worlds split apart." – Philip Pullman, "The Golden Compass," 1995. Retrieved from: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1536771-northern-lights>

Allen James Cartwright, Jr. was convicted on all counts; capital murder, arson, and abuse of a corpse. Cartwright was able to escape imprisonment, with the assistance of Dan Thipp, and evaded custody, fleeing to Newfoundland, Canada, and living out his days under the pseudonym, Allen Holbright. During Jim's trial, he learned of a son he had with his former girlfriend and lifelong obsession, Ella, and became obsessed with finding out more about his son. Spending his days stalking Ella and Jimmy, Allen eventually came out of hiding and kidnapped the pair, returning to Newfoundland to isolate them before returning to the capitol to obtain a new vessel, should his experiment with his son not work out. When attempting to secure a new vessel, a strong Native American man Allen assumed was White Horse, he was murdered savagely, but his essence preserved by someone who knew what they were doing.

That someone was an agent of Sergei, who wanted to secure Cassie's entire remaining bloodline for the mission to space. And so, Jim made it to space after all, though in another, parallel universe. In what capacity is anyone's guess, and that story is yet left untold.

Unable to get over the death of her sister, Yvette, Layla Salazar became a savage serial killer, enlisting the help of Fernando Zapata, who she later married in a strategic effort to ensure her survival. Since Hector was being subjected to experiments designed by Dr. Popov, he became a shell, what little personality he had developed during his life had been erased by this experiment, only to be replaced with pieces of Ruben's consciousness, as well as Yvette's, since Nick Ward was able to manage to procure both and combine them to inject them into Hector. This way, he would have the ability to control Ruben without having to actually, physically deal with him. Hector was preserved as a computer, a hybrid version of both Ruben and Yvette, and used to attempt to lure Layla in so that her essence could also be captured. However, with Zapata at her side, Layla was able to murder Nick, and ensure her survival with Zapata by becoming subjects of Sergei's, and submitting to his experimental surgery. He would include both of them as chosen to join the entire group in space, inside the heart of Sergei's makeshift version of his obsession, Iva Petrov.

The message to news media from Cassie Holbright was simple – she looked exactly like Iva Petrov by the time the video was shot and edited. She was a hybrid human as it was, and though her transition in one reality was much simpler, it was basically the same in both, though bloodier in the ascension than it was descending. Iva Petrov was to tell the world that the zombie apocalypse was happening in America, and that she was a representative of this phenomenon. During the video, as she was telling the horrific tales of the coming doom, she described a planet containing the horrors one would see in a science fiction novel, or in some movie about a dystopian future. Iva warned of cannibalism, great earthquakes, and yet made a promise of a brighter future somewhere near a constellation called Algorab. Iva promised that those who were strong enough to live through trials set forth in the post-apocalyptic planet formerly known as Earth, those who could see it through would be rescued, much like a rapture. Iva said that these trials would define the next race of

humans allowed to survive, saying the first round was a failure of epic proportions.

When the broadcast was over, it spread like wildfire across the planet, from Russian World News Network to the United States, and soon, the entire globe erupted in the worst pandemic in history, worse than COVID-19, and there was no known cure, nor a way known to prevent the onset or the spread of this new virus that prevented people from completely dying. This virus that was completely capable of passing down generations was doing so, as these creatures were able to eat people and procreate, and that was the extent of their existence.

A time eventually came when these creatures were able to learn to coexist with humans, and Cassie's old flame Paul wound up among these unfortunate souls in one alternate reality. In another, he joined up with Cassie, dying for her as Zoe and Arseny so selflessly did, but Paul had another mission he was in line for, one that was far less painful and divisive as one side of the coin had in store for him.

Jim still roamed the planet in one reality, the one where Zara said he'd be just like her. She was right, and Jim found himself wondering why he let her die that day. He remembered it as though it was yesterday; she laid down on top of a bed made of white feathers and set herself on fire, burning for hours until finally dissipating into nothing. She said this was how she wanted it, and though the pain was horrendous, and she knew it would be, it would be her last time to be alive, and she wanted to feel as much of life as she could while she still had the ability to feel.

Before leaving existence, Zara gave Jim a part of her essence to carry with him, when he eventually made it to space. She promised Cassie's eventual son would have a sister, and she made good on

her word, though she failed to mention that Zara herself would have a very strong influence on this little sister to be. She did say that Cassie's eventual son, one of many she would have but apparently the one of main significance to Zara, would be quite evil and would eventually rule this planet she referred to as Algorab. She said her influence would be needed, but not all of it. Jim's essence was to also be a part of this little girl, so it would be his child with Zara essentially, and his ultimate ticket to reuniting with Cassie. Zara explained she may remember Jim, but in the New World, she would have much less of a need to forgive him for anything, so having this little girl would be a savior to Jim, since even though Cassie distrusted Zara initially, she would grow to be incredibly appreciative of her assistance with the transition. To know a piece of her still lived would undoubtedly be comforting to Cassie, especially with the horrors she still had yet to endure as the Queen of the New World.

Last, but definitely not least, White Horse was selected by Sergei and Dr. Popov in one reality to be a contender for Cassie. In another, he made his way there through the cunning wit of Layla Salazar, who ended up able to transport many more souls with her than anyone was aware of, and could hide them in her own computer chip she had inserted into her very essence, so she could become a vessel within the vessel that was Cassie.

The transport vehicle was completely ready, and so they were all off to space. What will happen to them? To us?

Only time will tell.

>>>Go back to the beginning<<<

