**Big Chicago**  
**by Samayel**

**Summary**

Drake Malfoy is serving seven years in prison for acting as a drug mule for his old boyfriend, and then a green eyed man shows up and turns his life upside down, pulling him into the underworld of espionage and proxy warfare between rival powers over global dominance. A story about love, sex, life, politics, trauma, music, literature...and really, really good food.
This is what it comes down to. Hands clenched around steel bars, teeth gritted quietly, eyes closed while another pumps into my body. It isn’t an act of desire…it’s a matter of claiming property. It’s stress relief in a pressure cooker for humans. It’s silence broken by the small, wet sounds of a greased hole being used roughly and quickly and the terse grunts of the unsophisticated bastard behind me taking his pleasure. This is hell. This is where bad people go for good reasons. By that definition, I must be a bad person. I must deserve this somehow…someway. This is a federal penitentiary, where the worst dwell among the worst. This is my life, but it wasn’t always like this. I came from heaven where the angels sip champagne and worry over brand names. It was a long way to fall.

My family was Old South nobility, back when things like that still mattered. After the Civil War they lost everything and moved north looking for a new start. My great-grandfather was a shrewd investor, and so was my grandfather. As for my father, by the time he took the helm of the family and controlled the fortune that had been left to him, he could have lit his cigars with thousand dollar bills and still never exhausted the interest on our accounts. Naturally, this being Chicago, he went for politics.

Father was the kind of man who made other people feel like they worked for him…even if they were nominally supposed to be the one in charge. The city aldermen of Chicago are a viper’s nest of movers and shakers and money makers, but without the need for obvious graft, my father quickly became untouchable. It was never about money…it was all about power and influence. In truth, now that I can look back, life really doesn’t deviate much from that in prison. It’s cruder and even more brutal, but it works the same as anywhere else.

I have come to realize that, no matter how much I adored her as a child, my mother is a self indulgent lush interested only in her own comforts. She is the ultimate trophy wife, and never complained because she really couldn’t have cared less. Her husband is rich, she has everything she wants, so nothing really matters. She’s little more than a glorified blonde lapdog to my father, but that’s neither here nor there. I know these things because I take after her in many ways.

Ours was the kind of family born into isolated luxury. Gated mansion and servants at beck and call. Cars and chauffeurs, stables and horses, gardens and parties that took weeks to plan. I am the product of private academies and tutors and piano lessons. I can speak French and Italian and Spanish and write or compose in them just as well as in English. It rather makes the irony of surviving based solely on my ability to sate an engorged cock somewhat more embittering, don’t you think?

Among the upper class, being beautiful is a way of life. It is the norm. People wonder why the spectacularly wealthy always possess the glow of good health and look younger than they are. There is a reason for things being that way. It’s called money. Doctors, nutritionists, dentists, plastic surgeons, personal coaches and an endless array of professionals who can help you change anything you don’t like about yourself. All it takes is money.

Only when one is poor or of the lowest class is being beautiful a crime or a curse. You become vulnerable to those who hate you for being what they can never be. Even if all you have to call your own is the image of beauty and success…the fantasy of what it must be like to be as fabulous
as the rock stars or famous actors, there are a hundred bitter souls who would take pleasure from stripping even that from you…just because they can. Those kind of people tend to wind up here.

This is where beauty is a curse. It damns you to servitude or suffering, slavery or death. If you aren’t strong enough to take, you become the taken. This is where I fit in. There shouldn’t be any shame in being beautiful, but here, in this forsaken place, I wish I’d been born disfigured, or obscenely hairy, or morbidly obese. Anything but willow slender and smooth as a girl. Here, the way I look makes me a commodity. The only virtue in it is that, being exceptionally pretty, it was inevitable that whoever was strongest would claim me as their own, jealously guarding what they took to be their property.

I could have wound up like Nott. He could have been handsome enough, if he hadn’t tried to fight back. He got busted for dope just like I did, but he wasn’t a faggot with the good sense to bend over and just try to get the job over with. Once the dentist removed the shattered bits and pulled out the roots, he was left with nothing but back molars in his mouth. They don’t hire plastic surgeons in prison. The reason his left eye looks like it droops is because the bones near his temple were smashed beyond easy repair. He’s the kind of prison bitch that gets given away to anyone that needs him at the moment. As for me, I belong to Flint.

That brings us back to the fucking miserable bastard behind me, sweating and grunting, pushing hard just to be mean, making it worse than it has to be just because that’s what he likes. Flint held the dubious distinction of being both strong and smart, even if he is a crude and miserable piece of shit. He was arrested for committing serial rape throughout the greater Midwest, from Michigan to Montana, and for robbery, arson, weapon possession and for the famous interstate flight he attempted just before they caught him. Flint doesn’t fear death…or pain…or anything else for that matter. He exists only to control or to hurt others, and he made himself right at home here. He blinded the first person that picked a fight with him, and hospitalized several of the others that tried to join in. It didn’t take long before he assumed a position of leadership in this shithole.

I assumed a position here too. The cell I was placed in on my first night was famous here. ‘The Bitch Tank’ was a cell reserved for frail or small new arrivals who might need additional time to blend into population. I was pathetically grateful for it at the time, because I was eighteen and scared to death, sentenced to seven years for transporting drugs across state lines. Did you know an airport is technically federal land? It doesn’t matter what state you’re in or from, possession of narcotics is a federal crime, when the intent to transport them across state lines is established. Thus, a first time offender get a stiff sentence to a federal prison instead of a county lock-up. The cruel irony of the Bitch Tank is that it immediately marks you. Everyone knows who the new arrivals are and what they look like, and being in that cell for a week guarantees that you’ll be private property or every man’s toy within minutes of your release into the general population.

It was an hour after breakfast when Flint showed up with his goons at his side. I put on a brave face and pulled off the act of a lifetime. The siren…the seductress…every platinum blonde bombshell I’d ever seen in the movies guided my instincts. I vamped him the best I could, demanded that he be first, and gave the most ferocious, mind-shattering blowjob I’d ever given. I still had to do the others, but by then the hook was in, and from the corner of an eye I saw him watching while others enjoyed my talents. Jealousy and greed saved my life. As soon as his sidekicks were finished, instead of the gang rape they’d expected, Flint called me his own and had me moved to his cell. Power players can pull that kind of favor easily, even if they are prisoners, and I was Flint’s personal toy before the day was out. For the most part, he hates to share. Good for me. Yay.

A lot of people wouldn’t believe the amount of power a prisoner can have behind bars. Flint has control over others, and influence with other leaders in here. His cooperation can make things
easier for the warden and the guards, so Flint gets what Flint wants…within reason. It also means
that, as long as I play my part and don’t ask for too much, I can get what I want. I only have a
couple months left to go. I don’t want much, but there are things I need that are useful.

The prison doctor gives away lubricant. Nothing good, just the cheapest brand of greasy petroleum
ejelly. The stuff that lingers and leaves you feeling like the cheap, dirty whore you are. Not because
they approve, or care, or want me to enjoy the experience. It’s about economics. It’s less expensive
to give away the stuff than it is to stitch up the torn asses of every queen in the prison every month.
Aside from that, I need very little, and I ask for very little. Flint likes that.

Flint doesn’t like boys. He likes women, or rather he hates women enough to assault them, but he
prefers to have sex with them…especially against their will. In fact, he hates fags and holds me in
contempt, but what else is there here? To make it a little easier for him to enjoy himself, he got
cosmetics for me. Eyeliner and eyeshadow, lipstick and nail polish. When I got here, I had the
standard prison haircut and a cheap uniform like everyone else. It’s been ‘customized’ since then.
My slacks were cut so short that they look like something Daisy Duke would wear, and my hair has
been allowed to grow since I got here. It hasn’t been cut since that first day, and it’s well past my
shoulders now, bound in a pony tail with a rubber band. Not a very long one, but enough that, given
my natural features, I look like a white trash prom queen. Being more than a little femme helps too.
No one here really looks forward to fucking a man. They make do when they’re too horny to care,
but the illusion on my part makes them less violent about it. I make a fantasy come true for a few
minutes, and I get to keep my pretty face intact. Flint mauled the last person who bruised my face.
Not for love’s sake of course, but because someone hurt something of his without his permission.
Yes…that’s horrible. I know.

None of this means that Flint doesn’t hurt me. When we have time and privacy I live out his private
fantasies. Mock-rape. Or real rape when you acknowledge that I would rather be anywhere but
here and my other choice is being hospitalized regularly or used by dozens of junkies and killers.
Nott was HIV positive before he was here for a year. That could have been me, and if I’m not
careful, it could still be me. Thoughts like that make Flint’s fist in my hair seem like a small price
to pay. Pretending to be terrified, acting like a surprised victim until he comes, these are easy things
to do. The bruises fade, the soreness goes away, and the cycle starts all over again.

If I play it carefully enough, I might just leave here with only one scar. The one where a modified
piece of wire was heated to white-hot and pressed into my lower back, just above my ass. The wire
was shaped like the letter ‘F’. Flint’s brand, marking me as his, just to remind me in case I forgot.
It only happened because I’d gotten just saucy enough to act demanding about something, and I’d
picked the wrong day. He decided to make a big show of reminding me whose grace I lived by,
and I didn’t forget again.

A little about how it came to this. There are very few ‘guilty’ people in prison. So many people
who were ‘misunderstood’, ‘framed’, or just wrongly imprisoned. Honestly, there are problems
with the criminal justice system, but the odds of ninety percent of prisoners being innocent are
pretty fucking slim. At least Flint is proud of his crimes, and even if he belongs here, his honesty is
occasionally refreshing. I could say I was framed. I could say the judge was unfair, or that my state
appointed lawyer was a moron and misrepresented me, and those things might be true…mostly, but
at the end of the day, I was caught in an airport with a bag full of cocaine in my luggage. And not
just a little for personal use. Lots of it. I did what I was told. I kept my mouth shut and waited for
Blaise to send a lawyer and bail me out. No one came.

I was eighteen, and I was stupid, and I thought I was in love, or at least thought that I was wanted
and valued. How I wish I’d had just a little of my current cynicism. Blaise took my ass off the
streets, made me the well-dressed trophy on his arm, gave me nightclubs and all the drugs I could
use. He was gorgeous in the fine, cruel way that men with power can be. He was Italian, and loved that I could speak the language of his parents. He was Mafioso, and I knew it, but I didn’t care. He had wonderfully curly dark hair, the kind that made me think of foreign fashion models. The best of European genetics, and charm for days. He also had one of the most perfect penises ever attached to a man…at least in my opinion. Let me reiterate…I was a teenaged whore in a very big city, alone, and with very few prospects. I was stupid because I chose to be that way. Life was shit, and then there was Blaise, and I was living the life I’d left behind. Back among the angels, sipping drinks I wasn’t old enough to be holding, but with enough money no one asked questions.

In retrospect, I might have had a clue about the nature of our relationship, but I chose not to push it. Blaise had a lot to prove, because he was technically a low level pusher and errand boy and still had to earn his way into a better position with his ‘family’. Seventeen is pretty young for a person with responsibilities, but Blaise was smooth talking and calm when others panicked. I admired that. How many other boys my age could afford to put me up in a nice apartment and take me shopping whenever I felt like it. Instead of street trash hooker-wear, he put me in outfits that made me look like a goddess. With him, I didn’t mind the clothes hitting the floor when the lights went out. He was good in bed, or at least my attraction to him was so great that I honestly didn’t care about anything but having him inside of me as often as I could get him excited, and he got excited a lot.

That kind of infatuation makes everything seem like a good idea. When he said he needed me to do a little favor for him, I did it without question. Shit…I was proud to be of use to him in more than one way. Not that I wasn’t enthusiastic about the way I was useful, but my ego was pretty battered before we met, and the way he made me feel needed was better than any drug you could imagine. So I did it.

I know enough now to know that someone tipped the security off before I got there. I was only barely eighteen, traveling alone in clothes that were worth more than the staff there made in a year. I suspect that Blaise sent me because he’d known he was about to be set up. I can’t even guess at the politics that might have caused that, and back then I was careful to ignore his ‘business’, but the end result was the same. Blaise wouldn’t come anywhere near a courthouse or do anything that involved him with me at that point. So was I framed? Sort of.

Law enforcement goes a big rubbery one when it comes to drugs. They love them. Not the way club kids do…at least not always, but they universally owe their budgets and careers to drugs. If it wasn’t for people trying to party or just forget, the cops would be forced to concentrate on either serious criminals or traffic infractions. Drugs provide a steady stream of busts that are often uncomplicated, and move thousands of people through a system that employs clerks and lawyers on a scale that no Wall Street firm ever could. Drugs are bread and butter, and if they vanished like people wished, the system would collapse overnight. Like blood-gorged ticks on the back of a dog, law enforcement survives on the flesh and blood of junkies and fools.

‘Tough on crime’ is the watchword these days. Judges, even the ones who aren’t elected, are political creatures. They have to watch what they do and what they say, always thinking of where their career will be in a few years. A judge who shows mercy will sit a local bench for decades, but a judge who plays hardball and sends the criminals away is a hero. Of course, this philosophy doesn’t leave a lot of wiggle room for a basically harmless person who did something astonishingly stupid. It happens more than you’d think. I was charged with everything they could tack on, and the court appointed lawyer who defended me made it sound like he was doing me a huge favor when they dropped a few charges and pressed on with only the most serious.

I’ve realized since then that the court appointed lawyers see their client for a few weeks or months at most, but they work every day with the judges and prosecutors. It’s an unspoken deal between the two sides that, when a generic defendant is charged, the prosecutor will start by firing off
stacks of charges, scaring the shit out of the defense lawyer’s client. Then the defense lawyer ‘saves you’ by getting some of the charges dropped or reduced, but not enough to actually get you free. They do just enough to make you feel lucky that you’re not going to prison for as long as you might have. I reacted just like so many others do. I was too stunned and scared to be cognizant of much, rotting away in the city jail for weeks, almost starved for something to change. I agreed to plead guilty to the remaining charges and hope for mercy. That makes me laugh sometimes. Not happy laughter…bitter, angry laughter.

I got seven years. The judge does this for a living. He can’t be innocent after years of sending people to jail. He knew exactly where he was sending a skinny, ignorant kid. When they read the sentence, they might as well have included ‘…the court sentences you, the defendant, to seven years anal intercourse with vicious felons, with the possibility of your death or permanent injury at their hands, and furthermore, the court finds this highly amusing, and hopes that you will scream a lot while they take turns fucking you.’

Seven years. I’ll be twenty-five just before I get out. it’s so close, but it raises new questions. Seven years keeping your ass greased for convenience doesn’t prepare you for much of anything. What could be worse than this? The answer is this: the unknown. The only practical skills I have are getting men off and looking good while I do it. The only thing waiting for me outside is a new chance to hook until I get killed or arrested. I’m still pretty, for now, but it won’t last forever, and the next guy will probably be just like Blaise. I’m a felon. It’s like a permanent tattoo that says ‘don’t employ me’. There is no future after prison, or at least no future that doesn’t genuinely suck.

Some people come back here again and again. They need this place because they don’t fit in anywhere else. I have two months to go, but the question is where will I go in two months?

I won’t be going home to family. I’m dead to them, and it was that way before I even got here. It was traumatic enough for my father that he’d spawned a flaming faggot, but that his child preferred to dress like a girl was just icing on the cake. I thought they’d still be vacationing in the Hamptons. I was seventeen and I loved to get out of the house and take the BMW into Boystown, the gay district in Chicago, and just cruise for cute guys who knew where a party was being held. Even if you can’t get into clubs, being pretty and young will get you all kinds of places. I got into them all.

I came home at six in the morning, a little stoned and still walking a little funny from the two hotties that took turns trying to fuck my brains out for most of the night while sharing their coke, which always made me completely insatiable. I would have called it a good night, until I walked in the door, still dressed as a girl, and met my father. Thirty minutes later I was in a taxi with a split lip and a hundred dollar bill, most of which paid for the ride back to downtown. It didn’t take long before I was completely broke, and my father had disowned me and refused to answer any calls from me.

It’s amazing how many people adore you when you’re rich and pretty, and equally amazing how quickly they have contempt for you when you’re not rich anymore. With only pretty on my side, people had only one use for me, but that was enough to survive on. It wasn’t all bad. I got into clubs and got a fake ID. I knew people who would supply drugs to party with before we ‘played’, and genuinely pretty queens are in demand, which guaranteed me a certain steady income once I got used to it.

I got used to this too. I suppose I was lucky to be experienced before I came here. I took it like the pro I was, and I’m still here. I’ve seen more than a dozen others get sick or hurt. I’ve even known a couple who died. Nott only wishes he died. He’s been on suicide watch a dozen times or more, and in my opinion, anyone with a shred of mercy would let the poor bastard die. The world was happy to throw him away, but it’s stunning how hard they try to keep him alive and prolong his suffering.
Nothing he did was so terrible that it merited what he’s lived through. Then again, it’s hard to feel pity when I’m holding onto metal bars, making the right noises, sounding like it hurts and I’m scared, trying to make sure Flint comes soon and enjoys it enough to not kick my ass. Two more months. Where do you go…after hell?

TBC!!!
It’s twisted, the way I feel something almost like jealousy when the latest residents of the ‘Bitch Tank’ get released into population. Maybe not real jealousy, more a sort of ‘professional envy’. I always worry about the pretty ones. My position hangs on my ability to be more interesting than anyone else Flint fucks. If someone younger and prettier and just a little more interesting shows up, I could find myself fucking half the building to stay alive, and that’s a fast track to AIDS and death, aside from the dozen or so other social diseases that could just fuck up my life in general. I’ve lived through having the clap twice, thanks to Flint fucking the new ones and bringing back a little something for me, but I know others have it worse. I just want his attention to stay focused on my ass and my ass alone until I get out of here.

There is no one prettier than me…at least not here. Competition is slim for me, but you never know. All it takes is another pretty little fag to screw up his life enough to land here, and Flint could drop me like a bad habit. The ugly or just plain ones are of no concern. Their asses will be raw meat by tomorrow morning. No, it’s the ones with looks and a certain attitude that will catch Flint’s eye. He’ll try them out tonight or before breakfast, or at least pick one and let his boys have the others, but he always keeps me handy. It helps that I behave. I make no trouble, I require no effort to keep, and I do what he wants the way he wants it…and I do it well.

I thank my lucky stars every day and most nights that Flint has a normal dick. Not huge, not small, just normal. There’s a gang boss in another cell block that’s supposed to have a cock bigger than my forearm, and if he’d taken hold of me, my ass would be so played out by now that no one would want me for anything but the occasional blowjob. Men are every bit as vain as women, they just show it differently. No man wants to fuck a guy whose ass is so loose as to make a man feel poorly hung. It damages their precious ego. The small-dicked thugs are the worst. Their ego hangs exclusively on their capacity to hurt others…with something other than their dick. I’m different from them in that I’m a queen to start with, and a bottom besides. Why even care if my dick is small? It would only get in the way if it were large, and with the exception of a few tricks before I met Blaise, no one has bothered with it much since I was still in high school, and I prefer it that way. I’m leaving this cesspit in two months, and in a few weeks no one will be able to tell I was here by looking at me…unless they see the ‘F’ on my ass, and if they’re seeing that, they’re probably not going to care much about the little things at the moment, they’ll be too busy getting off.

I haven’t spoken a word about my release date. Lifers, the ones who will never leave here, sometimes get touchy about the cons who are happy because they’re going somewhere after here. Bad things can happen when angry men get jealous. It’s safer to look like I don’t care about anything, and safer still to look miserable. You blend into the background, keep your head down, and you don’t matter. Being worthy of notice is for bosses, not for the rest of us. Sometimes a new guy will shake up the order, like Flint did, and the guy before him did, but most of us have no identity, no politics, and a lot less to worry about. Flint is one of those few with power, and that brings responsibility…even here. To keep being ‘the boss’ he has to earn respect and fear every day, and constantly remind people not to test him. Most of the time it’s quiet, but he’s always rougher when he’s tense, so I like the quiet times more than anyone you’ve ever met.

The new bitches hit population. They’re a mixed bunch, entering here with new uniforms and
cheap blankets, guided one by one to cells that will be their homes unless someone with power gets them moved. There’s a blond wanna-be gang banger with tattoos, but he’s young and short. Probably a suburban kid who watched too much rap on MTV and tried to be a player like the gangsters in the movies. This is the place the movies don’t show, and white teens from the ’burbs learn to choke down a cock and keep quiet while their ass is getting tagged before the first week is up. He’ll probably fight too, which means he’ll wind up like Nott.

There’s a wheezy, skinny one with hair like dirty ash. Skinny, but not much too look at. Someone will probably keep him around for amusement…at least for awhile.

One’s scruffy as hell. Hairy, both on the arms and with a five o’clock shadow that’s seven hours early, but small and wiry. He might just get ignored completely. The ugly ones sometimes do, or if they don’t, it’s usually just a one time deal to establish dominance, and they never have to deal with it again.

Something is very wrong. The last of the new ones had no business being in that cell with the others. He’s taller, the same height as Flint, and he moves like a snake. The uniform is the same crap everyone wears, but he’s all muscle underneath. Not large, just powerful, contained, like a coiled spring. The prison haircut only produces a coal black buzz cut that makes him look like a military man, and he has the clean, tanned look of an athlete. I can’t help watching without looking like it, since that’s what I do every time new arrivals move in, but he scans the crowd and I have to look away. I can’t be seen making eye contact with someone or Flint could have an excuse to make my night hell. The eyes. Jade green volcanoes. Intense, the way a maniac’s are. Powerful. Maybe the others know something is wrong with this picture, but I have nothing to say. I always get told to stand back and watch, and that’s what I always do.

Flint means to try the new one in our section after breakfast. He knows I hate watching it, and he knows I hate competition. It figures that Green-Eyes would be in our cell block. I can smell a risk taker from a mile away. All I do is watch people in here, and if I have a sixth sense about these things, it’s because I need it stay alive. I don’t like interesting times, I like quiet times, and this bastard is going to be trouble. He could ruin everything, and the last thing I need is change. I only have two months. Two! If he shakes up the order here, I could lose my place. I could wind up getting nailed by another boss, or get turned over to someone’s goons just to make a point.

I can’t help looking at him at breakfast. The look on my face must be like murder. I wish someone would just kill him now and make the potential problems go away. No one does. The fucker stares down the first person to even hint at giving him grief. Those fucking eyes! People know he’s serious, but quiet, with danger just beneath the surface, waiting to explode. The other guy backs down. A point for Green-Eyes, but that kind of shit just piques Flint’s interest. Eyes and attitude don’t scare Flint. Nothing does. He lives up to his name. He’s a rock, and nothing can scare a rock. It’ll really be between the two of them, and Flint always wins. Always. At least…he’d better. I don’t want this. I want to be somewhere else, but there’s nowhere else to go. That’s why they call it prison. I have to watch this insanity unfold. I hate him. If a look could kill, his ass would be dead and buried.

Breakfast is over and it’s milling bodies, walking to the yard or to cells. Green-Eyes has no idea what he’s doing. Anyone with half a brain would head for the yard. He could talk a little, make deals, make a show of strength and improve his position. No…he takes the halls, back to the cell that’s his for now. Back to where it’s quiet, and Flint and his boys can have a little privacy. I follow in their wake, same as always. I can’t say no. Flint loves to make me watch it all, knowing that it makes me sick. I hate violence, and I hate blood, and I hate seeing both of them at the same time. What a lovely irony that I should live and survive in the kind of fuck-hole where I see these things so often. I’ll see them again in just a few minutes.
A single nod from Flint and a guard takes a few steps and moves out of sight. Either he knows to let Flint have what he wants, or he’s bought and paid for. Either way, Green-Eyes is just inside the open door of his cell, kicking off the cheap sneakers they issue here. The kind with Velcro instead of shoestrings so you can’t hang yourself or strangle anyone with them. Not that they care if you use your hands to strangle someone, but as long as they didn’t supply you with the means to do it, then it isn’t their fault.

Green-Eyes is f*cked, and everyone knows it but him. It’s so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Flint and his three best goons keep going. I hang back like always. That’s what I’m supposed to do. Once they have him down, I just have to watch. Another stupid asshole with teeth gritted, face burning because this is not a place where tears are well received or have meaning to anyone but yourself. I hate this, all of it, every second…and then they move in.

It never made it to the point of threats. If I had a rewind button for my brain and a slow motion setting for my eyes I still couldn’t catch all of it. Green-Eyes explodes into the middle of them, out of his cell and into action. I know the ball of his heel crushed the fragile bones in the bridge of Flint’s foot. I saw knuckles rake across the tender flesh at the pit of the throat. I saw limbs caught, bent and twisted until cartilage popped and bones ground. They’re the ones screaming, not him. Four men attacking one, and the four men are losing…badly. He’s making no noise at all…but he’s smiling. He loves this. He thinks this is fun. He isn’t even trying.

No one moves that way. No one I’ve ever seen. Not in real life. He glides. There is no wasted movement, just action and results. The others keep trying to get up and fight, and he has the advantage now. They’re hurt, confused and angry, and he is upright and in command. Every time one of them makes it to his feet, he sends them to the floor again. I don’t know what to do. I hope he won’t notice me. He’s ruined everything. I want to run. I want to piss myself. I want to scream, but I don’t dare bring attention to myself now. Everything is changing right in front of me. My life isn’t worth shit. My safety is spitting blood out of his mouth and trying to get onto his feet. I’m a piece of meat and there isn’t an alpha-wolf to own me. I’m going to die. I’ll never make it out of here intact. It’s over. Green-Eyes signed my death warrant. I only had two more months to go!

He’s standing over them, silent as before, and he’s staring at me. I realize that I’m shaking from head to toe. My teeth are chattering even though it’s hot as an oven in here. I can’t help staring back. His fists are still balled up, and there’s blood on his hands. His face is like a thundercloud. He looks like God. He’s above us all, more powerful, more certain, more inflexible than any of us. Nothing can break him. Not this place or these people. He is here, but he will never be one of us. Nothing could pull him down from the clouds. Nothing. God has green eyes, and his gaze makes me feel like something low that crawled from the muck, on its belly like a slinking dog. I know how far I have fallen when I look in those eyes.

He isn’t watching the men he’s beaten. Flint is behind him, silent and full of menace, pulling the steel shiv out of his pantleg. A moment passes, and I’m back where I belong, here in hell, and I have a choice. Who says all changes have to be bad? Flint will cut him open with a chunk of sharpened metal and pull him down from his high place…if I let him. All it took was a single breath.

“Behind you.”

How sweet a betrayal. Flint suffers for his crimes. For all of them. He still isn’t afraid, but before long, he isn’t even conscious. Even Flint never hurt anyone this badly. If he lives, he will never be the same, never be strong enough to hurt others. There are wet, sick, snapping sounds, and I’m kneeling by the wall, throwing up breakfast and crying. I haven’t cried in a long time, but I can’t help it. It’s too much. Everything is changing.
“You! Who’s in charge of this dump?”

“Flint.”

I can hear kicks rouse the others. Grunts from blows to places that matter the most. I keep my head down and let them work it out. Everything is blurry, distorted and weird. I know I have to use a toilet. I can hear Green Eyes again.

“Wrong answer.”

Someone is screaming. He’s taking over. Making sure there are no questions. Bile is dripping off of my chin while I shake uncontrollably.

“Who…is…in…charge…here?”

“You…you are.”

“That’s right. I own all your asses. If you even look at me wrong, you’ll wish you were him. You and you, pick him up and dump him off at the infirmary. You, tell your pals who to come talk to. This cell is now my office, and if you answered to that punkass, you answer to me now. Tell them what happened to him, and tell them to show some fucking respect when they talk to me, or I’ll use them to warm up, then work on the next person I see just for fun. That one stays…he belongs to me now.”

He’s talking about me. I have to pay attention. My life is hanging on this, and I have puke on my chin and tears on my face. I’m back to square one. I don’t know what he likes or what he wants. There’s no routine. One fuck up and I’m branded or cut. He’s a killer, and he isn’t afraid of anything. Men like that are dangerous because they have no compunction. They will do anything, anytime, for any reason that crosses their mind. Consequences mean nothing to them. I used to love that type, before I knew what those things meant. Danger, power and strength made me horny; made my knees weak and my stomach fluttery. The sight of a man with that ferocious intensity made me ache inside, so empty because they weren’t inside me, fucking me until I came onto the sheets, screaming their name and begging them not to stop. Now they just terrify me, because I know what else they can do, and I’m afraid they’ll do it to me.

I have to get up. They’re carrying Flint away. His arm is hanging all wrong. His face is unrecognizable. Green-Eyes is standing at the door of his cell, waiting for me, and he doesn’t look patient.

“Get in here. This is your new home.”

Try acting demure after watching a man beaten almost to death. I’d call it challenging, but I’m given to both sarcasm and understatement. My hands can’t stop shaking, so I’m holding them to myself while I step into his cell and stay quiet. I hear the barred door slide and clang, but it won’t lock until the guards trip the switch for the whole block.

“Wash your face.”

The cheap, shitty makeup must have run when I was crying. I must look like shit. I don’t want to do this. I never want to, but now more than ever. I’m sick and shaky and I want to pee so bad I can almost taste it, but I don’t fucking dare offend him. There are people in cells across the hall. Bars give no privacy. I’m used to it. Word is already spreading. This man runs this block now, and if he could break Flint and three other men besides, no one wants to piss him off. They’ll stay quiet while he fucks me and pay respect to him when he’s done. I have to go through with this. Flint is
gone, and this is the new boss. I have to get it together enough to give him what he wants, or I’ll be something he throws to the dogs like leftover scraps.

The water is lukewarm but it still feels like needles when it hits my face. I have to make it fast and scrub hard with my hands, and there’s nothing to dry myself with. The sound of the water makes my bladder clench. Please, God, don’t let me piss myself. He’s waiting and this is my only chance for a good first impression.

“Get in the corner. Sit on the edge of the bed.”

I move my ass and sit on the cheap metal frame bed that’s bolted into the concrete. The same uniform mattress that every bunk has is on it, with a blanket that would itch if it wasn’t so hot that no one used them right now. His back is to the world, blocking me from sight. It’s going to be a blowjob. I can already tell. Thank God, because I couldn’t handle a fucking without pissing myself in the process.

“Keep your mouth closed if you know what’s good for you. Do only what I tell you and you won’t regret it. Fuck with me and you’ll wish you hadn’t. Now put your head right here and stay quiet.”

His voice is a whisper only I can here, and he’s holding my hair by the braid that runs into the ponytail. My face is pressed into his groin, into cheap uniform slacks, and he’s moving his hips. His fly is down, but he doesn’t make a move to pull his dick out. Am I supposed to do it for him? He said to do only what he tells me to, and I know I should do that, but I don’t understand. No one can see me, and he’s moving and making noises like I’m giving him the best head he’s ever had, but my face is in his crotch and he’s not even hard. Is this what I’m supposed to be doing? Just pretend that I’ve got his cock in my mouth and wait until he’s finished? Not knowing what to do makes me sick, and I still have to pee so bad it hurts.

A minute, maybe two, and he makes a noise like a groan, tensing like a man who is unloading his come into a skillful mouth. He steps back and fumbles with his fly in a way that, from the view of anyone outside of this cell, looks like he’s relaxed and just a bit sensitive after orgasm. I’m just hunched on the edge of the bed, wondering what the fuck is going on. Then he whispers one last time.

“You gambled on me. You won. I’m gambling on you now, and I’m a sore loser. Act your part and you’ve got it easy. Fuck this up and I’ll make you a new definition for sorry. Consider it my thanks.”

I get off the bed and wipe my mouth on my sleeve, heading for the sink and toilet. I try to do everything the way I would when I’ve just taken a real shot in the mouth, but I’m so fucking shaky it’s hard to remember. If people assumed I was off my game because I was scared shitless, they’d be right. I rinse and spit into the sink, then drop my shorts and sit on the toilet for a desperately needed piss. Funny thing, but that’s the way I’ve always done it. Drove my father crazy when I was little, until I was old enough to make sure he thought I’d started standing up to do it. I keep my head down so that no one can read my face. You lose the ability to blush quickly here, but I feel naked and vulnerable all over again. I understood everything until today, now it’s all new to me again.

I finish soon enough, and move to the corner quietly. He’s against the bars, arms spread out like wings, looking out at a tiny, filthy world he suddenly owns. I’m just a part of it, and I know it, and my part is to keep him content for two months. Two months and I’m free of this, but until then, I belong to him, and I don’t anything about him. I know he’s dangerous, and I know he’s more than just a little crazy, but I also know he understands the idea of gratitude, and he just showed me something like mercy. I take a very small chance and speak up just enough to ask a question. I keep
my head down the entire time, trying to radiate complete submission, hoping I’m not wrong about the weird streak of kindness I only suspect is inside of him.

“What do I call you?”

He doesn’t turn around, or even twitch, and silence hangs over this shitty little cell for a string of heartbeats.

“Harry. Harry Black. I suppose I should call you something too. Name?”

My real name means nothing anymore. I haven’t used it in years. Drake Malfoy was a spoiled party boy from the jet set crowd. Drake Malfoy died in downtown Chicago when his father wouldn’t answer his calls. Drake Malfoy died when he sucked off men for money and drugs to stay alive and forget what he was doing. Drake Malfoy is history. He gets the name everybody gets now.

“Dee. What do you want from me? I’ll do whatever you want.”

“Dee…relax and enjoy the ride. Very soon, things are going to get real interesting around here.”

TBC!!!
These have been the most surreal weeks of my life, and that’s saying a lot when you’ve done a mess of drugs and wandered the streets of Chicago. Harry Black is my alpha-wolf, and I am his property now. Flint was flown out of here with very few questions asked. They’re honor bound to heal him up in some hospital with a guard on him at all times, but he’s no threat to anyone. The cartilage in his right knee has been shredded, some of his face has to be reconstructed, but since he’s prison trash they won’t do a good job, and the fingers Harry smashed mean that Flint will probably never be able to pick up anything heavier than a full spoon or a coffee cup for the rest of his life. When he comes back here, it will be to the special ward for cripples and old-timers.

Black is nothing but contradictions. He can talk like a sailor or a trucker, but he can sound like a professor or a poet when he wants to. What are the odds that the ‘weird’ things he sometimes says would be recognized by a pathetic prison bitch? He knows that I know he’s educated. I was so surprised when he quoted a passage from Dante’s ‘Inferno’ that I accidentally whispered the name of the book in response. Prison bitches don’t generally remember their private lessons in history and literature, and only I would recognize Chopin, and know the title of the song, when he whistled it during an idle hour. When I look at him or whisper the source of his oddball quotes, all he does is smirk mildly, or give me a wink when no one else can see us.

He can be stunningly violent, and he’s good at it in a way that makes the rest of these people look like the dumb brutes that they really are, but under that lurks a gentleman, who doesn’t seem to have any desire to hurt the weak…specifically me. I can’t help but appreciate that. I’m sure you can see why.

He’s had plastic surgery. You couldn’t tell unless you went to school with the silver spoon crowd and knew what to look for. His forehead. The skin is shinier, smoother than normal, and the creases that other people would have from frowning or smiling seem a little off on one side. Scar removal or a skin graft from an old injury. It was a good job, and that means money.

I haven’t been forced into sex in three weeks. Not with him, and not with anyone else. He fakes it. Tells his goons to fuck off so he can get some head and relax, but it’s always the same as before, and I play my part convincingly. I’ve seen his dick. Out of the corner of my eye while he was pissing. He’s not shy, and I’m thankful he isn’t using me the way he could. It isn’t the stuff of legends or something that belongs under a mule, but it is big, and if he were rough like Flint, a thing like that could do some damage. To be honest, if I weren’t burned out and sick of sex right to the core of my being, I’d be trying to get him to fuck me, just to prove that I could. If he wanted me, he could have me, and I’d do it just to keep my position secure, and I’d make sure he enjoyed it enough to keep me around, but he doesn’t seem to care about that. He is my type. Darkly handsome, tanned and muscular, powerful and dangerous, but he’s very different from the type I’ve always known.

I don’t understand him at all. There are moments when he looks at me and I know he’s just a man…and not as straight as some might guess. He’s thinking of it…fucking me… or coming in my mouth just to relieve the tension, but he never does anything about it. I can see it just behind his eyes, but even when no one else is around he doesn’t even hint at it. He knows he can take what he wants. No one would stop him, but he doesn’t. Not that I want him to, but I can’t understand why he doesn’t. If he were really straight, he wouldn’t show the little signs and signals of attraction, and
he shows those just like most men do when I’m around. How many rats do you know that ignore cheese when it’s right in front of them? Maybe…maybe Harry Black just isn’t a rat.

He’s all business. There are hushed conversations with other prisoners, runners from different gangs, all day and in the early evening. Messages passed almost constantly. He’s making deals, building his reputation, making alliances, and buying favors wherever he can. The guards ignore all this studiously. Normally, they hate new guys for the same reasons I did…change is a disruption to an environment you want to keep peaceful. This time they let Black do his business without complaint. They barely investigated Flint’s near death, and there was no punishment for Black afterwards. Normally, someone like Black would be in solitary just on principle, isolated as punishment for causing serious trouble. Something is just wrong enough that I can feel it, but no one would dare to say it. If he’s an undercover narc, he’s the craziest one ever, and the last person to call him that discovered what it was like to shit out his own teeth.

I’ve begun to suspect that, when that guard nodded to Flint as he moved toward Harry Black’s cell, he wasn’t privately pitying Black, he was laughing at what was about to happen to Flint. Black is working toward something, but I don’t know what, and I don’t want to. I just want to stay alive.

It feels weird. I have no purpose. I should be relieved, and I guess I am, but I’m terrified at the same time. I used to know what to expect. I have my stuff from Flint’s old cell, but Black doesn’t care if I wear make up or not. Every little thing I do is new around him. A stupider queen would do something riskier than changing their look, just to test their boundaries and see what they can get away with. A stupider queen would get beaten…or handed over to others for a nice, old-fashioned, very humiliating gang rape.

I stick to very small things, and he never cares or says a word. He doesn’t perceive my actions as rebellious, and he doesn’t seem to care about small differences of behavior or appearance. I obey his words implicitly, when he bothers to speak to me, and I maintain the illusion that he uses me for sex every day or every other. No other demands. None. It drives me crazy. I don’t know what part to play, and I don’t know what tomorrow will be like, and I have no idea what to do next.

Three weeks of playing out this fucking insane fiction, pretending I’m his whore without doing anything more than laying my head in his lap for a few minutes. It’s weirdly more intimate than the sex I got used to providing. So close to him, and yet completely apart, playing the role that’s been handed to me. Sometimes, it scares me almost as much as the routine of genuinely sucking off Flint. There are unknown factors at play, and I’m only ashamed of the tears spots I left on his pant leg once. I never cried when I was actually giving head…why…why would this fill me with dread? I only barely remembered to pick up another batch of Vaseline from the doctor. I discreetly dumped the rest of the old batch down the toilet, just to maintain the illusion that we’ve been busy in here when no one is watching.

I don’t even know what his crime was. Murder would be an easy guess. He could kill without breaking a sweat. I know he could. He’s too smart, too educated to be here, too decent to have any business in a place like this, but he’s here. I was just an ignorant little slut who let a boyfriend talk him into being a drug mule, but what’s his story?

He asked me questions at first. About other bosses, about locations and gangs and who the real players are. I answered as quietly as he asked. I told him who to watch out for, and how to deal with the other bosses most effectively. He knows I’ll follow his lead. Now he doesn’t ask anything at all, except meaningless little questions that make no sense. How do I recognize Chopin? Because I played piano for nine years. Why do I recognize passages from Voltaire’s Candide? Because I fucking well read the blasted thing. The satire aimed at the fatuous and self congratulatory nature of eighteenth century pseudo-intellectuals was brilliant, but that shit has NO RELEVANCE TO
MY LIFE NOW!

I hate these questions, but what can I do but answer quietly and keep my complaints to myself? Making him angry is not on my agenda. It’s just…would anyone headed for a life of shit want to be reminded of the life they lost? I wish he understood that.

So intense. His eyes are still hypnotic, which is why I spend a lot of time staring at the floor. I feel shaky when he tells me to look at him while he’s talking to me. I get lost for a second and come back wondering what he’d just said. It scares me that after watching out for myself carefully for almost seven years, one pair of green eyes could put me this close to fucking up my situation. I can’t stop remembering the way he looked, standing over Flint and the others. I know he isn’t God, but I still feel intensely self-conscious of the mistakes I’ve made, and of the shallow, stupid things I’ve done. He knows I’m scared. Of him. Of change. Of death. He can tell, but tenderness has no place here. His actions say he won’t hurt me if he doesn’t have to, but I can’t believe in anything… I can’t afford to.

Something is brewing. He acts contented, like he’s confident that all is well, but no one is talking to him today. Something is in motion, and it’s likely something to do with him or he wouldn’t look so pleased with himself or be nearly so calm. It’s all I can do to keep from screaming from tension, but he looks like he’s just taking a Sunday stroll through the park. The day passes like it’s in slow motion, and I ache from head to toe every fucking second of it.

“When you close your eyes, where do you dream of being? Beaches, bars, a ranch in the country? Or even another country? Where do wish you were?”

We’re alone in his cell, like we always are at this time of the evening, and that’s when the stupid questions come. My guts are aching because my life is upside down and he still asks me things that hurt, and have no bearing on my life. I have to answer, or maybe I don’t. I just don’t know. I’m so dangerously close to telling him to fuck off that I can feel the words on my lips, but I bite my tongue and give him what he wants.

“I went to Europe when I was a kid. I liked Italy. I used to wish I had a little villa somewhere quiet and out of the way, where no one would bother me, and I could just enjoy the coastline and the mountains whenever I wanted. That’s what I used to dream about.”

“Used to? So what do you dream about now?”

It’s too much. It would be better to get hurt than face this. Pain is direct, but brief, and this is subtle. It’s suicide, but I’m not really afraid of that. I’ve wanted to die before. Maybe it would be even better for me than what’s waiting for me outside of here. I can feel the grip I’ve kept on myself snap, and the words are out before I can stop myself.

“Anything but here! Fucker! Fuck you! Fuck…you! Anything but this shithole and your stupid fucking questions and this…this fucked up freakshow I call a life! I dream of nothing anymore. Nothing! Are you happy? Ask another question!”

I’m fucking crying again. I was too loud. People would have heard that. He has to do something. It’s going to hurt. He’s rolling off his bunk slowly, calmly. I can hear it creak even while my eyes are too blurry to see much.

“Get in the corner.”

I stumble out of the bunk and head for it, shoving the heel of my hand across my face to clear my eyes. I want to puke. I did it. I went too far. I who knew so much and never pushed my luck. I did
The lights are going out here, and it’s time for sleep, but I couldn’t wait another few minutes for some peace and quiet. I had to put him in this position. He’s not stupid. If he lets a bitch tell him off, he’ll spend days fighting to gain control of people who already follow him right now. I hit my knees, gulp back tears, and wait for his fly to open.

“No! Stand up and turn around. Drop the shorts, bitch. Let’s see your ass. You need to know who’s in fucking charge. I can show you that.”

I really did it. I made him angry enough to do that. I didn’t think he would, but he has to now. I still wonder if he really wants this. I can’t keep the composed face I kept around Flint. It was routine. Always the same. Now I know nothing, and I’m ready for nothing. I stopped greasing my ass after two weeks without sex. I got overconfident, and if he’s angry enough to do this, I don’t dare ask for a break to grab some lube. I’m going to the hospital. A raw grudge fuck will put me in the infirmary, with our asshole doctor giving me a local shot and some penicillin before putting a few stitches in my ass to heal up what I’ve gotten myself into. All I can do is turn around, drop my shorts and put my hands on the wall. I’m shaking, and my knees are weak, and then a fist is in my hair and I’m pushed level against the wall, legs kicked apart, ass exposed and waiting. I hear his fly come down, and his elbow is in my back. I can feel hot breath on my neck and his voice is a quiet whisper in my ear and my ear alone.

“Make some noise, or we’re both fucked. Sorry, but we have to do this and make it look good.”

He slams into me from behind, and I’m so surprised that at first I can’t make any sound but a gasp. It’s dark. No one can see all that well. He isn’t fucking me. Just two dark shapes, one large and one small, locked together and close enough that with the right noise you’d think I was getting the grudge fuck of a lifetime. I make the noises I made for Flint as soon as I get my head together. No mistake, it does hurt, but not like I’d imagined. I’ll have bruises, but mostly from having my hips slammed into the wall so many times. I won’t be in the hospital. I won’t be stitched with my knees in the air. The only price I pay is making sure he looks cruel to the rest of this place. I want to laugh with relief. No one this good should be here. I am the luckiest bitch who ever walked the earth, and I’d sing if it wouldn’t get us both killed.

He throws me to the floor after he plays the part of finishing, and I try to crawl to the toilet and retch a bit for our audience. It’s believable, the way he lunges after me in the dark and grabs my hair. They know he’s whispering death threats and promises of revenge, but only I hear his words.

“You belong on silk sheets and under candles. Kissed by starlight with champagne bubbles on your tongue. This is not where you belong. I’m almost finished here, and your help will not be forgotten. Your release date just got moved up. There will be a car waiting to pick you up. If you want to see me again, I suggest you take the car. For the record…hurting you would be like ripping the Mona Lisa in half. I would never destroy something beautiful. Now go to bed, and stay quiet once you get there.”

He drops me back to the floor and stalks to his bed like an angry tiger. I crawl to my shorts and then to my bunk, trying to remember to sound and look pitiful, even in the shadows. For all they know, I just got my ass torn into for speaking up. They’ll never know that my heart is soaring. Seven years. I haven’t felt this good in seven years. This one isn’t like Blaise…or Flint…or anyone I’ve ever seen or heard of…and he wants me. I haven’t been wanted for anything but a warm hole to come in since…well…since I was too young to know about come or holes. Anyone else who said those things would be a smooth talker like Blaise. Harry Black makes me believe in him. That has to be worth something, doesn’t it?

Another day starts, and there’s no mistaking that I’m sore. It doesn’t take faking. My hips hit that
wall at least two dozen times. If I’m limping while others snicker at me, it’s because it hurts like hell. I’m grateful for the pain in a way I’ve never been before. I can act my part easily. He doesn’t ask me any questions now, and he can’t possibly know what I think of him. It’s better that he doesn’t know. What people know about your feelings gives them power over you. The only edge I have over him is that he doesn’t know what I think or feel about him. I don’t even want sex, but I want him. I want him to be mine. I want him to think of no one but me. Not because I owe him, but because I want him more than anything I’ve ever wanted.

Most human emotions except fear have been a stranger to me since I got here, and he woke them all up in just a few weeks. I know enough to know that love is a joke that never stops being funny, as long as you like shitty punch lines. So maybe there is no love, but when you want somebody enough, when you feel a need for them, like they’re your personal cocaine and all you want is to get high forever, that has to be something. It has to count enough to be worth trying to have them.

A day later we start ‘the routine’ again. I have to get in the corner…on my knees and waiting. He’s unzipping his fly loudly, letting the world know I’m his and no one else’s. His hand is soft on the back of my head while I make the small noises and movements that ought to be real. It’s an impulse. I’m a fool. I slip a hand into his fly. He doesn’t dare move, and I’m fumbling to get it out of his pants while not spoiling the act.

A glance upward, and he’s mouthing the words to me. ’You don’t have to do this’. All I do is smile. I haven’t enjoyed having a cock in my mouth since the last time I saw Blaise. I was eighteen the last time I wanted someone and did what I do best for all the right reasons, even if it was with the wrong person. His body is so taut it’s a wonder he doesn’t pop a vessel from the tension. Flint never got head like this. I’m not giving a blowjob, eager to get him off and be over with it…I’m using my mouth to make love to his cock. This is an act of worship disguised as sex so that no one other than us is the wiser. I love that he has to work so hard to pretend indifference. I enjoy the way it fills my hand, warm and stiffening with every second of contact until it’s as hard as stone. Thick, long and scrupulously clean. The kind of cock that’s a pleasure to make use of. His come is liquid gratitude, and I drink it all. It’s good to be proud of sex again, even in the middle of hell. He could take me back to heaven…and I’m reminding him that it’s worth the effort.

Three days. I gave him three days of the best head I could give. He looked at me differently, but he never said anything out of the ordinary. He has to know that I did it because I…Ian approve of him. He looked like he was measuring me. Weighing me. Not my body…my soul. He didn’t tell me when they would come. My release was moved up without a word to anyone. One day I was a number, and then I’m escorted to the offices, given my clothes and personal effects and allowed to dress, handed my paperwork and led to the exit. I never got to say anything to him. He never said anything. He’s still in that cell, and I’m walking out of the building.

Where will I go? What will I do? How will he find me? There shouldn’t be one fucking thing that would make me look back at where I’ve spent the last seven years of my life, but I’m staring behind me all the way, wondering if he arranged to be able to say good bye. Maybe even just a waved hand. Anything.

It’s been so long that I’ve forgotten how clean it smells to be outside. The stench of fear, hate and anger from thousands of men blows away on the breeze. It doesn’t seem real. I didn’t get to the yard much. Flint liked to stay near his cell or in the gym. I was always with him. The sky is dizzying. It goes up and up forever. There are a couple of other releases today. There’s a van to take us back to the city. Our papers include the locations of employment services that will place convicts, as well as charitable organizations, halfway houses and shelters. There’s also a black sedan with tinted windows a few feet from the van. The others are shuffling toward the van. I don’t know what to do.
What if it isn’t here for me? I believed in him…in there…where there was nothing else to believe in…but it all sounds crazy now. Everything is surreal and I feel dizzy and sick and nervous. I’m not used to decisions. I didn’t make any for seven years, except the silent kind that ensured my survival, and I don’t think I know how to make them anymore. If I knock on the car’s window, will I get dragged away by guards or told to fuck off? The door opens while I stand there, wearing the sexy little outfit that Blaise bought me seven years ago. I’m a prison whore in an outdated skirt and top, stinking of brimstone and sulfur from the hell I belonged in. What will the man getting out think of me?

He wears a chauffeur’s uniform, right down to the formal cap. He steps out and opens the door to the back, then stands aside, as stiff and formal as his hat. I can’t make out any expression through the sunglasses he has on, but his jaw is tight and a fringe of red hair is peeking from under the edges of his cap.

“Mister Black sent word that you would require a ride. If there is anything else you require, please feel free to ask.”

It’s real. It has to be real. I’m not asleep in a cell dreaming of things that will never be a part of my life again. Maybe it’s stupid, but I pinch myself just to be sure. I hurt, and it’s real. I sit in the back of the sedan, running my hands across the plush interior. Every inch of the interior is a mild beige or light tan. This is the softest thing I’ve sat on or touched in years. I can’t stop stroking the material of the seat because it just feels soooo fucking good. The last car I was in was a police car. Then it was prisoner transfer vans and the bus that led here. This car has no barrier between the driver and the back. We’re already in motion and I just haven’t paid attention.

“Where…where are we going?”

The driver’s head doesn’t move an inch, and the car is moving onto the road to the highway.

“Mister Black’s penthouse suite, unless you request another location, in which case I am to take you wherever you wish to go.”

“Will ’Mister Black’ be showing up there anytime soon?”

“I’ve been instructed to give you this package before we reach the highway. I expect your questions will find answers inside.”

He hands back an envelope. It’s a fat envelope. It isn’t even sealed. Before I even see the letter, the greenbacks catch my eyes. It’s all twenties. There must be a couple thousand dollars here. Enough for a cheap apartment or a trip to wherever I want to go. Enough to get a good first few steps on life anywhere. If I went somewhere small and quiet, I could make this last. Then I pick out the note.

A lot of people would take the money and run. It’s yours if you want it, no strings attached. You don’t know where you’re going, and if that doesn’t worry you, you’d have to be insane. I understand.

You gambled on me once, and I hope you didn’t regret it. I’m asking you to gamble on me twice. If you give the money to the driver, he will take you to my place. It’s very comfortable. You deserve to enjoy that comfort. If you keep it, he will take you anywhere you want to go, and I hope you have a good life.

If you wait, and stay put, I will be there, and very soon. If you choose to leave before I get there, there won’t be any coming back. We have a lot to talk about, but there’s no pressure. Do what you want to do. It’s your life.
But if you gamble on me, you won’t regret it.

Yours, Harry

How many people have crossroads in their life that stump them? All of us? I’m in a car worth sixty grand with a chauffeur and two thousand dollars in my lap. Two thousand dollars is real. It’s now. I didn’t have a work program in prison…Flint was too busy fucking my face or my ass to let me earn a little money or a skill for the future. I have a matching outfit and a purse full of junk I barely remember. I have no money and no future, unless I take this two grand in cash. I could be anywhere in the U.S. before the week is out. I could start over with no one to tell me what to do. I could get dropped off anywhere and find a trick with some coke to celebrate my freedom. I’m out of practice at making decisions for myself. Basically, I’m scared shitless.

I shove the money back into the envelope with hands that shake and then drop it over the edge of the seat, wondering what the fuck is wrong with me.

“Take me…take me to heaven. And turn on the air conditioning.”

“As you wish.”

The AC unit drops the temp in the car to a crisp fifty degrees in a matter of seconds, and the highway back to Chicago is a ribbon of flowing asphalt and speeding steel. I’m going to where the angels sip champagne. I’m going home.

TBC!!!
Satellite TV with hundreds of channels. Furnishings worth more than most people make in a year. Wardrobes full of clothing with brand names that have risen to the top while I was away.

Convenience. Luxury. Opulence. Champagne lightly chilled for my arrival. Penthouse suite, my ass...this place is the entire top floor of a building. It used to be warehousing on the quiet end of town, but inside the old brick façade is a hidden paradise. The driver escorted me to the elevator, and I could tell when he opened the door for me that the bump in his pocket was not caused by driving gloves. Armed security, and he’s quiet enough that I suspect he’s well trained, but I don’t think he likes me very much. Who cares what he likes? Harry Black likes me...and Harry Black is absolutely, filthy, stinking rich!

I get handed off to the maid and the cook, who actually bow for me when I arrive. The only tragedy is that I hate being seen the way I look right now. Frowzy and hagridden, dressed in the things a man I want to forget bought me, and stinking of the cesspit from which I came. I get guided to the bedroom suite. The bathroom is larger than four or five cells put together. Carpets so thick my feet get lost in them. I beg for privacy so I can bathe, but it’s really because I don’t want to be seen gawking anymore.

The tub is more like a Jacuzzi. Enormous. They must have known approximately when I’d arrive down to the minute, because the ice in which the champagne is resting is still fresh. Moet and Chandon. White Star. I’m back. This is heaven. I’m home, but he’s not with me yet. For this...I can wait as long as I have to. How the hell does someone like Harry Black, who lives in a place like this, wind up in that abominable shithole I just left? This place is what I’d expect of someone like him. It’s luxurious without being ostentatious, something a lot of people can’t pull off. It makes no sense. He belongs here...and I, frankly enough, belonged there. Not that I mind Prince Charming riding to the rescue when he did. Could have shown up about seven years earlier though.

It’s hard to figure out what to do first. So many things. So much I haven’t seen or done or lived in years and years. In just a few days I’ll be twenty five years old. What a way to celebrate it! I pop the cork on the champagne and fill a glass, then set the tub to fill, pouring in the exquisite scented bath oils that garnish the edge of the tub. I try not to swill the nectar of the gods like some thirsty wino, but it’s so very, very perfect, and it’s been so damn long.

I kick off the high heels I’ve been wearing. My feet hurt, and I realize that I just lived through seven years of wearing flats! I’m out of practice, but I’ll get it all back. Then it’s time to lose the skirt and top, and it’s only a few more scraps of cloth before I’m stark naked. More champagne. The mirror is huge. More like a wall than a mirror. The boy in the mirror isn’t eighteen, and that comes as a shock.

I only really needed a mirror for my makeup in prison, and it was just reflective, relatively soft plastic. I don’t look good. Not as I good as I did seven years ago. What does he see in me? Why would he want this? Is it because he knows I’m desperate, and because he can control me easily? I don’t know. All of this is intoxicating...but it’s also scary. My eyes are more hollow than I remember, and I look a little skinnier than I used to be. Not in a healthy way, or in a sexy, waifish way. My skin has lost a little color, and I was pale to start with, but now my hair and flesh seem lackluster.
Still, I have a slim waist and faintly flared hips, which lends a bit to the illusion of femininity, and my stomach is still flat and tight, but not chiseled by exercise. I still look small…and soft…the kind of creature that makes men’s nostrils flare and that triggers a gut level response from them. Most of the time, even straight men find themselves wondering about sex when they’re near me for too long. I give off all the right signals, and I’m not sure they can even help it most of the time. That confusion can make some men violent, but most of the time…it just makes them horny and easy to deal with. It certainly kept me from going the way of Nott in there.

I move to turn for the bath and there it is in the mirror. F. My scar. My one physical reminder of where I’ve been. The rest is locked in my head for all eternity, but that fucking letter stares back at me, bringing back a few thousand acts of degradation with it. Flint. Maybe I’m not his bitch anymore, but he certainly left his mark for all to see.

Fuck Flint. Fuck woolgathering. The bath is full and a third glass of champagne is starting to go to my head. In fact, I’m fucking giddy when I slide into steaming water full of products that practically clean me without any effort on my part. That’s not enough though. There are soaps and body scrubs, shampoos and conditioners. I use them all…repeatedly. If I could burn this body and build a new one from the ground up, I’d do it rather than have any trace of that god awful place left on me. The only reason I stop is because I really do want to relax. I almost forgot how. I still feel like I’ll open my eyes and find myself daydreaming in my bunk.

I’m drunk. I’m…starved…and there’s a cook who lives here! Huge, soft towels and a hairdryer serve me perfectly. The way my hair hangs is all wrong. I need a stylist…a good one…to undo years of braiding it back to keep it out of the way. Clothes…I need clothes! That’s one amenity that’s lacking. His closet is so huge I could do a back flip in it, but only one side is occupied, the other is empty. All I can find that even hints at suitable for the moment is a set of silk pajamas that are so large on me that I have to roll the waist down and the legs up, and the shirt is hanging off me like a freaking gown. Fuck it. I’m not here to impress the staff…I’m here to impress Harry Black.

It’s still the middle of the afternoon. As it turns out, the maid barely speaks English, and the only Spanish I know is classical European. Maria’s legal, but born Venezuelan and fairly new to the US, and she adores Mister Black. Fat chance, sister! Mister Black swings my way, and once he gets here I’ll make him mine and keep him that way! At least I managed to make enough sense to find the cook. Therese is probably sixty if she’s a day, looks perpetually angry from spending a life over a stove, and keeps giving me a look that stinks of disapproval. Maybe it was that, after seven years in the pen, I didn’t exactly challenge her skills by asking for a pizza. Or maybe it’s that her employer invited a cheap whore from prison into the house. It’s so hard to tell.

It’s a long wait at the table, and she wasn’t in the mood to leave me anything in the way of snacks. I can’t really muster the nerve to order people around. This isn’t my place…even if I’d like it to be. It’s quiet except for the sounds coming from the kitchen. Too quiet. I’m used to thousands of people packed in like sardines, with a soft susurrus of background conversation, snores, laughter, shouts and catcalls going on almost sixteen hours a day if not more.

The pizza comes. Not the stale cardboard and government cheese garbage from prison, a real fucking pizza. Not just any pizza either. It’s a masterpiece. The dough has herbs and spices baked into it and it’s been brushed with olive oil. The cheeses are probably mozzarella, Romano and at least one variety of goat’s cheese that I haven’t had before. There are fresh cut mushrooms that look like imports and tiny peppers peeking out here and there. The sauce is thick and spicy, but without the acid tang that so many often have. This is a work of art. I should be ashamed of eating it.
I try to be proper and thank the frowning woman, then risk a single bite. I could say that I was acting, and trying to butter her up and win her favor. That would be a blatant lie. I cry because it’s the best thing I think I’ve ever tasted, and if she seems to warm up to me because I broke down and wept for her food, then so be it, but the tears were real.

There is a den full of shelves with books by the ton. There’s a study with a music system that shames the one I had at home when I was sixteen. Classical music, jazz, swing, big band, blues. CD after CD of it. There’s a computer that looks ready to go and better than the one I grew up with. The funny part is that, with a building to explore and a world just outside of it that I haven’t seen in the better part of this decade…I just want to go to bed.

It’s firm and still soft. I’ll probably never know what kind of quantum mechanics go into making a mattress that can be both at once. Science was never my thing. Art, music, history, language and literature…the liberal arts…and sex. Those were things I excelled at. The mattress is still perfect. In the aftermath of the champagne and the pizza and the bath…I’m just tired. Culture shock. Overload. I woke up this morning in cut-off short shorts with a scratchy wool blanket on a bunk with a mattress that felt like it was made of lumpy iron. Everything smelled disgusting…like the bowel movements of a few thousand sub-human bastards, and I was just another one of them. But look at me now.

It’s been less than twelve hours since I woke up, but I’m exhausted. I curl up and try to sleep, which shouldn’t be hard, but I catch myself half afraid that I won’t wake up here.

The pillows. Everything here is so clean…and perfect and untouched. Like no one really lives here. The pillows have a scent. His scent. This is where he sleeps. You can wash the covers but the pillow itself still carries his scent. He’s real. He’ll be back. I’ll see him again. He’d said he’d see me soon. This is all going to be mine, and the crown jewel in my empire will be Harry Black.

There’s something else I haven’t done in years too. Fear, stress, pain and self loathing do nothing for the libido, not to mention the fact that, for the most part, I have very little interest in my own penis. I’m horny, inside and out, tipsy, and excited by the faint hint of his scent that teases me. I haven’t done this in a long time. It wasn’t important to me in there, surrounded by thugs and with a perpetually sore ass, but here it’s different. I’m clean and smell divine, everything is soft and comfortable, the temperature is perfect no matter what it’s like outside, and I’ve had the best meal of this decade. My dick is as hard as it’s ever been, and I want Harry here now! I want him to do all of those things he wouldn’t force me to do against my will. I want to write his face and eyes overtop of every memory of Blaise or Flint or anyone else I’ve ever been with, and I want to give him everything I have…even if the only thing I have to give is myself.

A lot of people may not know this, but I did my homework on this subject. There are two types of orgasms that men can have: the traditional penile one, and the more mysterious and slightly frightening prostate orgasm. There is no happier or more sexually contented creature on earth than a queen who likes to bottom and knows it, and has been blessed with a reasonably sensitive prostate. It’s a two-edged sword at times, since I lost interest in coming the popular way after the first time a date made me come ‘inside’. Masturbation frequently lacks charm anyway, and was out of the question with an audience made up of psychopaths. Nothing quite satisfies the way being pounded through the mattress and headboards does, but at the moment I just don’t care. My fingernails are too long to stimulate myself the way I like, and they get in the way a bit while I try to find a way to get a proper stroke, but I finally find one that does the trick.

Every so often, Blaise would go down on me and actually suck my dick, which has always been a bit ticklish. It never threatened his precious manhood to do so, since mine was probably half the size of his. Even though I was circumcised just a few days after I was born, the head is still
sensitive and I don’t like too much contact with anything there. Mostly, I just tuck it back and out of the way and try not to think of it. This time, the need to relieve built up stress is too overwhelming to cope with, so I tug gently at the head, wriggling back onto the sheets, knees clenched tight together while I try to imagine that thing of Harry’s inside of me. He’s good at everything else, decent in every way that other people have never been, so why wouldn’t he be good at this too?

It isn’t the same, having at it this way, wishing for something more tangible, but it has to do, and it gets results quickly enough. The embarrassing part is that when I get a little sense back in my head, I realize that I’ve just come all over myself and I haven’t even got a towel handy. The bedspread is fucking thousand count Egyptian cotton for Christ’s sake! Only a heathen tramp would trail spunk all over it. I haul myself to the bathroom and clean myself up, then flop back onto the bed and collapse into a heap.

If it ever gets out, I’d have to hang myself from shame, but hardened tart that I may be, I still desperately want a cuddle after I’ve come. Blaise always hated that. I want Harry Black…here…now…not his pillow…him! Sleep finally chases me down and pulls me under, but it doesn’t come without a fight.

Funny. I slept like a rock in prison. Here, in the proverbial lap of luxury, I wake because my dreams are too much. It’s an alien environment, soft and clean and just too different. The pillows are like clouds, and the sheets are a cocoon of the finest silks and linens. It’s summer in Chicago and I should be roasting, but the suite has central air and the temp is perfect. Wrong. It all feels wrong.

I dreamt of Flint. Of Blaise. I dreamt of faces I haven’t seen in years. Tricks who paid well and weren’t too rough. Club kids who shared drugs and sex like schoolchildren sharing candy on a playground. Maybe it was jerking off that triggered it. I remember liking sex so much that I wanted it more than drugs or money. That was what comes of being seventeen and horny all the time. I’m not that kid anymore.

Three in the morning knows all my secrets, and I’m clearer headed now that the champagne is out of my system. Now I have time to be scared. Harry Black is an enigma, a weird riddle waiting to be unlocked, and like Pandora’s Box, I may not be able to deal with what comes out of it all. I’m helpless. He’s dangerous. What will happen if he’s angry with me? Maybe he’s done this because he has to have someone too desperate to run away from him. Who would take a prison bitch home after a few weeks of not having sex and four blowjobs? He really did a number on me.

The logical part of my brain is sure that there’s a catch, and I’ll pay for this largesse somehow. The tired queen who was tipsy on Moet and Chandon White Star wanted to believe in something…anything…and was willing to entertain the flight of fancy that a man who is just my type could fall out of the stars and take me away to heaven without any price. I know that that kind of fantasy just doesn’t come true.

Fact. Mr. Black has loads of money, and yet he’s in prison. Fact. Mr. Black was working some angle, making deals while he was there, and that means he’s no ordinary dirtbag. Fact. Mr. Black is better trained in the martial arts than most Olympic competitors. He’s had real training, years of it, and he knows how to employ that training effectively. Fact. Mr. Black is cultured. The music, the books, the refined sense of humor. He’s been well off for some time, and that spells education.

He doesn’t seem like the generic Mafioso, like Blaise, but there are mobs most people don’t know about. The Triads and the Tongs for the Asians, the Irish mob, the Jewish mob, the Greeks and the Arabs. The Latin American and Mexican cartels. The Russians are a tough bunch too. More quick
to violence than most. They don’t waste time with subtlety, they go straight for what they want. Look at the walls in the Post Office sometime. Check the Most Wanted lists. You’d think that in the aftermath of 9/11 that it would be all terrorists. Nope. Latin Americans, Asians, and Eastern Europeans are all over the lists. Oh, there are generic murderers and dealers that were born here too, but the organized criminals come from practically every culture you can name. Every operation and culture has it’s own rules, and Harry Black doesn’t fit in anywhere. He could be ex-military, or some kind of federal agent, but they usually don’t have this kind of money to throw around.

Who is Harry Black? What does he really want from me? I want a stylist, and a manicure and pedicure, and the clothes to knock his socks off when he comes back. I want him to want me, and I don’t feel like I can do that like this. Does he really want a worn out club queen who fucked gangsters to survive? Will he have any interest in the kind of queen who prefers to dress as a woman but still keeps the parts that make him a boy? I may have very little use for it, but I never really wanted my dick removed. I’ve known real transsexuals, pre-op and post-op, and unlike them, I don’t really mind being born a boy. I just mind that I was born into a world that doesn’t much appreciate a boy who looks good in a skirt. What does he want? He’ll get bored or decide he doesn’t like me. I’ll piss him off and he’ll throw me away like an old newspaper, and I’ll just drift down the street on the breeze like the trash I am. Too much. Too much to think about.

I grab the remote off the nightstand. I never watched much TV in prison, mostly because I was at Flint’s beck and call, and he never wasted much time on TV. I remember people making a big stink about the ‘luxury accommodations’ for prisoners. Cable TV for our society’s throwaways. Free room and board while prisoners live it up with modern conveniences. Such an outrage! Bullshit. It isn’t a gift to the prisoners…it’s a godsend to the guards. There are always more prisoners than guards. Always. The staff is outnumbered hundreds to one some of the time, because it’s expensive to house thousands of human beings and employ people to guard them. TV is a more powerful weapon of control than any number of clubs, or even guns. It works because it’s a Trojan Horse. A gift that charms and disarms. When you see slack jaws and empty eyes staring at a tube for hours you realize that the goal is quiet and peace, and TV delivers that like an angel of mercy.

Men who are staring at Vanna White’s ass while she spins the letters and wishing they were banging the huge-chested starlets of Baywatch aren’t kicking the shit out of each other or testing the limits of the guards. TV is an investment that reaps a profit margin so huge that it pays for itself ten times over. It’s easy to be bitter about some criminal who doesn’t deserve any mercy getting something for nothing, but for a guard who wants to go home alive and unscarred, any tool that works is a winner.

Flickering light makes the room a series of sharp angles and soft, blurry corners. So many channels. I haven’t seen much of anything in the last seven years, and I don’t remember much of what I saw a couple years before that. I had better things to do than vegetate, since I had drugs to do that for me while I shook my ass on the dance floor or buried my face in a trick’s pillow, but tonight I need distractions. Bad movie…bad movie…really bad movie…good movie, but I’m so not in the mood for it. Financial news channel, of no use to me…sports news, how utterly uninteresting…unless I’m trying to nod and smile while a guy explains his favorite sport…local news…and Holy Fucking Christ!

‘…federal penitentiary is under lockdown after seven hours of prisoner riots. No demands have been made by prisoners yet, and very little information has been forthcoming from the warden. Early reports hinted at a gang related war that broke out between rival factions, and we know only that in the first hours, several prisoners were killed, including incarcerated members of three separate criminal organizations. Prison officials say the situation is rapidly calming, and that they expect to have all blocks under control before dawn. Back to you, Bob.’
Dead gangsters. That had to be the goal. They were targets. My heart feels like it’s palpitating. Harry Black is a killer, and he made this happen. How? Why? Who does he work for? What the fuck have I gotten myself into?

Harry Black is a mystery, and it’s a mystery in itself that he would want anything to do with me. I’m in the penthouse suite of a man who infiltrated a prison and incited a riot, just to cover his tracks while a few marked men lost their lives. I’ve done stupid things, but I’m not stupid. I should have taken the money and headed out of state fast. He probably needs a private whore he can use at his convenience, and he wanted one that was desperate and grateful but could still pass for classy when it’s necessary. He’ll come back and spell out the rules, and it won’t be much different from in there. Keep quiet and do what I’m told, and I can enjoy the good life, but if I push my luck I’ll be in more trouble than most sane people could imagine.

Sleep isn’t coming tonight. I’m in oversized silk pajamas in a bed so big that it makes me look like an infant, holding onto a pillow and wishing the sun would come up. I’m afraid…and I have every right to be.

Harry Black is coming here soon…if he’s still alive. I’m not gambling against him on that. He said he’d be here soon, and I bet that he’ll show up just like he said. When he gets here, all of this becomes real. Not a convenient dream or a vacation from hell. Real. I’ll have to pay for it.

Who is Harry Black? I’m going to find out, and I’m shit scared of the answer to that question.

TBC!!!
I can’t leave here without knowing. I can’t. If I go, I can’t come back, but if I stay…there’s no way to know what might happen. Killing time is essential to maintaining my sanity. Not that different from prison really, but given a choice, I’d choose this.

Therese made crepes for breakfast. Maybe my choices are limited, but at least I’m fed like a king. I think she actually smiled when she watched me eat. Or maybe she just had a nervous tic that made her lip twitch. I couldn’t tell…I was face down in crepes and unrepentantly stuffing myself.

I can’t get a manicurist or a pedicurist until he gets here, but his bathroom is stocked with supplies for personal hygiene. Maria explained with a mixture of Spanish and English that, in this suite, only people pre-approved by Harry are allowed to enter. It wasn’t easy, but between the leftover bits in my old purse and the things available in his medicine cabinet, I cobbled together the things I need to make myself a little more presentable. Nail files, razor, scissors etc. You can’t stay pretty behind bars without learning to improvise a little. I thank the random genetic selections that decided I was to be nearly hairless below my neck. A little time with shaving cream and a razor, and I’m feeling a little more like the pampered bitch goddess I used to be…and for the record…this time…I wasn’t shaving my face.

Filing and properly polishing and painting my fingernails and toenails keeps me busy for awhile, and it’s oddly comforting. I feel ridiculous in a huge puddle of silk pajamas that clearly don’t fit, but it’s nice to just sit on plush carpet and do something so patently sybarite without any pressure or scrutiny. I don’t dare snip too much away from my hair, since despite the pathetic presumptions about queens, being a stylist is something that takes an education I haven’t had, and I’m not risking any mistakes that will make me look more pitiful than I already do. At least I was able to trim away most of the split ends and ratty sections. That and some careful tweezing of the eyebrows gets me looking more like someone I remember.

The silence is eerie. I don’t know how long it will take to get used to being alone or in the company of just a few people. I have privacy! The one thing prison steals from you is privacy, and any sense of it. You’re constantly surrounded, observed, monitored, and handled like a cheap package, which I may have been, but it’s still dehumanizing and just plain rude. Now I’m in open, spacious rooms with no one else, and I find myself willing to clean things with Maria or do dishes for Therese just to be near someone else. Will this ever go away? Thank God there’s satellite radio piped into every room. I can tune into pop channels in the bathroom and try to pretend that I’m a carefree, brain dead sixteen year old again.

Intellectually speaking, I know that almost all pop music is hyper-produced garbage that preys on the emotional immaturity of its audiences, selling a culture of glamour and wealth and sex that isn’t realistic or attainable or even healthy…but it’s still so goddamned fun to shake my ass to it that I just…don’t…care!

Killer be damned…the man has product. Not the kinds I prefer, but good enough to work with. The leftover make up from my purse is just enough to finish the job, and with the one outfit I still have, I look fairly decent…but outdated. It’s a tiny boost to an ego that’s fairly badly battered, but it’s all I’ve got. At least I know I can greet Harry Black looking a little like someone he wouldn’t cringe at the sight of.
Most people woefully misunderstand drag queens. They keep mixing us up with transvestites and transsexuals. The definitions are specific for the last two, but drag queens are a little harder to explain. Genuine transvestites actually receive a sexual thrill from dressing as a woman, even if they’re nominally straight and only date women. It’s a fetish behavior, rooted in the actual act of donning and wearing women’s clothes. The clothes or the wearing of them actually turns them on…and I don’t meet the criteria for this definition.

Transsexuals are a little more obvious. These are people who wholeheartedly wish they were the opposite sex. Men who feel that they would truly be happier as women, and women who are certain that they would be truly well adjusted as a man. Nature has lots of little quirks, and sometimes these surgeries can make a huge difference in the way a transsexual lives their life and interacts with society. I’ve gotta respect those who make the choice to embrace such an overwhelming change, and endure every kind of hassle along the way. They have incredible nerve and determination. Once again…I don’t meet the criteria.

I like being a boy. I like having the option to use my penis, even if it’s usually just in the way. Would I have been happier if I’d been born a girl? I don’t know. I doubt it. Do I get a sexual thrill from looking like one? Not really. So why on earth would anyone ever put up with the things that I have, just to look this way? Here is your answer…

I like the way other people look at me, when I’ve done my best and I feel beautiful. In real life, I’m a very pretty, very skinny, naturally blond boy, and that ought to be enough. It isn’t. I walk down the street and men see a scrawny faggot they’d sooner shoot than look at. Women see a boy who isn’t even manly enough to be worth looking at. Not that I care what the women think, but it’s the contempt that stings. Drake Malfoy was just a skinny faggot, but Dee is beautiful the way models are beautiful. The same men that wouldn’t bother to spit if I was on fire now look at me in awe, wishing they were the ones who could take me home and fuck me senseless. They open the doors or hold elevators for me. Heads turn and cruder men whistle or shout. Women feel envy when I walk into the room, and they unconsciously grab their husbands’ hands to remind them who they should be staring at. That’s power. That’s beauty. Drag sets me free. High heels may hurt, and getting this pretty before going out is a bitch, but being admired and desired is better than being hated and ignored any day. That’s my fetish. That’s my reason.

Some do drag for money, on stages in bars, lip-syncing songs for tips, because we can’t all make it to Broadway, but you can feel houselights and hear applause in your own town if you apply a little effort. I did that too, because it was extra income and it beat the hell out of hooking full time. That’s how I met Blaise. We all wish we were famous, and had a slice of the American Dream, but very, very few ever get that slice.

The American Dream used to be a nice house in the suburbs, a decent car, a job you could count on to be there for awhile, and someone to share a good life with. Now the dream is a winning lottery ticket, so that the crap we see on TV can be ours and we can be free of the debts we rack up just by trying to live the way our media tells us we should. I’ve seen just enough of both worlds to know that it’s better to be rich than dirt poor, but I also know that money only looks like the solution…it’s also the problem. Money is like coke. The more you have, the more you want, until you run into trouble. When you have it, it’s never enough, and when you don’t, it’s the only thing you think of until you have it again.

I had all the money in the world. I was one of the teenagers who carried credit cards and drove to school in vehicles worth more than some people’s houses. I lost it all because I wanted to be the one everybody looked at. I wanted to be beautiful, and famous, and unique in all the world. Daddy had no patience when it came to the way I wanted to live my life. Of course, anyone with an ounce of sense would be frustrated with a son who was a teenage cokehead and a raging slut…and my
being a drag queen was really just the icing on the shit-cake of his opinion of me. Admittedly, I wound up making a very unique whore, but that was about it. That’s as close as I came to my dreams. All this aside, here I am…in front of a mirror…trying to be all those wonderful things again, because I want a little of the good life, and I want someone to look at me and want me. God, I hope it’s worth it, even if it’s just for a short while.

In the absence of cocaine and/or cock, I need distraction desperately. The study and the den have a pastime waiting that I haven’t indulged in a long time. I haven’t read anything more stimulating than the articles from dog-eared and spunk-stained copies of Playboy that got smuggled into the prison thanks to bribery. People would be astonished to learn how much illegal contraband gets into prisons. You try hiring security and corrections officers for rock bottom wages and see how secure you can stay. A smart guard can straddle the line, letting harmless goods pass and still keeping his job while picking up a few extra dollars or some small perks. The bad ones don’t care what gets in…drugs, small weapons, booze etc. I used to read a lot…in high school…then I discovered boys and drugs, and reading was the last thing on my mind.


Oops. Fuck. I know I shouldn’t read too much into this. If I think about it too much, I’ll wind up fainting or hiding when he gets here. Maybe I shouldn’t even be looking around in here. Most men, even wealthy ones who collect books, don’t keep old CIA assassination and counter-espionage manuals from the Cold War and Latin America. There are three different versions of the Anarchist’s Cookbook, the infamous how-to manual for committing illegal acts. There are weapons manuals for more than two dozen different types of firearms, and a handful of engineering texts on gunsmithing and field repair. What kind of man needs the manuals for these kinds of things? One thing is certain…Harry Black terrifies me as much as he fascinates me, and I need to find somewhere else to kill time. I head for one of the rooms I haven’t even explored yet.

There’s a piano here. There’s a piano here. I’m repeating myself. There is a fucking piano up in here! It’s just a baby grand, but it looks about a minute from new. Shit! The tag is still on it. It was shipped here a week ago. It can’t fucking be. He didn’t. Why would he do that? All I said was that I’d had lessons for nine years. I didn’t say I missed it. I didn’t say I wished I could play again. Nothing. He just got a message out and had this delivered. For me. Before I even got here! He didn’t…did he? I hated those lessons, but I do love music, and I always got frustrated to tears when I couldn’t make it sound as good as my idols did. Honestly, I wasn’t all that bad, but if you have an ear for it, it’s hard to ignore hearing your own small mistakes.

I can’t play this. Not yet, at least. I just finished my nails an hour ago, and my palms are sweating furiously when I think about what this could mean. He bought this on a whim…just because I could play it. It’s weird. And scary. Maybe…maybe just a little. To warm up.

I know what to do. I haven’t forgotten it all. It just doesn’t flow right. Too strained. Too tense. The notes are individually correct, but they all stumble out like nervous strangers. I’m still sleepy from staying up half the night. I can take a nap and try again another time…on the piano that Harry Black bought just because he knew I could play one.
Two days. In two days I learned a lot about Harry Black just by living in his home. His personal effects are all neatly arranged...orderly, likely only touched when they’re needed. He’s given to tasteful understatement. He is intensely private...more so than anyone I’ve ever known. I’ve been through this place with a fine tooth comb, and there is only one item that shines a little light on his past. Most people have trophies, or yearbooks, or memorabilia of some kind. Not Harry Black. In the study, next to the computer, there’s a single photograph in a small frame. Not pricey like the other stuff here...just a cheap, dime-store wooden frame. It’s a man and a woman. They both look a little like him. These are Harry’s parents. They have to be. The man is tall and handsome. He looks confident and cheerful. His mother is very pretty, and if I look close enough, I can see where he got his green eyes from.

Are they alive? Do they know what their child does? My father wouldn’t admit to having a son that does the things I do. My mother is probably too drunk to care, or too stoned on Valium to remember that she has a son. How would his parents feel about him? Harry Black, the killer that brought home a whore. They look awfully young in the picture...perhaps the age I am now at the most. Probably just a bit younger. Are his parents even alive?

Maria and Therese and I get on fairly well. I’ve managed to piece together some of the non-Spanish or colloquial words that Maria uses, and it’s getting easier to talk to Therese. I think they like me well enough...like I’m 'one of the girls'. They’re all I have to talk to here. From them I’ve learned a little about Harry, but they don’t tell me anything that would be...dangerous. They probably don’t know much, especially if they haven’t peeked through his books. He moved here three months ago. He’s very polite, and very quiet. He never yells or shows anger, and he’s sometimes gone for days or weeks at a time, then he comes home for a few weeks until his work takes him elsewhere. They think he’s corporate, but I know better.

They don’t know that I came from jail, and I’m not sharing that tidbit. It turns out that Therese, the cook, just scowls like that all the time. No one here knows where I came from, only that they were told to make ready for a special guest, and to take good care of me. Therese complains that I’m too skinny, and Maria is politely jealous of my blond hair, but they both seem very serious about following Mr. Black’s orders and making sure that I’m content, no matter how much I reassure them that I’m fine.

The day after tomorrow I’ll be twenty-five years old. I thought I’d have to ignore it like the last six birthdays. They lose meaning when they become a celebration of one more year wasted forever, rotting away surrounded by stone and steel, getting fucked by people I wouldn’t voluntarily touch just to stay alive and unscarred. Now it matters again...kind of. I don’t know. Twenty-five years. My eighteenth was celebrated in grand style, with Blaise taking me everywhere I wanted to go, being seen in the clubs that most people can’t even get into, and a coke-fueled frenzy of fucking until the sun was coming up. The day after tomorrow, I’ll be twenty-five years old, and I’ll be here, in the home of a killer, drunk, with the cook and the maid.

I did practice at the piano. I’m horrible compared to the way I played at fifteen. Maybe I’m not so bad next to someone who only knows ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’, but when you’ve performed at recitals and made grown men and women who know their music gush with praise, it’s a bit humbling to realize that you might as well be in elementary school all over again. On a lighter note, I discovered a gym and a sauna in this palace of dreams, and it’s hard to fret over talents that have waned when you can soak in steam and let the stink of prison ooze its way out of your pores until you feel clean again.

I watched TV until my eyes ached. I haven’t watched anything intently in years, but the distraction was nice. So much has changed in just a few short years. Including my father. That was a local news tidbit I didn’t expect. Especially the part where they called him by his title...Representative
Malfoy. He’s a congressman now. He spouted off the usual prattle about how devoted he was to bringing progress to Chicago, as if in the absence of his efforts, one of the largest cities in the world would dry up and blow away. Asshole. He acted all coy and mysterious when they asked if he meant to run for the Senate, like a horny virgin on prom night flashing a little skin for attention, but never delivering the goods. In his own charming and classy way, my father is a whore on a scale I couldn’t even imagine. At least I acknowledge my sins…and I deliver the goods. In his mind, his every act is made right by the fact that he was the one taking action, and if he did it, then it must be good by default.

I got nauseous before they could continue, and I wish I had a channel changer that would make him really disappear, but the one in my hand was all I could make use of at the moment.

My former ‘home’ is back under control now. No more riots, no more bloodshed. No mention of Harry Black. I did learn something interesting though. Five of the men killed during the riot, the first deaths, were due for release sometime in the next one to two years, and each of them was tied to a significant crime family. They weren’t the biggest fish in the pond, but they were all well-connected, and they would have gone back to the organizations they left behind when they were arrested.

Federal agents and cops don’t stage riots just to kill criminals. If they want you dead, they plant a gun on you after they shoot you and say they had no choice but to fire in self defense. If the coroner knows what’s good for him, he’ll ‘forget’ that the bullets entered the body from behind, indicating a fleeing or helpless suspect, not a man fighting back. Harry Black is no cop. He’s a contract killer, and he must work for someone that doesn’t like competition. I try to distract myself from this, but I can’t ignore it. I can’t.

What if he’s like Blaise? He was kind to me…in there…but he was on the job, making things happen, and he needed a quiet accomplice. Maybe he was nice because…because he wanted me to stay quiet, and not betray him like I did Flint. He could get here and be different now that his job is done. I’m too scared to be turned on or horny anymore. The rush of freedom is still with me, but I don’t feel anything like what I felt the first night. I’m a very pretty toy, and the kind of men that want me get bored with all their toys eventually. Some hate to admit their own infidelity, and their cruelty is the way they amuse themselves in their boredom, so that, when you run from them, they can call you the coward, and absolve themselves of all blame because you left them.

This place is a beautiful dream, but I have to wake up soon. I like silk sheets and champagne. I like gourmet meals and saunas and Jacuzzis. I like the piano, and the CD collection, and the huge mirror in the clean and well lit bathroom. I like all those things, but I’d also like to not be afraid. I was too young and too stupid to fear Blaise, or I’d have seen what was coming. I’m not that young anymore, and I’ve had the stupid fucking and beaten and burned out of me since then. If Harry Black seems reasonable about it, I’m going to ask him if I can leave. If he offers money, I’ll take it, but I won’t ask for it. I just want to be alive and free, even if I never live like this again…at least I’ll live.

Maybe I’ll turn twenty-five in some shitty bar in Boystown, wearing clothes that were bought for me seven years ago, looking for a trick that will pay well and give me someplace to stay the night, but I won’t be scared shitless of a pair of green eyes that hide a soul that can kill. I won’t die here…because of him. I’ll thank him for the hospitality, show gratitude and give him what he wants, go on my way, and hope against hope that he doesn’t consider me a risk for knowing what I do about his recent activities.

Every day Maria washes my one lone outfit, and then later cleans the pajamas I’ve been borrowing. I think I’ll kind of miss those. It’s nice to feel scruffy and unkempt in the morning, but still be clean
and washed and wearing something soft and comfortable. Beats feeling greasy and dirty and smelling like the misery and fear of others, with the oily residue of petroleum jelly and old spunk making the crotch of my old short shorts stained and gross. Anything beats the fishy stink of my own unwashed groin, or the peppery bite of the sweat from under my arms, occasionally relieved by a shower in water that smells like an ironworks and industrial soap that leaves me feeling like I’ve been dipped in lye. After that, wandering around in the morning in baggy silk pajamas while I soak up coffee and decide which body scrub suits me best is pure paradise.

I can walk in heels again. I knew a little practice would bring it right back. It’s like riding a bicycle…you never really forget how to do it. I’m getting fretful waiting for Harry, but the food is good, and the girls are nice, and everything is so comfortable that I can wait a little longer if I have to. I trimmed my nails back, since Maria has some press-on nails I can wear later. I hate to waste all the effort I just put into my own nails, but at least now I can play the piano a little more deftly.

I spent part of the afternoon reading Le Livre Blanc, The White Book, in the original French. Jean Cocteau’s masterpiece, opening a window into the world of what it means to look upon another man and find him beautiful, has lost none of its poignancy. That I am in a place where I can read such a thing and then play piano at my leisure is a pleasure I can’t describe. If only it weren’t underscored by the solemn knowledge that I’m in a hit man’s home, and that I have to leave here and go back to a world I barely know anymore.

Time to kick off the heels and play. Not Elgar of Liszt…the bombastic parts always annoy me. I probably ought to know better, but I try Chopin’s Minute Waltz anyway. I fuck it up royally. It’s a short enough piece that I can remember it without a sheet in front of me, but I’ve lost too much speed and reach over the last eight years to manage it. There are moments when it just soars, and I’m a flightless creature these days. When I botch the last of it, I curse out loud and just put my head in my hands and try to catch my breath.

“Fuck!” At least cursing lets a little steam off. I hate crashing into my own limitations.

“You know, traditionally, when one finishes a piece like that, you stand and bow, but you’re the maestro, so you can end it your own way if you want.”

Harry Black has come home.

TBC!!!
His voice makes the hair on my neck stand up, and the surprise makes my bladder clench around
the coffee I soaked up this morning. He’s here…behind me…in the doorway. Harry Black is here.
Say something, Drake! Fuck! Anything! Just sound calm. Calm…ha! Yeah…right.

I turn slowly, keeping my hands on the keys so he won’t see me trembling.

“I…didn’t know I had an audience. I’m very…out of practice.”

Also out of breath. He’s wearing a crisp white shirt with no collar, open at the throat, and black
slacks that show the quality of his tailor. He’s barefoot, and his hair is still short from the prison
cut he’d been sporting. He must have stopped to clean up before he came here. He looks
impeccable, as comfortable here as I imagined him. The eyes. His eyes are still hypnotic. Sparkling
green, impish, as if he’s laughing at the world in silence, and deep, like the glimmer of water at the
bottom of a long, dark well.

“I apologize for the unannounced arrival. I didn’t mean to surprise, but I was just enjoying hearing
you play. I can’t play, myself, but it doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy listening. And by the way…I can
get you some music notation if you’d like something a little less complex than the Minute Waltz. I
can’t even believe you tried that one. I knew you had nerve, but you’re pushing yourself too-”

“Who are you?” It came out strangled, but I can’t stop staring. Fear and desire don’t mix well, like
oil in water, and it’s hard to see straight. How quickly I’d forgotten the strength of his presence. He
dominates a room ruthlessly, whether there are two people or two thousand. Something about him
radiates power…precision…confidence, and it makes my head spin being near it. I can’t push away
the way we met, and even surrounded by luxury I feel like an inferior creature that deserves his
contempt.

“Harry Black will work for now…or just Harry if you prefer. Who am I beyond that? A grateful
gentleman that was very impressed by you, and who is very glad that you accepted his invitation.
I’m sorry I was delayed and couldn’t make it home sooner, but as I’m sure you know, leaving is a
bit trickier than arriving. It took a little more time to arrange than I originally expected.”

He’s padding into the room, on feet I’ve seen break bones, a glass of scotch and ice in a hand I’ve
seen maim others. He’s magnificent, and I know he’s trying to be disarming. I know what he is
beneath the surface. I can’t not be terrified, and I try to stare at the keys instead of him. I know it’s
rude, but I’m not sure I can speak while looking at him with…with these thoughts in my head. Too
much. Too fucking much.

“How? How did you get out? I…I saw the news. I’m glad you’re alive.” He’s standing behind my
right shoulder, ice clinking in his glass while he sips his scotch. The smoldering nearness of him
makes my skin hot and prickly.

“Prisoner transfer. As far as anyone there knows, Mr. Black is bound for the SuperMax facility, for
instigating a riot and conspiring to kill other inmates. Of course…there is no Mr. Black, and the
vehicle that picked me up was driven by my own people. You’d be amazed by what can be
accomplished by a good hacker and some authentic looking documents. A few large bribes helped
too. Thirty minutes after I left that shithole I was debriefing in a safe house and getting clean before I came home. My job there is done…Drake Malfoy.”

My name. He knows my name. He must have my records. He tells me these things like it doesn’t matter that he just arranged the deaths of at least five people. He doesn’t seem to care what I know. He’s going to kill me. I’m a liability. I’m an unnecessary risk. Why am I here? Did he just want to fuck me before he makes sure I stay silent forever? I can’t stop shaking. I can’t control it. He must know I’m shit scared. I’m going to die. At least I had a few good days before this. I’m sorry…I’m sorry about so much. I want those years back…and when my life flashes in front of my eyes, so much of it was wasted that it makes me sick. My head is spinning…I’m hot and I can’t breathe. The floor is jumping up to meet me and the darkness is so welcome. At least…at least I won’t have to see it coming.

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“Doc? Can you make it to my place today? Yeah…just routine check-up. Maybe some blood samples and some other samples for lab work. You know…‘eyes, ears, nose, and throat, turn your head and cough’ kind of stuff. The last doctor to look at him was borderline retarded and wasn’t worth a shit. Fainting spell…I think, but I’d rather have your word on that. Thanks, I mean it. We’ll be here. I’ll have Ron bring you in. He’s already en route. Right. See you soon.”

There is a cold rag on my head. I’m on silk. His bed. His sleeves are rolled up and when I open my eyes and look, all I can see are the cords of tensed muscle in his arms. There are scrapes healing on his knuckles. The antibiotic ointment gleams on them. I feel light headed…and a little nauseous. Harry Black is snapping a cell phone shut and picking up an icepack. He pauses when he looks at me and sees my eyes open. He called a doctor. A doctor is coming. Why waste time on a doctor for someone who knows too much and is going to wind up in some morgue? I’m too confused to think straight, but he’s smiling while he puts the icepack on my head.

“Maria is bringing some orange juice. You worried me for a minute there. Your pulse is a little high, but I don’t think you have a fever. I’m just guessing, but this last few days must have been a little stressful for you, right? Unanswered questions, too many assumptions, incomplete information and too much of a change of pace for such a short time. You need to relax…not that I can blame you for being a little high-strung.”

I lose it. I’m not proud. Not anymore really. Having a breakdown because you’re pissing-yourself-scared of death is allowed in my book.

“I don’t want to die. Please! I won’t tell anyone anything! I’ll do whatever you want! I swear it! I swear to God I’ll do anything…just-” It comes out punctuated by sniffles and gasps, but he interrupts with a vaguely insulted air and a finger raised to his lips.

“Shhh…shhh! Hey, hey, hey now. None of that. Not in front of the girls. Besides…I have no intention of doing any such thing. I think I’m a good judge of character, and if I didn’t want you here, believe me, we wouldn’t even be talking now. Breathe, okay? You’re going to be just fine. You can walk out of here anytime, and nothing will happen to you. I’ll give you my word on it. I know how little that counts for these days, but it means something to me. Maria will be here any second, then I think we should talk before the Doc gets here.”

Maria knocks politely and brings the juice, and Harry sets it on the nightstand and thanks her with a smile. She pulls a worried face for me, and asks if I’m alright. I don’t know if I can speak properly yet, so I just nod and gulp the orange juice. As soon as the door closes, Harry sits himself on the edge of the bed and sighs.
“Heh. Where to start? I’m gonna go out on a limb here. I knew you were smart. More than smart enough to piece together some of what was going on back there. I didn’t think you’d react quite like this though. I am a good judge of character…really…and I liked what I saw in you…there. Don’t look so surprised. Do you remember what I said?”

I whisper it. Those words will be locked in my head as long as I live. I just didn’t think I’d live long enough to have a reason to say them out loud.

“You belong on silk sheets and under candles. Kissed by starlight with champagne bubbles on your tongue. This is not where you belong.”

“You do remember. Well, you forgot the last part. For the record…hurting you would be like ripping the Mona Lisa in half. I would never destroy something beautiful. I never spoke a word to you that I didn’t mean. What I do…my job…that isn’t who I am. I won’t say that it doesn’t come with some complications that I’d rather not have, but…how do I say this? Drake…I’ve been looking for someone. It isn’t easy…in my position. So much I can’t say, so much I can’t share…at least not with most people.

While we were in there, I think I got a glimpse of who you really are, in spite of everything you’ve done and seen, and I liked what I saw. You gambled on me, when it would have been safer to keep your mouth shut and take advantage of whatever happened after the fact. You drew a line and picked a side. It was the right side. You can guess that I’m not frightened by taking chances. In gambling, all that matters are the stakes…and the odds. You’re here because the stakes are worth it to me, and I think the odds are on my side. I need someone…who understands what I can’t talk about, and knows when to stay silent. I want someone that can name the books I read and match me word for word. I don’t want a pet…I want an partner.

What I do…it has a purpose. A higher purpose. I can’t explain…yet, but with enough time I might be able to. Just because I do…what I do…it doesn’t make me an ogre. What I am…here…is alone.

This place is beautiful, isn’t it? So many nice things. Comfortable. A lot better than some places I’ve been, but I’m alone here. I move from city to city, and it’s always the same. Things that mean something to me, but no one else. Not solitary confinement alone. I can come and go when I want, but when I come home, it’s always to a place full of things that are nice, but have no meaning, because there is no one I can share them with that matters to me. You’re something different in a world of all-the-same, and I…I thought I’d take a chance on you. Let’s face it…something between us…chemistry, if you will, makes me want to see you in my life…completely. I wanted you the minute we set foot in that cell, but raping people just isn’t my thing. I did what I did to give you a reason to believe that I’m better than that, and I meant it. You’re in no danger from me, and if you want to go, you can…and I’ll make sure you’ve got enough for a good start out there. Just…I’m asking you to stay. Do whatever you like…play the piano, read, sleep in, enjoy yourself however you like, but please take a chance on me. I’m not going to disappoint you. Okay?”

Floored would be an apt choice of words for my condition. If I weren’t already lying down, I’d be sprawled across the floor in an ungainly heap. He wasn’t like this…in there. The intensity is down to a simmer, and when he speaks to me, he sounds like a nervous teenager asking a girl he barely knows to the prom. I don’t know what to say. I have to say something, but I just nod. I know the question that has to be asked. I can’t even ask it while looking him in the eyes.

“Rules. There are always rules. What are they?”

He looks chagrined, and he keeps playing with the gold Rolex on his wrist.
"Shit. Yeah…there are rules. I wish there weren’t, but they’re not mine. Between you and me, no rules, be yourself, say what you think, do what you feel, but there are complications that come with my line of work. I can’t help that. I was damn lucky to meet someone like you where I did. What would I say if I met someone…like a bank teller, or a waiter? Hi, I’m Harry…I whack gangsters and scum for a living…nice to meet you. Not so hot an idea. You already understood before I even said a word, and that’s more than I’ve ever found before. It isn’t just flattery to add that I also think you’re drop dead gorgeous.

Here’s the gist of it. We never talk about my work in front of anyone, unless I mention it in front of you first. You remember Ron? The driver? He’s a company man, like me, and a good friend. The chauffeur gig is a cover. He’s one of the few people that comes here regularly. The doctor that’s coming to give you a check up…he’s the company doctor. He’s kind of an annoying bastard, but he’s one of the best. Him you can trust. Maria and Therese know almost nothing, except they’ve been cleared by the company I work for and know to ignore any unusual things about me or my life. It’s why they’re paid so well. Let’s keep it that way. The cover story is that I own significant shares of a plastics company. The Phoenix Corporation. All you know, if anyone should ever ask, is that I sit on the board of directors and frequently have to travel. I negotiate solutions to problems. That’s all.

Officially, to you, and in the eyes of certain people in the world outside of here, my name is Harry Potter. To Maria and Therese, and on certain jobs, I’m Harry Black. I have other aliases, but those you can learn later as needed. I’ll walk you through the correct names and the appropriate circumstances later. Depends on who I’m meeting, really. No one comes here, and I mean that. No one but company people only, or pre-approved by me. There’s no standard phone line into this building. The TV and computer are satellite linked. Don’t worry…there’s nothing in the computer you can’t or shouldn’t see, and it’s secure. I can get a cell phone for you. A secure one. Never reveal the address of this building, and if you want to leave or go somewhere, ideally it should be with me, or with Ron as a driver and security for you. He’s good. One of the best wheelmen in this business, and a wicked good shot besides. Worst case scenario, if you wind up alone, take a cab to a few blocks away, then walk until you can make sure you’re not followed and have Maria buzz you in.

Maria and Therese have been cleared, and their mail and other interactions are handled carefully. P.O. boxes. Yours would be too. Therese and Maria make trips for groceries and supplies twice a week. Mail leaves with them or comes back with them. They believe I’m eccentric and obsessed with privacy. They respect the rules, and have clean records of employment, or they wouldn’t be here. They’re paid very well, and they work well together, and this place runs like clockwork. We all follow the rules, no one has any problems.

That brings me to the next subject. Records. I read yours. Please try not think of that as creepy. Given my occupation, it was necessary. I didn’t want to spy on you, but before I could take a gamble and bend the rules here, I had to hedge my bet. I had your files pulled and a comprehensive security check done and waiting for me when I got to the safe house. I know who your parents are, where you went to school, and even where you stayed before you met Zabini. I had the piano shipped in last week, because I hoped it would give you a chance to do something you enjoyed. I expected it’s been much too long since you’ve been able to do anything like that, and you deserve more than a few breaks in my books.

I know it was coke that got you into trouble, and that can’t happen here. Understand? I’m not making a value judgment…the problem is that it brings other bullshit along with it, and this place is secure and meant to stay that way. There is no wavering on that. What we do outside of here is irrelevant, but we don’t bring trouble here.
These aren’t just rules. These are Holy Writ. They’re Commandments. I liked what I saw enough to ignore things that might make other people flinch, but when it comes to the integrity and security of my work, there are no compromises. Are we understood?”

I don’t know what I’m doing. I knew what I wanted with such clarity this afternoon, but my mind is a quagmire now. I want to run away…take some money and start over far away from here, but he makes me weak. I’m frightened of what I become when he’s near…when I hear the things he says. He’s better, and kinder, but he’s like Blaise all over again. Just by being near me, he makes me ache to submit. I used to love that feeling, but it’s hard to reconcile it with moments when my mind screams for me to run for safety. I have to ask more questions. There are things I have to know. Will the answers salve my conscience? I pick at this like a sore I won’t let heal. I need an excuse to let go and say yes. I need my fears allayed…and I have a lot of fears.

“What…what do you want me…to do? I could leave…today…if I wanted to? You’d let me? I don’t want trouble. I just want to be safe. I’m…I’m very tired…of being scared. I wouldn’t do anything that would make trouble…but what would I have to do? What…what do you want from me?”

“This might sound a little weird…given the time you’ve had of it, but I don’t want you to do anything you don’t feel comfortable with. I don’t have a big itinerary or anything, but I had some loose plans for the right now, starting with getting a check up. I was thinking dinner here tonight, a good night’s rest, maybe some shopping tomorrow if you feel up to it. Anywhere you like. Just some time on the town before we celebrate that birthday you have coming up. Other than that…read to your heart’s content, make music, enjoy the food, and live. Find out for yourself what you want to do with the rest of your life.

I’m going to be blunt…I hope you’ll actually spend some time with me and let me enjoy your company, but I didn’t bring you here to pressure you into sex or bribe you into staying. I mean it. I don’t want a pet. I can have that if I want, and keep it apart from my life here. I want to know the things about you that I can’t read in a file. I’d like to flatter myself into thinking that my gamble will pay off, and that someone might decide to stay here because I’m worth being around. I’d like it very much if that someone turned out to be you.”

What do you do in a situation like this? This insane shit is my life. A stunningly handsome man, wealthy enough and strong enough to protect me from anything, wants me for his own…no strings attached…and with just the usual luck I always seem to have, he’s a hit-man with the soul of a poet. A romantic philosopher who kills for money. The brusque knock at the door makes me gasp, and Harry turns to answer it.

“What…what do you want me…to do? I could leave…today…if I wanted to? You’d let me? I don’t want trouble. I just want to be safe. I’m…I’m very tired…of being scared. I wouldn’t do anything that would make trouble…but what would I have to do? What…what do you want from me?”

“This is a house call I shouldn’t even be making. Rules, ever hear of them, Harry? Who the hell is that, and what the hell are they doing here? And don’t give me any of your usual sass. If it isn’t you or the staff, I’m not required to give a damn.”

Harry is grimacing, but whispers a few last words while the man drops his bags and starts pulling out equipment.

“Just think about it. Please. You won’t regret anything…I promise.”
‘Well? I’m still waiting for answers. And get me a chair. Might as well be comfortable while you interrupt my golf game. You’re lucky you’re a commodity, boy.”

“Doctor Snape, this is Drake. He had a little fainting spell, and he hasn’t had the best medical coverage for quite awhile, so I thought it would be a good idea to get him a proper check up by someone that knows what they’re doing. Drake…meet Doctor Snape.”

“Flattery will get you nothing, brat. Make yourself useful and get that chair while I get my things ready. I’d like to make this brief.”

Harry brought the chair from the desk, rolling his eyes behind the doctor’s back so that only I could see the look of exasperation on his face, but this man has eyes in the back of his head.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me either! Put the chair by the bed and leave. Then I can get on with this and get back to my game. Go!”

Harry puts the chair down beside the bed, and this Doctor Snape starts laying out things I recognize on the nightstand. Blood pressure, and glucose testers, vials, syringes, something like litmus papers for simple blood tests. A small, portable microscope and more.

“Did you get lost between the ‘g’ and the ‘o’ in go, Harry? Amscray!”

Harry shrugs and leaves, giving me one last look of sympathy before he goes. Then I’m alone on the bed with a very irritable looking man next to me, and he has a penlight in one gloved hand and a tongue depressor in the other.

“Tongue out, mouth open. I’ll assume you’re not congenitally retarded or he would have warned me. Let’s try to make this simple…Drake.”

My name drips off his tongue like a curse. What must he think of me…or of Harry? A boy in an outdated skirt and top. No wonder he’s disgusted. I do what he tells me, one terse command after another. True to what Harry said on the phone, he does all the standards. Eyes, ears, nose and throat, and then he starts with the blood pressure and pulse. I come up a few points below normal, but nothing serious, and my pulse is just a hair high, which is unusual for a person whose blood pressure is a little low compared to average. I get my finger pricked and my blood sugar is low too. All he does is grunt and make other non-committal noises while he orders me around.

I hate needles, but he draws five blood samples. FIVE! Fucking vampire. How many things can he need to check? He seals all but one of the samples and starts preparing some kind of chemistry set on the stand, rattling off questions like gunfire. Known allergies? History of drug use or alcoholism? Current medications or supplements? Dietary choices? On and on. He’s thorough, and he asks questions I’ve never even been asked before. When he gets to some very personal questions, about sexuality, and what I’ve been doing or not doing…I clam up. He pauses in the middle of his tests and gives me a look that could peel the paint off a wall.

“I’m not your mother. Answer the fucking questions and don’t be a blushing idiot. If you’re old enough to do it, and you are, then you’re old enough to talk about it out loud with a doctor.”

I have to explain…in slightly veiled terms, that I’ve had ‘passive’ anal or ‘active’ oral intercourse every day or every other for the last seven years, sometimes with multiple partners. I don’t mention prison, because he doesn’t really need to know that part. When you say these things, clinically, divorced from the reality of them, it seems so much more disgusting. When I run the numbers through my head, I realize that I had sex, involuntarily, about two thousand times in the last seven years. I was damned lucky that it was almost always with one person, and that was Flint. He
accounted for 95% of the sex I was forced into having. I’ve been tested for HIV every year, and came up negative every time. I only had to suffer through a couple cases of gonorrhea. How’s that for winning at Russian Roulette? In the meanwhile, he’s gone back to his tests and his vial of blood and his microscope.

“Well…Drake, aside from being a bit insipid…there isn’t much wrong with you. Your blood sugar is low and you’re hypoglycemic. I’d watch my sugar intake if I wear you. That includes starches like bread, potatoes or noodles, as well as sodas, candies and all the other garbage kids eat these days. You could find yourself diabetic someday if you aren’t careful. You’re underweight for your size, by about ten pounds. Eat healthy and regularly…and get some exercise…it’ll level out your blood pressure. I can tell you’ve had a sedentary lifestyle for too long. You seem to be suffering from a little hypertension and anxiety, but that can be dealt with via good sleep habits and stepping away from stressful situations for a little bit and thinking rather than forcing yourself to deal with things instantly. Failing that, I can supply a very mild sedative. You haven’t been sleeping well, and I expect it’s mostly stress related. Sudden changes of environment can cause that. How long were you in prison?”

“Seven…seven years.” I’m so fucking humiliated. It’s like my worst nightmare came true. He can see it on me. It’s written all over me. Prison bitch. Trash. Slut. Junkie. Whore.

“Stop looking like that, and never presume that others are stupid. Your diet has been crap. The words ‘seven years’ came up half a dozen times while I was questioning you, you admitted to using illegal drugs, and to an unusual amount of sexual activity for a non monogamous relationship with one primary participant beside yourself. I also know where Harry has been this last month. Pardon me if I draw my own conclusions…they’re generally right. Here’s a piece of advice, boy. It happened. Get over it. That was there…this is here and now. You fucked up monumentally, but you don’t have to do anything that foolish twice. The definition of insanity is expecting different results from the same actions, despite seeing the evidence with your own eyes.

Don’t live like a teenager forever…you’ll die young and look terrible before you go. Eat well, exercise regularly, sleep on a stable schedule and don’t treat your body like a toxic waste dump. Just because it’s legal to advertise something on TV, it doesn’t mean it’s good for you…in most cases, it’s quite the opposite, or they wouldn’t be spending money to convince you to buy it. I’ve done the standard screening for social and other diseases that are most common and easiest to detect quickly, and you’re clean despite the odds. The rest I’ll have results for in a week to ten days after I get back to my office. For your information, I was this close to playing a par game when Harry called me. If it were anyone but him…I’d have told them to fuck off. Take my advice and you’ll be fine. I’ll have a write-up printed and sent to you here…assuming you’re going to be here…”

Zero hour. I guess I have to make that call. I’m in shock from the barrage I’ve been under today, and he’s packing his things like I’m not even here. His clothes say he makes the kind of money that Harry does. No one who went through the hassle to get him to see me would kill me. I think…I think I’m actually safer here than I’ve ever been in my entire life. It’s kind of dizzying actually.

“Yes. I’ll be here. And thank you. I think…I think I was just…scared.”

Doctor Snape stands up with his bags and sniffs at me.

“I suppose I can’t blame you. I forget sometimes that not everyone lives the way we do. Bit much to take in all at once. Harry had no business bringing you here, but it’s done, and he’s our golden boy, so he’ll get what he wants. Go easy on yourself, get some rest, and try not to need any attention that requires me. Another time, Drake.”
And then he’s out of the room and gone. I can hear him sniping at Harry on the way down the hall and on the way to the elevator. Harry will be back here any minute. I feel terrible…but tomorrow… I could be going shopping. Who says all changes have to be bad?

When Harry comes back in, I stay quiet while he sorts out the chair and sits by the edge of the bed. I feel exhausted. My stomach keeps fluttering, and the urge to throw up is still flirting with me. I can’t help it. I’m woozy from losing that much blood to the doctor’s samples, and Harry’s presence smolders near me. I can feel it. He’s full of thoughts he keeps to himself. I can tell he’s making an effort not to frighten me. How can this be the same powerhouse of certainty that took me into his cell? Nervous silence hangs over us. Too long. I want to cry. I feel stupid for it, and I won’t let it happen. Doctor Snape’s words are still ringing in my ears.

‘Get over it. That was there…this is here and now. You fucked up monumentally, but you don’t have to do anything that foolish twice.’

Am I crazy? The last time I let my desire to be looked after and cared for by a good looking guy make my choices for me, I wound up in prison getting raped for seven years! Am I making the bad choice again…or is this the change I’ve been waiting for my entire life? Harry Black sighs loudly, yanking my train of thought right off its tracks and back to him.

“Drake…I’m sorry. This is too much for you. Sometimes I gamble and lose. I can make sure you’ve got plenty of money to get a new start somewhere, and Ron can be here as soon as he drops off the Doc. I understand, and all I ask for is your silence about this place, and my name. I…I really do hope you have a…”

“I’ll stay.”

The words dropped off my tongue like anvils. I feel like I can breathe again, and the quiet smile that looks so good on his face is back again. I can believe he doesn’t want to hurt me. I can believe that…but I just can’t believe that he won’t wind up doing it anyway.

His words are kind, and when I tell him I’m still dopey from stress and giving blood, he gets up and tells me to go ahead and have a nap if I like. Dinner won’t be ready for a couple more hours. He’s happy, and he radiates that happiness. I lay in silence while he leaves, and I have to wonder what will come next. So much. More than I can process. I’m in his home, in his bed, enjoying his kindness. He is my ‘type’ of man. Too much so for comfort, because my kind of man always means trouble. I don’t want trouble, but…I think I want Harry.

I close my eyes praying for the first time since I was innocent enough to believe it would matter. Dear God, please don’t let one also be the other.

TBC!!!
Last night, Harry Black...I mean Potter...I mean...damn it! Fucking aliases. At least Zabini was just Zabini. Of course, he was just a chump change pusher compared to Harry. Where was I? Oh... yeah... last night Harry let me sleep alone. He didn’t even ask about it. I was overwrought and so woozy from losing that much blood to ‘doctor vampire’ that I just nodded off.

I agreed to stay...for awhile. Maybe curiosity killed the cat. I’m not a cat, but I sure seem to have the nine lives and the ability to land on my feet. Harry seemed relieved, and while I nodded off and slept through any hope of dinner, he must have slipped off to one of the guest rooms. I woke up alone. It surprised me, because I really thought that, since I’ve had his dick in my mouth, he’d just expect to sleep in his own bed, whether I was in it or not. I also kind of wanted him here. It was anti-climactic, coming this far and then waking up alone on pillows that smell like him, but without him actually here beside me.

I haven’t slept next to anyone in so long that it’s kind of creepy to think about it. To be honest, I like playing the catty, cold-blooded bitch when I’m out on the town, but I’m kind of a cuddle bug after the lights go out. It’s the one kind of intimacy I haven’t had enough of. Who would I have shared that with anyway? In general, tricks don’t cuddle, and most of them aren’t anything you’d want to hold close to you anyway. It’s get your money and leave when you’re finished. It figures that the first decent man to pay attention to me, who goes through all the effort to get me here, would scare the living shit out of me and spend the night in another bed. Actually...it’s kind of sweet.

Everything about him was sweet. It’s impossible to pair up the image of the man that beat Flint half to death with the polished, bright and eager to please guy I met yesterday. Harry James Potter. How could anyone say no to that? He told me his real name...and he isn’t going to kill me. If anything, I think I’m in less danger than ever. That knowledge alone is enough to make me kind of giddy.

I woke up really early, thanks to passing out before it was even four o’ clock yesterday. By the time it was all over, I slept from six in the evening until five in the morning. I haven’t slept that long...ha...Doc Snape was right. Everything comes back to seven years. You have to get on with living eventually. I can wear what I’ve done or been forever if I want to...or I can be something else entirely. I’m alive...and today I’m going shopping. This...this is going to be good.

Harry was awake not long after I was. I heard the shower running in the guest room down the hall. I made my way to the kitchen to get some coffee. Therese always sets the machine to start brewing at five, so it’s ready for Harry whenever he’s home, even if they’re still asleep. When they know he’s home, they get up earlier. I realize I’m wearing his pajamas again. That’s been the routine, but now he’s back. What if he wants them? Are there things that annoy him? I’ll find out soon enough. I’m a scruffy mess in oversized silk pajamas, with a cup of Arabica Highgrown coffee in one hand and the other stifling a yawn while I make my way back to Harry’s suite for a shower. He pops out of the door in the hallway and smiles. He’s wearing nothing but a towel. Not a very large towel either. Part of him is peeking from below the edge of it, and I have no business blushing after the things I’ve done, but it’s early, and I’m not quite at my best yet.

“Hey...you headed for the shower? I just need the closet for a few minutes. I think something
semi-formal for today, since we’re shopping later. I can call Ron in when you’re ready. After breakfast. Therese should be up and starting anytime now. Did you sleep well?”

He’s so cheerful. For a man who didn’t sleep in his own bed because an emotionally exhausted queen was in it, he’s awfully chipper.

“Yeah. Just wanted coffee before I did anything more complicated than opening my eyes. You… you don’t mind if I wear these until I get dressed…do you? I slept…okay. I didn’t mean for…for you to…it’s your bed and all…so…”

“Ah. Cool. We’ll figure all that out later. I just wanted to make sure you were alright.”

He heads for the master suite with the unperturbed calm he always shows, and I watch his back as he enters the room ahead of me. Yum! I saw a lot of hard bodies in prison…but it’s hard to enjoy the view under those circumstances. Here, on soft carpets and sipping premium coffee, I can look at the man walking away and nakedly lust over the muscles of his back. Nice to touch…nice to hold onto while he’s…damn it. My pajamas may be loose but I still have a little bump in the front now. Maria would collapse into giggles if she saw me reacting that way to Harry!

After all the cocks I’ve seen and had shoved into one end of me or the other, whether I wanted them or not, it just defies explanation that after a few days and some good living, I turn back into a raging slut for the first cock that presents itself. At least it’s a nice one. I want to peel that towel off of him and…damn it…his pajamas are bulging again. I can wait. Tonight, I could indulge a little…if today goes well. If he’s as nice to me as he’s been so far. Maybe it would complicate things…but it can’t get too much more complicated than this, can it? Why shouldn’t I have what I want? Especially after the shitty decade I’ve had.

The shower always warms quickly, and it never seems to run out of hot water. I just love it. The body scrubs and salon quality shampoo and conditioner make the whole room smell like a basket of fruit and spice. In here, I feel more than just human, and I like that feeling. I’m beautiful, and sleek, and I can see why someone would keep me around for awhile. Sometimes it’s just good to see that for a little while. A little product and my hair stays where it belongs, which is normal for me. It’s always been fine enough that it isn’t hard to manage.

I slip back into the pajamas after I’ve dried off, and I make my way back to the bedroom…almost hoping Harry isn’t gone, but he is. Probably out of politeness. The man is considerate…I’ll give him that. Just wish he’d be a little more forward. Not vicious or rough…so I guess I prefer this, but I don’t know how to be in charge of anything…I’m better at rolling with whatever comes my way. At the moment, I’m hoping it’s breakfast, shopping, a stylist, dinner somewhere nice and some sex for dessert!

My conscience tells me that I’m a maniac for thinking these things about a man who kills people for a living. Whatever Harry Black gets up to normally, he’s making one person very, very happy today. My conscience can fuck off. I want to live the way I used to, the way I can, the way I love to live, and Harry is going to make that possible.

He’s at the kitchen table, talking with Therese, who gives a small smile when I arrive and take a seat. For once, I’m not the only one in here besides her. There’s toast and jam, slices of smoked ham and eggs benedict, fresh slivers of melon and grapefruit, juice and more coffee. I forget that Harry is in the room for about ten seconds, and then I remember my manners and try to stop eating like someone who just got out of the pen.

“You looked like you were enjoying yourself. Don’t stop on my account…I rather like that look on you.”
When he says things like that, I wish Therese wasn’t here. I’m not used to compliments, at least not anymore…but I think I can manage to get back into practice at it. Fuck formality. I have eggs benedict and chilled slices of melon. Harry eats lazily, carving off snippets of ham or distractedly bringing forkfuls of fruit or eggs to his lips. Once I’ve gotten just enough food into me to take the edge off of my hunger, it’s easier to watch him…and enchanting.

Everything he does is so precise and no-nonsense, but he seems very relaxed right now. At peace. This is his home. The only thing in this environment that’s out of place is me. He looks pensive and restless, full of thoughts he’s keeping to himself. I refuse to interrupt, trying to keep from offending him. I know he doesn’t want me dead, and I know he seems very kind…but it doesn’t mean that I’ve forgotten anything. It matters even more now.

I have a big choice. A decision…one of those things I’m generally lousy at. I have to think about it carefully…and calmly…like Doctor Snape said. Harry is a killer. No matter how I dress it up, I’m attracted to someone who commits acts far more illegal than Blaise ever attempted. It was all good when I was seventeen and went from sucking dicks in cars and cheap motels to dining in four-star restaurants…but I’m twenty five tomorrow. Is there any man worth being involved in this? Would I risk another prison sentence or even death…just to be with someone wealthy and handsome…and nicely hung. Arrrgh! If I keep thinking like that, the bump in the front of the pajamas won’t let me leave the table while others are present!

It’s hard to tell because his skin is so tanned, but when our eyes meet across the table, I think he blushed! He did! I’d swear to it! He fucking blushed! I can actually feel my half dead ego inflating to new heights. I can make a stone cold killer blush…at six-thirty in the morning…while my hair is a mess and I’m wearing huge pajamas! Maybe I don’t know if I’ll stay or go…but I think this going to be a great day.

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Let me say a few things about Chicago. This is a true world-city. A giant marketplace of cultures, ideals, dreams and bodies. Nestled on the shore of Lake Michigan, tucked comfortably between the main highways to four different states, Chicago is huge and vibrant because it has always been at the heart of America’s heartland. When trade was still conducted by use of river barges, long before the automotive came, Chicago was already big and bustling with activity.

Is it full of corruption? Yeah. Is it big and loud and dirty? Yeah. Is it home? Yeah…it is. Chicago is nick-named ‘The Windy City’, and when the wind comes off the lake, the stink of urban life is peeled away and people pull on warm coats and get to work anyway. Cold or hot, stinking or sparkling, Chicago is always in motion. Sports, agriculture, shipping, manufacturing, politics and party-goers…Chicago never stops living and breathing. The museum district is just one of this city’s pride and joys. Maybe it isn’t the Louvre, but if you’re in between New York and Los Angeles, this is one of the biggest and best cultured cities in America. And the food! Cuisine in America used to be laughed at overseas. American cuisine was an oxymoron. Not anymore. There are delis here owned by the sons and grandsons of immigrants, and they know the food of their former homelands. If you can eat it, you can find it here.

There are restaurants here, rated highly by even the harshest critics, that can match the best meals in the world bite for bite. Every ethnic subculture you can imagine has a restaurant somewhere in this giant burg, and if you want real Cantonese made by real Cantonese, you can find it. The same goes for everything from Irish to Afghani food. Want your palate challenged? Come to Chicago…but bring money. Nothing in America is cheap these days, except our politicians…and they can be rented by the hour like the kind of seedy motels that I used to get fucked in, and Chicago is no exception. Space is at a premium, and if you want to live here and keep your life and health intact,
you need to pay the high rents in the good parts of town.

This is the home of neo-capitalism. Milton Friedman and ‗The Chicago Boys‘ dreamed up the heap of neatly phrased and catchy bullshit that was adopted by almost all fiscal conservatives of the last thirty years. The gist of it is that, if you let rich people do whatever they want and generally leave them unsupervised and untaxed, business will flourish, jobs will appear, and a better economy will evolve by default. Essentially, Milty was a lying crapsack with a good line of patter that sold well to audiences and think tanks that frantically needed a logical sounding argument to support legislation that favored their interests. Decades later, around the world, these policies have proven that, if you take away accountability, enforcement and responsibility, CEO‘s act about as maturely as teenage boys who are given whiskey and car keys. It‘s a dubious honor for Chicago to claim that philosophical disaster as it‘s own, but Chicago has survived worse, and always will.

Honest capitalism, on the other hand, has some great benefits, and you can see them all here. The shopping is divine. If they have it in Paris, London, L.A. or New York, we have it here too. I‘m still internally debating whether shopping is better than sex, and I admit that shopping is probably a close second, but you hardly ever need to clean up afterwards. Shopping may not be messy, but sex should be. If you didn‘t get sticky and sweaty and make too much noise…then it wasn‘t worth doing in the first place. But hey, don‘t take my advice…I‘ve been nothing more than a glorified dartboard for dicks since I was fifteen. What I know about making the right choices could be poured into a thimble…with room leftover for your thumb.

Harry took me to a salon. A proper salon…not just a stylist. I got a manicure and pedicure, as well as a much more suitable hairstyle, while soothing music played and Harry read a newspaper. I picked a nice, shorter, unisex hairstyle. Longish bangs, almost in my eyes, and reasonably short in the back. It‘s perfect, and with my hair finished and styled into place, I look almost eighteen again. I got a massage too, and let me tell you, I haven‘t had one since I was just a kid who wasn‘t old enough to be sore anywhere that counted, and if it brought tears to me eyes…well…they were from joy.

The makeover at the M.A.C. salon finishes the job. By way of explanation, M.A.C. is the salon of choice for drag queens worldwide, as well as anyone who is finicky and conscientious about their make up, and their make up lines are simply brilliant. I picked out all the make up I wanted, and Harry just hands them a card and pays the bills. I could pass as boy or girl now…not an obviously haggard and worn out prison bitch. One major goal left…clothes!

I need men‘s and women‘s clothing. I know I like to look like a girl when I‘m out, but at home I‘m just fine in any clothing that looks good and flatters my figure. I kind of want to see what Harry thinks of me as a boy. He‘s seen me at my worst, and he‘s seen me in the clothes I left prison in, but he‘s never seen Drake Malfoy. I want him to. I want to be judged looking like the person that nature made me. If he wants me no matter what I look like…well…it‘s almost too much to think of.

My solitary humiliation is that, when we finally get the car into the private parking and get to the shopping…I have to go to the teens section. I‘m too short and too skinny for almost any of the adult sizes, and probably always will be. The salespeople are ingratiating, but I think it has more to do with the aura Harry gives off when he‘s around strangers. He commands them, kind of the way my father did. Ugh…that‘s a comparison I sooo don‘t want to make! People respond to him because he knows he‘s the boss. I get good service even though I‘m a boy in women‘s clothes, shopping in both sections, and trying on outfits one after another, because Harry has a line of credit that can‘t be beat, and these people know where their bread is buttered.

Barney‘s New York, Jade, Tragically Hip, Neiman Marcus…one after another we hit the places
that carry just what I need. They can tell he’s got class the same way I can. It’s the tasteful, relaxed understatement of his wealth. Quality without pointless flash. Only gutter trash wear excess bling as soon as they get a little extra cash. Real money makes a tiny, simple display. Harry has no jewelry. No rings or tattoos or piercings. No jeweled cufflinks, no diamond tiepins. Just a perfectly tailored suit and a Rolex watch that tells the time in all the major financial centers around the world. No more, no less. The quality of his hand tailored clothes is such that most people don’t earn in a month the cost of what he’s wearing right now, and that probably isn’t even the most expensive outfit he owns. When people get sudden money, and try to show that they’re well off, they all make the same mistake. They use their wardrobe and accessories to shout out how wealthy they are. It’s pitiful, and the people with real money just nod their heads and laugh up their sleeves at it. Harry doesn’t care how much money he has. He isn’t even counting, and that means he doesn’t have to worry about counting. That’s wealth.

These days, in America, being a millionaire is about what it takes to be middle class. This may not be good or healthy or fair…or even sane, but it is getting closer and closer to true. A lot of people pick apart the world and look for the signs of racism, or sexism, or homophobia, but they’re missing the big picture because they’re staring at the details so intensely. There is only one ‘ism’ that has ever mattered. It feeds all the others like a zookeeper hurling chunks of bloody meat to the big cats. It isn’t black or white, or male of female, or gay or straight…it’s all one color…green. Dollars. Gold. Classism. The rest are all byproducts of the first great difference between people. Wealth.

There are only two real classes. The truly rich, and everybody else. I’ve lived in both states, walked in both shoes, and it gives me a rather unique position in this world. I’m back in the world that supermodels and the companies who own them shop in, and I see the differences more clearly than ever. Harry has it, I have it for being with Harry, and the girl packing my purchases into bags and boxes doesn’t and probably never will.

I have shoes and stockings and socks, slacks and skirts and dresses, club clothes and evening gowns, pajamas and lingerie, hats and gloves and every beautiful little thing it takes to make a wardrobe. I have thongs that are both comfortable and just unbearably sexy. I’m almost afraid of the moment Harry sees me wearing one…because whatever self control he possesses might just evaporate on the spot. I’m dressed in the boy’s clothes now, because I need to make a special stop before I even consider wearing one of the outfits we got today. There’s a small store in Boystown that caters to queens, and they have the accessories I need to make certain outfits look right…up front. I don’t have much of a chest, and I have nothing in the way of cleavage anymore. I like the appreciative smirk on Harry’s face when I step out of the changing room as a boy. It makes my stomach flutter.

Tailored slacks can come later, but I have a belt that’s tasteful and slim, Brush Modal socks that feel like heaven, and good black shoes that have just enough heel on them to be nearly comfortable. They’re obviously shorter than the heels I was wearing when we came though, and I notice the difference on the way out. No wonder he seemed so enormous in prison, but normal when we met again. He isn’t really all that tall, but when I’m out of the heels and wearing something flat the difference is much more visible. Harry is much broader through the shoulders than I am, and his hips and legs are thick and corded with muscle…deliciously so. It all adds to the impression of bulk and size, but he probably doesn’t weigh much over a hundred and eighty pounds. Next to other people, he looks normal. It’s only when he’s next to me that he looks hulking and enormous. I like that.

He hasn’t been silent the entire time. We spoke en route to each destination, but there were snippets that were so much more meaningful than the rest of the chatter. I got my nerve together and actually asked what he was blushing about at breakfast. His staunch refusal to admit that he
blushed was amusing…because he was blushing while he denied it! I pushed for answers and boy did I get one.

“Fine! Fine! You wanna know? You looked adorable in my pajamas! A lesser man couldn’t have handled that much temptation. I wanted to drag you back to bed on the spot. I’m only made of stone when I’m on the job…the rest of the time…it’s not so easy!”

I am a creature of mischief. I can’t help leaning to his ear and whispering so that Ron, the driver, can’t hear.

“A lesser man maybe, but a smarter man would have known that I really…really…wanted him to do exactly that.”

His nostrils flare. I can see his pulse pounding in his jugular when I slip back into my seat. He isn’t angry—he’s excited. He wants me…just the way I want him to, and when the time finally comes, the anticipation will make it perfect for him. I’m hoping it will do that for me, but I think it’s safe to guess that I’ll have fun either way.

We spoke of more than that. Much more. He likes me, boy or girl, dress or slacks. It sounds like an old line, but I think he wants my mind and soul, not just my flesh. Being gorgeous doesn’t hurt my chances, but he really is looking for something more, and I wonder if I can be that to him. He has a restless mind and a passion for living that makes me remember when I was glad just to be alive. It can’t be wrong to want that near me. It just can’t.

I asked about personal things. I stick to things that have nothing to do with his work, and I get answers that are couched in vague terms that leave names and locations out of the picture. I understand this. He’s only known me for a few weeks. He can’t risk too much, and he’s already taking a gamble of epic proportions.

His parents died in a car crash when he was just a year old. He was the only survivor, pulled cut, bleeding and crying from the wreckage left behind. The only reason he lived was because his mother had curled her body over him, cushioning him from most of the impacts and from all but a little of the broken glass. Relatives looked after him, but I get the impression they weren’t especially kind or even decent to him. When he talks about them, his eyes go flinty, and if it were me he was talking about while having that look…I’d be shit scared of him ever seeing me again.

When he was thirteen, his godfather took custody of him, and his eyes light up when he speaks of the man. This person, whoever he was, defined what Harry thought of as a real parent. That man died two years later, and Harry was sent to a military boarding school with the money that was left to him from his godfather’s estate. That was where he figured out what he wanted, specifically that he liked boys more than girls by a serious margin, but he didn’t do anything about it for a long time to come.

He was always focused tightly on doing what needed doing, and he passed with honors, joining the military after graduating as an emancipated minor at seventeen. He had two estates waiting in trust, his godfather’s and his parents’, but he chose a life of danger just to push his skills as far as they could be pushed. He was Search and Rescue. The people that only show up when a situation has already gone to hell. Ever heard of ‘Blackhawk Down’? He was one of the guys that pull other people out of nightmare scenarios, and it certainly gibes with what he did for me. He pulled me out of hell and gave me a glimpse of how good life can be again. Right now, I’m just glad that he did, reasons be damned.

Most of his time was spent in the Middle East, which certainly explains his tan. As it turns out, he speaks Farsi in three dialects, and can read and quote the Koran like a native. He doesn’t have a
religion of his own, but reads of them all, trying to piece some kind of sense out of the mish mash of ideas that humans have had over the last eight thousand years. He mustered out of the service after four years, taking a contract with his current employer for reasons he doesn’t share, but there are hints that he has a strong personal reason for his choice.

Some parts we just can’t speak of here, and that’s good enough for me. A window into who Harry really is…that’s good enough for me…even if it’s a little cloudy. Harry is twenty four years old. The same age as me. Our birthdays are about a month apart. It’s strange, because he seems so much older. Maybe I do too. I guess it’s the things we’ve done…not the time we’ve had, that make the difference.

There’s a tiny German delicatessen we stop at for lunch. I may be skinny, queeny, Drake Malfoy now, but I glow because Harry likes me…all of me…and I don’t feel like trash when he looks at me with a quiet smile, happy because he’s here with me, and I suspect that he’d be just as happy wearing rags and picking through garbage, as long as I was here. I can feel it rolling off of him in waves, pounding me like I’m the shore, and I love it. I shine most when I am the center of someone’s world, and I am shining again at last.

I am emboldened. I am unafraid. Here, in the heart of the city, feasting on ham and Swiss on rye with spicy mustard, I am not a frightened ex-con in a situation that feels perilous. Here, I am an attractive young man, and I am here with a very attractive man who wants me every bit as much as I want him.

“Harry?”

“Yeah?”

“Why me? You just spent a small fortune putting clothes on me. You bought a piano and had it shipped before I even got to your place, just in case I said yes. I don’t even want to know what it took to get me out a month early. My sentence had no parole or time off for good behavior. Don’t get me wrong. I’m grateful, but I have to know why. What…what the hell do you see that I don’t?”

He’s silent, chewing his sandwich and sipping bottled water to clear his palate. I wait until I almost want to speak again. I wish he wasn’t wearing sunglasses. If I could see his eyes, I could guess at what he must be thinking. Maybe I sound needy. It’s because I am. I want to know. I want to believe in something, and I just can’t let go so easy. When the answer comes, it’s deadpan, voiced as if he knew it all along and wanted the timing to be right. Everything I know about the world dies a beautiful death and is born again in the ashes of his words.

“Potential. Somewhere along the way, you stopped seeing it. It never went away though. I saw it when we were stuck in that cell together, simmering under the surface. I heard it in every answer to every question I asked you. I still see it every time I look at you now, and I want to be there when you can see it in yourself again. I don’t care what you’ve done…or what you’ve been. I only care about what you could be. It would be worth everything I’ve done or will do, if I get to see you look at yourself…and see what I see.”

I will never properly celebrate birthdays again. The day before my birthday will always overshadow any meaningless marker of age. I wanted to believe in something, and Harry makes me believe again. This will always be the day that something dead inside of me came back to life. The day I fell in love.

TBC!!!
Are there even words for it? Poets think so, but most of them struggled with their own demons or played to the audiences of their times. No whore has any business believing in love. It’s a weakness that is always exploited. Always. A chink in the armor of the soul that keeps you safe from harm and lets your mind stay on the matter of staying alive and sane.

Harry. So quiet and confident. Powerful in all the ways I admire most, not just the ways the world measures. Money? Money is great, but he has so much more than that. In the ancient world he would have been the soldier that became a king. A man who rises aloft on the wings of his own talent. A mind like a diamond and a heart of purest gold. If he had been Alexander, I would have been his Bagoas, quiet at his side, there to comfort him when he was tired of being a king, and only wanted to be a man.

Could anything I say about these feelings be enough? Or would even the smallest confession be too much? I fell into love, tumbling headlong without a net to catch me. I landed in Harry’s arms. We shopped, or rather I shopped and he enjoyed seeing me happy, we dined and drank and laughed, at Tru, the restaurant that defines haute cuisine in Chicago, and we danced in clubs that hadn’t see a pair like us in a long time. The man can dance too. Some say that tough guys don’t dance, but Harry moves like he was born here. People also say that dancers always make the best lovers…and I’ll be testing that theory at the first opportunity.

It’s inevitable that in the places that only the wealthy go, I should run into someone I knew from years ago. My first day out of the house, when I want to exist for Harry alone, and I hear a vaguely familiar voice from across the bar.

“Drake!!! Drake, baby!! Is that really you?!”

Pansy. She gained weight in all the places I lost it, but it’s her. We went to the same private schools, drank at the same parties, and slept with more than one or two of the same boys. Seven years haven’t been gentle on her, but what the hell, right? They weren’t exactly easy on me either.

“Pansy Parkinson, you heinous bitch! It’s been a little while, hasn’t it?” The tone is friendly, but we were never more than shallow, alcoholic, barfly buddies at best.

“Oh…my…God! It is you! You look wonderful! I can’t believe…Dee…I heard you…you know… over that guy you were seeing. That was the last anyone heard about you. We’d written you off as dead, sweetie. What happened? Wait…come with me…we sooo need a chance to powder our noses in the restroom. Like old times, sweetie!”

A hand is on mine and Harry is giving me a bemused look while I get dragged off by a girl I obviously know. He probably finds it amusing, because he’s sweet and very secure in himself… while I discover that I hate being away from him for more than a few seconds. I want to be grafted to his skin…or worn like a permanent accessory, like a tattoo. But no…I’m headed for the unisex toilet with Pansy, in a bizarre flashback image of a hundred bar nights years ago.

She’s shouting over the stall while I wait outside, just like then. No couth, my Pansy. None at all. She’s dating a construction company heir, husky but handsome, good at going down on her, but no
finesse when they fuck. Her parents finally divorced after twenty seven years of marriage, acknowledging that they pretty much hated each other for the last twenty of them. Not many of the old school crowd are still around. Most of them moved East or West, headed for the Ivy League or Silicon Valley. Daphne married a lawyer and they have three kids and a summer house in the Keys. On and on. She’s wired. I can tell. I wonder how many lines she’s done just before she pops out of the stall.

“It’s your birthday tomorrow! I never forgot. Remember the Sweet Sixteenth you held while your parents were out of town! God, that party is still a legend. I racked up sooo much blackmail material at that party that I didn’t have to buy my own drugs for two years! Speaking of which, here you go, baby doll! Just for you. ‘Cause I still love my Dee-Dee!”

It’s a vial. There’s almost a gram of coke in this. She gave me a gram of coke as a birthday present. I don’t know what to do, so I shove it in my pocket and pretend to be mortified until I can figure it out later.

“Jesus, girl! You’re not doing bad if you can throw that around. Thanks, but just keep it out of sight, okay! Paranoia is your friend, remember?”

“Aww, you were never such a stick in the mud back in the day. I know for a fact you used to snort it right off your boyfriend’s dick. Which reminds me! Who is that man you’re with? He looks like a nice piece of work. Just a random beefstick…or is he the new beau? What’s he do for a living?”

Harry was right to brief me before we started this, but I didn’t think I’d be giving pat answers this soon.

“Harry is my everything now, Pans. He’s in plastics, hovering near the top. You know…seven figures a year. Just my style too. Tall, dark, handsome, cock that won’t go down until the sun comes up. Sweet, sane and generous. I’m keeping this one, and he only swings my way. Don’t even think about working him. He won’t budge.”

“I’m wounded! I would never do anything so scandalous…and admit it to anyone’s face. Don’t you want to try your present out before we head back out there?”

I do. I really, really do. Badly. My heart is palpitating. I can hear my pulse in my ears. It’s coke, and Pansy would only have the good stuff. I need privacy. I can’t do this in front of anyone.

“Maybe…just one toot before home. Cover me from outside.”

She’s by the stall, and I can hear her heels clack on the way to the sink and mirror. I’m sitting in the bathroom stall of a club whose cover charge is higher than most people pay for a meal for two, with a gram of coke in my hand. I know what I want. I want to snort it. Coke always made me so horny. I could huff this now and ride Harry’s dick for hours afterwards. Coke is mildly anesthetic, and discomfort is your least concern after a little sniff or two of it. It makes you tense and full of energy, and in my case, that translates into a desire to be distracted…by serious deep-dicking. I wanted coke and a trick for my birthday a couple nights ago…but…

I want Harry. I want him so badly that I feel like I’ll die if I can’t have him for my own. It’s sickening, but it’s true. He’d know. He’s smart. He’ll figure it out. The chemical taste on my breath, or a stray fleck of white crystal on my nostril. Maybe he’d sense the sudden tension, or the nervous edge of my voice. He’d know…and he would be angry. The rules included no drugs in his house. I could do it here, now, and say it was just a hit with Pans for old times. I open the cap. The faint scent is as intoxicating as I remember. Chemical mind-spice to scour away the ugly edges of reality.
I pour it into the toilet, white powder spilling down between my thighs, dancing across the surface of the water, taunting me. I dump it all, amazed by my own temerity. I won’t lose this…this feeling I have. Not for this. Not for a little vial of goddamn powder from Latin America. Harry is the only thing I want, the symbol of everything I was ever looking for and lost along the way. I hide the vial behind the toilet so no one will see, and so Pans will think the rest is in my pocket. A quick flush and I’m done and gone. Pansy is missing. That whore! She’s already headed for Harry. I just know it!

I’m right, of course. She hasn’t changed at all. I mentioned that the man I’m with is good and she’s all over him like ugly on an ape. Harry looks marginally amused. She’s getting nowhere, and it’s obvious to everyone but her. I make a calm entrance, chat politely, and finally steer my way to a goodbye that hints for Harry to get us out of here and headed for home. He’ll never know how close I came to losing it over her gift. Not if I can help it. I could admit the whole episode and fish for compliments, but it would cheapen what I just did. That wasn’t his struggle…it was mine and mine alone. The only one who ever needs to know what just happened in that toilet is me. It’s off to another bar, and a different dance floor, and more drinks so I can forget what I just did. Or rather, what I didn’t do.

A week ago I would have been quietly weighing options while I pretended to be interested in just one person, secretly keeping tabs for a better opportunity in case one wandered in. Now I’m blind to everything, everyone but Harry. Others can sense it, and no one even tries to get between us in the age-old, classic maneuvering of gay bars everywhere. Not because Harry is dangerous, but because a single glance our way could make it clear that we exist in a world with only two people in it…me and him.

He isn’t blind. He can see the shift in my behavior. He knows I’m not thinking rationally, or shrewdly calculating the odds of every move. He could tell by the long silence in the car, after the words that changed my world. He could tell by the quiet way I move a hand into his, or by my sudden inability to maintain any sense of distance. Maybe he isn’t comfortable saying what he feels all the time, and the truth behind his actions slips out in small moments of clarity like the one in that little German deli, but he glows the way I do because he can tell that his words were heard, and that everything that lurked unspoken behind them was understood.

He was right. It’s hard to grasp it all, but I can feel it in my heart. Potential. I stopped believing in myself so long ago that I’d forgotten what I am…what I’m capable of being. I have talents and gifts I’ve barely used, scrambling to be seen as beautiful, judged only by my surface and by my ability to be attractive to men. He wants me to wake up and live the way I could…not just the way he wants me to. A lifetime spent shaping myself to fit the expectations of others. My parents, the media, my classmates, and eventually my dates and tricks. He wants the substance, not the image. He wants me to set my own expectations, and all he wants is to see them become real. I can give him that.

How many people ache to be loved for who they truly are, even while they strive to be something they aren’t? I’ve been given the hope that there is more possible than just meeting a man’s expectations. I’ve been given back my life, and the will to do something with it. I don’t know what I’ll do…yet, but I won’t go back to rolling with the punches and waiting for opportunities that never come. I will make my own.

I can’t stop kissing him. We never got around to it until today. Everything was so new, and neither of us were pushing the other toward action. The chains have slid away and I care about nothing. I’m spilling my soul into him, and I believe he’ll be gentle with it. Ron is probably mortified up in the driver’s seat, but I can’t think of that for more than a split second. I have to crane my neck when we’re in the club, because I’m still in boy clothes and I’m not wearing heels. He smells like
world class cologne and the even the faint scratch of stubble pleases me and makes me hungry to be closer. If it were anyone but Harry, I’d have been gauche and hauled him off to the bathroom so I could taste his come, and feel the shudder in his body with sweet satisfaction, but I couldn’t let that happen. I wouldn’t soil this with anything so tawdry. It can wait…just a little longer…until we’re home.

He tastes like scotch and fire, and I’ve had a few cocktails between extended rounds on the dance floor. Poor Ron has to drive despite the way we’re entwined behind him, with me almost comfortable in Harry’s lap, except for the starved hunger that makes our necks twist while we savage one another’s mouths. He whispers words that melt my mind. Sweeter than cocaine, more heady than Ecstasy. I want him so badly that it genuinely hurts. I want to drown in him, be filled by him, let him drive out the air in my lungs while I float into oblivion in his arms alone. All that I’ve endured, and still such a passion can overtake me? So be it.

I am drunk on raw emotion and completely alive when we reach the penthouse, and it’s only by the slenderest of margins that I haven’t pulled the clothes from him in the elevator and dragged him to the floor. I can feel his hardness through his clothes, and only because he mercilessly pins me to the wall and holds my wrists above my head does he escape from being exposed in the hallway. Maria and Therese have already gone to bed hours ago, and the way to his suite is clear. He murmurs something about originally planning something different, about taking it slowly. Fuck slowly. Never mind that! Fuck ME slowly! Or quickly…but just for the love of God please FUCK…ME…NOW!

I probably just ripped the button off a shirt that cost more than the salesperson made in a week, but I’m not sorry. Tailors can deal with that another time. I’m almost past the point of sanity when I can finally feel his skin on mine. Some of the time, he lets me explore him, with mouth and hands, enjoying the way touching him pleases me, but he also commands, just as I knew he would, prayed he would. He pushes me back, plunders my mouth, dominates me effortlessly, reminding me that he is wonderfully, potently male. At moments like that, it is so very easy to surrender completely. Like a roller coaster, where you know that there is nothing you control, and you let go and scream until your lungs ache, and you can only be a helpless passenger until it’s over. I always loved roller coasters…and at this moment I feel like I’m dangling on the precipice of a plunge that won’t ever end.

He relents long enough to let me finally take hold of what I want. Unlike that abyss we were trapped in, here I can make myself comfortable and approach from the right angle. I’m not contented lapping the head or hastily stroking him to completion into my mouth…I want it all. I devour him, like a serpent’s meal, stretching my throat for every inch until my breath is only faint puffs and a few small motions are enough to leave him groaning. I can’t sustain it forever, but I can try again and again, pulling away only for convenient air before I pull him into me again. I learned to deep throat in high school, sucking off college boys at parties I shouldn’t have been at, and it’s a skill I’ve never regretted acquiring. Looks like Harry’s glad I picked up the knack for it too.

The surprise for me is that he has the sense of self left to shift positions carefully, taking my stiffened prick into his mouth, and I have to pull away enough to gasp, because I’m not used to being touched that way by anyone. I remember being more ticklish than this, but it evaporates in the face of a desire so violent that nothing else could matter. I try to make myself busy, but the shudders of pleasure throw off my rhythm, and I can’t concentrate when my head is spinning hard and my pulse is thundering in my ears. When a fingertip brushes across my entrance, I lose it. I can feel a thumb pressing gently in just the right spot, and then I’m exploding, dying, shouting his name while my come slides across his tongue and down his throat.

He doesn’t stop. He pulls away while I’m flaccid and stunned in the aftermath of orgasm, and finds
a better use for tongue and fingers than even before. My knees draw up almost instinctively, and a much more familiar hunger is still alive inside of me. He kindles it, feeding it with soft manipulation until it rages again, insatiable and out of control. I sound piteous, I’m sure, and for a second I wonder if Maria and Therese can hear me, then I remember that I don’t care, because what Harry is doing between my legs is enough to merit crying out while blinded by tears of joy.

I’m hard again before he’s done, but while his mouth has shifted back to the erection I used to put so little stock in, his fingers are teasing me cruelly, pressing against places that haven’t known a gentle conquest in years. I keen, I whimper, I bite my lip until it bleeds and I don’t care. I don’t even remember where the small bottle in his hand came from, but I know what it is. The good brand. The slick stuff that makes everything so very, very easy, and then vanishes in the night without a trace. No greasy slime for prison or gutter trash, this will make his passage into me as comfortable as if he’d belonged there in the first place.

I’ve missed that feeling so much. The clean slickness that presages entrance, that makes me inviting and accommodating, that strips away the pain of entry and makes it a mere matter of pressure and time. His cock is stone hard and hot between my thighs, even through the latex of a condom, and I’m already pushing myself open against it, wriggling back against the sheets, before he can even ready himself. Most of a month without sex isn’t enough to forget how to make it easy, and as soon as we’re both moving toward the other, his progress into my body is swift.

I’m delirious, rambling, with words I can’t control spilling off of my tongue. I’m not face down and holding bars or a sink…I’m on sheets that kiss my skin and I can savor every second as I please. Stretched…filled…opened utterly and fused with him. Legs twined around hips that are in motion, the languorous slide of body against body while he pleases me more than he can possibly understand. Every touch, every caress breathes respect and desire and hunger to make me his. I am a treasure. I am valued. I am worthy of these feelings and I know it like I never have.

He is crueler than I imagined. He knows that I’m hanging on the edge, so close to the kind of orgasm I haven’t been allowed in years, and yet he tethers me, keeping me from it with a deliberate desire to tease me until I’ve lost any semblance of dignity. He strips from me even the faint shred of self control I held to myself with Flint, knowing that I was just an actor playing a part, making him the audience. Not here, not with Harry. I weep because I’m begging aloud, because I care about nothing but feeling him within me, harder, faster, deeper and in just the right spot.

My surrender is complete. A dam has burst inside of me, while my legs tremble and my breath stops, eyes clenched shut while I tumble and let go of everything but the feel of him. He has my measure, and knows me for insatiable. The positions change, but the meaning is always the same. I have him in every way we can manage. Seven years is erased in his arms. I am alive and nothing compares.

I wake, sore and replete, curled against his sleeping form. I drag him back to wakefulness with a gentle insistence that overcomes slumber, and make him sate me again, this time slower, this time within and without, on my knees and half upright, speared upon his lap, his hand slicked and working around my cock while I grind myself in just the right ways around the swollen flesh inside of me. The soreness means nothing next to the terrible feel of emptiness when he withdraws.

No bath this morning. I drag him into the shower. We clean one another so carefully, with the greater part of our attention paid to one another’s mouths, until I can’t stand it anymore and I bury my face in his lap, letting hot water roll down my back while I pull another orgasm from him, this time shamelessly pulling away and letting his seed spatter across my face and chin, sliding down me as the shower pulls it away. Ours is paradise, but there is no innocence here.
My twenty-fifth birthday single-handedly makes up for one of the worst decades on record. Therese makes a breakfast that went largely unappreciated, mostly because I deliberately showed up at the table smirking indolently...wearing Harry’s pajamas in spite of finally having my own. We didn’t make it through more than few bites before I was waving goodbye to Maria over Harry’s shoulder and giggling like a schoolgirl.

Control of the bathroom and the giant mirror is turned over to the giddy queen trying to get ready for a day on the town, and Harry showed his patient side, since it took hours to figure out just how I wanted to look beside him. For all the world will know, the woman at his side will be a suicide blonde that makes every man wish that he could be Harry just for a minute. They’ll go home with jealousy in their hearts, furiously beating off to the memory of Dee, never knowing that Dee’s lover peeled back his thong and gave him stellar fucking head in the bathroom that morning while freshly applied nails were scratching their way across Harry’s shoulders because I’m still not used to coming in a man’s mouth. Women will hate me just for being nearby, making myself a rude, living reminder of every tiny inadequacy they frantically shop to forget.

And I’ll enjoy every second of it...because that’s the kind of bitch I can be.

I’d describe our behavior as cloying or sickening...if I weren’t lapping it up like ice cream. We hit the museum district. Art, history, science and the Aquarium, which is arguably among the best in this hemisphere. I’m finally beside a man who appreciates all of the above. My hand is always in his, but we whisper, comparing impressions of things like so many other couples do. It hits me then...that I’m not different. Not really. I’m in love, the way everyone wants to be, and I act like everyone else who knows how exquisite it is to be completely intimate with someone who doesn’t care a damn about the things you see wrong with yourself, but who wants all of you, as you are, quirks and petty flaws included.

I call myself a cynic, and maybe I have the right to, but it doesn’t matter now. Gay or straight. Man or woman. Rich or poor. This crosses all boundaries, all colors and creeds, every age and every way of life. At the end of the day, I’m just a human being, and I’m in love, and I like being that way, even with all the crap that comes with it. The wind comes off the lake here, and it carries away everything that is foul and wrong. You can hear gulls calling, because Lake Michigan is so huge that it might as well be an ocean, and because where people dwell, trash offers a steady diet for the local birds. Chicago is beastly hot in the summer, but when the wind is up, there is no place better to be than here.

We hit Narcisse, which has been remodeled since I was able to hit town this way, and it’s as decadent and stylish as ever. Everything costs far more than it should, but the money pays the price for being in a place where only wealth can take you. They know what to do with a drink here, and the caviar isn’t the cheap swill that finds its way around everywhere.

The great irony of America is that you can get nearly anything anywhere. Every town has a superstore of one kind or another that frantically tries to cater to every whim, but most of what you can get is sheer garbage, dumbed-down, cheapened and mass marketed to rake in the largest amount of cash with the least amount of effort. You have to get things imported before you can get much of anything that’s been crafted with a sense of artistry or passion, and our Customs people hate imports...especially food.

I’ve long suspected a conspiracy to prevent Americans from discovering the bitter truth...food that hasn’t been engineered, irradiated, genetically altered, preserved, flavor-enhanced, frozen and reconstituted...won’t kill you. In fact...it tastes better and isn’t carrying more chemicals in it than a toxic waste dump. If real, natural food were that bad for you, the human race wouldn’t have survived eating it for thousands of years, but if we figured something like that out en masse...a few
dozen chemical companies would go bankrupt before the year was out. Thus, the bullshit spin and hype. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t store it carefully, wash your hands and clean the surfaces you prepare food on…it just means that the odds are against our being killed by sweet corn that came from a local farmer instead of Mega-Fucking-Super Corp. International.

I get tipsy all over again. I’m pretty well behaved when intoxicated, considering, and I always have been. Good champagne always makes my nose tingle, and it’s tingling now. I tease Harry mercilessly, despite trying very hard to maintain a sense of decorum while the fuzzy warmth of alcohol makes me utterly comfortable and vaguely horny all over again. I deliberately whisper provocative comments in his ear at inopportune moments, promising every act I can name when he least expects it, and hinting at acts of public debauchery that probably would scandalize him…if he weren’t every bit mine and helpless before the strength of my wiles. I want him, again, any way I can have him, and I finally make it clear that I’m ready to leave. No one is fooled, except regarding my gender. They all know that the man I’m leaving with is getting laid tonight, because the air between us is electric with mutual desire.

Poor Ron. His neck is scarlet in the front seat, but he’s a pro. Bet he wishes there was a tinted glass barrier between the front seat and the back right now. He probably can’t see low enough to catch any action anyway, but he just has to know what it means when my head disappears from view entirely. It’s my birthday. I want what I want, and I’m getting exactly that. I don’t feel the least bit ashamed of enjoying myself, and maybe it seems common to some, but I fill my mouth with Harry’s sex because I want it there and I love the knowledge that it pleases him every bit as much as it does me.

I don’t make it a quickie either. This is as much my present as it is his. I can make it last and last, teasing until a man is blind to everything but the hunger to finish, and I haven’t had the leisure to use those skills in a long time. I use them now. When I let him come it’s because I want him to, and I can feel the gratitude radiating from him alongside the relief, while I lap away the last sticky evidence and neatly tuck his cock back into place. After all those hours on the town, behaving myself, I desperately needed that, and in spite of being stiff inside my thong and eager for the night to continue at home, I’m relaxed and happy curled against him, and I love the wicked gleam in his eye when he kisses me and his tongue darts across mine, stealing just a little of the taste of his orgasm along the way. It’s hard to believe he’s so comfortable with his sexuality, and still so powerfully, intensely male. Maybe it’s that, when life and death are on the line, bullshit becomes meaningless. Harry knows exactly what he wants…and he likes it…and I just happen to be it.

He drags me into a detour on the way to the bedroom suite, and whispers happy birthday to me when he swings open the door of the room that holds the piano. There is a shelf that wasn’t there before. Music notation. Chopin, Mozart, and so very many more. Simple pieces and complex ones alike. All for me. Hundreds of them. I’m not wrong to feel the way I do. Not at all.

His lips on my neck are a poetry of the senses. I shake off the clingy, little, black number I’ve been wearing today, and I quickly ditch the bra and the small, fake breasts that maintained my illusion during our time on the town. Now I’m just slim and pretty, in a tiny thong that makes it absolutely clear that I ache for him, and if sprawling myself across the sheets and begging him to peel that thong off of me and fuck me senseless is a bit slutish, then so be it, but it’s my birthday, and he is what makes me happy. His teeth are on the thong, and I can feel the heat of his breath while it slides down, and my entire body is shaking with anticipation…when his cell phone rings.

“Fuck!”

He’s off of me and snapping it open, erection flagging fast from irritation.
“Yeah, what is it?! I just got back from the last one a couple days ago, Goddamn it! Now?! Yeah, yeah, fine. I said fine! I’ll be ready, just get Ron back here in a hurry.”

The phone snaps shut, and he’s furious. His face is red, and he looks like he wants to hit something. I know what I should say.

“It’s okay. I understand. I’ll be waiting for you…when you come back.”

He practically deflates. The anger evaporates when I say those things, and he looks at me with a wounded pride and a gratitude that is so very real that it hurts. He places one hand on my chin and his thumb is brushing across my cheek. I lean my head into it and sigh.

“I knew it. I knew I was right to bring you here. I have to go. I have to do what I do…and you understand. Even though it’s your day…you understand. You’re perfect, you know that? You never belonged in there. You belong here. You deserve everything I can make happen for you, but this is the price I pay to have so much. Thank you.”

I said I understood, and he’s grateful, and he knows he made the right choice gambling on me…but I lied. He kisses me, dresses and kisses me again, and with a few whispered words and a promise to return, he’s gone. I’m on silk sheets, alone, on my twenty-fifth birthday, and all I have left is the lingering scent of him on my skin, and the last faint memories of his come slithering across my palate. I understand that this is what he does, but I’m selfish and greedy and full of bitterness because he’s gone, and there’s no way to know for how long.

This is my paradise. Sitting alone in a huge suite, pining away in the night for a man who has a terrible job to do, painfully aware of the empty place between my legs that he should be here to fill. I’m surrounded by luxury. It’s so beautiful here. I fell into love, tumbling headlong without a net to catch me. I landed in Harry’s arms. Aren’t I the lucky one?

TBC!!!
One night. One lousy, shitty, incredible, wonderful night. That’s how many I got to spend in this bed with him. He’s out there…somewhere…killing someone or getting ready to. He left behind a cell phone for me. A secure line that can reach Maria if I need to get back into the building, and it can reach Ron if I need a driver or security. Doctor Snape’s number is here too, but I don’t think I’ll dare to be dialing that unless I absolutely have to! Maybe I’ll go out tomorrow, but today I stay in. I wear his pajamas because I like them…and he likes them on me. I eat breakfast with Maria and Therese.

Who would expect stern, dignified Therese to gossip about men with Maria and I? She does, and I blush a lot and leave out the positively pornographic details, but I do wax eloquent about what I think of Harry. They think he was called into his office to troubleshoot a crisis of some kind. Only I know that, whoever the crisis is, Harry is going to shoot them, and they won’t be troubling anyone for long.

It’s therapeutic to talk. They’re both very nice people at heart, and they both have a sense of pride in what they do. I kind of admire them. Maria is always working her way from room to room, keeping every last thing as clean as the day it was purchased, and Therese maintains a kitchen that would honor a restaurant and makes meals that most people couldn’t afford. They’re paid far more than the average wage for their professions, and that’s on top of room and board. They have jobs and do them well. I envy them that satisfaction. I’m from a very different kind of world compared to them, even if we have enough in common to get along. I am from the world of the served, and then I became a trophy on men’s arms, and then I became a prisoner of the state. I’m not sure what I really am any more, but I’m trying to figure it out as best I can.

I should be happier. It’s hard to remember that I was terrified of all this a few days ago. I guess I’m like that. Once I was free of prison, I turned back into the seventeen-year old that fell hard and fast for Blaise Zabini. I fell for a better class of man this time, but I fell just the same. I don’t have a middle gear. I went from zero to sixty in one second flat, like a racecar that spent too long idling and needed to tear screaming down the highway to feel right again. The minute I lost control of myself I crashed into love, and this is the burning wreckage. Nice things everywhere, and no Harry.

I play the piano for hours. With the nails off and boy shoes on I can play a bit better. It helps that I have notation and that I can pick pieces that will help me get my reach and timing back. Harry was right. I pushed myself too hard. I can make a baby grand sing when I’m at my best. I’m just in dire need of practice…and I have lots of time for that.

I also watch the news. A lot. I’m looking for crime news. Mysterious deaths, shootings, executions, dead gangsters. I get nothing. No surprise really. Harry spent weeks prepping for the job in prison. When I think about it, he arranged my release just before his plan kicked off. He was protecting me even before I felt this way about him, just because he could. I feel strange and wonderful inside, when I think of him looking out for me, even though he might have been seeing me for the last time. A guy like that shouldn’t be doing this for a living, but I don’t have any say in that.

My asshole father is on again though, making the familiar noises about the city and state he loves, pimping his latest pet project for the improvement of Chicago. Urban revitalization. Lovely words,
but it means the same old thing. Knock down old buildings, put up new ones. The owners of old properties get forced to sell them to the city for bargain basement prices, the city sells the property to real estate developers for a modest profit, and the developers build incredibly expensive store fronts or office properties, which they lease or sell for piles of cash that would amaze anyone who wasn’t personally involved in the process. It isn’t really about accomplishing anything…it’s about making a chance for money to change hands. They give the process marketable names and then get on their soapbox and bleat about how their business choices are rooted in a love for their community, but to me it all sounds the same. It’s like having Flint read me a love poem just before raping me and beating my ass before throwing me to the curb. The pretty words don’t make it any less of a sick joke.

How long will this job of Harry’s take? Will it just be one person? Other questions come to mind as well. Does he only kill gangsters? What about their families? Does he ever have to kill them too? Women…children? He’s a killer, and the professionals are paid to not ask questions. He has no choice about who the targets are. He’s like a gun…emotionless…distant from it all…a tool aimed in the direction of a target and fired when ready. Can a living weapon pick and choose the people it’s used against? I can’t imagine Harry killing women and kids. I can’t.

The day will come when he tells me more. He can’t afford to tell me certain things until he’s sure I’ll do the right things. I understand this. I could learn more as time goes by, and maybe when he gets back I’ll ask some questions when we’re alone…after I make him compensate me adequately for being gone. That part might take awhile. If I thought I was lonely last night, that was nothing compared to the way I feel the night after that.

I pick through the library again. I won’t be reading poetry before bed. I need a real distraction. One that will keep my attention off of romance! Even though it usually bores me to tears, I take a book on economics, An Inquiry Into The Cause Of The Wealth Of Nations, just to guarantee that sleep will look good. Harry doesn’t keep a lot of liquor in the house. Some scotch…the top shelf, single malt kind that gets imported from Scotland. There’s some gin and vermouth for proper martinis, and there’s a few import beers, several bottles of wine and champagne, and that’s about it. I don’t want to be a lush like Mother, so I settle for mixing some orange juice with one of the lesser champagnes. It’s called a mimosa, and it’s a perfectly acceptable drink for almost any occasion. It won’t be enough to get me drunk, but it’s something tasty to sip at while I read.

Dear old Adam Smith. Most of the authors and philosophers of his time, the Eighteenth century, prefaced most of their assertions with a belief in the virtue and honesty of men who feared a God that punished the wicked. Whoever that God was, no one fears him now, not even his own followers. I haven’t got anything against the concept, but it’s hard to feel any empathy for the faithful when you watch how they conduct themselves.

I’ve noticed a few basic things in my time. One…any religion you have to work hard to sell to others…isn’t worth buying into. Evangelicals have the loudest voices in American religion, and people with loud voices are usually shouting so that people won’t notice that they haven’t got a rational leg to stand on. In nature, animals that make the fiercest noises get left alone or win by default, and here we are eons down the line, still using the same pathetic tricks…and falling for them. Don’t get me wrong…I admire Jesus Of Nazareth, but to me he’s kind of like Eminem. Probably a real nice guy in person, but his fan club is full of annoying assholes that just nauseate me.

I can believe in God, but not the way so many others do. They cite His influence behind every typhoon or tornado, every flood or famine, every disease and every drought. Even terrorism is the Lord’s punishment upon the faithless. Sinfulness, such as homosexuality, brings His wrath down upon the wicked and evil. Funny thing though. If you weigh the evidence from natural disasters, it
would appear that God considers trailer parks to be the most egregious sin known to mankind, because he seems to be wiping those out in far greater numbers than gay bars or abortion clinics. Call me crazy, but I don’t believe in a God with lousy aim, and I don’t believe he’s as worried about the fine print as the religious leaders like to claim. I also can’t quite believe that he needs such extravagant donations. If God can’t manage his own money, I’m not sure we should be turning to him for advice.

Economics really does bore me to death. My eyes are sagging before I get through a single chapter. The day ends as quietly as it began. I’m going to have to find more to occupy my time than this or I’ll go crazy. At least the perpetual fear I experienced in prison made time seem to blur. Here, without Harry, I feel the emptiness so acutely that I’m not sure I could cope with it without Maria and Therese. Tomorrow…definitely getting out tomorrow.

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Ron, the driver, Harry’s ‘wheel man’, answers the call on the second ring. If I feel a little awkward asking for an escort to town, I hide it well. He’s all business.

“Right. Be there in five minutes.” Click. No sweet talk or chatter from Mr. Driver. I wonder if I should ask Maria to come along, but I think better of it when I remember one of the stops I mean to make.

I feel good. Or better. I guess. I didn’t sleep that well. Big bed and no Harry means lousy sleep I suppose. I’ll get used to it. I dressed up today. I look like a business woman who cracked the ‘glass ceiling’. The white skirt and jacket give me a no-nonsense, ball-breaker, Wall Street look when I wear sunglasses and keep my chin up. I’m too good for the rest of you scum and I know it! Doesn’t really go well with at least one of the places I mean to visit, but at least I’ll knock ’em dead at lunch.

True to his word, Ron pops out of the elevator six minutes after he hung up. Their base of operations must be close by for him to make it here so quick, but it makes sense that Harry would be near transportation and support, even though he can take good care of himself alone. Ron isn’t dressed in the chauffeur’s uniform this time. He looks like a high priced bodyguard. Black coat and slacks, bulge in the left side of the jacket, dark glasses and neatly trimmed red hair.

He’s bigger than I remember, now that we’re standing here in the hall. Bigger than Harry by at least two inches and twenty pounds. His face is expressionless while he holds the elevator door for me and punches the button for the lift to take us down to the garage. Even though he’s very professional, I can just feel the irritation dripping off of him. We’re in the car and en route to a good lunch before I figure out what to say.

“I’m sorry…about last night. It was my birthday.”

His head never moves.

“Nothing to be sorry for. Happy birthday.”

All monotone. He doesn’t mean it. I’m stupid. Why would his approval mean anything to me anyway? Just…he knows Harry well. Harry said they were good friends. I want to be able to speak openly to someone about Harry. Even if it’s someone who doesn’t like me.

“I know I can’t ask where he is…or what he’s doing. I…I miss him. I was going to ask you to…if you could…tell me something to make me believe he’ll be okay.”
He’s quiet for a minute, then he snorts. “What’s to tell? He’s that good. I’m pretty sure Hell wouldn’t take him…”’cause he’d take over as soon as he got there. He’ll be back. He always comes back. Trust me on that.”

It’s something. I stare out the window at the cars and buildings while I mull it over. We’re headed for Chinatown first. I want real Chinese, the kind where the people serving the food don’t bring you silverware…they bring chopsticks, and if you can’t eat with those, you can’t eat. Harry left behind petty cash. A little less than a thousand dollars. I expect there will be more once I prove that I won’t do anything stupid with it. I won’t either, because I want very much for Harry to trust me completely. I know he’s being cautious, and keeping me in the dark to keep me safe until he’s sure I can be trusted, and I won’t do anything to fuck that up if I can help it.

“Harry said you were the best driver around. Have you been his friend for a long time?”

“Long enough. Driver, hell! If it has an engine, I can make it fly, swim or roll. Prop engine aircraft, helicopters, boats or small ships. Cars, trucks and semis too. Never flown a jet, though. I may try for that next year. Just hate the idea of something I can’t make go.”

He’s on familiar ground, so it loosens him up a little. This is good. He likes vehicles. We could talk about cars if it makes him more comfortable around me. His head still never twitches. His eyes are always on the road. That’s kind of comforting actually.

“I miss driving on long trips. My father had a small fleet of cars. When I was sixteen, I used to drive for hours, just because I loved the way it felt to be on the road and moving along. Especially in the BMW.”

“Ahh. I’ll give it up to the Germans…they know how to engineer a car. Always hated sauerkraut, and German potato salad, but they know beer and cars, so they can’t be all bad. What other cars did your dad have laying around?”

I run down the list of classics and vintage cars, most of which I didn’t dare touch. The Packard, the Aston Martin, the Lamborghini, and a few of the others I never did more than look at wistfully in father’s garage. Ron whistles appreciatively. We chat about classic cars for a bit, until I exhaust my knowledge of them…which doesn’t take long. I shift the conversation to more personal topics. He seems like a nice enough guy, once he gets over the whole ’my friend is dating a sleazy prison bitch’ issue.

“When did you first know you wanted to be a driver? Did it just happen by accident? Or did you know that this was the one thing you were going to do no matter what?”

“Hah! When I was twelve I stole my Dad’s car and drove it to town just to prove that I could. I wanted a cold soda and a new comic book, but I didn’t want to bicycle there. The nearest town was almost five miles away. I always watched him drive, so I had a good idea of what to do. The rest was instinct. Of course, when the police brought me home…after impounding the car because I was doing ninety-five mph in a thirty-five mph zone…well, Pop was pissed. Hell, so was Mom, but at least Pop was pissed and proud at the same time. After that, it was just a matter of time. I was doing the raceway circuits when I was just seventeen. By the time I was twenty-one, I was doing this. There isn’t much else I wanna do, but a little more action would be nice.”

That was the most I’ve ever heard him say. Now’s a good time to go for the kill. He’s mellowed, and we’re almost into Chinatown. We’ll have to walk part of the way after that. Better get the private stuff out of the way before we hoof it to lunch.

“That’s pretty cool. Knowing what you want that way. Ron…”
“Yeah.”

“That’s how I feel about Harry. The way you feel about cars. There isn’t anything I want more than that. He isn’t like anyone I’ve ever met…and I’m not here to hurt him. I thought…I got the impression that you…you don’t really like him bringing me into his life. I know it’s…kind of weird…but I want Harry to be happy, and I swear I won’t do anything to mess things up. Okay?”

The tension in his neck says he doesn’t appreciate being led to a conclusion that way, and he’s silent. Too long. We’re parking. He hasn’t budged yet. When he turns around, I feel a twinge of nerves. Just because he’s the driver, it doesn’t mean he doesn’t know how to use that gun. Harry said he was a good shot too. Maybe I pushed too hard, too fast.

“You made your point. I’ll take it under advisement. A word of advice. This ain’t like any other gig you’ve been a part of. This is the big league, and that’s all I can say. You’ve never met anyone like Harry because there is no one else like Harry. He’s the best at what he does, and that’s the only reason you’re here instead of where I picked you up. He’s never brought anyone in like this before, so even if can’t figure it out, Harry is nobody’s fool. You must be worth it for more reasons than one or we wouldn’t even be talking now. You and I will get along fine…if you don’t complicate things for Harry. Harry’s a good man, and he might be generous about a mistake or two. Don’t take this the wrong way, but I have no such problems. You fuck up and put people at risk, I’ll dump your ass in a concrete mixer and make sure you become part of the foundation of a building somewhere, and I’ll apologize to Harry later. Behave, and we’re fine. Fuck up, and we’re not. That’s all there is to it. Can you handle that?”

“Got it in one take. Don’t worry, it won’t come to anything…like that. I promise.”

I sound calm, but I’m good at that when I’m scared shitless. Ron the driver is no one to fuck with. That much is clear. At least the silence is broken, but damn…I know he wasn’t kidding. I can tell.

“Alright then. Welcome to Chinatown. Remember to take a seat facing me while I sit with my back to the room. You eat and enjoy…I watch the crowd and the doors. If I give an order, it’s for a reason, and you follow it! Got it?”

“Got it.”

That aside, Chinatown is a much missed pleasure. It’s one of the few places on earth that I’m actually a little above average height and look tall when I have heels on. Plus, I learned to eat with chopsticks when I was sixteen. Prices aren’t bad in the little ‘mom and pop’ eateries that line the street, and you can get big meals pretty cheap if you shop around.

People bitch about immigrants coming here and not adapting, or they gripe about them coming here period, but aside from expecting people to learn enough English to get by, I never minded it much. They seem so happy to be here, and they like working hard and earning money honestly. Most of them anyway. Every culture has its criminals, but the majority of these people get up at dawn and go to bed after sundown, knocking themselves out to make it in ‘the land of opportunity’. They do well because they try so hard. I wonder if that’s what went wrong with those of us who have been here for six or seven generations. We stopped trying so hard, and just expected it to be easy. Maybe things get easier the harder you try? Makes sense to me.

Either way, these people know food. They have an intimate relationship with it, because in a lot of cases, they came here to live in a place where there was more of it, and they’re used to preparing it from scratch. Like, live chicken…dead chicken…plucked and gutted chicken…add heat…dinner. They didn’t buy it at the supermarket…they raised it from a chick, or grew it in a garden.
I think of food a lot. I didn’t always, but it’s funny what starvation will do to your perceptions. I was very picky when I was a little kid. Turned my nose up at everything. Ever starved? Not fasted…starved. Like when you go over a week with no food, and you drink from fountains ‘til you feel full just to make your stomach feel better. I did. I didn’t hit the streets here and say to myself, ‘Hey, I’m a little peckish…I’ll suck some dick, get paid for it, and then go get dinner.’ When things hit rock bottom, and people had figured out that I was dirt poor and of no value to them, I starved for eight days before my morals were compromised. Not that I had a lot of morals, but one of them was ‘Thou Shalt Not Fuck The Ugly…Even For Money.’ That moral died a hard death, but eventually I got some money and figured out where to get some food on the cheap. Ever since then I’ve cherished food.

When Blaise first took me to the kind of nice restaurant a gentleman takes a lady (or in my case a pretty boy) to, I savored every bite of everything on my plate. The only time that changed was while I was in the pen, eating slop that would make pigs puke. Industrially mass produced glop that no one with taste buds would voluntarily touch without a damn good reason. Besides, prison food will make you fat, and I wasn’t interested in getting dumped by Flint or handed off to the rest of the building. Staying pretty meant staying thin meant staying alive and healthy…so I ate like a bird. Now that I don’t have to do that, I mean to make up for a little lost time, even if it means having to take up exercise to keep my figure for Harry.

I won’t stuff myself or anything, but I mean to eat well and enjoy it again. Ron leads the way and picks the table, sitting with his back against the wall so he can watch the room. I know just a few phrases in Cantonese, and they’re all related to ordering dinner. I aim for spicy, and I ask Ron if he wants anything. He settles for letting me order some noodles and a cup of tea. He’s too on the job to concentrate on food. Good for me, because I feel safer with a large and dangerous man near me, even if he might bury me in concrete for doing anything too stupid. Silly? Maybe…but it beats panicking over it all.

He didn’t realize that there are no forks or spoons here, and it’s pure comedy watching him try to wrangle chopsticks to his mouth while eyeballing the room every few seconds. His eyes flick left and right, and his noodles slide everywhere except his mouth, while I’m cheerily popping bite after bite into mine.

The big goof gets frustrated, and finally winds up a huge wad of noodles on his chopsticks, then pops the whole ball into his face in one gulp, then stares menacingly at the room in general while his cheeks are bulged out like a squirrel eating a baseball. I can’t stop giggling! He gets red in the face, which is even funnier with a freckled guy. He finally grinds down enough that he can swallow and speak, and his voices drips with irritation.

“Not a word. Not a fucking word. You tell this story to anybody, and I call a buddy with a cement mixer. Understood?”

“Okay, okay! Never happened!”

But I still snort while trying to eat. He isn’t so bad, as tough guys go. Blaise’s people were mostly older than he was, and they all entertained notions of tagging the cute, little piece of ass that followed Blaise around like a puppy. I know where I stand with Ron. He’s my bodyguard, because Harry values me, and that’s all. No more, no less, but I think we’ll get along alright.

I don’t plan to be out all day, but I make a few purchases along the way, which leads to our final stop. It’s enough to make Ron turn pink all over. Sure, it’s trashy and nasty, but they have what I need. My mind was made up last night. If Harry is going to be gone, sometimes for weeks, I need something to keep me company, and I won’t be chasing any men other than Harry. I need a dildo.
For that, I need an adult store.

It’s the trashy side of town, and there are more than a few of those here in Chicago, but it will have to do. They don’t see a lonely queer boy looking for a way to kill time until his lover gets home, they see a blonde bombshell in a power suit picking out a toy that only the serious would choose. I pick it because It looks just about the size and shape of Harry’s dick, and that’s exactly what I crave right now. If I can’t have Harry, then I’ll at least have something that feels a little like him inside of me.

Dark pink, just about ten inches long, and not quite as thick as a bottle of beer. Perfect. It even has a little suction cup on the bottom so it can be stuck into place on the floor or a wall. The poor, greasy, nervous looking kid at the counter can’t believe a stone-cold fox in a power suit came here for a seriously sizable fake cock, and I’d bet my ass that he’ll be jerking off to thoughts about that now and again for the rest of his life. I pick up a few other little essentials. More good lube, a piece of lingerie I think Harry might like seeing me in, and some large condoms for Harry when he gets back. I plan to make him go through them very quickly!

I pay the poor schmuck at the register, give him a wink, and walk out with a smirk while he watches my ass sway on the way out the door. I love the impact I have on men. It makes all the effort and trouble worthwhile when their tongues hang out and their eyes are glued to me alone. Ron is eager to leave here, and growls out a request for less information when I explain that I needed a little something to keep me company while Harry’s away. I keep the laughter strictly internal, but that red neck of his tells me that he knows I’m laughing anyway.

We pull into the garage in the basement of the building, and Ron gets out to open the door for me. I open it on my own before he gets there and he looks annoyed, like I’m not letting him do his job.

“Ron. You were very nice today. This was fun. Thank you. You don’t have to do the chauffeur bit for me, you know? It’s enough that you’re watching out for me. I’m grateful, and I just wanted you to know it.”

He looks surprised…and irritable. I don’t think he’s used to talking to anyone who isn’t inside the company.

“Cool enough. No chauffeur gig. But pay attention when I tell you what to do out there. That’s my job, and I’ve never fucked up yet. If I say duck…you duck. If I say stay…you freeze. All clear? You’re welcome…whatta I call you, anyway? Drake?”

“Dee is good enough for me when I’m looking like this. Drake is so formal. I think…just Dee will do. Nice to make your acquaintance, Ron.”

“Likewise, Dee. See ya around. I’m headed back to the depot…as soon as I see that elevator go up. My job isn’t done until you’re indoors.”

“Okay, tough guy. Thanks again.”

I say it with a smile and make my way into the elevator. The old elevator here has been repaired recently. It moves like gliding silk, unlike a lot of the others in a city that’s been around as long as this one. They probably remodeled this whole building for Harry. The money involved just staggers my imagination. He must be planning to operate here for a good long while.

I have what I need to get along while Harry is out. I have a piano to practice so I can play something nice for him sometime soon. Maria and Therese are always good for gossip and girl chat, and there’s a library full of books that beg to be read at my leisure. I knew a day out would
put things back in perspective. The elevator door opens and I’m home. This is my home. Harry’s place. My little slice of heaven, even when he’s away and I miss him. I think I can get used to this.

TBC!!!
Big Chicago Part 10...By Samayel

I am getting used to it…being alone sometimes. It’s been a week since Harry left. I’ve enjoyed myself for the most part. Sometimes there’s such a thing as too much aloneness. I think I’ve accepted that this is where I live. I’m starting to feel less out of place and more at home. I wish I had things that made it ‘mine’. Like a picture of me and Harry somewhere, so I could have it by the bed. Maybe some mementos of a place we went together. I have ticket stubs from the museums, but they don’t look good on a wall. I have memories, but they only live behind my eyes. I’ll ask him for photos of us when he gets back. It would help a lot…I think.

Harry sent flowers from wherever he is…or had the people he works with send them. Two dozen roses, long stems intact. They’re beautiful, and the card with them was simple but sweet. ‘Even here, I am thinking of you. Love, Harry.’ I used to be suspicious of the worth of gestures like this, but it’s Harry, and I know he means it. I miss him terribly, but it helps a lot to know that, even with all the things he must have to worry about, he knows that I am here, missing him, and that a reminder that he’s well and thinking of me means so much right now. It reminds me that I am not an idiot for wanting him, even if I have to close my eyes to picture his handsome face.

Yes…I am a terminal sap and a closet romantic. Get over it.

I could paint a picture, but I’ll have to get supplies first. I’m pretty lousy, in my opinion, but with certain mediums it’s all subjective anyway. I don’t do well with pencil roughs, or charcoal, but I make do okay with oil, watercolors or acrylic. Then I could hang something on the wall somewhere. I think that’s a goal for my next trip out. Maybe I’ll have Ron take me somewhere where I can get a real Chicago deep dish pizza! Therese’s cooking is wonderful, but there are more than a few places in Chicago where they can make a truly good pizza.

Let me explain for the uninitiated. You may think that, in restaurants near where you live, that you have had a Chicago deep dish pizza. Unless you live in Chicago or have had one while you were here…you have been misinformed. If you can’t push a finger into it down to at least the second knuckle, it ain’t deep dish! Imagine a huge pie with no top crust, filled to the edge with sauce, meat, cheese and veggies. Big, greasy and bad for you if you try to take it all on at once…the very essence of Chicago. Bring friends…it helps. I expect Ron could knock out whatever I can’t finish. I’m not bringing back leftovers if I can help it…I’d hate to offend Therese.

Before or after lunch I could hit an art store and pick up a few supplies. And a tarp…because I wouldn’t dare get paint on carpets like these. I could set up in the music room. There’s still space for days. Pizza and shopping…I can live with that. I’ll save my pining and whining for when the lights go out, but for now, Ron is just a phone call away, and he’ll be here with the car in the usual five minutes. Possibly faster if I mention the deep dish pizza. On second thought, given his natural inclination toward speeding, I’d better tell him about that after we’re halfway there.

It’s off to Malnati’s. Let me explain again. Malnati’s may be a Chicago chain of pizzerias, but it’s a chain that happens to do deep dish pizzas and do them well. They weren’t the first, but they are one of the best. This is good eating that won’t make your wallet cry too. Ron even looks pretty happy, since deep dish pizza is generally eaten with a fork and knife because it’s so gooey that you can’t eat it by hand. No chopsticks for Ron this time!
We hit the art store first, and I spend a bit more than I planned, but not enough to make a serious
dent in the petty cash. I still have several hundred left, which means I can handle a few more trips
into town if I need to, but big time shopping is out until Harry gets back.

Harry. Riding in the car, alone in the back, it’s hard to distract myself from the way I miss him. I
don’t have all that many memories of him, but this backseat has some. Making the journey to the
beautiful place I live now, gambling on the hope that he was for real. Holding his hand quietly after
the words that made me want to be his and no one else’s. The luxury of that perfect cock filling my
mouth on the way home. Oh yeah…I really like that memory.

I used my ‘new toy’ the night before last. I made myself comfortable on the bed, with a nice fluffy
towel protecting the sheets. I used the lubricant I bought, since I didn’t want to waste the stuff
Harry keeps in the nightstand. I lavished a little more that the usual attention on myself, using
fingers carefully to get everything thoroughly slicked, then I nuded the head of it into myself.

There’s no shame in admitting it. I’m a very sybaritic, very sensual, creature of pleasure. I like to be
on my back, or on my stomach, as long as I’m the one who’s fussed over. With the exception of
moments when I have a point to make or when I’m almost dangerously excited, I like to be passive.
It’s like being worshiped, and I like the feel of that.

It wasn’t hard to slide a little more in at a time, because if you combine the considerable experience
I had before prison, and the years of it that came after, I’m very comfortable opening my body up
to entry. I know how to make it simple and comfortable. The only disappointment is that rubber, or
plastic, isn’t warm and alive, and there aren’t strong hands on my hips or shoulders. No lips to rain
kisses onto my shoulders. I was really just pressing the thing in and moving it slowly to stimulate
the lonesome and aching place inside of me that cries out for Harry. I haven’t used a toy in years,
and frankly it’s so awkward, posing that way, one arm twisted to reach the base of the toy and
manipulate it, that it’s hard to properly enjoy myself.

Still, it does the trick in a pinch. I needed it. The feeling of fullness, with no roughness or cruelty
attached. The soft nudge against nerves inside of me that need contact desperately now that they’ve
woken up. Having your ass battered by someone who hates you three to five times a week is NOT
sensual or stimulating. Harry made the part of me that craves real sex, real contact between lovers,
come back to life, made me want it to come alive, and now that it’s back…I’m almost as needy as I
was at eighteen. This isn’t the same, and no toy ever could be, but it’s the best I can come up with
for the moment.

It didn’t take much to finish when I finally wanted to. I didn’t really want it to be a brief and hasty
thing, so a half hour of lazily letting myself writhe in nervous desire around a thick, hard toy does
the job. When I couldn’t stand it anymore, and my prick was leaking pre-come onto my stomach, I
relented and let my hand do the rest, making a sticky and spotted trail on my chest and stomach
while my legs shook and I could feel myself clenching around the thing buried nicely inside of me.
Remembering it all while I relax in the back of the car is easy enough, but it does bring back the
point that, when I get home, Harry probably won’t be there to make the lingering feeling of
emptiness go away.

Malnati’s is always busy. That’s just the way it is in one of the best pizza joints around. Ron has
the place checked out and seats us near the exit, this time with his back to the wall as always. I’m
in my boy clothes, which is fine, but I get a few looks because I can’t help that I ‘swish’ a little
when I walk. I have never been ‘butch’ or tough. It just isn’t who or what I am. I’ll fight to survive
if I have to, but I know I haven’t got a chance in a brawl, because I’m too small to last more than a
few seconds. Struggling makes it hurt more, and after a while, you learn to let go. For me,
surviving is finding a man who is strong enough to protect me…and I think I’ve finally found that
in Harry.

The lunch rush is underway, and in a place like this class doesn’t really matter. When the prices are low, everybody rubs elbows with everybody else, and money doesn’t mean much here. One downside. Cro-Magnon, ass-ignorant construction types. They’re already giving me the hairy eyeball. I should have dressed up and come as Dee. For me, being a boy is always taking a risk, but being Dee is always an asset. Small wonder I prefer it. Ron gives a tiny nod when he sees the worried look on my face. He knows they’re there, talking shit just a few feet from us.

“Faggots make me puke! How are we supposed to eat in a place fulla queers?”

My face is burning. This was a stupid idea. I belong in higher class places where this can’t happen. I have no business coming here, where assholes breed like flies on dead meat. It’s like asking for trouble. I just wanted a pizza. Ron sighs softly and stands up.

“Funny thing. Ya can’t eat pizza through a straw. If you like those teeth, shut your fuckin’ hole.”

People are already moving away. Women are grabbing their children and leaning over them. What kind of animals make a scene like this in public over a person that just isn’t like them? The biggest one moves forward, finger pointed at Ron.

“Nobody asked you, you fuckin’ fairy bastar-AAAH! SHIT! FUCK! FUUUUUCK!”

I didn’t even see Ron’s hand move, but everyone here heard that finger snap. The big one is screaming and cursing, holding a hand with a finger that’s just been bent backwards until it snapped like a twig, but the others are moving forward. Ron opens his coat enough to show his pistol. That stops them cold.

“That’s right. You know what that is. Guess you’re not as dumb as the whores who shit you out. Is there anybody else with a fuckin’ comment? It’s all fun and games ‘til they scrape you off the pavement. Now fuck the hell off. Outta here, the buncha ya! Ya fuckin’ apes.”

Ron waits until the goons have cleared out, sullen and still talking trash under their breath. If there hadn’t been a gun, they still would have gotten their asses handed to them, but that type is too dumb to know it until it happens, then they look surprised when they wake up in a hospital. The world is chock full of losers just like them, and the only advantage they have in life is that they breed faster than real people. Ron gives me a nod that says it’s time to go, and we’re out and headed for the car. Same rule for any incident. Immediate departure, then rendezvous at the safe point and wait for a report.

He takes me to the depot. It really is close by. Just a dozen blocks away in what looks like an old mechanic’s shop. There’s an automatic car lift that moves us into a basement garage. There are other cars here, vans and trucks and cabs, police cars and city vehicles or ones that look like them, as well as repair equipment to match any garage in the city, a couple of motorcycles, two ATV’s and even a few bicycles. Must be for gridlock traffic days. No one gets places faster than a bicyclist downtown. I’m kind of honored to even be here. It feels like I’m trusted…sort of. I guess this was necessary. But Ron was so cool about it all. I’m glad he was there.

He’s out of the car and motions for me to follow. He jacks his phone into some kind of antenna system that will get a signal out of the basement, and makes a single call.

“Just had to tell them what happened. We’ll be using a different vehicle until I repaint the other. Get your bags and put them in the black Lincoln Towncar. As soon as the office crowd checks the chatter on the police bands and makes a hasty search of law enforcement computers, we can roll out and get you back to the penthouse.”

“Ron…do you live here? You’re always so close by, and I thought…where would you live in here?”

“Upstairs. Nice place too. Maybe not Harry’s, but pretty sweet for a guy who drives a car. I’m on call twenty-four seven, so I have to be near Harry’s place and near my vehicles at all times.”

“What do you do for fun?”

“Fun? Are you kidding me?! It’s a garage with cars! This is fun central! It’d be nice if I could have more than a single beer someday, but that’s a driver’s life for you. Other than that, I get cable TV, all the music I can jam to, and a bank account that will let me buy an island somewhere before I’m forty! I got the good life.”

“Don’t you get bored? Do you ever go over to Harry’s? You two are friends, right?”

“Well, yeah. I did. No offense, I just haven’t been over a lot ‘cause Harry is gone or all about you right now. I’m sure once you guys settle down a little, I’ll be over for a poker game some time.”

“I’m very glad you were with me today. I’m just sorry we didn’t get any pizza.”

“Don’t even sweat it. Comes with the job. Bodyguards guard bodies. Nobody is putting so much as a finger on you while I’m on duty! Besides, there are two dozen Malnati’s all over town. We’ll try it again sometime, alright? Now if you’ll excuse me, I gotta switch out some license plates while you get your stuff into the Lincoln. As soon as I get the call, we’re outta here.”

“Okay.”

I pack away the bags from the art store and take a seat near a pile of magazines. Mostly car magazines. Some motorcycle ones here and there in the mix. Nice guy, Ron…just not a deep thinker. No wonder I love Harry. Same reason he’d want me, I guess. It makes sense all of a sudden. I can’t share Moliere or Mozart with everyone. Hardly anyone most of the time. It doesn’t make other people bad…that they don’t enjoy these things. That’s not the point. The point is that I like them. I miss them. And Harry understands them, and enjoys them, and that enjoyment is even greater when they’re shared. He probably likes his friends a lot, but they aren’t the same. When he gets home…if we have time, we’ll talk again at our leisure. Well…as soon as I exhaust his body and mine enough to merit wasting time speaking.

In the meantime, Ron is installing plates on the Lincoln, and I can hear his cell phone ring. That’s our call. I put aside the magazine and head for the car.

“Ron. Check. Car two is now in operation. Car one down for remodel. Check…Understood. Ron out.”

The snap of phone closing and he’s in the driver’s seat. Five minutes later I’m home. I love saying that. It’s still so new for me. This is my home. This is my life. This is not a bad state of affairs. I thank Ron before I go, and he just gives a terse grunt and a thumbs up sign.

“I mean that, Ron. I’m glad you were there. Thanks for taking care of me like this. I know it isn’t exactly what you want to be doing, but you’re as good at it as Harry said you were.” Ha…I made the big goof blush.
“Knock it off already! You’re a piece of alright yourself, Dee. Hey…mind if I ask you something?”

“Nah…go ahead…fire away.”

“I heard some of the stuff outta the files. How’d someone like you wind up in a place like that at eighteen? It just doesn’t figure. I know it was coke and all that, but how did you wind up doing something like that? Just doesn’t seem like you. You don’t hafta answer if you don’t want to. Just curious.”

What can you do? I smile and shake my head.

“I was in love…or something like it. He asked me to do something for him, and I did it. I know I shouldn’t have, and I know I paid for it in spades, but that’s why I did it. That’s why I kept my mouth shut and took the time.”

“Damn. You took the hit and went down for seven years because of some guy? That’s a tough break, kiddo. If it happened all over again…and it was Harry on the line…whattaya think you’d do this time?”

As if I even need to think before I answer.

“Whatever he needs me to do. A lot more than I did for the last guy. You were right…Harry is different, and there’s no one and nothing I want more than him.”

He’s quiet for a few seconds, mulling over the answer that came without a second thought.

“I guess that’s good enough. You’re a piece of alright, Dee. See ya next time. Get in that elevator and be good to yourself, right?”

“If you say so, hero.”

I say it with a smirk and make my way in. He’s got layers to him, our Ronny-boy. If the notion of red hair and freckles didn’t make me gag, I’d say he was a prime catch in his own right. But I’m just a push button away from paradise, and my one and only man is Harry James Potter.

I’m famished, since I never did get that pizza, but Therese already has some concoction brewing that smells heavenly. I’m not sure what it is, but I can tell that leeks and chive are in the mix somewhere. Who cares? If she makes it, it will be good, and I’ll eat every bite. I kill time before lunch by setting up my new easel, laying out the tarp, setting up canvases and preparing a palette. I also unpack the smock I got for myself, so I don’t spoil otherwise nice clothing.

One corner of the room looks fit for a true musician, the other looks well prepared for a painter. Lunch is served, and Maria and Therese and I dine on a thick soup that is just out of this world. Therese baked some pumpernickel bread on the side, and it’s fresh and hot. I can smear as much butter as I want on it. The butter is French…sweet, salted, real cream butter. The kind where the salt content is from real salt, and it makes a tiny crust around the edge of the brick of butter. Just incredible…that such a simple thing as bread and butter can be so good. Wonderbread and Land O’ Lakes…eat your heart out! This…this is the staff of life. This and the soup make up handsomely for the pizza I didn’t get to enjoy earlier.

The rest of my day is booked up in what I call the ‘music room’. Even though it really is more than that, I can’t think of it as anything else. I play until my fingers ache, pushing myself to take back what I’ve lost. Schubert’s Moment Musical #3. It isn’t an overwhelmingly complex piece, but it is fun and makes practice more interesting. I won’t compromise. I want it all back, every iota of skill
and talent that slid down the toilet while I wasted a life I almost ruined for good. When my fingertips pulse and throb I relent, and then it’s time to try some painting. Oil on canvas, smock in place over my least pricey outfit, trying to vent what I’ve felt for the last decade.

I used to be good at this in school, but like so many things, I’ve lost a bit of my edge from lack of practice. The brush strokes aren’t steady or sure, and to be frank, my sense of proportion is more than a little off. The perspective never seems quite right. I don’t care…it doesn’t matter…because this is about release…not perfectionism. I’m not Rembrandt, or DaVinci, or Chagall, and I never will be. But I can put who I am and what I’ve seen onto canvas, letting it out of my skull and transporting it onto cloth for the world to see. That’s good enough for me.

I should have picked up way more black, white, and gray. What else would a person who was in a shitty little cell for so long paint? I didn’t really notice it until I was working on a third canvas, but they’re all distorted scenes of the penitentiary. Hollow-eyed men shuffling mindlessly, staring upwards as if waiting for a miracle or a sign, hungry to see the sun again. Cold-eyed guards in uniforms that blur ever so slightly, watching the milling lines of men in gray.

This last one is really the best effort of the three, or at the least, I like the subject so much that I’m pleased either way. Harry. In front of that cell, his back turned and only a hint of his jaw and face visible. I couldn’t get the texture of his hair right…and admittedly he was wearing a shirt when it really happened, but I like this. The shading around his torso and head gave him an aura of power that is deserved. The muscles along his back are nearly right. Someone more talented or more practiced could do better than this, give the moment the justice it deserved, but this is the best I can do…and it isn’t bad. I might just hang this one somewhere in here once it dries and cures.

After a nice dinner and some conversation with Therese and Maria while we clean up the kitchen, I take my leisure in the library, in the huge, padded leather chair next to a small table and an exquisite little lamp. It’s just me and Samuel Taylor Coleridge for a few hours. Even through the opium, the man’s brilliance shines. Don’t think ill of him for being stoned most of his life. He had afflictions of several kinds that would have left him in crippling agony if it hadn’t been for the soothing power of the poppy. He produced his most scintillating works within a few years, captivated the attention of his peers even during his own time, and he produced very little that wasn’t memorable. The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner, Christabel, Kubla Khan…all three poems have endured as classics for almost two hundred years. The English, in the great scheme of things, may have been a big thorn in the rest of the world’s ass, but the bastards really knew how to write.

To drink the milk of Paradise, indeed. No Paradise or ‘milk’ to drink for me…at least until Harry comes back. Admittedly, I think clearer now that he’s gone. When I think about it carefully, I know he makes me irrational. Even before we spoke, just staring at him from across a crowded prison, he made me feel emotions so easily. Fear, anger, envy, desire…and it was happening before I realized it. Something primal in him makes me his, without a word spoken between us. The smart, calculating survivor in me stumbles and crashes, and the giddy queen snaps to attention and takes over. It’s a weakness, I know, but I guess I like being weak.

When he’s gone, my mind is back, even if it flutters with memories of him and crazy, lurking desires at every turn. I can think about where I am and what I want, and even here…now…lonely and horny and curled around a book and a glass of mimosa, I want him back. He wants me to define myself…and I think I want to let myself be defined by him. I could be anything I want, but I am a lazy fool because I want nothing more than to be his?

Sometimes I wish that I were less intelligent, less given to introspection and more a creature of blind passion, living on instinct and whim, never questioning my own reasons. It would be easier. Fewer hard questions. I think that’s why I really did those things when I was a teenager. Drugs and
sex and loud music took the edge off my mind, set me free from worries, and erased those pesky questions from a mind that wasn’t ready to handle them. Just because a person is smart or gifted, it doesn’t mean that they can handle what they perceive. Emotions are the great leveler. Everyone has them, rich and poor, man and woman, black and red and white and yellow, gay and straight. We’re all confused, and frightened, and desperately uncertain of what to do next. The only edge anyone really has is how well they cover for it, and how cool they can look to the rest of the world while they wrestle with their fears in silence. I can do that pretty well, so I guess that makes me one of the lucky ones…but it still sucks.

I’ll sleep, and dream, and eat and paint and play and come alone for as long as it takes. Harry will be back, and he’ll make me not-think and just feel, and what he makes me feel is good. I can wait. For him. As long as I have to. Maybe I’ll stumble onto an answer or two while I’m waiting, and maybe…just maybe…I’ll work out what I want to be and what I want to do. But I know what I want to say. I whisper it into a pillow that holds a hint of his scent every night.

“I love you, Harry. Please come back to me…soon.”

TBC!!!
Big Chicago Part 11...by Samayel

On her eighteenth birthday, Nymphadora Tonks changed her name. Her mother was Andromeda Starchild Tonks, and as much Dora loved her mother…the woman was a hippie of epic proportions. The tail end of the Sixties and the dawn of the Seventies had seen Dora’s mother stoned on acid and tripping at concerts around the country, offering up Free Love to anyone handsome enough to merit it. As a consequence, Dora had been raised without a father, first in small communes, and finally in a quiet rural neighborhood in Wisconsin. Her mother had lavished attention upon her, and clearly loved her baby girl, but she hadn’t had the first clue regarding what it would be like to enter a junior high school and spend the remainder of her school days nicknamed ’Nympho-Doorknob…everybody gets a turn’.

Dora wasn’t really very much like her mother. She was generally a friendly enough person, and cheerful and outgoing in her own way, but the resemblance stopped there. She’d always been more capable of concentration than her mother, and positively hopeless at art and music. For all her mother’s best efforts, she never really enjoyed making music with any instrument enough to learn it, or creating via some artistic medium enough to practice. She liked looking at art…or hearing music, but to her mother’s utter and complete horror, Dora Tonks had been quite good at math and science, and liked books that were less about fiction and more about facts.

Andromeda Tonks had been so proud of her daughter’s scholarship to the University Of Wisconsin, but the choice of majors to study had baffled and frightened her. Dora had gone immediately into a Criminal Justice program, with minors in Psychology and Forensic Science. Her desire to work in law enforcement had been the source of dozens of heated arguments between her mother and her self, always in the same vein. The cops were the bad guys…the Pigs…the Blue Meanies…the Man…and corrupt right down to their socks. Law and jurisprudence were evil incarnate, and part and parcel of every horrifying conspiracy to diminish happiness and the pursuit thereof. This didn’t stop Dora one bit.

She’d argued and argued well that, even if it was a bad system, it was because good people had fled from it, and only when people who had a conscience became the majority would anything really change. She at least managed to get her mother to admit that the world could certainly use a few actual good cops, even though Andromeda was skeptical that such a thing could even exist.

Dora Tonks graduated fourth in a class of several thousand men and women, having made the Dean’s List every semester without fail, with a grade point average just a hair shy of perfect, and letters of recommendation from three of her professors. Her application for training as a police cadet was accepted immediately, and Andromeda Starchild Tonks’ little girl grew up to be a cop. That hadn’t been enough by a long shot.

Dora put her time in as a patrol cop, pushing constantly for a crack at a detective slot. She earned it, even when some of the guys claimed it was purely because she was a chick, and though it wasn’t her first goal, she accepted a promotion to the Vice Squad. She’d seen an awful lot during that time, and very little of it was happy in nature. Drugs, prostitution, gambling and all the human suffering that came with them. Maybe that was why she’d let herself fall in love. She’d needed to believe in something…anything that said the world could be a good place.

Her husband had been a decent enough man, and good looking as older men go. He was a detective
from another precinct, and therefore safe to interact with, and he was very soft spoken and quiet as a rule…except when he drank. Things had slid downhill in just a matter of two years. His drinking had gotten worse and worse, and even though he never hit her, or did the any of the other awful things that men often do, he became cold and distant, and they argued constantly while she tried to get him to quit the bottle. It was a battle she couldn’t win, and almost didn’t want to before it was over. As ex-husbands went, Remus was pretty okay, since he stayed quiet and out of her way while she got on with her life…and the life of their daughter, Diana.

Diana had been the one constant joy in her life since the day she was born, and though many things had changed in Dora Tonks’ life, the joyful leap in her heart when she saw her daughter’s face hadn’t changed a bit. It had kept her going through working nights as an undercover cop, enduring endless gropings and touches during her time reeling in men for solicitation. She’d seen more than a few dirty cops as well as downright evil human beings in those times, and the overwhelming majority had been men. Could anyone doing that for a living have blamed her turning to women? The truth was that she’d been inclined that way as far back as she could recall…but like so many deeply personal things it was the one issue she hadn’t tackled and dealt with immediately. It had taken years to come to terms with the fact that favored women over men by a wide margin, but eventually she’d worked it out in her own time and way.

Her emergence as a lesbian hadn’t been easy, but having co-workers who thought well of you and trusted you could take the edge off of anything. She wasn’t the only gay or lesbian detective on the job, but she was the only one ever promoted to the homicide branch of the Organized Crime Task Force in the heart of Chicago. It was the crowning moment of her career, and a job that she truly loved. To top it all off, less than six months after making the Task Force her new home, Dora Tonks had found a lover.

Luna was frighteningly similar to Dora’s mother at times, and yet oddly better grounded at the same time. She was, of all things, an artist whose mediums were oil, watercolor, acrylic, and charcoal, and she was hanging her new display in an upscale coffeehouse on Halsted St. when Dora had nipped in for a latte. It was the gay friendly end of town, part of the long strip that made up Boystown, but despite the patriarchal nickname, more than a few shops there were owned, staffed and patronized almost exclusively by lesbians. The art was beautiful, and she hadn’t been able to keep her eyes off the slim neck and shoulders of the young woman hanging canvases on the wall. Staring turned to conversation, and conversation to dates, and dates inevitably led to something oh so much more.

Luna made a marvelous lover. Thoughtful, sweet, and perfect with little Diana, and even Andromeda had fallen for the smiling, earnest young woman that was almost more akin to her than her own child. They’d made a nice life for themselves here, and Dora could call herself truly content at last. If they could be said to have an occasional conflict, it would have to be over some of Luna’s wilder theories about the way the world worked. Dora could barely bite her tongue through some of them, and every now and then she lost it and just laughed out loud, which always pissed Luna off to no end.

One month it was the Freemasons, another it was the Templar Knights. It could be the TV networks, or the big corporations, or the Tri-Lateral Commission that ran the world and made it full of bad things, but every week it was something new. Area 51 was full of dead aliens and their technology, black helicopters were mutilating cattle for government experiments, and the genetic modification of food was a secret plan to control the world…if the stuff they put in the water to clean it for drinking didn’t turn everyone into zombies first. Sometimes it was a bit much, but when someone worries over you when you work too much, raises your child with you, and in every little way brightens your life, you can forgive an awful lot.
Remus hadn’t been any trouble. She suspected that, deep down, he was glad it wasn’t some other man, and he could comfort himself by saying that she hadn’t wanted a man at all. Maybe he was even right, but as long as he was content to leave Dora and their daughter alone and untroubled, who cared what he believed? She really just hoped that he’d get it together someday and have a better life of his own. He’d never been much for taking help or charity from others, and he wouldn’t admit that he was self medicating for depression and anxiety. He was clearly not violent, and with a little help, she could see him having the life he deserved. Still, at the end of the day, her attention was focused firmly on the things that mattered most. Her family, and her work.

Dora’s partner was another oddball in a profession dominated by white males. Kingsley Shacklebolt. The man had a heart of gold, and Dora was glad she’d been assigned to work with him from day one. He was well over six feet tall, black as coal, and weighed two hundred and thirty pounds, none of it fat even now, and he was just past forty years old. Kingsley had played football at Duke University, and earned every honor he’d ever received. Once again, the blue collar boys loved to say that he’d gotten his job just for being black, and maybe that hadn’t hurt, but the man was brilliant, energetic, hard working and just damned good at what he did. There was no doubt in Dora’s mind about how he’d gotten his rank.

Kingsley had been nicknamed Shaq, against his many protests, since he couldn’t play basketball worth a shit, but that was what the boys in the office called him anyway. Not that he didn’t enjoy watching it, but his bulky size had all been channeled into football, and he’d been outstanding in his day. He was well read, polite to a fault, funny, and tolerant of most other people’s bullshit. For a nervous lesbian newly assigned to a very demanding job, Kingsley had been a godsend. He was happily married, had two children he adored, and treated his partner with complete respect, occasionally even sharing their personal lives. Kingsley and his wife Deirdre had enjoyed dinner at Dora and Luna’s, and vice-versa, several times over the last three years, and Dora’s partner was quite truthfully one of the best friends she’d ever had.

Today, they’d started early with a review of the penitentiary documents and interviews, going back over the mish mash of wild rumors and eerie silence that surrounded the whole case. Nothing productive had turned up in almost a week. Word of mouth testimony from prisoners, which couldn’t be trusted, claimed that a man named Harry Black had started it all, but there wasn’t a shred of paperwork left on the mystery man who supposedly provoked the riot. The computers had nothing on him. Only a couple of guards had anything worthwhile to say, and one of them turned out to be a raging lush. Everyone else agreed that it was a war between rival gangs, which broke out because of agreements that had been dishonored and because of threats that couldn’t be ignored. Again, rumor placed the blame on a new arrival, and the only lead they had on that man’s whereabouts was a flimsy story about his being transferred to the SuperMax facility a day after the riot. No prisoner ever arrived at the SuperMax facility matching any description they had available, and the paperwork for the transfer seemed to have been lost in the shuffle of post-riot cleanup.

It was looking a bit like they’d have to call it a mystery or hand the case off to the feds. The local impact was chilling. Tension had flared between the criminal organizations whose members had been killed in the riot. No violence yet, but a lot of ugly chatter on the street. The last thing anyone wanted was for someone to light the fuse on this powder keg of emotions…and then someone did. This morning as a matter of fact.

Somewhere around two in the morning, an unknown man had walked out of a small bar and bistro in an Italian neighborhood, leaving behind six dead men. Four ‘soldiers’, one capo and a courier. The Italians were keeping quiet about everything, but secretly blamed the Russians, who had lost one man in the riots compared to the Italian’s three. The other death in the prison riot was from a Chinese Tong, and they were harder to get a word out of than the Italians.
There were no solid answers at the scene. There were no witnesses left alive from the massacre in the backroom, and it looked like a professional revenge hit had taken place. When mobsters tired of a competitor, they usually kept it quieter than this, or sometimes just shot it out with smaller numbers. One problem, one target. Not here. Every man in the room had been killed by one of two guns used at the scene, both nine millimeter pistols, likely silenced. There were no significant pieces of evidence left, and it was almost certainly because some employee of the place had opened in the morning and called his boss, who quickly got people down there to remove any evidence of illegal activity. The names of the victims were all known, and there were no questions as to whether or not they were in the mob, but the ‘image’ of honesty had to be maintained. There was no telling what clues might have been missing by the time the cops became involved.

Kingsley was pulling the video records from every ATM in the area, and from several of the surrounding stores and gas stations. Anyone who had a view of the nearby streets and might have seen the killer before or after the crime. Dora herself was picking apart the scene with tweezers and gloves, while the crime scene photographer prepped for his second round of pictures.

‘Creepy’ Creevey was a pasty-faced, skinny, whiny pain in the ass, but he took good pictures, and he could develop them carefully enough to pick out details that most people would miss. Given his skill, people forgave the fact that he was annoying as hell, but that didn’t mean they liked working with him, and Dora was no exception. There was just something wrong about a man who passionately loved photographing murder scenes.

“Looks like I’ll be raking in overtime if this keeps heating up! Second set’s finished, Detective. Any ideas on who might have done what?”

Dora answered quietly. “Not really. And stop sounding happy about this, Creevey! This is the last thing anyone wants. This could easily bleed over into public shoot outs. There’s nothing to be cheery about here…so pipe down!”

Today’s largest annoyance had been the total absence of any staff for the bar. Whoever had opened the place probably had some warrants out for his arrest on something minor, and he wasn’t showing his face anywhere. No one had heard shots, and no one living nearby had seen anything out of the ordinary. It was normal for people to keep quiet after something like this, since they didn’t want to get involved or draw the wrath of already angry mobsters, but the complete lack of information was still frustrating.

Kingsley slipped back in through the door of the office, a cup of coffee in one hand and a handful of videos in the other.

“Guess what?”

“Bad news?”

“Is there another kind? You won’t believe this shit. There was a power outage. A ’flicker’ that lasted eight minutes. Guess when?”

“Oh shit! Somewhere near two in the morning, right?”

“You got it, hot stuff. Two twenty-three until two thirty-one in the morning. There wasn’t a worthwhile image of anything on this entire grid during those minutes. I’m thinking this is no coincidence.”

Dora soaked in the reality of what Kingsley had just said. “Sweet Christ! They hacked the city power grid just to make sure there were no cameras in operation at the local gas stations and
ATMs. What the hell kind of outfit are we dealing with here? The locals never do it that clean. They haven’t shot the city up in decades. I knew something was weird about that prison riot deal! I hate to admit it, but we’re going to have to call in the feds.”

“You’re reading my mind. This is bigger than us…an’ we ain’t small, sister. Shit…cell phone again. Can you hold the tapes?”

Dora took the small stack of CD’s and VCR cassettes from Kingsley while he fumbled with his cell phone.

“Detective Kingsley here. What?! Where? We can be there in ten minutes. Thanks.”

The cell phone snapped shut and Kingsley sipped his coffee deeply before he smiled and rolled his eyes.

“Bad just got worse. We got two dead Russians and what we think is a Czech national with no papers in a trailer behind a warehouse west of here. Looks like the lid is off Pandora’s Box, and it ain’t hope at the bottom of it. We gotta roll. You finished here?”

Dora Tonks stood and peeled off her gloves, pocketing her forceps and sighing.

“Yeah. I’ve got my statements and the reports from the local beat cops. It’s enough for now, but we’ll have to backtrack and check up on a few things later. You know…I love this job, but I kinda hoped I’d never see an all out mob war. A lot of people could get hurt in this, Kingsley.”

“I know…I know, kiddo. Nobody wants something like this. I’d rather bust pimps and dealers and bookies any day, but it looks like we drew the short straw. ‘May you live in interesting times’ is an ancient curse for a reason.”

“True enough. Let’s go…the local boys can handle the clean up.”

Dora trudged toward the car, fishing her cell phone from her pocket. She’d have to call Luna while they were driving to the next site. It looked like this would be the first of many late nights in the office.

Remus Lupin cracked his eyes open at ten in the morning and stared at the cheap ceiling fan swinging above him. Round and round. Just like him…except that it served its purpose. What did he do that was worth anything?

‘Get up. Get up and take the fucking pills, Moony. Take the pills. Dora would want you to. Diana would want you to do this. Just get up off the bed…take the fucking pills…and you’ll be alright.’

Remus was a tired man of nondescript appearance, in a shabby little room, in a shabby old suit. The only thing that distinguished him from the type that people called hobos was the worn out private investigator’s badge he carried. That and his old .38 revolver. A lot of guys on the force had switched to the new nine millimeters and loved them, but Remus had refused to part with the service revolver he’d had since he was a beat cop on nights almost twenty years ago.

It was tough to get a gun with a condition like his these days, but a lot was possible if you were a likable ex-cop who still had a few friends in the right places. Remus knew he had problems, but he’d never once thought of hurting others. Only himself. Dora had thrown around words like
cyclical depression and anxiety, along with the usual smattering of comforting remarks about how normal it was and how easily it could be treated. He had problems even more significant than those. Remus hated doctors…and the only thing he hated more than doctors…was taking pills. Even vitamins had made him break out in a cold sweat when he was kid. It wasn’t a rational fear, but it was his, and he was comfortable with that fear.

Sometimes the anxiety would hit harder than usual. It felt like the walls were closing in. People were always too loud and too fucking close and his heart wouldn’t stop pounding until he’d had a half a fifth of whiskey to take the edge off of it. Sometimes the depressions were just as bad. It was a fight just to get off the bed and make it out the door, much less shave and shower and make the rounds looking for work or getting jobs done. Working as a PI gave him a certain freedom, but with his reputation in the shitter, good jobs didn’t often come his way.

Remus didn’t have an office. He had a motel room, a pocket full of business cards, and a cell phone. On the bright side, he knew all the right people in this town, and he had resources in the police precincts that a lot of guys in the same line of work just didn’t have. He had a laptop computer, several cameras, and a little black book with so many informant numbers and contacts that it wasn’t hard for him to dig up dirt on cheating husbands or insurance frauds. It wasn’t exactly a noble cause, but the pay was just enough to keep the clerk at The Lucky Ace Motel from throwing him out.

‘You can get it over with quick if you hurry. Take the pills. You’ll feel better fast if you just knock ’em back quick, Moony. You can do this. For Diana. You can see your baby girl again if you just take the fucking pills.’

Remus rolled off the rumpled sheets and lurched to the bathroom. He’d left two pills on the counter beside a glass of water, same as every night. He snatched them up and dropped them in the water, then sucked the whole thing back a second later, trying to gulp them down while his gag reflex rebelled against the knowledge of what he was doing. It hurt every time. He’d got them down, but he’d been painfully conscious of every second that the horrid things had been crawling down his throat. He couldn’t explain it, but he knew it made his skin crawl to even think of it.

The man in the mirror was unkempt and red-eyed, with eyes that had bags under them that you pack and travel to Europe on, and a mustache as streaked with gray as the rest of his thinning brown hair.

“Attaboy, Moony. Now let’s go photograph some adulterers in action, cause it’s time to pay the rent, fucker.”

Remus splashed some water on his face and ran his wet hands through his hair, slicking down the unruly bits and lamenting the few hairs that always came away in his hands. Christ. He wasn’t even forty five years old. Why did he have to be the one who started balding at thirty? Dora had liked him anyway, but he’d fucked that up…just like everything else in his life.

A hasty morning leak and a quick check of his equipment, and Remus Lupin was tucking a small camera, his black book and cell phone, and his notepad and pens into his coat. He locked up his room behind him and headed for the bus stop. It was a lucky thing he looked more like a hobo than a PI. In this neighborhood, if people thought you had money, they took it from you however they could.

He was already late, but hey…if the jerk he was tailing lately would just conveniently give in and fuck his secretary instead of his wife at the right time, this would all be over and Remus could score a fat payday plus expenses. In the meantime, there was a greasy spoon diner where the Greek waitress liked him, and he could get a cup of coffee and a second to go for a buck.
It was the start of another shitty day, and it was one of many that were just the same as the ones before them, but he’d already had three little victories. He was still alive…it was his fifty-third day without a drink…and he’d taken the fucking pills every morning this week. Dora would be proud. But first…he really needed that cup of fucking coffee.

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Johnny Wu loved his life. He ran a string of girls for his boss, and collected ‘insurance’ from a small section of Chinatown businesses. It was an easier job than some had, even though the girls were a pain sometimes. On the bright side, he could afford any girl he liked, and new girls always provided him with nice distractions if they wanted a steady clientele or a good location to ply their trade. That’s what brought him out tonight.

He left his two bodyguards in the car, waggling his eyebrows suggestively, savoring the knowledge that he always got the most premium girls as often as he liked. Waiting upstairs and down a hall was a nineteen year old from just outside Shanghai that had been in the U.S. less than three months, and had worked for him for less than three weeks. Without bad habits or a long history behind her, she was still pretty, but had just enough experience to do all the right things. She wasn’t any better or any worse than any other girl Johnny visited, but she was new, and that made her a refreshing change of pace.

The upstairs hall was empty as always, and the old couple that ran the restaurant downstairs was already asleep. Johnny popped a key into the lock and entered the room, already half-hard with anticipation. The little apartment was basically a bedroom, a mini kitchen, and a bathroom with a shower, but it was good enough to keep new arrivals in until it was time for them to start working a little on their own. The TV on the floor was flickering static, then suddenly shut off entirely, along with the clock next to the bed. Even the streetlights had gone out. Fucking city power. Useless fucks. The set of mattresses that served as a bed was in the center of the room.

Johnny stepped in and closed the door behind him, taking the nice watch he always wore and his good rings off and slipping them into his coat pocket. She was sleeping on her stomach, black hair braided long and down her back, a coil of midnight against pale and silky skin that he knew well. The tattoo of his gang was fresh on her right shoulder, and stood out starkly in the moonlight from the window.

“Hey. Wake up! Time to earn your keep…lazy girl!”

Johnny slid his coat off and dropped it onto the floor beside the bed, kicking off his shoes while he spoke. The lazy cow didn’t move at all. She was sleeping like she actually worked for a living, instead of humping a few tricks a day. He’d remind her that she could be fucking fifty tricks a day if he wanted her to, as soon as he enjoyed himself first.

He prodded her ass with his foot. The worthless bitch didn’t even budge! He’d had other girls who got onto drugs, and while they did what they were told to get their fix, it was often as much of a pain in the ass as if they were sober. Had the silly little thing gotten her hands on some dope? He rolled her over and slapped her face just hard enough to wake anyone up, then peeled her eyes open. As he’d half expected, she was as high as a kite, but who the fuck could have gotten her drugs without his permission? Someone was fucking around with one of his girls, and Johnny Wu didn’t take that lightly. That’s when the loud click behind him registered in his brain.

The bathroom. Someone else was here, and that click could only mean one thing. Johnny raised his hands slowly, hoping negotiation might buy him some time while he turned slow to face the
intruder.

“Easy there. No trouble. No gun on me either, man. We can talk about this…work something out. Girls, some money…I know people…we can make you pretty happy, you know?”

The man behind was dressed almost entirely in black, and the gun in his gloved hand had a silencer on it. He looked more like a commando than anything else, and even in the black hood, dark suit, dark shirt and and dark tie he looked like a pro. Johnny’s stomach flipped when he looked into the green eyes of the stranger. Disgust, loathing, contempt…but nothing remotely like mercy.

“Nothing personal. I’m a messenger…you’re just the message…but the fact that you’re a piece of shit makes this a lot easier.”

Johnny almost got a word out before the harsh chuff of the silencer preceded the explosion of his skull. The body hit the floor only a second before the man left the room, and in the street below, the two men waiting for Johnny Wu never even saw the shadow that slipped from around a corner and unloaded a half dozen quiet slugs through the open windows of the car, tearing through their necks and skulls with brutal efficiency.

Six minutes later, the streetlights came back on, and alarm clocks blinked in every apartment for a block in any direction. The man in black was already long gone. When the girl in the bed came to, she panicked, frightened by what she saw on the floor, but she had enough sense to grab Johnny’s fat wallet and leave fast, taking her chances anywhere but where she’d already been. She knew better to stay in a place where a stranger in a black hood and gloves had shoved a funny smelling cloth into her face until she passed out. Johnny Wu was dead, and there was no telling what would happen to her when Johnny’s people came looking for him. One bus ticket later, she was long gone and headed to places she’d never heard of, but anywhere was safer than what she’d left behind.

TBC!!!
Another day in paradise. The only kind I ever have...now. I’ve read books and played the piano, painted pictures and eaten like a king. I finally started exercising, since I noticed a certain softness near my middle that wasn’t there a week ago. Nothing overwhelming, since exhausting myself any way other than dancing or sex isn’t quite my style, but it should be enough to keep me fit for Harry. Especially for some of the outfits I picked up. I love showing midriff again, now that I only want to show it to one person for one reason. In the pen I always went shirtless or wore my issue shirt hitched up to create the illusion of breasts. Now I have the simple 'falsies' that slip into place and let me make some of these outfits look as good as they should. I have developed an serious aversion to pink though.

I think it’s because pink, in prison, was a symbol of femininity, and there was a bitter implication of being less of a human being that came with it. Insulting to me both as a queen, and as a person who believes that men and women are equals. Only where the majority is comprised of genuinely un-evolved, thoroughly subhuman bastards, could one envision a world where being feminine is a failing, or a shortcoming. My nails were pink for seven years. The sliver of ribbon in my ponytail was pink. Pink meant pussy…property…slavery. It meant cheap grease fingered into my ass so that I could take a fucking whenever I was told to. I used to like pink, but I think it’s something I will never be able to completely get over. Now I like black. Or white. Or metallic blue. Or the silvery gray that I think compliments my eyes. Anything but pink.

Harry has been gone for days. I stopped watching the TV…nothing but Daddy running off at the mouth and the usual nonsense that people call news. The latest scare-mongering over a flesh-eating virus that one person in a million ever catches. Sound bites from politicians and other criminals. Advertisements flogging away at why we desperately, frantically, urgently need to BUY THIS NOW! What a fucking joke. The right pimple cream won’t get you a date with a cheerleader, the right cologne won’t make you a celebrity, the right soda won’t make you an athlete, and the right beer won’t make your boss stop being an asshole and conjure up a beach full of sun-worshipping female volleyball players. It’s enough to make you puke, but it pays the bills, so that stations can keep broadcasting material handed to them on scripts, or quote ‘research’ handed to them by special interests, in between ‘reality shows’ that are spectacularly unreal.

It would be a dangerous thing if anyone in the news actually used the scientific method or carefully investigated anything…which is why it’s now legal to sue broadcasters for saying anything ‘harmful’ to a company. To stay safe, news shows stick to well rehearsed scripts of pseudo-news. Nice and safe. No blame cast at the direction of anyone powerful enough to fight back. This is the country of freedom. But we’re also free to intimidate, bankrupt or bully journalists, and the corporations that employ them, into silence. Only when something has been so blatantly exposed that no doubt is left, do the networks take a gamble on airing anything controversial. Can you blame me for hitting the off switch on the channel changer?

I have just enough money left for one good night at a club. Nothing too much, just a chance to have a couple of drinks, make some men drool, and dance until I feel better. Dance is primal, and along with the voice, the creation of the drum, and cave-painting, it was one of the earliest forms of human artistic expression. From the moment we leave behind our mother’s heartbeat above us, and venture out into the world, we search for rhythm. Of course, some of us search in vain, and find
polka or Lawrence Welk. I don’t think I could have survived the era when such things were considered the height of ‘cool’. I still suspect that Hell is an elevator, where the greatest hits of Lawrence Welk are played through eternity…as Muzak. That notion still makes me shiver. Still, all I want tonight is to forget that Harry is gone for a little while, and to remember that I can break hearts easily when I want to.

I used the computer, since the nightclub landscape has changed since I was free, and I need somewhere other than Pansy’s hangout. I’m not honestly sure if I could resist coke a second time…with Harry gone and an empty bed as my reward for being a good boy and doing the right thing. There’s a newer club called the Fire House that’s well rated and supposedly red-hot. I’ll try it out and see if it meets my standards.

I could just have a nice dinner out. Maybe Charlie Trotter’s. It isn’t haute cuisine, but it’s one of a handful of restaurants in the U.S. that actually merited a Michelin rating, and they are some of the most guarded critics in the world. A rating from Michelin is a fast ticket to fame, and Charlie Trotter’s prices reflect that. Dinner and drinks for one is about all I can afford, and with a couple hundred in my purse, I’d be leaving with pocket change, but I’d leave with a smile. This is all assuming I can even get reservations. Nah…Charlie Trotter’s can wait. I’ll drop a hint to Harry and see what his clout can do. Tonight, my ass will shake like Harry is watching, and I’ll sweat and shimmy until I look forward to the AC in the car on the ride home.

One of the cuter outfits Harry bought me will do. A gunmetal blue-gray, shining silk, Oriental wrap with a hand stitched dragon rampant that rides just high enough on my legs to give a great show. With a little black thong and some careful tucking, when I bend over, one of my best features is nearly visible. Just enough of the bottom of my ass cheeks to make every cock nearby pound like a bass drum. Very drool worthy. There’s something about a hot blonde in an Oriental outfit that makes men crazy. I’ve got earrings that will match well, smoked crystal sunglasses, just the right makeup, and stiletto heels that are perfect for an evening of deliberate, cock-teasing ‘bitchery’. Maybe I’ll get my tongue pierced sometime soon. Harry would probably love that…once I show him it’s not just for decoration. Not to flatter my own ego too much, but…no…what the hell…it isn’t flattery! Whatever my other talents are, and I do have others, it remains that I am a singularly amazing cock-sucker, and I’m am rightly proud of the fact that I can make a man come in my mouth a hundred times and every single one will still be unique in his memory. Drake or Dee, it doesn’t matter…I’m damn good in bed…or anywhere else…and I fucking well know it!

It isn’t an insult to my self worth to admit this. It takes skill and originality to make sex stay interesting. Any half-baked slut can spread his legs or open his mouth for his boyfriend or his trick. I have a lot to offer Harry, but I also have this. He will come home, and when he does, I’ll make him remember that I’m good at more than reading books and playing piano while I look good. Dancing is one of the things…aside from coke…that makes me feel sexy and hungry and alive. My only lament is that it will be a toy waiting for me when I get home…not Harry. Still…I don’t want anything more than this. I want to be here, and I will wait until Harry comes home, and I will give him the benefit of all my many talents when he gets back.

I call Ron early, so he knows that we’ll be out late. He’ll pick me up at eleven. I think I’ll call it quits by one. That ought to be just enough time to work up a good sweat and unwind a little…if the music is right. It all hangs on a DJ. A good man in the booth is worth a million dollars easy. You have to read the crowd, feel the mood, adapt when the people do…not just sit there and spin song after song by memory. The best DJs own the crowd, making you feel what they want you to, pulling you back to the floor for just one more song, making you want to move just a little more, until the night is gone and you wish the house lights would go back down and let you shake it just a little longer. This…this is what I want tonight.
Maria loves my outfit, and I’d bet just about anything that Therese wishes she could get away with wearing something like this. They’re headed for bed before I get finished with my makeup, and while I didn’t really mean to, I wind up keeping Ron waiting while I finish my primping before we leave. My ass is already shaking in the bathroom while the satellite radio pipes in some dance music. Poor Ron. He probably hates the music, and I’m pretty sure I have the usual effect on him in this outfit. I’m small and soft and pretty, and his gut instincts cry out, ‘It’s sexy…try to fuck it!’ while his brain is shouting, ‘God damn it! Cancel that boner! That’s a boy!’ I’ve seen that uncomfortable look on a thousand straight men before. It’s just adorable, and it’s exactly the ego boost I need to start the night.

He goes over the rules for nightclubs. He’ll enter just a little after me, so that we aren’t associated as a couple, then he’ll case the place and check the exits, watching me the whole time. He won’t intervene unless I’m in physical danger, or if I make a scene and endanger myself. He gives me a hand signal I can make if I want to be extracted from the building quickly, and that’s all there is to it. He’s wearing a sharp suit that will blend well anywhere, so he’ll be buying himself non-alcoholic beverages and sticking near the walls until I’m ready to go. Pretty simple stuff. Combine that with his usual instructions to obey him implicitly if he needs to swing into action, and our rules are in place for the evening.

The beauty of Ron’s working with me is that I’m not a legitimate target. No one really knows I’m connected to Harry, so no one is after me personally. The rules would be much different if I were a target. Ron is only a bodyguard for me because Harry values me enough to make sure I’m safe. For Harry, Ron is just a friend and an expert driver for mission support, but for me, Ron is someone who makes me know that, even when Harry is away, I’m still looked after and protected from harm. Ron is a professional, and he’s wonderfully discreet, so all he does is keep his back to the walls so he can watch the crowd and exits. He doesn’t really crimp my style in the slightest…bless his big, goofy heart.

At least, since this is a gay club, I won’t be hassled just for being gay. That’s why we love them. It’s the one place you can go where there are no secrets about your sexuality, and we are truly free when we walk in the door. It’s intoxicating in a way that most people will never understand. A gay bar can be fun for anyone, but it’s different for those of us who can never be truly free anywhere else but home.

I remember people asking me questions in school about being gay. Why would I do it? Like it was a carefully planned form of entertainment. It isn’t like waking up and deciding…hey!…today I’ll ride a roller coaster instead of walking! I was flirting with the knowledge of it when others were just beginning to notice girls. I knew I was different, and I just can’t hide it as well as some people do, so I made my differences into my armor. I forged my shame into my pride.

While other boys stared at pictures of girls or panted over stories about which famous women were the hottest, I was just starting to notice that I liked older boys and men. Athletes with strong muscles and serious bulges in their pants. You don’t need pornography to figure out what you like. Straight boys gravitate toward nice breasts and pretty faces, and I gravitated toward handsome men with hard bodies and a nice package up front. It didn’t take long to figure out what I wanted, and I just happen to be the type that men will make the extra effort to have.

Being a queen, even before I found out I looked good in my best girlfriend’s clothes, was the natural flow of events for me, and it was better than pretending anything different. Some guys can pass as straight…and even get married and have sex with their wife and raise kids. I’m just not one of them. I can look at women and admire them artistically, but I don’t feel sexual attraction toward them. They’re like a beautiful painting, a piece of art that I can judge from a certain safe distance. A man is different. The right man is very different. Harry is exactly the right man. When I think of
him…God…I’d better not! This thong isn’t big enough for thoughts of Harry while I’m on the way to a club!

The Fire House still has a modest line outside when we get there. The staff walks up and down, picking people out as they go. Good thing Ron has that suit on, or he’d never get in. If I know him, he’ll palm the bouncer a fifty and be in right after me, but I get picked out of the line in less than a minute.

Fire and firemen have a special place in Chicago’s collective heart. The Great Chicago Fire put a huge hole in this city a long time ago, back when most of it was built of wood instead of steel, stone and glass, and because of that, the concept of firemen as models of heroism is embedded in this city’s soul. This place reflects a little of that. The walls have been painted with murals of flame, and the go-go boys dance on brass poles like the ones inside of fire stations. One boy is even dancing in a cage on top of a converted truck ladder. Old firefighter’s equipment is under glass or decorating behind the huge bar, and red strobe lights fire off regularly while sirens slash through the ambience. The drinks have catchy little names like ‘Old Sparky’ or ‘Where There’s Smoke…’, drink specials kick off when the sirens sound, the bartenders are wearing fire helmets and very little else, and the place is packed to capacity. A little kitschy, but perfect for what I want tonight.

The DJ is playing the right stuff, and Ron is finally in and moving along the walls the best he can. This is the place where the pretty people enjoy themselves at their leisure, and there’s enough security visible here in staff shirts to make sure people behave. Of course, quite naturally, I can’t get my first drink without getting three phone numbers shoved into my hand, and I do love the way the few other queens in this place get that pinch-faced, tight-lipped look of irritation when I stroll by them. There’s nothing like the envy of my ‘peers’ to make me smile the smile of a cat with an endless supply of cream.

I finish my shots, which were purchased for me by who knows who and who cares, and head for the dance floor, feeling the first faint tickle of booze warming my skin and face. My crowning glory…my moment of triumph. I get picked up by one of the go-go boys, a bronze skinned and muscled hottie wearing a thong so tight I can tell what religion he is, and he carries me to the top level of the stage on the dance floor, where only the people they want to ‘represent’ the bar get to go. I am what they all want to be, and I fucking love it! Bow down, bitches! Worship this! I…am…your…goddess! And not the loving mother kind, either! We’re talking Black Kali, die in my name, bitch-queen from Hell, you fuckers!

This is my little slice of heaven. The wicked, hedonistic, naughty minx in me revels in this, and with the fire of alcohol in my belly and speakers that shake the building behind me, I can move my ass and roll my hips and let the adoring masses just wish they were me. The best part is…it isn’t a dream…and I don’t have to wake up! Dee is back in town, and this town is mine!

What a way to kill time! I don’t know where the time went. Buff boys bring me water, and good looking guys dance with me, every one imaging that he’s going to be the one to take me home and give me the deep, savage, down and dirty fucking my body language screams I need. They’ll all go home wishing they had, or pound into someone else, wishing it was me underneath them. Hours peel away and I just don’t care. I finally need a bathroom bad enough to slither off the stage, and there’s a drink waiting for me when I come down.

I am good. The owner wants to introduce himself when I get back from the bathroom, and the cute boy in the helmet will guide me to his private table. No doubt they want me here every weekend. It’s the usual offers I’m sure. The kind of thing I heard a lot at eighteen. Free drinks, free drugs, whatever you want, just hype the crowd and be gorgeous for us. The right person can be a star without lifting a finger, and it’s all in the attitude and the look. A hasty piss in the unisex toilet,
which is quite the vogue in gay clubs, since some people don’t like to be defined by gender, and I’m sucking down a well-mixed drink that didn’t cost me a dime and following a well-muscled and oiled back to the table of the man that owns this slice of heaven.

Blaise fucking Zabini.

“Welcome back to the world, baby. Looks like you haven’t lost your touch.”

The world freezes, and it’s all I can do not to lose my composure here and now. How may million poisonous thoughts crossed my mind in seven years? How many revenge scenarios to keep my mind occupied while I rotted away in that abysmal fuck-hole? How many drinks did I throw into that handsome face? Thousands upon thousands. The insults I dreamed for years die on my lips before I can say them. He’s sitting there, flanked by the help, with a slutty little Filipino boy next to him, wearing short shorts and a black halter top. The little tart has gorgeous lips and nice eyes. Probably nineteen years old or a little younger if I’m any judge, but he has attitude. How dare the little skank even think of looking at me that way!

Blaise looks good…but older. I can tell he probably still does coke, and I’d bet anything that he drinks more than he ought to. Still and all, he’s fit and clean, dressed in a suit that compliments him, with dark hair that curls as handsomely as I remember it. He only wears a couple of rings, and some quality earrings in his ears, and the cufflinks and watch say ‘money’. Very stylish. He’s bigger than I remember, and his shoulders have broadened over the years. Makes sense…we were just seventeen when we met. Memory floods. I also wept because I missed him. I dreamed about him, waited for him, hated myself for not meaning enough to him. I have to say something…anything.

“As if I ever could?”

The miserable little man-mattress beside him shrugs and lips up.

“Blaise, honey. This is an old flame of yours? And let me stress the word ‘old’. You really have moved up in the world since then, because you have oh-so much more class now.”

Blaise is chuckling, but I lean over the table and pluck the cigarette from his hand, then take a deep drag.

“Tell the penis-parking lot to make tracks, love. We need to talk, and I don’t waste time with small words for the junior high set.”

I blow the smoke into the little bitch’s face, and drop the cigarette into his drink with a lazy flick. The look of outrage is all the reward I need.

“BLAISE! Did you see-!”

“Open your mouth again when I need a place to park my dick! Dee and I need to talk business. Get scarce for awhile.”

Watching him sidle off in a huff, reminded of his place as a fuck-pet and nothing more, is as satisfying a feeling as any I’ve ever had. I slide into the soft leather chair my ersatz rival left behind, smirking like the little demon-bitch I am. I can do this. I can talk to Blaise Zabini and keep my cool. Fuck it…I’m doing it right now!

“Thank you. Nice club, Blaise. I like it. You look good.”

Always a cool customer, my Blaise. He doesn’t look shocked or stunned by my appearance, but
then he never did. He does look amused and interested though. Nice to know I still have some clout.

“So do you, baby…but then you never looked any other way. Been a long time.”

“We both know why. Anything else to say?”

He’s swirling his drink, playing for time. I know him enough to know the little gestures. He always looks cool, but he’s always thinking on his feet. I give him the time he needs.

“It was you or me. I chose you. Didn’t really want it that way, but that’s how it is. Looks like you came through it all okay.”

“Not a word. Seven years, Blaise. I stayed silent. I did it for you. Don’t even make me say why. Just tell me what happened.”

“No beating around the bush with you, is there? Okay…I’ll bite. I owe you this one. I had competition. I was young, they were jealous, and they wanted to see me spend a little time out of the loop. Not really my style, and I had enough connections to get a warning about it, but the deal still had to go down. You were the only person I really believed in enough to take a gamble on your silence. It paid off. The cops had enough information to make you radioactive. No one could get anywhere near you without winding up tailed for years, and as it was, I still had to go legit and find a new line of work for awhile. What else can I say? I’m not sorry it wasn’t me…but I am sorry it had to be you.”

He isn’t lying. I can feel it. It makes my head spin. Blaise Zabini set me up, knowing what would happen to me, knowing I’d try to protect him. And he’s sorry. He wasn’t happy about how it played out, but fuck him! He had seven years that I can never get back! I hate him…I love him. Harry…I love Harry now, but that has no place here.

“So that’s what happened. I wondered for a long time. I picked at it like a scab. I guessed a lot, but it’s good to know. I missed you. You can’t even imagine how much. Those are nice words, Blaise, but they don’t mean much anymore. You know what it must have been like for me in there.”

I watch him sigh and nip at his drink.

“Yeah, I do. I guess those words wouldn’t mean much…even if they’re true. Are you all hooked up now? You look great. I can get you work, entertainment, chemistry or cash. Need a place to stay, connections? You name it…I can get it. You paid your dues. I can make sure you’re taken care of right. Like old times…but this time no hassles.”

Ideas are turning in my head. There isn’t much I can say without spoiling them, but I need to make a peaceful exit from here and think about this when I’m calm. There are possibilities.

“You know me…I always land on my feet. I was fresh out of the joint when I picked a nice daddy. The rich kind. Too old to get it up, but he loves to keep me around. I already have the easy life. What I don’t have is you. Got a phone number? I can come and go as I please, and if I wanted to get a little something Daddy can’t provide, I could swing by your place sometime and make you remember what you’ve been missing.”

Blaise flips me a card. I got a number. This one I’ll be keeping. The two dozen others that men pushed into my hands will be in the trash before I go home, but this one I’ll be keeping.

“My place is always open to you. Especially you. Give a call and I’ll make sure the boys let you in. It’s good to see you, baby. Glad you made the scene.”
I stand, making sure I make every motion sexy in its own way, and cock my hips while smirk at him. I can feel that gaze slither across my skin. Up legs that are long and clean, past a narrow waist and a tight little stomach, along shoulders that are slim and a neck that begs for a man’s lips to touch it. I still own him in my own special way. I wondered for a long time, but now I know. He can’t see the scar. A scar I wouldn’t have if it hadn’t been for his cowardice.

“You should ditch the tart, Blaise. You can do better. Lots better. Who knows? When we get the chance, show me if you’ve still got what it takes to keep me, and maybe a change of address is worth my while.”

“What can I say, Dee? There’s something sexy about Filipinos. Just enough Spanish blood to stay horny all the time, just enough Asian to stay small and cute for a good long while. It took a lot to keep my mind off you for this long, but I never forgot, even when I couldn’t say it to you. Don’t lose that number, and be good to yourself…you deserve it.”

Truer words were never spoken. I will be good to myself. Don’t doubt that, Blaise. You, however, might not be so lucky.

“See you around, Blaise. Sooner rather than later.”

I stroll toward the door, making sure my strut sets his loins on fire. I always did it then, and I know I can do it now. The night air makes the sweat on my skin feel cold, even though the last faint hints of summer heat are still here even at night. The silk sticks to my skin and the breeze tickles. I feel so alive! Ron will take me home, as soon as he catches up, but I have my private moment of victory now.

It takes him a little longer to make his way out than I expected. His face is flaming when he joins me down the street.

“C’mon. Let’s roll!”

His voice is tense and full of barely contained irritation. I just have to ask.

“Sure…what’s wrong?”

“Nothing…no-thing! Just ready to get moving…that’s all.”

Not the answer I’d hoped for, but we head for the car and start for home. I’m not doing anything scandalous in back, but his neck is bright red. He is pissed. I can’t help but wonder why. Besides, despite the complication of running into Blaise, I had a fantastic night.

“You’re sure you’re okay? I thought it was a really nice night. No hassles, no fights, no trouble. I thought you’d be happy.”

I can actually hear his teeth grinding. “Great night. Yeah. For you. I spent the last couple hours getting hit on…by GUYS! Not really my idea of fun.”

“Oh, come on! Admit it…even if you don’t like guys, you must be flattered that they thought you were hot enough to try hitting on you.”

“Okay Mr. Wiseguy! Lemme ask you this! If we went to a pool hall, and I drank beer and ran the table and wiped out all the rookies, having the night of my life, while every chick in the place rubbed her tits in your face and tried to grope your crotch…for two hours…would you call that a great night on the town?”
Score one for Ron. I think I’ll shudder over that image for the rest of the week.

“Oh.”

“Yeah…‘oh’ is fuckin right! Man! I’ll take a bullet to look out for you when I’m on duty…but the next time someone’s hand goes down my pants, and it isn’t a chick’s, there’s gonna be trouble! Nothing personal…I’m just saying.”

“Okay. Good point. Next time I go clubbing, I’ll wait for Harry. Then you can relax while we’re out. You were a good sport about it all…considering. Thanks.”

“Good enough. Just needed to get that off my chest, y’know?”

Ah, Ron. A ladies man through and through. No loss for me, mind you…seeing as the mere thought of gingery pubes and freckled genitalia makes me cringe in horror. Still, just because he’s a straight-arrow, it doesn’t mean he isn’t a hell of a good guy.

He’s more relaxed by the time he wheels us into the under-garage at home, and he watches me every step of the way into the elevator. What a guy. I can’t help being a little pensive and rattled. I just topped off my night by talking to Blaise ‘The Son Of A Bitch That Fucked Me Over’ Zabini, but I’m still in a capital fucking mood. I have plans. Wheels are turning wheels in my head. I’ll have to wait until I can talk to Harry, but that will give me a little more time to plot things out while I’m sober.

There is something pure and wonderful about coming home tipsy and tired, sweaty and sore from dancing, triumphant and happy because I was at the very top of the social ladder…because that’s where I belong. It doesn’t take but a minute to slip out of my clothes and flop onto the bed. Sooo soft. Perfect.

I am frantically horny. The endorphin rush from dancing for almost two hours. The adrenaline from seeing Blaise again and publicly humiliating that heinous little skag he was with. The aching, painful absence of Harry. The lowered inhibitions that come with a half dozen high end cocktails. It isn’t even really a choice. It’s a necessity. I could only get hornier if Harry was here with me. It stings, that I have to fumble for a towel and my toy, which was scrupulously cleaned after its last performance, instead of letting my lover sate me, but what else can I do? I am a creature of need, and the emptiness inside me is insistent and demanding. Rubber, plastic or whatever it may be…I urgently need a cock inside of me.

I’m just tipsy enough to not waste time with any frills or luxuries. It’s get comfortable, get slick, get filled. Sure it sounds tawdry, but frantic need isn’t always pretty. When I’m in this kind of mood, sex happens…immediately. The back of the car with Harry was just the tip of the iceberg. He’ll learn about moments like these once he’s been around a bit more…and I am so very looking forward to teaching him all about them. I’m sure he can handle it.

Feeling my body stretch to accommodate the thing moving into it, crushing my eyes shut and savoring the way my own prick pulses just a bit more desperately with every perfect inch. God, if only it were Harry! There’s the spot! That’s it! Fuck! If I could just feel HIM there instead of this! God…PLEASE! Get Harry home SOON! NOW! HURRY! His name is on my lips, breathy and needy, while I plunder myself, imaging him with every stroke.

“God! Harry…Harry…yesss!”

“I see you really have missed me. It’s good to be home.”
The lesson here…while my cheeks are flaming from abject humiliation and the bitter irony of a moment like this slams into me…is be careful what you wish for.

TBC!!!
Big Chicago Part 13….by Samayel

I suppose it could happen to anyone. Poking the daylights out of myself with a rather large toy that was intended to alleviate my desperate need for my lover…only to have said lover walk in on me. I’ve missed him frantically for days and days, but all I can do right now is turn crimson and scramble for something to say. How strange that masturbation, which is so commonplace, can be so intimate and personal, impossible to share easily and still feel comfortable in any way.

“Don’t. Don’t move. Don’t change a thing. You’re beautiful. You know that, don’t you?”

He’s padding across the carpet lazily, coming closer while I lie here, half full of fake cock and flushing furiously. Thank God he looks aroused. Fuck humiliation. Fuck embarrassment. He’s home! He’s really here, and my skull is pounding from my pulse, words on the tip of my tongue, hungry to free themselves and vent what I’ve felt. Can anyone believe that I’m crying?

“I…I missed you…so much. You can’t even guess. This…this was just to…to make it bearable.”

“Shhh. It’s okay. You have nothing to explain. I’m not saying that I’m not a little surprised, but you’re beautiful like this, same way you’re beautiful no matter where you are or what you’re doing. Don’t take it out. Let’s celebrate how much I’ve missed you too…thoroughly.”

He’s sitting on the edge of the bed, shirtless and full of intensity, looking at me the way I love to be looked at by him. Full of naked admiration. Desire. He wants me…any way he can have me…and that turns me on more than is healthy, but that’s just part of who I am. His hand pushes mine away from the base of the toy, nudging it just a little deeper, while I lean up, into the kiss I’ve been waiting for for what feels like days and days on end. He smells like soap and shampoo, but not the stuff I remember. His safe house must have a place for him to clean up before he comes home. He’s clean, and strong and perfect…everything my mind’s eye recalled in detail each empty night.

I’m moaning into his mouth while that tongue plunders me ruthlessly, because he just shifted the angle of the toy and he knows he’s brushing the place inside me that aches for him. I love feel of faint stubble across my neck. Not thick or unshaven…just the little reminder that he is very much a man…and he is very much mine. His free hand has woven its way into my hair, and his teeth are just so delicately scraping their way across my nipple. Indescribable. When all of these elements are combined with the heady knowledge that he is alive and safe and here, I can’t find words for what I feel, and then he shifts that toy again, moving it with a steady hand that isn’t afraid at all, and all I can do is whisper affirmations of desire, letting him know that every little thing he does is right.

A small shift of positions, and he’s perfectly situated for me. Just as the warmth of his mouth envelops my cock, I gasp with pleasure, stifling laughter and faint tears of happiness. How perfect a homecoming. I fill my mouth with that perfect cock, and I can feel his pace falter when I slither my tongue around the head. He punishes my temerity with a strong and steady stroke of that wonderful, wonderful toy. When it isn’t my hands manipulating it, and I already have the pleasure of that thick, hot flesh pulsing softly inside my mouth, every little move that toy makes is a tiny burst of joy.

I tense as he sucks gently at the head of my prick, lavishing the same care upon it that I do upon
his, and when I tense, the thing he slides wetly into me meets resistance, but just enough to make it all the more interesting. I can’t last like this. I keep popping his cock out my mouth to gasp for air and cry out involuntarily…I’m noisy when I’m excited, and I’ve never been excited like I get for Harry. I can’t even maintain a stroking pace on his cock when I start to come. I lose control so easily, but I guess I never wanted control to start with. I want it taken from me, but only by someone who would use it mercifully…with love guiding their hand. Harry does. My hips are bucking because I’m coming into his mouth, and the head of my cock is frantically sensitive, and the toy is tapping gently in without so much as a pause in his pace. The sounds I make are guttural, more animal-like and keening than human. Reduced to howls and pants of lust and desperate release.

God, but I love him! There is no one, anywhere, who has ever made me feel like this. So desired, and not as a trophy, or a prize to be collected, but as a lover, to be pleased and sated because I deserve nothing less. It’s my pleasure that matters, and he hungers to give that satisfaction to me. When the shuddering subsides, and some tiny shred of self control is left to me, I’m nuzzling the swollen flesh in my hand, brushing it across my cheek and kissing the shaft with an affection that is entirely sincere. How I adore his cock. Neither tragically small nor painfully large, but a fine, thick, perfect fit for a queen who’s had as much experience as I have. I love Harry, all of him, but right now I need this!

“Pleeeease…Harry! Don’t…don’t make me wait anymore! Fuck me…now…god, pleeeease! I…I can’t wait another minute!!”

I can hear that throaty chuckle from him. He has a cruel streak. He really does. The toy keeps flirting…in…out…almost out, then in just a little before he pulls it away entirely and rolls to his right. I have no idea when he cracked the edge of the foil around that condom, but it’s the most joyful sound I’ve ever heard while I shudder with relief, hearing him rip the rest of the package open, knowing that, already wet and ready for him, my wait is almost over. I’ll be connected to him, filled by him, feeling him hot and alive within me again…so very, very soon!

He relents. My god is a merciful one. My Harry. His fingers brush against the slickness already inside of me, the condom already came slick with its own lubricant in that tiny wrapper. I’m clenching my teeth and whimpering because I am so desperate to feel him in me, and that pause he makes while he steadies my trembling legs and moves into place is entirely too long!

And then he’s in. I’m pierced by the sword of his cock, a willing victim and a cheerful sacrifice to the gods of lust. I can feel every perfect and pulsing inch of him inside of me while I make small delirious noises that almost sound like laughter. No drug compares to this. One of my hands is in that thick, dark hair, and short as it may be, I just want to caress the skull that hides the mind of the man I adore. The other hand is on his chest, savoring the feel of soft dark fur and hardened muscles just beneath my fingertips. My lips curl in a crazy sneer, eyes bright and feverish while I deliberately pinch a nipple between thumb and forefinger. It’s a challenge, and not a subtle one, and he answers it…majestically.

Can a person describe the actual fucking of a lifetime? Can utter savagery be confined by petty verbs and adjectives? He knew he wasn’t hurting me…because the sounds that came from me all cried out for more. When I clenched fingers tight and hard into his skin, gasping out staccato pleas for more and more and more, he knew that he couldn’t go too far, or do wrong in my eyes. The hard crack of an open palm across the cheek of my ass simply made me beg all the harder and throatily whimper my approval. The calloused hands that wrapped around slim hips were strong enough to pull me into every powerful stroke. The wet slap of his balls against the slick and sweaty skin of my backside while he held my legs up in a high and perfect ’V’, my ass suspended several inches above the bed.
Victory. Never has ‘V’ stood for it more.

My face muffled by a pillow while his hips slap hard and fast into me, his cock hammering into my body like the thunder of the gods while I bite my fingers, coming into the sheets while he slams into me again and again. It’s not about the perfect place inside of me now, and it isn’t about gentleness or kisses and poetry. It’s about the crazy, mad, intoxicating freedom that comes from surrendering yourself completely to someone you trust with all your heart.

The soft, wet pop as he slides out of me and turns me over yet again. I think he came earlier. I don’t know for sure. I don’t remember, and honestly I don’t care. My knees are being pinned to my chest, ankles back almost to my ears, and he slides back into me deep and fast, from an angle that allows every last micrometer of his cock to press all the way into me. My cock went limp…who the fuck knows how long ago. I’m far past the point of traditional orgasms being possible, physically too spent to come that way again, but the beauty…the dark, malevolent perfection of the prostate orgasm…is that exhaustion means almost nothing. He fucks me until I’m screaming his name in the dark, clenching hard around the thickness that tunnels into me over and over again, soaked in the sweat that drips off of the both of us.

We’ve gone through condoms. More than one, but I can’t recall with any accuracy how many we really used. He missed me every bit as desperately as I missed him, if the matter can be gauged by his performance. I’ve been sore like this many times over the years, but never so pleased by it. The feel of my body thrumming and pulsing, bruised and sullen after lovemaking that smoldered hot and steady when it wasn’t erupting like lava and scouring away all thoughts other than those of lust. That discomfort that ignites an almost crazed and feverish need for more. So painfully, violently aware of the absence of him inside of me where he belongs.

I am very much his equal. His opposite number. His doppelganger. For all the vigor he possesses, all the power to plunder and conquer and satiate, I can match him with a need to be sundered, taken and pleased. I can provoke him, prod him past his limits, bring forth from him a capacity to give that he didn’t even know he had. Whatever he gives, I can take, and I demand more than he imagined.

I am the Moon to his Sun. Endlessly chasing and being chased. Born to die in fiery glory. We aren’t fucking. This isn’t a bedroom. This is a church, a hallowed place, and this is an act of worship. We venerate one another, like pagan gods, until there is no strength left in us.

Sunlight doesn’t reach in here. The faint blue of the digital clock beside the bed is the only real light. Dawn is coming. The world is waking, but we haven’t yet slept. I’m on my side, in front of him, with his flagging cock buried inside of me while we gently grind against one another, too weak to push any harder than this. Utterly spent. This is how we drift to sleep…fused as one…locked together, his arms holding me close, spear upon the wealth of his desire for me, writhing faintly even as consciousness slips away. Bruised by ardor out of control, still full with him inside of me, whispering words of love…content at last.

We sleep, and wake again, stirred by the reactions of our own bodies. I’m half hard again, my cock and balls cupped in his sleeping hand. He’s as hard as stone inside of me, twitching restlessly in slumber while my eyes flicker open sluggishly, gummed by tears of joy and ecstasy from the night before. I very deliberately exploit this comfortable opportunity. Slipping a hand over his to keep it in place. I love the calloused feel of it against the most sensitive parts I have. Writhing against his lap, stretching and flexing, making myself comfortable despite a soft undertow of soreness that encompasses me inside and out. Wrapping his hand around my cock and pumping myself back and forth against the shaft of the cock inside of me. Purest luxury…and I know enough now to not fear for the sheets. Not after all that we did on them last night!
He wakes quickly, even exhausted, and I know it when the hand tightens carefully around my cock, stroking of it’s own volition, and his hips move subtly, matching my motions and making a perfect rhythm. I’m allowed to make noise now that isn’t a silent and solitary use of his engorged flesh, and when I keen and come across his hand, watching the white dribble over his knuckles, I pull his hand free and lick each finger clean myself. He’s chuckling softly. He must have plans.

I find out how right I was about plans when he pulls away just long enough to get out of bed, then picks me up bodily, ankles over his shoulders, his arms around my waist, and pins me to the wall before he fucks his way to the finish line, filling last night’s final condom with his come before kissing me good morning.

He left a note in the kitchen last night, telling the girls to enjoy a morning off. They’ll be out picking up groceries and mail for a little while. It’s just us in here, enjoying the giddy feeling of being alive and together and fabulously horny. I almost passed out in the shower, fucked into a state of confusion, suspended by the fine body behind me and the support of arms like iron, flopping against the wall and grinning like an idiot while hot water pours down both our bodies, sluicing away the sweat and lube, come and spit and latex smells of sex. I can’t stop smiling while I dry myself. He takes the towel away and pats me dry and I just relax and let him pamper me.

I’m not really an empty-headed sex toy, but it’s hard to break the comfortable and sensual silence between us. He is so very clearly glad to be home, and I made him that way. He isn’t ashamed to say it either. We don’t speak of serious things, not yet, not when we need so badly just to enjoy being near each other, close enough to reach over and touch when we please, savoring the physical reminder that we really are here, together again.

He makes me breakfast, in spite of my naughty, wicked, deliberate habit of wearing his pajamas. If we hadn’t indulged ourselves so wildly last night and again twice this morning already, there’s no way he’d have managed to pay attention to making food. The amazing thing is that he’s quite good at it. He’s used to being served, and yet he can make a light breakfast quickly and easily. Coffee and juice and toast with exquisite preserves spread across it. Grapefruit and cantaloupe, eggs with diced green and red peppers and cheese. Slivers of ham and bacon.

Chicago, by the way, is practically a giant shrine to the notion of pork as a way of life. Hog Butcher To The World they call us. I personally think that the key to peace in the Middle East is getting everyone there to try a breakfast with bacon, sausage and ham. I accept that there are reasons for religious observations that determine diet, but I think shortchanging themselves of a breakfast worth waking up to is a major contributing factor to violence. A breakfast with no bacon or ham or sausage? Who wouldn’t be fit to kill after a life like that?

I lure him off by the hand after breakfast, after savoring the quiet clean up together, dragging him down the hall and into ‘the music room’. The first thing he sees is the paintings.

“Well…will you look at that.”

So matter of fact, but I can tell he’s impressed, unsure of what to say while he peers at them one after another.

“I didn’t even know that you could paint. These are wonderful. I see a little artistic license at work though…I’m pretty sure I remember that moment, and I know I was wearing a shirt. Hah! It’s brilliant! We should hang this in the study. If you want to, of course.”

He moves to the self-portrait I did, and I can’t help but blush a little. I hadn’t really thought about him seeing that one. It was done quickly, almost out of instinct, and it’s brutally honest…a reflection of a self opinion that probably isn’t very healthy. Me, up against a wall, pale and skinny
and naked. Sickly and unkempt, obviously hopeless, waiting for violation. The 'F' burnt into the flesh of my ass is much larger and clearer than in real life. The memory of it will always loom larger and brighter in my mind than the real scar, now faded, ever will. He keeps staring at it, silent and strange, while I stare at the floor and wonder what he must be thinking of me for making such a thing.

“Do you want it gone? I can make arrangements…with the best. You wouldn’t have to live with that anymore. You shouldn’t have to. If you want that removed…we can make it happen.”

I hadn’t really thought of it. Scar removal is normal these days. A laser scalpel and some careful healing afterwards. This one last reminder of where I’ve been could be gone. He’d make it go away, forever.

“God, yes. Harry…you can’t even imagine how much I want it off of me. Whenever it can be set up…yes, please. I don’t want to think of then, or of him, ever again. That shit shows up in my dreams enough as it is.”

He steps back, sliding an arm around my waist, and I just curl in and get comfortable.

“Then it’s as good as done. Doc Snape is incredible. Trust me when I say he does good work. He did all mine. I can’t have any permanent marks, tattoos or disfigurements in my line of work. They increase the odds of being ID’d too much. I took a bullet in Afghanistan, and another a year ago. He cleared the scars for both, and he was the one who got rid of the scar I had on my head when I first started working for the Phoenix Corp. It was from the crash my parents died in. Used to look jagged…like a lightning bolt on my forehead. From a chunk of glass. Gone now, and he can do the same for you.”

It’s the first time he’s ever spoken of getting hurt doing what he does, and I can’t suppress the chill that runs down my spine, even while the rest of me is intoxicated by the idea of kissing this filthy fucking scar goodbye. When you carry a mark like this, you get used to it, and it becomes a part of you. I feel like I could actually shed my skin and move on, leaving that place and time behind me forever. Of course, the image of a bullet tearing through his perfect flesh just destroys my elation on the spot. He is perceptive. He pulls me a little tighter when I shiver, kissing my head.

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll be trying not to let that kind of thing happen. We work almost surgically now. Always by surprise. Most of the time, they don’t even know what the hell just happened before they’re out of the picture. You don’t worry about me. I always come back. Understood?”

“Yeah. Understood. It’s…still getting used to this stuff. God. I don’t come from a world of bullet wounds. It doesn’t seem real, here, but it still bothers me. I know you’ll be okay. Ron swears by it, too, and I’m willing to take his word for it. He’s really looked out for me lately. You were right. He’s a pretty good guy.”

“I wasn’t lying. There’s a reason I trust him completely. He’s never let me down. Good to hear you two are getting on alright.”

We stroll back down the hall, arm in arm, cuddling even while we walk. I love that I have a man who doesn’t push me away for clinging. I am not the fickle creature of the night when I am in love. I am not cold and powerful and made of ice. I am needful, insecure, hungry for constant proof that I am desired and not alone. He feeds me what I need most, the steady assurance that he wants me, here, now, in every way, sexual and otherwise.

“What to do with our day? I had some notions about tomorrow. Maybe a quick flight up to a resort
town in Michigan. Beaches, sand dunes, maybe a swim in the moonlight. They don’t have any world class eateries, but the atmosphere is perfect. Best part…the place is supposed to be a gay Mecca. The population is used to gay couples. Minimal hassle, maximum comfort. Ron can have the Cessna prepped by tomorrow morning, and we could be there a couple hours after we step out of here. Sound good?”

“Hmmm. I don’t know…no high end dining, you say? Well…I don’t usually compromise on food, but if it has you, with me, then there isn’t anywhere in the world I’d rather be.”

“Tease. You can’t wait to get out of here, can you?”

“You caught me. Guilty as charged. I’ve been here missing you so much I thought I’d implode. Are you sure you can leave town for more than a day?”

“Oh yeah. Trust me. I was pissed about having to leave last time, so I exercised a little ’judgment’ and hurried a few issues that were on the slate for later. All approved from above, mind you, but it’s enough to say that I made it clear about wanting at least the rest of this week to myself. They don’t usually call me in right after a session like the one in the pen. I was supposed to have a couple of weeks to rest. This time I made sure they know I plan to be out of town for a little while. No calls until we get back…I promise you that. I do have to drop into my office later today, but it will only be a couple hours at most. Strategy session for future ‘problems’. Nothing I can’t do and come back home fast, alright?”

I stay light-hearted, sounding like I find it all very blasé, but it’s very surreal to hear him speak so openly to me about what he does. He’s been killing people. Real, used-to-be-alive people. He’ll kill more, again, when he leaves me, whenever that moment comes. My happiness, my intoxication with him, being here, and so close to me, is tempered by that sobering reminder. Still, that he says things like this…it means he trusts me. When you think about it, it’s amazing that a man like him could trust anyone. He really believes in me. Not in a convenient, nothing serious on the line but a broken heart, kind of way. He believes in me in spite of the huge risk he took bringing me here. I mean to be worthy of that…whatever it takes.

“Thank God! Even Superman has a Fortress Of Solitude to fall back on when he needs a break. Call me greedy, but I want to steal you away, all for myself, and leave a message telling the world to fuck off instead of calling back later. We’ve never even been in the library at the same time. I want you to pick out your favorites, and read some of them to me.”

He smirks. “And what will you be doing?”

“Don’t think it crass, but I’ll be lounging on the couch with my head in your lap. Resting…of course. Unless something comes up and disturbs my place. Then I suppose I’ll have to take matters in hand and put things to right. I just want to hear your voice, and hear the things you like the most. How’s that for a way to kill the afternoon?”

“Absolutely perfect.”

And it is.

What a perfectly marvelous day. Never minding the blow job I rather enjoyed giving him in the library. Call me slutlish if you will, but Keats got me a bit excited. Well…in all honesty…it wasn’t Keats. It was hearing Harry read Keats while I was separated from his cock by a thin layer of cloth. It certainly didn’t bother Harry much either! Of course, to return the favor, I read sonnets by
Arthur Rimbaud while Harry sucked me off to good effect. I always admired Rimbaud in particular. Only a teenage schoolboy while he wrote his greatest works, drunk on absinthe and who knows what else, all the while shacked up with a married, male poet twice his age. The nineteenth century had its share of famous queers, but little Arthur Rimbaud broke the mold. Passion for life excites me, even echoing through centuries, written on the printed page, it still makes my breath catch. Or perhaps that was the moment I came in Harry’s mouth, hand clenched on his head while my hips bucked automatically. Hmm…either way, I enjoyed myself.

When the girls return, it’s time to shuck the pajamas and get dressed. Harry dresses nicely, since he’s headed for ‘the office’ for a couple of hours. I already have my own plans. I stay in my, or rather our, pajamas, since I feel like lazing about today. At least until he leaves. Then I need to put a little plan in motion. Actually, my only second thoughts are almost indecent. I mean to meet him at the door when he gets back and inspire a good hard fucking from him, but in truth, my ass is more than just a little sore. It’s kind of a turn on, and kind of an annoyance at the same time. Ah well. I’ll make up my mind long before he gets back.

Maria brought mail, and there’s an envelope for me. Therese is making us lunch before Harry leaves, and I just love the differences between us while we wait in the kitchen, sprawled and lounging in our chairs. Harry is neat and sharp and freshly clean shaven, dressed in his usual spin on the classic black suit and tie look. So formal! I, on the other hand, am clad in his oversize pajamas, with a barrette that doesn’t really match keeping my bangs out of my face, sloppy and giddy and blissfully a mess. I really feel comfortable like this. He likes me anyway I am, and I actually believe it. With Harry, I can be a mess, (albeit a damn sexy one!) and he still wants me. That…that is happiness.

Doctor Snape. The word is back on all the tests he took, and he did a lot of them. There’s shit on here I haven’t even heard of, and I’ve heard of a lot! No one can say the man isn’t thorough. But the best part, the part that makes my heart leap, is that I’ve come back negative for any and all sexually transmitted diseases. My mind is made up now…Harry is gonna hit this booty when he gets back, whether he knows it yet or not!

The only nasties I ever caught were curable, and that was pure luck in operation. We’ve used condoms for the serious fucking, and there have been certain acts that I’m sure we avoided for all the same reasons, even though we never spoke of it. Not anymore, The gloves are off, so to speak, and with a clean bill of health, I can do any damn thing I please with him. As long as we don’t sleep with anyone but each other, and I feel surprisingly secure about that, we can do anything we desire…risk free.

Some people may think monogamy is passé, and I suppose I might have been one of them, but these days, in the age when a scythe-wielding reaper looms every good fuck, having one person and one person only, who pleases you in every way, is a blessing of incalculable worth. I’m clean, he’s clean, and all I can suddenly think of is the feel of his naked flesh, his bare and living cock, warm and perfect inside my body. Letting him fuck his hot come into me with joyous abandon, taking every drop for my own instead of letting a cheap piece of latex steal what is rightfully mine!

Oops. My eyes must have glazed over. Everyone in the kitchen is looking at me, and under this table there’s a bump in the pajamas. Time to put the slut away and let the princess shine until the time is right to shift gears. My bad.

“Dee? You okay, love? You look a little…off.”

“Oh…yeah. I’m fine. It says here that I have low blood sugar and I’m slightly anemic. I’m supposed to take some vitamins for it all, and he sent along a list of ways to balance my diet. I’m
supposed to have another check up in a week or so. He’ll swing by whenever you set an appointment for me. Also…all my blood tests came back negative. Isn’t that lovely?”

He can’t possibly mistake the smile on my face for anything else. He knows what I’m thinking. Clean and healthy. No condoms. Fuckfest to celebrate the occasion, coming his way very soon. I love that he can stay subtle and understated, just smirking over the rim of his coffee cup.

“That’s nice. I suppose we ought to celebrate that…somehow.”

Christ! Even Maria and Therese know a hint of what’s going on. Maria is stifling a giggle, because she’s more than sensitive enough to pick out the vibe in this room right now. Therese is rolling her eyes with mock irritation over the practically teenage hormones we must be putting out.

Oh, Harry. Talk of Blaise and other things can wait awhile. Tomorrow we’re bound for a resort town, and time alone together, but tonight…tonight we’ll celebrate this…my way.

TBC!!!
Big Chicago part 14.....by Samayel

This skirt is so short that, if I had I a religion, you could tell which one it was! Don’t know what I was thinking when I bought it. Oh…that’s right…I was thinking: ‘When Harry see me in this Catholic schoolgirl-meets-bondage slutwear, he’ll fuck me ‘til I need hip replacements.’

I hope I’m mostly right. About all of it except the hip replacements.

I haven’t used the cherry red lipstick yet…I think it will do. He’ll be back in a couple hours, and I already warned the girls to duck for cover, because I’m meeting him when he steps in the door of the entry hall…and this isn’t going to be a Disney flick! I have nine-inch heel-destroyers on and I really can’t wear them for more than a couple hours before my legs and my arches ache. Of course, it’s not like I’ll be doing any acrobatics in them. Mostly I’m hoping to just vamp the hell out of him just in the door, do whatever it takes to get him hard again and let him serve up a good and proper up-against-the-wall fucking to me.

The shirt is meant to be worn short and showing midriff, tied off well above the bellybutton, but it’s kind of reminiscent of the way I wore my shirt in the pen. Especially since I’m not bothering with anything more than a bra. No need for realism here, I want Harry’s attention on my ass and nowhere else. I don’t like the association with the past, but since I’m in my present and future, surrounded by luxury, wearing clothes that look sensational on me, giddy on raw lust and sucking up a mimosa to get a little tipsy while I primp in front of the mirror, I can handle the memories. The past is the past…and Harry will be back in less than an hour.

Little belt made of handcuffs…check. Little tie that is obviously supposed to be loose and for show only…check. Tartan skirt so high you can see panties…check. Fuck-me-now-daddy heels…check. Make-up and accessories matching…check. We’re ready for take off!

For the first time since I left prison, I lubricate myself in advance. Too many little reminders. It’s a little unnerving, but I think I can tell what’s different. Love. I do this because I want to…desperately, not because the threat of force is looming over me every fucking second. What was torture and misery only a month ago is luxury now. The irony is staggering. One tiny shift of perspective and everything is different. A cute, little, greased hole waiting to be fucked…miserably…is now a cute, little, greased hole waiting to be fucked…eagerly. Fucking surreal. Dadaism’s got nothing on my life!

There are a few sparse pieces of furniture, minimalist and decorative only, in the entryway, and from here I can wait for Harry’s return in comfort. There are two chairs and an end table, as well as a lamp, and a few magazines. When I bend down to pick up a copy of Saveur, I can feel the breeze from the central air across the cheeks of my ass. Perfect. I mean to be ridden hard and put away wet before dinner even hits the table tonight…and this outfit is the perfect vehicle to get me there! Harry means to celebrate my newly confirmed freedom from latex, but he won’t be expecting this.

Perhaps, after we’re through, I’ll talk about Blaise. I have plans. Loose, informal plans that took a backseat in my imagination the minute I saw Harry’s face again. It’s the kind of thing we should speak of before we leave town at least. I want revenge. Preferably with me laughing as Blaise goes down in flames. I could ask to have him killed…I guess. I could tell Harry everything in the worst possible light, and he’d be furious on my behalf. So chivalrous. He’d kill for me. I know he would.
It’s…horrifying…and intoxicating.

That kind of power can go to anyone’s head. My lover is a killer. The professional kind. Anyone who hurts me could become a corpse if Harry hears about it. How much power is that? But…I don’t want dead bodies. Not on my conscience. I want justice. Nothing more…nothing less. I know what I want.

Blaise Zabini needs to go to prison. I don’t care how…or for what. All that matters is that he goes…for years. The more the better. Not just some crummy little state facility either. I want him in maximum security federal hell, fending off daily assfuckings! That would be fair. He stole seven years from me, and now I have a lover who can make him pay. Am I wrong to want this? Just because it’s within my grasp? No. I don’t think so. Blaise Zabini bought me a one way ticket to rape and fear, nightmares and scars that have to be surgically removed. At the end of the day, he may be a criminal, but that doesn’t mean shit! This is entirely, purely, completely personal…and he will rue the fucking day he betrayed me.

Maria just poked her head into the entryway, giggling because she knows what this outfit means. Senor Harry just buzzed in, and I won’t be waiting much longer. I give Maria the thumbs up and a conspiratorial wink, and then she’s gone, and all that remains is for me to strike the pose I want.

Back turned to the door so my ass is right in the line of sight, white panties easily visible, tempting with the knowledge of what they cover. Head turned back and looking toward the door. One hip cocked like a challenge, hand on hip, mouth just barely open like a promise is waiting on its lips, and eyes shrouded and lazy, poorly disguising a desire that smolders and fills the room with an atmosphere like incense. Harry…come home. Come here. Or just come anyplace you feel like, as long as it’s inside of me when we’re finished!

That’s my man. Walking in the door in that fine black suit. Poor thing…he looks like he just died and woke up in heaven, confused about how he got there. Then that killer smile spreads across his face and I know he has his equilibrium back.

“Welcome back.”

“I guess so! Looks like I should have brought champagne! Can I just assume we’re celebrating Doc Snape’s report earlier than planned?”

I stalk the distance between us like a tigress, and lean into him while I pull his tie slowly out of place and twirl it through my fingers.

“Celebrate? That’s a good idea. Tell you what…you are the champagne…and I’m going to pop the cork. I like the way you’re looking at me. Let me show you how much.”

My hand is already kneading the stiffness in his slacks into something more forceful. I silence him with a kiss that is pure wickedness. He’s powerful…I like him that way…but I have power too. This is mine.

His hands have already slid down past my waist, warm fingers on the skin of my ass cheeks, and I can tell he’s savoring the way it feels when he touches me there. That’s a pleasure for him. He likes to touch, my Harry does, and how fortunate for him that I enjoy being touched by him.

I slip buttons through holes with a practiced hand, even while my mouth is busy pillaging his. In my mind, one of the great accomplishments of mankind is lipstick that doesn’t smear easily. Just brilliant. I’d kiss the person who invented it, male or female, if I knew who they were. My other hand can feel that perfect prick of his hardening and it’s time to open that fly and let me play with
what I want before we get to the serious parts.

He must already know that I’ve warned off the girls. He doesn’t protest at all, because he knows I planned this myself. When I fish his cock out of his boxers and through the fly of his slacks, he flops back against the wall, well aware of what’s about to happen when I dip low and let my nails rake across his chest on the way down.

Cock-sucking, too, can be an art form. Painting, writing, music and all forms of human expression deserve equal consideration, and sex can be artful just much as any other human endeavor. This is my other art. I suck his cock as lovingly and with as much passion as I kiss his mouth. There is no part of Harry that I don’t hold dear, but this part…this part is special. I treat it like I would his soul, every tiny flick of the tongue a reminder that I hunger to be close to him, to please him, and that he pleases me just by being near.

But will I let him come?

No. Not yet. I may like the hands that riffle through my hair, and I may adore the sound of his head thudding back against the door while he grits his teeth, but I know by feel whether he is or isn’t hovering on the edge of orgasm, and I make sure he stays on the brink, but never crosses that threshold into release. When he’s actually growling low in his throat, tensed from head to toe, and his hands are flexing helplessly, then I can relent. Now it’s time for more. Only when he’s so savagely hungry that he’ll give me the kind of vicious, perverted fucking I urgently need…only then can I stand up and put my hands against the wall, arching my back sharply and coaxing him with a breathy whisper.

“Don’t you want to fuck me, Harry? I’m ready for you. Fuck me right here…right now. You know how I want it, don’t you? I want you to fuck me hard, just like this. Don’t fuck around…just come here and take me.”

He responds predictably…and thank heavens for that. Hands that fumble, pushing the skirt up and the panties down. A warm mouth that meets mine while my head is craned back and turned. Hungry lips that slide down my neck. A soft bite that makes my body suddenly ache for the want of him in me. His prick is out and stone hard, slick with my spit and poised for entrance. Hot, living flesh pulsing indelicately with lust, fiery against the sensitive skin of my ass.

I make it easy for him. The first nudge…the instant he’s safely inside of me…I shove myself back, impaling myself on his cock as quickly as I can, starved for the feeling of him inside of me.

“Fuck me, Harry! I want to feel you come! Come for me, Harry. Please!”

And he delivers. Slow and steady at first, but he knows I need more than that. It’s a good thing there’s a wall to hold onto, because before he’s finished, my ass will be bruised tomorrow. He’s sweating and whispering sweet words to me. They’re only special because they’re from him, and because of that they are true. They’d seem shallow, or corny, coming from anyone I didn’t love as desperately at this, but now they’re like music…or sweet wine.

The kind of fucking where my bangs have fallen into my eyes and sweat makes my hair stick to places where it tickles but I can’t get a hand off the wall to do anything about it. The kind of fucking where my vision blurs and sometimes it’s hard to breathe right and I think I might be hyperventilating but who the fuck cares at a time like this. The kind of fucking that touches off a prostate orgasm and leaves my knees weak and shaking while I flat out cry with relief and don’t feel ashamed of it. That’s what I wanted…that’s what he gives me.

When he comes I’m suddenly wrapped in his arms while he thrusts deep and shudders from head to
toe, and maybe I can’t feel it inside of me, but I know it’s happening, and a weird, warm glow fills me, knowing that it’s just a little part of him, warm and alive inside of me. His life. His come. He’s kissing my shoulder, and I can feel the small droplets of sweat on his hair, cooling on my skin now.

“God. You’re incredible, Drake. I love you. You are what I’ve been missing my entire life. I knew it. I could feel it. Do you know how glad I am…that you stayed? There aren’t even words.”

I love that he has to pant for breath while he’s speaking, flopped against the wall with me crushed to his chest and trembling just as I am. I love that he’s still inside of me, and I can feel the heat and pulse of him, alive, still coming inside of me. I wish we could curl up like this forever, except that we’re up against the wall of the entryway, and eventually reality will kick in, and he’ll have to pull away, taking that perfect cock out of me. But some of him will stay. It will have to be enough. I roll my head back onto his shoulder.

“I know. Words just don’t do it, do they? We both needed that. I wish you’d come earlier. Before…everything. But who knows? Maybe I wouldn’t have been this happy to find you…if we’d met then. I’m happy, Harry. I’m not used to it, but I’m so fucking happy. You know this can’t end, right? Not without destroying me in the process. I belong to you. Just…take care of me…okay?”

“I can do that.”

It’ll have to be enough.

Naturally enough, after I’d mused over it in his presence, he got reservations to Charlie Trotter’s with nothing but a phone call. God help me, but I love a man with clout. Another shower was called for, given that I was sweaty, sticky, sore and faintly leaking cum into the otherwise perfectly nice pair of panties I’d worn. For Charlie Trotter’s, I can travel as myself. It’s dressing up in my very best boy clothes tonight. I do tend to be a little flashier than Harry, but that’s alright. I’m built for show, and he’s Mr. Subtle. It works. We look great together, and even Ron is sweet on the way there.

“Looking sharp, boys. Must be a quality place. I’m guessing we’re not talking steak and a beer, huh?”

Harry chuckles. I do love that sound. “You might say that. Probably not your usual fare, Ronny, but you can come along if you like.”

“Nah…you two lovebirds enjoy yourselves. I never feel right in those ’upper-crusty’ joints. Just behave yourselves and try not to scandalize the place the way you do me, kapiche?”

I roll my eyes with mock frustration. “What? One little blow job in the back of the car, and he thinks it’s the last days of Rome. Give a queen a break, tough guy. You need to get out more!”

It’s nice like this…laughing with them. I fit in here now. This is where I belong. Ron seems like he accepts me completely, and maybe he’s still a creature of necessity, like Harry, but they don’t make me feel like a stranger in a strange land.

Dinner is the stuff of legends. The Michelin ratings people didn’t give this place enough credit. Their wine cellar must be very respectable, since I remember just enough from when I was younger to know what some of these vintages are…and they don’t come cheap. This is the kind of place where the prices are all round numbers, because they don’t quibble over change. If you even made
it through the door, you have enough money to make a meal here nothing but pocket change. The
wait staff here are just incredible. They’re lucky and they know it. These people make the kind of
money from tips that would put their kids through college. In exchange for that, they work damned
hard to please guests.

Inevitably, the wait for food turns to talk, and the time seems ripe. We have wine, and a quiet place
to sit together, and I’m supremely content. We’d been speaking of my artistic endeavors, and Harry
means to take me shopping again, this time for more than just clothing. Now is the time to talk of
Blaise.

“Maybe I was a little…needy today…but I have my reasons. I didn’t tell you who I ran into last
night. The club was marvelous, but the company left a little to be desired.”

“Was it…I remember…Pansy? You seemed pretty exasperated about her attention as I recall.”

“No. That might have been preferable. Turns out…the owner of the place is Blaise.” The look on
his face is like ice. “Yeah…that Blaise. He was a perfect gentleman, but I guess I got the answers
for a few questions I’ve carried around for a long time.”

“Really? And those answers were?”

He sounds so calm, but I’m not fooled. The atmosphere has shifted, and I can tell that the thought
of Blaise makes him think dangerous things. You’d think it would make me happy, but it
doesn’t…not really. It makes me remember that when he has to, this man can kill. This was the
man who smiled while he broke Flint.

“He knew what was happening. He was being set up. Some internal rivalry thing. He sent me in
his place…because he knew I wouldn’t talk…if he was on the line. He knew what would happen
to me…and he did it anyway. He apologized. And you know what? I even accepted it. Spirit of the
occasion and all.”

“That was very generous of you. An apology…for seven years in that dump? That hardly seems
like a fair exchange.”

How can I not smile? He knows what I’m thinking. Not all of it, I’m sure, but he knows I want
more than that before I experience ‘closure’. He isn’t reading my mind…he just ‘knows’ me. How
I think, what I feel. I feel so much more comfortable, knowing that he invites further comment.

“I love it when you know what I’m thinking. I quite agree. Not that he didn’t offer a lot more than
words, but to be honest, he only has one thing I want. He’s capable of suffering. I want him to
suffer. Like I did. I want him in a federal prison, wishing he could walk out every single, miserable
day, and just living with it. That’s what I want from him.”

“That’s a tall order. You’re sure you don’t want me to consider him a ‘problem’. Because I’m
pretty good at solving those. Not that making him miserable is off the menu. I’m just saying…it’s
a little more work to do this the hard way.”

Tough question. He sounds so calm about it. He’d kill for me, just to give me revenge on the man
that nearly ruined my life, and could have gotten me killed. I don’t want death on my hands. Not
even for this. Maybe he’d die in jail, but turning Harry loose on him would be just like killing him
myself. As clear as if I’d pulled the trigger on a living gun. No…I don’t want that.

“No. Not that. Not because of me. I know I shouldn’t ask for something like this, and if it’s too
much, then forget it. I want him to be in prison. Like I was. Is there a way to make that happen? I
have a card with his number…if that would give people something to trace him by. It isn’t too much…is it?”

I can almost see the wheels turning in his head. Something about the fact that I don’t want him to kill because of me. He looks…he looks…concerned. Or curious. I can’t tell.

“Alright. If you’re sure that’s what you want. For the record, I’ll have to work on this after we get back from Michigan. I need approval to do something like this, and it will take a special kind of effort to arrange this the way you want it. That reminds me. You’ll be meeting a few people after we get back to town. I thought I’d have some of the team over for a night. Dinner, drinks, some poker. They’re an interesting bunch. Not much like me. They handle more of the technical and logistic support. I handle…the more direct parts, but they make it possible to do things as smoothly as we do. I think you’ll get on famously with them.”

“I’m sure I will. If they get along with you, then I’ll like them for that alone, if nothing else. It would be wonderful to have company. I assume it will be okay for me to be a gracious hostess?”

“If you want to, but the effort might be wasted. They’ve all been over before, and we don’t stand on ceremony.”

Dinner passed as smooth as silk. Superb. Frankly, who could resist overeating here? Poached New Zealand cockles with preserved celery, Serrano ham & roasted Mayan scarlet peppers. Swan Creek Farm lamb shoulder with garlic, aged Manchego & parsley. Red and white wines carefully chosen for each course. My taste buds get the workout they so richly deserve. Even Blaise never took me places like this. When I was fifteen I was just too young and too bored and jaded to properly enjoy food the way I do now. I almost want to thank Blaise, since this wouldn’t be so heavenly if he hadn’t sent me to hell. Misgivings aside…I’ll feel a lot more forgiving of Blaise after he’s wept alone in a cell with a sore and throbbing asshole, after being whored out to some son of a bitch’s thugs because the guy in charge of that block felt like amusing himself by watching someone else’s misery.

But I’m not bitter. Heh! It’s time to smile and enjoy the dessert chocolates. I’m fairly sure that even revenge won’t taste this sweet.

Our final toast of the evening rounds out a bottle of Bordeaux. Lafite…1865. Ironically, that was the year my ancestor first fled the ruins of the Old South and made his way to Chicago. Harry couldn’t know that, but the coincidence is wonderful. A toast to new beginnings, with a wine that dates back to my family’s arrival in this town. Delicious. A memory I’ll carry for a lifetime, drifting across my palate in my dreams forever after. Thank you, Charlie Trotter’s. Only in a place like this could I have experienced culinary ecstasy while scheming for vengeance. Those five star ratings weren’t a lie.

As surprising as this may sound, I finally feel content. Between good food and the sound of Harry’s voice, I’m no longer so frantically lonesome that I require constant sex. Mostly it’s that I’m absolutely full, and so is he, and there’s nothing we could do that would excite us enough to do more than kiss. I don’t mind a bit. To be perfectly candid, I’m actually bracingly sore from earlier this evening, and a nice break from screwing like bunnies suits me just fine. We are headed for a vacation after all. I can continue my quest to exhaust Harry’s libido when we get where we’re going.

Tonight, we read quietly, and talk of art, both mine and the art that inspires me. We cuddle, pajama-clad and comfortably full, enjoying the fact that we live together, and that we can be so close so easily. Such a short time. A few weeks in a shitty cell, a few stolen nights together here, and yet we fit together like two pieces of a puzzle that were lost and alone until they clicked into
place seamlessly. It isn’t about sex now. It isn’t uncontrolled lust blinding us to each other’s true nature. It’s about two people who are entirely comfortable together. That’s the ultimate proof that I chose well. We are as well matched in silence and peace as we are in the throes of passion, and this night, sated and content, sex off the menu for a little while, is what proves it.

But who am I kidding? There’s no way I’m letting him get out of that bed until he’s made me come at least once…tomorrow morning!

I’ve been in a lot planes, but they were private jets and international flights with Father and Mother. Four seat, two prop Piper seaplanes weren’t any part of my experience. Harry looks thrilled, throwing our luggage into the space behind the seats. We didn’t pack much, since it’s only a couple days that we’ll be gone, but it looks awfully small in there. Ron has already gassed the thing up, and keeps running small checks on instruments and other things. It looks like this kind of plane takes an awful lot of checking…or maybe I’ve just never seen this stuff done before. At least the big goof looks competent and comfortable.

Harry picks up on my nervousness. Bless him. He is sweet, but I don’t really want to be thought of as afraid…at least not of something like this. He steadies me with a hand to hold onto while I climb in from off of the dock. The plane is actually on pontoons that keep it afloat, so it can take off and land on water. It looks a lot trickier than a runway, and Lake Michigan is notoriously fickle, full of choppy days with waves that have whitecaps. Fuck it…I am scared. This is crazy!

“Shhh. Don’t worry. Ron knows what he’s doing, love. He’s taken off and landed a hundred times in planes like this one. It’s a calm day…we already checked…and it’s supposed to be perfect flying weather most of this week. We’ve got flotation gear and more, and a plane this size can practically act like a glider without engines.”

Ron shouts from the cockpit, while putting on earphones and adjusting his mike. “This plane’s been checked every way it can be. It’s in perfect working order. You’ll be fine. If it helps, think of it as a taxi cab for the sky, and up there, the traffic is a lot easier than downtown. You got nothing to worry about, kiddo!”

What am I gonna do? Back out of a vacation because little planes make me nervous? Not with Harry here. We deserve this time off. I’m going and that’s all there is to it!

Harry climbs into the back seat beside me, instead of taking the co-pilot’s seat by Ron. I’m not going to admit it out loud, but I’m damned grateful to have a hand to hold while Ron starts the plane off. Harry leans in for a kiss that I know perfectly well is meant to relax and distract me. It works…mostly.

“Don’t worry about a thing. You’re gonna love this once we get over the lake proper. You’ll be fine…because I say so. Okay, love?”

Lips. He has really nice lips. When did the engine start on this thing? Ron is shouting over his shoulder.

“Now cut that out! I didn’t bring airsick bags, and you two are lovey-dovey enough to make anyone puke! Here we go!”

Bouncing across small waves, shaking like a monkey on a stick, picking up speed as we go. The
weirdest and most familiar moment is that second when we go from skipping across waves to genuinely flying. One second we are of the earth, the next we are in flight. You can actually feel the loss of that connection to the earth. Uncanny. Suddenly, it’s not so bad, and I’m curled around Harry, looking out the window at the clean blue lake beneath us. Freight ships on the horizon. Small fishing boats along the coastline. Endless, deep, dark blue water.

Lake Michigan is one of five Great Lakes in this part of the country. Carved out by glaciers during the retreat of the last Ice Age, the Great Lakes are easily the among the largest sources of fresh water above ground anywhere in the world. It’s a miracle of nature when you think about it, and the people here take it for granted every day. Lush croplands, vibrant swamps and forests, plentiful fishing and wild game. It’s all owed to these lakes. Also…miles and miles of beaches and coastline. It’s beautiful from up here, if just a little chilly, but at least with Harry to curl around I can stay warm.

We’d have been driving all day to get here in a car. Just under two hours in flight, and this Saugatuck place is near. Ron brings us down after radioing his landing coordinates in, and the approach of the water and land at high speed is enough to make me curl back into Harry’s arms and try to keep my gorge from rising. Bouncing across water while the plane lurches because Ron brought the nose up a hair at the last second is NOT my favorite activity. Still, once we’re slowed down and zipping toward a dock, this isn’t really so bad. Even so…I’m glad it’s over and we’re here.

Saugatuck turns out to be cute, in a slightly surreal way. It’s so small, and touristy, and yet it seems very cosmopolitan. The pride flags and rainbow decorations that pop up all over are surprising. One doesn’t see a lot of small towns with gay friendly banners all over the place, but apparently the gay population here is so entrenched, and has been here so long, that people have become very comfortable with it. Kind of like Boystown, or the Village in NYC, where people have long since learned that gay men walk hand in hand or kiss in public, so it stops being a surprise to anyone.

Now that I think of it, that’s all anyone could ever hope for. Not to be a special, protected minority, but to be just an ordinary person. To kiss when you feel like it, just like any other couple anywhere in the world. That’s worth working toward. The best of all possible worlds would be a world where being gay meant nothing, because no one else cared about who loved who or who was attracted to who. That would be my perfect world. Places like Saugatuck, San Francisco and Boystown give me a glimpse of what that world might be like…and it’s beautiful.

I think I’m about to have a very, very nice time.

TBC!!!
Part 15

Big Chicago part 15....by Samayel

Not a bad little burg, really. Cute, in a Midwest American, antique-saturated, somewhat kitschy way. Ron got the docking for the plane taken care of while Harry dialed up a ride. He reserved rooms at The Kingsley House, a bed and breakfast in a huge old house that looks just darling inside and out. I prefer things a little more modern, both in color and style, but luxury is luxury, so I’ll take it as it comes.

Ron gives Harry a knowing nod after we’re all unpacked, then heads for the door. I can’t help but ask what he’s up to.

“Where ya going? We just got here.”

He gives me a withering look that just shouts ’How can you not know?’

“We’re on vacation! You’re with Harry. The flying is done and we haven’t got a car. We’re in Michigan, and we’re right by the lake. Duh! I’m renting a boat and going fishing!”

My God. Can a man get any straighter?

“Have fun. Don’t…you know…drown…or capsize…or anything like that, okay?”

“Hah! Right. If it has a motor, I can make it purr. Don’t worry about me. Catch you two later.”

And then he’s gone, and I’m unpacking things with Harry, getting comfortable in a suite that looks like some Victorian bedroom from Martha Stewart Living. You know…the kind of setting that looks like anyone who touches it gets their hand chopped off for disturbing the perfection. It’s an anal-retentive’s wet dream in here, but Harry doesn’t care. I finally get everything unpacked, and that’s when I realize our plans had a flaw.

“Harry! I only went shopping for regular clothes before. I don’t have a swimsuit, or any beachwear. Now we’re out in the middle of, like, nowhere, and I haven’t a thing I can put on for the bea-”

“No worries, love. This is a beach tourism town. They have shops for that kind of thing. I just figured we’d shop when we got here. Hope I didn’t assume too much, but shopping seemed to make you very happy, so I thought a little of that wouldn’t hurt while we have the time.”

He’s fucking brilliant. Oh, if my ass didn’t still smart a bit from waking him up this morning, I would sooo christen this perfect bedroom suite with some mind-frying sex. I must have done very good things in a past life, because I’m smiling at the only good thing I’ve done in this one, and because I’m almost sure I don’t deserve a man this thoughtful.

Strolling through downtown, there are shops, but they’re heavily biased in favor of kitsch, antiques, retro-collectibles and art. All of this is lovely to look at, but I don’t really need any of it. I need a swimsuit, and it must be fashionable. I won’t be seen looking less than gorgeous, not here or anywhere else…if I can possibly help it. I’ve spent too many years looking like drek to go back to it now that I don’t have to!

I feel a little chatterbox-like, but it’s nice to speak of trivialities instead of heavy things. The
weather, which is unseasonably humid, given the lack of rainfall, and my thoughts on the town in general. Harry is quieter than usual. He’s thinking, but he is smiling while he’s thinking, so it can’t be too bad. It feels like he marvels at me every so often, soaking up the ambience that only I can provide. I think I like that. Yeah…I’m sure. I like it a lot.

At least he gets a few kicks out of my comments on global warming. The lakes are lower than they were when I went into prison, and the average temperature in summer is hotter too. The whole world is busy flinging accusations about who and what is causing the change of climate, when the only thing people really need to concentrate on is adapting to the changes. There is no reversing it, and it might very well be a man made problem, but who cares? If we’re still arguing when the water dries up and the crops fail, movies like ‘The Road Warrior’ will be comedies compared to what comes next! As for me…queen of the short term plan…I’m increasing my sunblock SPF level…and making sure my lover always has air conditioning handy. Callow? Maybe. Realistic? Oh, definitely!

The beach isn’t all that far away, and since we had an early breakfast with Therese and Maria, we skip the eateries and head straight for the beach shops. Harry was right…they have everything, and being a very gay friendly town, they have some beachwear you might not see in some generic podunk towns. Especially for vain, little queens who want something they can wear and yet still scandalize people. A section of the beach is supposed to be nude, but even so, I’d rather have something on, even if it doesn’t amount to much in terms of fabric!

You can’t go wrong with basic black, so even if there isn’t much of it, the little thong I’ve found will do. Harry raises an eyebrow.

“Almost the same as going bare naked. You realize I’ll have to wear long jams if you traipse around in this? Otherwise, the entire beach will know how I feel about you.”

I put up a look of completely feigned innocence and concern. “Oh! I hadn’t thought of that! Whatever shall we do?”

“Smart ass. I should have known you’d enjoy driving everyone else absolutely crazy…not to mention making me eager to get back to the suite. Guess I’ll just have to bear up the best I can.”

I blow him a kiss, by way of teasing, and he picks up a few extras. The usual lotions and potions that protect from sunburn or speed tanning, and a giant towel just for the fun of it. Also…long beach jams. Hmmph! I was hoping he’d squeeze himself into something smaller. He has so much to show off. He’s probably just getting them to tease me!

Beach! Sun! Sand dunes that are as soft as gliding silk! I’ve been an indoor creature for most of this decade…all I have to say is: It’s about fucking time!!! We’ve drifted off from the main beach quite a ways, and there’s a lovely dune hill overlooking the area. It’s a bit high up, but I want a vantage point. I tease Harry by making him chase me, sniggering all the while, until we get around the corner of that hill and into the brush and scrub that crops up here on the edge of the beach. I’d say I let him catch me…but who am I kidding…the man is like lightning on sand. I’m exhausted in less than thirty seconds, he isn’t even sweating. Must be that whole military desert experience kicking in. Not that I’d want that experience, but I envy the results.

Snuggling in warm sun, so brazenly, so openly, is intoxicating in its own way. If he hadn’t put me right through the mattress this morning, not five hours ago, I’d probably give the signal for a prompt and sassy little ‘nooner’, but I wasn’t kidding about being a little sore. I pushed the limits a bit yesterday, and I’m paying a little of the price now. Don’t think I wouldn’t, or won’t, do it all over again in a heartbeat though. It was worth every slight twinge and ache a hundred times over.
So peaceful. So quiet. Just the sounds of gulls and small birdsong. Waves. Wind rustling the leaves on the bushes that line the edge of the dunes. You can hear other people a long ways off. This is a heat I can live with. Not the stifling stench of human misery, sweltering all day in disgusting little cells, stewing in our own hate and fear until we wish we could suffocate to death. This is the warm, golden, hazy heat that makes cats lounge on windowsills. At least here by the lake there’s a breeze, and feeling it caress my skin is just heavenly.

People only pass by every so often. Only men for the most part…at least on this stretch of the beach, and even then in couples most of the time, so we are left in perfect peace. I lounge until it’s time to roll over, basking in the heat like the cold-blooded reptilian creature I can sometimes be. Flicking a lazy, emotionless eye across the landscape, and ogling Harry’s muscled back in the process.

Yeah. For decency’s sake, it’s time to roll over. This thong doesn’t hide anything!

How perfect, the irony of savoring a moment of carefree near nudity, only to turn over and remember that the shapely, gorgeous little ass I’m about to show the world has the letter ‘F’ scorched into it. Moments like that still make me want to grab something sharp and open a vein. I didn’t even sigh. I only hesitated. Harry sensed it anyway.

“It’ll be gone soon. You took enough punishment for this life. Do really need more badly enough to serve it up yourself? Your dues are paid in full. When we get home, I’ll be calling Doc Snape. You won’t have to look at that by the time my birthday comes around.”

Thank God for Harry. The perfect distraction! I need to think about his birthday. I can hoard the resources I have, think of gifts I can create rather than merely purchase, and maybe pick up a few nice things besides. For what he’s done for me, I have to make his birthday something unbelievable.

“I hear you. Don’t worry. Just…not used to some things…yet. Your birthday. I know at least one present you’re getting already! Hardly a secret, that one. This is nice. Thank you, Harry. I’m glad we came here.”

He’s staring at the sky, sunglasses still on, quiet and still. He has the kind of calm a Zen Master would fucking envy. I wonder what he’s thinking.

“I liked what you said. When we spoke about Zabini.”

“What? What part?”

“It takes a rare person…to not want some kind of immediate, horrible revenge. The kind you know I could deliver for you. Power corrupts. Absolute power…corrupts absolutely. You still don’t want him to die. There…there are ways…I wish I was more like you.”

I can’t help but hold my breath. Something momentous is taking place, here on a hill by the beach. I can feel it. Immense and heavy like storm clouds. In his soul, it’s about to rain. I will dance in that rain, thanking the heavens just for the chance to get wet.

“What I do. My business. I told you I do it for a reason. My parents died in a car crash…like I told you, but I didn’t tell you all of it. They were driving through the mountains. One of their tires was shot by a long distance rifle. They went off the road because someone wanted them dead. They knew the man my father worked for. He was an intelligence analyst…for the people I work for now. My parents were murdered in cold blood, at the orders of the man I’m looking for. What I do, what we all do, is play a game. We’re drawing him out, making it hard for him to operate. He does the same to us sometimes. The trash I take care of? They’re just part of organizations he makes use
of. I ’discourage’ their cooperation with him.

The company I work for…is a front. It exists solely to track him and oppose him at every turn. I almost had him a year ago. That was the last time I got hurt. I was close. So close. He hired the people who killed my godfather too. I was raised by my mother’s sister’s family. They hated me. Wanted nothing to do with a kid that was tied to murder. They never let me forget that they’d been saddled with a kid they didn’t want. Funny, but I never really blamed them for it. I kind of understood the way they felt. Or at least the way they said they felt.

My godfather. He was my father’s best friend. He got into some trouble overseas. Doing the kind of thing I do now. He was framed and imprisoned for almost ten years. I suppose that’s why I don’t think of prison as some kind of mark that makes a person worthless. When he got out, the first thing he did was find me. Instead of being treated like a burden, he made me feel like a prince. Private school, tutors, museums and theaters. Symphonies and orchestras. All of it. He never let me think for a second that I wasn’t the most important person in his world. Two years after he found me, he was murdered. He left his entire estate to me, and it was arranged for me to attend a military academy. I was fifteen.”

I can tell it isn’t a time for me to speak. He’s tense. This isn’t easy for him. To look at him, a stranger might think he was talking about the weather. I know him better than that. He’s so powerful, so contained. Even speaking of this makes him vulnerable. He doesn’t like being vulnerable, but he’d doing it…for me. This is how he says it…louder than the words, the meaning behind them. I love you. I trust you. I’m being handed his heart. I’ll guard it with my life.

“Everything I’ve done, every…questionable…act, everything I’ve endured…it all has one purpose. I want the man who took my family away to die. I don’t even want it to linger. I don’t want to make a show of it. I just want him to be off of this planet. I want to know for a fact that he’s dead and buried, and I want the last thing he sees to be my smile. I want him to know why he died, and who killed him, so that he’ll know things came full circle. He took away the people who loved me, I’m going to take away his life…and die trying.

So you see…I understand revenge. I’ve lived for revenge my entire life. I don’t understand you…not completely. You have…compassion. Mercy. Some kind of moral voice that says ‘enough’. Maybe I don’t understand you…but I admire you. You…are a better person than I think I can ever be. There is something…good…and pure…inside of you, and that you would choose to be near me…makes me think I haven’t done everything wrong after all. You make me…you make me think there’s something to live for…after…after I do what I have to do. I’ve spent my entire life learning about death…and how to make it happen to others. You…you make me think about life…and just living it with you. I love you, Drake. Thank you.”

Awed? Dumbstruck? Those are close, but they don’t quite cover where I’m at. Maybe I shouldn’t use words. I’m not even sure I should use sex. Not that I don’t suddenly want to, but this is bigger than even that. I lean in…curl around his arm, lotion slicked and shining in the sun, and just rest my head on his shoulder. The words come when they’re ready.

“Harry. I love you. I didn’t even think those words meant anything…and then you made them mean something all over again. When you…finish…with what you have to do…I’ll always be here. When it’s all over…and the dust settles… I’ll still be waiting for you. As long as it takes. If I don’t show it every way that I can…just know that it’s still true. I love you, Harry.”

I know it to be true. Someday, somewhere…we will lounge upon some beach in golden sun and glorious silence, because nothing needs to be said. He will do what he must, until he doesn’t have to anymore, and I will wait for him as patiently and as desperately as I must, until I never have to
wait again. It will happen because I believe in it too passionately for it to not come true. That’s our future, and I will endure whatever I have to in order to see it.

It’s a joyful little vacation from the world. We drink lightly at the little nightclub by the beach. I say little, because it’s not that heavily populated compared to a Chicago club, but the place is actually sprawling. There is a piano outside, just begging to be played, and by keeping my choices simple I can make sure I sound my best. Ragtime or boogie woogie always pleases in situations like this. It’s strange to get tips this way. I’m not used to making money with my clothes on. Insert a wry smirk with that remark. I did, and when I said it into the microphone the crowd laughed. They can’t even imagine how truthful that statement is.

Naturally, I get tipsier than Harry ever does, so I wind up practically being carried home. Well, I did walk, but it’s good thing Harry is sturdy enough to lean against without losing his balance. There’s nothing frantic about what comes after. None of the mad urgency or crazed need of before. He knows I want to be fussied over and cosseted, made love to with deftness and gentleness, teased and pleased and softly sated.

In the silence of the night, burrowed into the crook of his arm where I can properly rest, we chat sleepily of things that randomly cross our minds. We really are still getting to know each other. So many tiny mysteries…waiting to unravel. We are close…closer than either of us have ever been to another, but it’s been so fast that we still have to learn the little details. The things I ask him fill those tiny blanks in my mental image of him.

I wondered where he learned to cook breakfast so well. His guardians…his mother’s relatives…they used him like a servant when he still very small. He cooked their meals and cleaned their house. Apparently he’d been raised to believe that he owed them a debt for their ‘kindness’. He wasn’t often struck or beaten, although I suspect he downplays such things, but he was always made to feel inferior. A burden. The product of bad people who shouldn’t have left such a burden for others. He says it so calmly. I know that under the surface he rages. He must know that they were wrong and vicious and hateful people. Where he gained his incredible confidence I can only guess, but it’s easy to believe that people like that could never have kept someone like Harry down.

He asked about the paintings. I only had a few art courses in school. Not enough to make a big difference. They just introduced me to the concepts. I was self taught. It was always about expression with me. The power to vent emotions and make the unspoken come to life. My mother’s chill disdain or feigned histrionics to assuage her guilt. My father’s towering arrogance and pride. The sense of isolation that comes to a teenage boy who one day realizes that he is not like others his age, and that no matter how he tries to fake it and fit in, some ineffable portion of his soul will forever set him apart from the rest of the pack. These were the things that moved me to draw, and then to paint. Sometimes pictures and images have so much more power than words ever could. I took up drawing at age twelve. By the time I was fifteen, I was working in oil and acrylic. At sixteen I had dope and coke and boys to distract me from anything dangerous…like thoughts deeper than, ‘So do you wanna fuck me again?’ That was the end of my artistic spree. And then there was Harry…and the place inside of me that was too dead to respond snapped to wakefulness and clamored for release.

I wanted to know it for quite a while. I admit to the tiny hint of stupid jealousy. Has he ever had other lovers? How did he get so good in bed? He must have learned somewhere. Some small and spiteful little imp inside me just despises the notion that anyone touched him before me. He should have been mine and no one else’s. It’s a comfort that he is mine and mine alone now, but I am different in love than I am in all other things. I am more possessive than Flint and his pathetic heated wire could ever be. Harry isn’t property…he’s the breath in my lungs. The pulse in my veins. It bothers me to hear it, but I asked, and I receive accordingly.
“Not as much experience as you might imagine. I haven’t had the kind of life that lent itself to romance. I guess I figured out what I wanted while I was in military school. Not that it did that much good. The only person I ever told was the person I liked most, and then only because I knew he was gay and wouldn’t turn on me. He was the captain of the soccer team. He was a bit older than I was, but he’d always been kind to me, and by the end of my first year there, I liked him more than anyone else I knew. He was about to graduate, and I got a bit maudlin about him leaving and admitted having a crush on him. All I got was one good kiss and a few kind words. He really thought of me as a younger brother, because I was fifteen and he was three years older, and I suppose he just didn’t feel the same way about me as I did about him. Oliver was one of a kind, and I never really met anyone quite like him while I was in school.

Once I signed up and joined the service, I was too busy proving myself to fool around on the side. I never really wanted anything that didn’t have real feelings attached to it. Laugh if you want, but I really am a romantic, I guess. The only person I really had a relationship with, of all the places in the world to have one, was in Afghanistan. There was a tribe of nomads, hill fighters and guerrillas all, that my unit was attached to for awhile. They provided us with directions and a safe station to re-supply and rest between missions.

A lot of people wouldn’t believe this, but I’ll swear to it that this is true. Parts of the Arab world are hostile to the idea of homosexuality, but not this tribe. It was a custom for warriors to have not only wives, but also a boyfriend. Wives were for marriage and children and leaving a legacy. Their male lovers were their real confidants and friends. We had orders to blend into the local population to protect ourselves and them, so we wouldn’t be easily targeted by militants. We grew beards like them, wore robes and turbans, and a few guys took boyfriends because there were no women in our immediate future, and because it made you accepted as a warrior in their culture. Including me.

I didn’t plan to. He kind of picked me. His lover had been killed in a mortar attack, and he’d spent months just mourning and getting by alone. I guess he set his sights on me because I was always on my own and reading when I had the time. I used to read Omar Khayyam’s ’The Rubaiyat’ a lot. I’d picked up a Farsi edition, to help me practice, because if you can’t curse properly or speak poetically, you don’t understand the language or the culture. Those are two things people respect deeply there, and if you can do both, you can get along well. Most of the area spoke a Pashtun dialect, and the ones who knew more than one language usually spoke Farsi for convenience.

He trailed around, staring at me quietly, bringing drinks and food every so often and occasionally smiling or asking me little questions. I never pushed him away, but I didn’t quite get that I was being courted until one of the older tribesman laughed at me and told me that I was blind if I couldn’t see that I was wanted. It would have been unseemly to throw himself at me, so all he could do was hint that he liked me and hope I picked up on it. It was up to me to ask him. He was humiliated…because I’d had to be told that, and because if I had to be told then it must have meant that I hadn’t wanted him at all. I went to apologize for embarrassing him and wound up with a lap full of him kissing me senseless, and that was that. He moved into my tent the next day.

Ibrahim was waiting for me for four months. He was eighteen, and I was twenty-one. He taught me what he liked most, and helped me figure out what I enjoyed most. Did I have feelings for him? Yeah. A lot of them. I don’t think it was love. It was more like mutual needs being met at a time when we needed them met so badly that nothing else mattered. He didn’t make any pretense about love, but I know he genuinely liked me. It was the same for me. When our unit rotated out, and another was coming to take our place, he packed my bags without a word, we spent one last night together, and then he wished my a long life and beautiful children. He still thought I was like the others, taking a boyfriend because I wasn’t married yet. The last time I saw him, I was climbing into a helicopter and staring down while we took off.
That was all there was. I still wonder if he found someone else, or if he got married and has kids now, or if he’s even alive after all the shit that happens every day there. Other than that, I’ve never been with anyone else. The only person I can honestly say I love is you. There’s never been anyone that made me feel this way. I feel like I was waiting my entire life for someone I hadn’t met yet, and when I first saw you, something clicked into place. Then again, when you tried to warn me about Flint, and again when you answered my questions. The first time we…when you…in the cell, when you didn’t have to…but you did it anyway…I knew something important was happening. Like I could feel something you were trying to say without words. When I heard it, in my heart, everything changed. I had to see you again…make sure you were safe and free…take a chance that you might stay long enough to know me. I wasn’t wrong. This…this is what I waited for.”

No baby will ever sleep as soundly in its mother’s arms as I do in Harry’s. I am safer here than I ever was in the womb. Maybe I am scarred…inside and out…but I regret nothing. Not anymore. Not if it led to this. Everywhere he has been, everything he has done, has been a part of him becoming who he is now. That is who I love. The same must be true of me. What he sees in me may have born in pain, but it was worth it to open my eyes and see a world like this, next to him, never really alone whether he’s near or far.

I am ashamed only of the slut I’ve been. Dozens upon dozens of men…held up against his one in stark contrast. I never felt that it was wrong to do as I pleased with whomever I wanted at the moment, but to even feel jealousy over a person who lived with self restraint and dignity while I wallowed like pig in the muck of my pathetic lust…it just feels wrong. While he waited, hungry to find someone who returned his feelings, I was the boy who deliberately seduced the summer gardener, willfully using him for a first fling to dispose of my hated virginity, only to set my sights on one person after another until I met Blaise. His is a legacy of searching patiently for love, and mine was a litany of empty encounters.

Thank God…thank God I can write off my past like a blank slate, because he doesn’t care about what I have done…only what I can do. The person who did those things is ebbing away like the flotsam along the beach, and the tide is carrying away the last of the old. Something new…and better…is being born, and Harry didn’t give his heart to a faithless whore. With every word that brings him closer to me, he brings me closer to him, and every minute next to him steals away an hour of the empty hell that used to pass for my life.

If only vacations lasted forever.

TBC!!!
Big Chicago part 16...by Samayel

In the history of comedy, there have been many great strides forward. From ancient Rome’s comic plays and farces to amuse the masses, to the more contemporary Shakespeare’s careful quatrains. The humble Punch And Judy shows and Voltaire’s skewering satires. Then came Ron attempting to ride a horse.

They have horse rentals nearby, and when I saw the brochure I couldn’t resist. I used to be just brilliant at this, but I’m a bit rusty for obvious reasons. Still, it is like riding a bicycle. You never really forget how. I’m a little put off by Western saddles, since I was trained for English Dressage, but they haven’t got any English saddles handy, so I guess that’s to be endured. As it turns out, Harry rode horses occasionally for a few years after his godfather adopted him, then rode them again while he was in Afghanistan. He knows what he’s doing, even if he never trained for competition. Ron, I think, only came along out of curiosity…and because he already caught more fish than anyone could eat alone. Therese will probably be putting a few of those on the menu very soon, and I admit they look big and tasty…but they are kind of slimy and gross, even if he did clean them first. Now he has time on his hands…as well as fish, and I think he just needs to prove that he can handle anything that qualifies as a ‘mode of transportation’.

Horses, as Ron found out, are quite a bit different from cars. For instance…if you’re uncertain and don’t know what to do next…a car doesn’t sense it and respond accordingly, just leave it alone and it'll do its job…at least if its automatic transmission. The staff was kind enough to chase Ron down on horses of their own, allowing Harry and I to have a quiet ride after they wrestled for control of the rather spirited stallion Ron picked, which ran off with him hollering bloody murder all the while. His face was as red as his hair when they brought him back. I can’t help but tease just a little.

“Don’t tell me you’ve never forked a horse before?”

“What? I’d never do something like that with an animal! That’s sick! You rich folks are all freaks!”

“FORKED, Ron! It means ’mounted' or 'sat upon’. Forks used to have only two tines. Like two legs. Thus, when you get on, the old term for it is ‘forking a horse’. And EEEWWW just for thinking that I would even do that!”

“Oh. Heh. Okay then. Never mind.”

“So? Ron…you really haven’t ridden before, have you?”

“Hey…I’m from West Virginia…we got horses all over. Just not at my folks’ place. Pop does workplace safety inspections for the state. I didn’t grow up doing this kinda thing. Besides…you’re the one who looks naturally comfortable with something huge between his legs!”

“Ha! Well…I suppose you could handle the penny-ponies at the supermarket parking lot.”

“Oh yeah! You ARE the penny-pony at the supermarket parking lot, blondie!!”

Things kept up in that vein for most of the ride, but at least it was all good humored ribbing. It doesn’t take much to feel good, riding through easy forest paths while sunlight creeps down, guided by a young woman mounted on the horse leading the tour. It’s quiet and peaceful here, if a
trifle hot, and you can see motes of dust and pollen dancing in the beams of sunlight that filter through the shroud of leaves. There is a wonderful place a rider goes to, when he or she is at peace with the animal they’re riding. It stops being about control, and it becomes a peaceful partnership. They know what to do, and you know enough to only intervene with instructions when necessary. Horses are herd animals by nature, and when you learn to think as they do, you can intuit their feelings and moods. You stop being a foreign and intrusive element, and just become a part of the herd-mind. Then you can truly ride in peace. Even Harry can’t do that. I rode horses and competed since I was only a little older than eight, and I’ve always loved it, but after years of riding I found that ‘place’. It’s nearly been a decade since I felt this way. Even bickering with Ron can’t peel away a feeling this good.

The trip is over before I know it. Almost an hour gone by just enjoying the feeling of riding again, and there we are, back and ready to head for the marina. The bags are packed and waiting at the Kingsley House, and Harry paid handsomely for a comfortable ride back to the dock where the plane is waiting. I’m already a bit stiff through the thighs, but that’s just lack of practice. Poor Ron, on the other hand, is limping along and making noises like an eighty-year-old virgin who just got deflowered by a pack of gorillas. Just sad. Such a tough guy in a car or a plane, but one little ride on a horse and he’s whimpering worse than I ever did for Flint.

“God damn it! My ass is killing me!”

“You should try it after several days of top-flight, through-the-headboards-and-into-the-walls, do-it-til-your-eyes-roll-back-in-your-head fucking. Then tell me your butt hurts after an hour on a horse. Just imagine that before you complain.”

“Thanks a lot. I’m trying real hard NOT to imagine that, thank you very much! Just for that…I’m gonna look for turbulence on the flight home. Hope you like your baggage shaken…not stirred!”

“You wouldn’t!!”

“Oh, yeah…I would. Also…ever done a barrel roll?”

“God, no!”

“Enjoy being able to say that while you still can!”

I take it all back. If I can have Harry kill somebody…I’ll have it be Ron! The man is pure evil. I’d prefer the cement truck over this! At least once we were in flight, Harry put the brakes on Ron’s antics, but I’m still convinced that the ‘rough patch’ we hit just north of home was pure fiction. If I hadn’t been vaguely airsick most of the way, I’d have blown Harry right on the spot just for the satisfaction of knowing that it would make Ron squirm. Well, that and the satisfaction of blowing Harry. The activity is kind of its own reward. Kind of like shopping, but less expensive.

Home is just like we left it. Placid, spotless, and perfect. Ron has things to take care of at the garage before tonight’s gathering, and I need time to unpack, unwind, and properly change. I think boy clothes tonight. I kind of prefer being introduced to Harry’s associates as Drake Malfoy, and since we’re staying in tonight, I’ll be playing gracious host in a home that is only recently my own. Given that I really want to impress Harry’s coworkers, who are instrumental in speeding my revenge upon Blaise, I’ll try to blend in as much as possible tonight.

Harry’s off to the exercise room, aiming to work off a little of the luxurious living he’s enjoyed lately. My exercise will be limited to a long hot bath and some quality time wrapped in a fluffy bathrobe while I surf the channels here in air-conditioned heaven. I know…it’s torturous, living this way. I suppose we all have our crosses to bear, and I’ll try to carry the terrible burdens of
comfort and luxury with as much grace as I can manage.

Yeah…I am a smug little shit. And proud of it, too.

TV has really lost its charm over the years. I remember watching for hours, loving every minute of it, being pulled into the plots of shows or just letting my mind drift while programs became background noise. Now it just appalls me. The commercialism is less subtle than ever, almost violent in its attempts to sway consumers. The years away from TV made the change more visible to me than it is to most people. Things slowly changed and folks didn’t really notice, but it’s painfully obvious if you haven’t been exposed to it in years. Especially the advertisements.

Drug companies flog their latest cure-all for every problem you can have. In the background, bright, clear and sunny skies frame women and men who are fit and healthy, smiling ear to ear because the legal dope they’ve been prescribed has taken away all that unfair stress they were suffering. Because, obviously, life should never produce any kind of stress, and no one should ever learn better coping skills when for thirty dollars a pill they can just knock back instant comfort. It’s not that people with severe conditions shouldn’t get treatment...its that it looks from here like the bar for ‘serious' has been lowered until anyone suffering even mild annoyance merits medical intervention. I know what the ugly end of that dependence on chemistry for comfort looks like...and I can't find it pretty or irrelevant anymore.

Energy beverages transform your boring life in front of the TV into a snowboarding tournament that miraculously involves surviving a jump off of a cliff that would kill just about anyone. Car salesmen are cajoling you to hurry out and buy a new SUV, with deals that are barely believable but quite real...as long as you understand that no one wants an SUV that gets horrible gas mileage in an era of ever spiraling fuel prices. They’re all but giving them away, and still no one wants them, thus the frantic pleas for customers...even customers with horrible credit.

Then there’s the banks, the credit card companies, and the insurance agencies! Names I’ve never even heard of! I was only away for seven years...did every single blasted bank merge or change its name while I was gone? What they call a fair interest rate is almost double or even triple what I knew a few years ago. Apparently the concept of usury, a term for corrupt money-lending practices, is now dead and buried...along with any sense of dignity or shame. It comes down to this...if you can’t afford credit, you shouldn’t be given credit. Both for your safety and for the bank’s. Bad debt...is never good. That’s why it’s called ‘bad’ debt.

Admittedly, my life choices weren’t exactly stellar, but I remember how stunningly low Daddy’s credit card interest rates were. One guess as to why he got rates way, way below ten percent...he’s rich. Really rich. There’s no risk of payment failure, and he doesn’t really need credit, so it’s necessary to offer him a stunningly low rate to make it worth his while. The thirty percent plus endless fees that other people pay...makes up for the huge risk they take offering credit to people who genuinely can’t afford it…and subsidizes the great deals they offer their few exceptional clients.

Oh, Daddy. There you are again, hogging the limelight on the evening news as always. The commercials are over, and Congressman Malfoy is turning an interview that’s supposed to be news into nothing more than a different kind of advertising. Every word and look is carefully chosen, every smile and laugh seems genuine. Only someone who truly knows him would know that inside he is as empty and soulless as a shark.

It’s Daddy’s favorite new pet project, that pathetic urban renewal scheme he’s touting, and this time he’s downplaying that the surge in violent crime is damaging the prospects for the start of construction this year. Oh, God. They’re talking about Harry! Not Harry personally...they don’t
know about him, but they’re talking about the deaths among organized crime groups! So many…

was Harry part of all of these? He was only gone for about a week…and they’re talking about a
dozen or more bodies.

Dead Russians at a construction site, dead Italians in a bar office, dead Chinese above and outside a
restaurant. An illegal sports bookie hanged in his apartment. A gas leak that asphyxiated a
supposedly retired mobster in his sleep. A Latin playboy/cartel rep stabbed in a bathroom with no
trace of anyone nearby. Every criminal organization in the Chicago area is on the brink of open
warfare with others, and every death is being watched closely now. They’re all attributed to and
linked to the prison riot, hinting that it may have started with the inmate deaths weeks ago. They
don’t know it’s all Harry, but they’ve called in the FBI.

I keep watching, wide-eyed and suddenly chilled, soaking up every weird detail that unfolds.
Power outages in the neighborhoods where murders took place…as yet unexplained. Different
weapons were used in different killings, so it isn’t even suggested that one man is behind it. Patrols
of certain neighborhoods are being dramatically increased, and the mayor has authorized a huge
budget for overtime police work. Telephone hotlines have been set up for people who wish to give
information and remain anonymous. Rewards have been offered for information that leads to
successful arrests. Christ…this city is on the edge of an explosion!

Maybe I’ve been isolated by luxury, and maybe I knew what Harry was up to, but the reality of it
comes back again now, this time clearer than ever. He’s a one man army…and he’s starting a war.

I don’t want to watch the news anymore. It makes my stomach lurch when I think of all the
scrutiny that Harry will be avoiding when he goes out again. They’ll all be looking over their
shoulder for someone, and it won’t be so easy next time. Harry’s good. Ron said so…and I saw
him in action in prison. But no one…no one is perfect.

All this…all these nice things…none of it means shit without Harry! I can’t…I can’t lose him. Not
and keep a shred of sanity. I NEED him…not money…not drugs…him! The others will be here in
a few hours. When did I start crying? I need a shower…again. I need a stiff drink…and some time
to compose myself. I don’t want Harry to see me like this. I don’t want him thinking of anything
but surviving out there. If I were a distraction…and it got him hurt…could I live with it?

I have a lot to think about…before they come here…and before the subject of Blaise comes up.
Something different than I’d planned is called for…urgently. An intercom call gets a vodka and
tonic delivered to me by Maria while I primp after my shower. I’m fortified and protected from the
terrors of my imagination by a nice, comfy haze of alcohol. Not so much that I’m drunk…just
enough that I relax. I need to modify my request…in a way that minimizes danger for Harry. There
has to be a way.

A little product and some brush and hairdryer time, and I have straight, but neatly faux-messy hair.
This is an occasion for the good suit…the best of the ones Harry got me. I really must get one
hand-tailored, but I’ve been busy just lately. There will be time for shopping later. Off-the-rack this
suit may be, but it’s simply gorgeous on its own merits. Very nice.

God. I look slim and clean and well-cared for. Not looking my real age at all when I’m dressed this
way. I look…Ha! I look like Drake Malfoy…the high school queer who dropped off the face of the
earth nine years ago. I’d muse more, but Harry appears in the mirror behind me, wistful…and half

“Well…look at you. A little sand and sun and you just glow, don’t you? Now is probably a good
time to remind you of how gorgeous I think you are.”
I love that smirk of his. It’s easy to forget the terror I was feeling not even an hour ago when green eyes are shining brightly in my direction. Easy to get lost in a kiss that has warmth and hunger and all the good little things that make everything feel right and decent.

It’s also easy to yank the jogging pants he wore for the gym right off of him and suck his cock quickly and well right here in the bathroom. What could serve as a better reminder that he’s safe and alive and powerful and well…than the feel of his hands in my hair and the sound of a voice made raw and tense by pleasure? The musk of a healthy man and the sharp and peppery tang of fresh sweat. Pulsing thickness alive in my hand and thick come spilling onto my tongue while I suck every drop into me with a desperation that borders on the crazed. I give him my very best, and I know it was recognized by the way he collapses against the wall panting for breath afterwards.

“Damn! If I’d known complimenting your looks would get me something like that…I’d have started sounding clichéd by now!”

“Just reminding you that you’re adored. I have to fix my hair again…but that was worth every second.”

“But…but you didn’t…”

“So? I didn’t do all that so I could come. Don’t you get it? Sometimes I’m all in favor of coming…but that isn’t all I care about. I feel good inside when I know I just rocked your world. Sometimes that’s all I want. Nothing more, nothing less. Now go take your shower and get ready…there isn’t that much time left until your people get here, and I need to compare notes with Therese about canapés and a few other treats for the guests.”

“As you wish, my love. If you didn’t look picture perfect already, I’d drag you into the shower with me just for good measure, but it can wait…a little.”

He says the last with a smirk while he strolls into the shower naked, and I just know he’s entirely aware of the impact his naked backside has on me. Not that I’m a ‘top’ or anything like that, but a man with a sexy ass, solid shoulders and strong hips just looks positively indecent walking away. It suddenly occurs to me that a third shower would almost be worth it…but the way I primp and preen after a shower, it would be another couple hours before I made it out of here. I have things to plan, and not just canapés!

One by one they will arrive. Ron, of course, is early and first, and he pulls a beer from the fridge and heads for the library, giving me a friendly wave and a thumbs up while he compliments my suit. Nice guy…as straight men go…that Ron. Maria has set up a small table and chairs for the occasion, and I’ve glued myself to the entrance, ready to meet and greet people as they come in. I get a little edgy when I’m alone, so Maria is here to take coats and hang them, and the pressure is off when Harry steps into the entryway looking casual but cool.

“Relax, love. These are my coworkers and all, but you look way too worried about this. They come over all the time. They can find their own way in. They know to buzz Therese or Maria for access, and we can just relax in the library with Ron until they arrive…okay?”

I feel sheepish. I haven’t entertained company in years. I’d forgotten how desperately I missed social gatherings that didn’t involve gang rape. I shine at this kind of thing, but here I am as nervous as a long tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Maybe just one more drink wouldn’t hurt.

He leads me to the library, mixes a Screwdriver and hands it to me. Vodka and orange juice. I take my seat beside him and try to follow his instructions about relaxing, but my mind is still racing
with thoughts of Blaise and Harry and finding a way to make this one less risk for Harry to take.

The door to the library opens, and a very tall, fairly slender black man steps in, dressed in a quiet
and tasteful suit, smiling easily when he sees Harry and Ron. Ron pipes up instantly.

“Hey, Dean! Good to see you. Haven’t had one of these get-togethers in a while now. How’s life
among the lab coats?”

“Just fine, really. A little busy lately, but aren’t we all?”

Harry makes the introductions for me. Dean is an engineer and an electronics expert. Apparently
he specializes in surveillance equipment, but has a talent for almost anything mechanical or
electronic in nature. He’s taller than Ron or Harry, and I feel like a dwarf next to him, but he’s so
quiet and easy going that it would take a real struggle to dislike him.

Then a woman steps through the door. Shorter, with bushy hair bound back in a heavy braid,
wearng jeans and an almost vintage looking blouse styled after those of hippies from the Sixties.
Her stride is a lot more confident and forward than anyone else’s, and I notice out of the corner of
my eye that Ron’s eyes are glued to her every move. He also stopped chewing his canapé, and his
beer is being ignored for the first time since I got into the room.

“Hey, ‘Mione. Long time no see.” Hermione, once we get properly introduced, turns out to be the
computer and internet tech support guru for this little company. A better title for her role would be
’world class hacker’, and after meeting her in person and listening to the others talk about her
skills, those power outages suddenly make an awful lot of sense.

The last to arrive is another woman, and she’s a study in contrasts. Obviously Hindu, but decked
out in a power suit. Parvati is a polyglot and linguist. Communications analysis and translation. In
tandem with Hermione, whom Ron is still nervously pretending to ignore, her regular duties
involve sifting through global communications that have been earmarked as ‘of interest’.

Only the mildest parts of all this get mentioned at first, but after everyone is assembled, cheerily
chatting about nearly everything but business, Harry nods to Dean. Dean places a rather plain
metallic box on the counter and pushes its one button. The faintest whine is audible, as if a satellite
is being tracked by a dish antenna somewhere near. A very soft buzz is coming from the box itself.
Dean breaks the silence by addressing me directly, answering the question I refused to ask so that I
wouldn’t seem as ignorant about this as I am.

“Oscillating frequency white noise generator. Now that it’s on we can speak freely about certain
things. Even if there were a surveillance bug in the room, it couldn’t be adjusted fast enough to
tune in to this conversation. Once I turn it off, we stop talking business and just enjoy ourselves,
but Harry said we needed to have a serious chat tonight, so I brought it along.”

“Thanks, Dean.” Harry looks seated and comfortable, but I’m surrounded by strangers. I can’t help
that I fidget just a little. This is suddenly so serious that I remember with clarity that these people
are involved in something outside the boundaries of the law. Wouldn’t you feel just the slightest bit
tense? Harry picks up the narrative. “Now that we can speak openly for a little while, I can broach
some topics I haven’t been able to safely touch on. I’m going to tell you a few things now, then I
think I’ll let Hermione cover the rest.”

“Drake, we, and a few others, are only one operating branch of The Pheonix Corporation. There
have been and are other groups like this one, both here in the states and around the globe. Our
employer is only ever spoken of as Mr. White, unless you should have occasion to meet him
personally. He is very old, very wealthy, and very powerful. He’s poured his entire life into trying
to erase a mistake he made a long time ago, and we’re part of how he makes that goal plausible. Hermione? If you’ll explain the rest?"

The bushy haired young woman nods and takes a tone almost like a teacher imparting a history lesson. Annoying, because she sounds like a terrible know-it-all, but I suppose if she is collecting a paycheck similar to Harry’s, then she almost certainly earns it, and not by being stupid.

“Thanks, Harry. In the earliest days of the Cold War, a British operative who had earned his promotion during World War Two made quite a career out of confounding his Soviet counterparts. In due time, he accepted promotions and eventually groomed and trained candidates for placement as actual spies, as well as holding enormous sway over how the day to day business of his intelligence community was managed.

Among his trainees was a pupil so gifted that even Mr. White was duly impressed. That candidate was Tom Riddle. Shortly before what we consider the end of the Cold War, and the eventual changes to the formerly Soviet Union, Tom Riddle, who had spent years proving his talent for international manipulation, making contacts and consolidating his power, resigned his commission and retired from the intelligence service. He’d used his considerable influence to ensure that his financial choices worked out well, and his fortune is comparable to Mr. White’s own. Tom Riddle made allies in nearly every country around the globe, mostly industrialists and financiers. He is a silent partner in hundreds of enterprises around the globe, and by carefully hiding his involvement but retaining access to offshore accounts, he stays off the popular lists that catalog wealthy citizens of the world. More than cash, what he has is clout.

He has been involved in arms trading and smuggling, the dispersal of military and nuclear engineering documents to foreign powers, white slavery, the recruitment of mercenary armies in various ‘hot spots’ around the globe, organized crime around the world, and various forms of economic terrorism. He is a devout and absolute neo-capitalist, believing wholly that any act that profits him is inherently right, and therefore worthwhile. This isn't just free market ideology we're dealing with...this is naked gangsterism with only the name "The Enigma Corporation" to hide it.

When Mr. White first suspected that his own pupil had become a well-connected criminal, he took steps to balk and curb Riddle’s growing power, only to learn that Riddle’s financial ties were so powerful that most of the people that might have able to exercise some authority against him… were already influenced by their profitable dealings with Riddle. Mr. White retired from the public view and the intelligence service, and concentrated on building a rival network, composed of and funded by like-minded people who feared Riddle’s meteoric rise to power and his grossly unethical methods.

That first effort resulted in the Phoenix Corporation, which allowed a legitimate front to cover the movement of his agents around the globe. The early network was cruder, and information technologies have since changed the ‘field of play’ as it were, but the refinement of those techniques has proven to be successful.

Where he backs a revolution by a brutal junta, our people dispose of the leader, freeze accounts, and deliver alerts and information aid to Riddle’s would be victims. Where he underwrites an enterprise that exploits slave labor, we slip in a camera and release the images, scandalizing the company that let him broker such a deal. When he makes arrangements for criminal organizations to follow his lead, we ‘discourage’ their involvement with direct force.

That’s what brings us here. The Enigma Corporation is quietly backing the renovation of huge sections of downtown Chicago, primarily to build and cement relationships with local crime lords and politicians. It doesn’t matter to Riddle if the project is ever finished, what matters is the
connections he establishes and the influence he gains. The millions of dollars in property sales and development is mostly irrelevant. We’re here to spoil his deal, make working with his company a known liability, and frustrate him into making an error that we can exploit.

We almost had him in New York last year, and it was only by the narrowest of margins that he survived an encounter with Harry. As it was he reportedly spent months recovering from the injuries he sustained when an RPG almost destroyed his evacuation vehicle. It took months just to track his recent involvement to here, and then weeks to get set up properly here before we moved into the ‘action phase’ of our operation. He’s invested a lot of effort into moving pawns into place, and he won’t back down easily now. By now, he knows we’re here, and he’ll be using his assets and allies to undo the damage we’ve done.

We were all recruited by Mr. White’s senior staff, and we are all some of the best at what we do. We don’t ‘gather’ intelligence the traditional way, we hi-jack it from around the world, plucking files from security organizations across the globe, most of which have already been compromised by Mr. White or his allies. When we find a link that we can verify as related to Riddle or his Enigma Corporation, then we act, doing whatever it takes to unveil and disrupt his plans.

The ultimate goal, of course, is to eliminate him completely. He’s quite elderly, and in due time nature will finish the job for us, but he has access to superb medical treatment and has survived the ravages of age for some time already. Nonetheless, we try to force his direct involvement in these affairs, or at least make it necessary for him to communicate personally with his stooges. He generally uses third parties to convey messages and conduct business, but when he is enraged, his ego drives him to intervene in person. That’s what can allow us, or rather Harry, a ‘clear shot’ at removing him from the worldly equation, and putting a stop to a decades long run of graft, crime, murder and corruption.

In short, he may be one man, and stopping him won’t fix everything that’s wrong with the world, but a lot of very bad people will lose their funding and support, and countless acts of evil will be prevented. It’s worth all our efforts to make a change like that…isn’t it?”

Harry takes up the lead again, keeping his eyes on me all the while. “What we’ve just shared with you is as secret as secret can get, and I want you to understand with perfect clarity that these things can’t even be discussed directly or frankly without a box like this one in operation. Riddle has business and political interests in his back pocket, and they have police and law enforcement in their back pocket.

This is why we work in small numbers, live privately, use carefully forged identification and routinely purge any records of our purchases, movements and activities. As a rule, we don’t let just anyone slither in and join us. It doesn’t work that way. We can’t afford an information leak. The last time one of those happened, it got my parents killed. I’ve vouched for you, personally, and that makes this conversation possible.

So what we need to talk about now is Blaise Zabini. How to deal with him in a non-fatal way. Drake…would you feel comfortable explaining the background details between yourself and Blaise…or would you like me to cover it?”

I pause a moment. I never really embraced the idea of talking about that in front of others, but I want these people to have confidence in me. Being a nervous, quiet, little church mouse won’t help anything…so what else can I do? I speak up after clearing my throat.

“Heh. I suppose everyone here probably knows more about my past than I like, but at least it means I haven’t anything to hide.” I get a few grins with that one. That and the warmth of vodka gives me a little more courage.
“Blaise Zabini was just a small time pusher for his family when I met him. We were both seventeen. I was crazy over him then, because he had money, looks and attitude, and I’d been in a pretty bad spot in my life until then. He had rivals inside his own organization, and they set him up because they didn’t like the idea of a punk kid who’d never done any time strutting around like a mafia Don. He had friends that were well connected, and they warned him about the sting. Rather than ditch the delivery and let it be known that he was aware of the plot against him, he sent me. As soon as I was arrested, he cleaned up his act and avoided any contact with me. No support, no lawyers, not even a letter. I kept my mouth shut, figuring he’d come get me out of it all. No such luck. I went down for seven years. You can probably guess that seven years in a federal penitentiary for someone who isn’t tough or well connected would be rough. You’d be right.

He owns a nightclub called the Fire House now, and that’s where I ran into him. All I have in the way of information to work from is his business card and the fact that the Zabini name is fairly easy to track in this town. Because he’s ‘connected’, I hoped it might be possible to justify tacking him onto the list of targets you have in this town.

I know you don’t have to do this. It’s a complication you don’t need, and I don’t want anyone to risk anything over my grudge…especially Harry. I want revenge, but I don’t want anybody’s death on my hands. I want an eye for an eye. I want justice. No more…no less. I want Blaise Zabini in prison. Anything that will put him there is good by me. And one more thing…”

This is the telling moment. I must be crazy. Maybe it’s the vodka talking, or maybe it’s my conscience. (Where the hell it hid out the rest of my life I’ll never know…but it sure is back with a vengeance!) I can’t let Harry just do this for me…not when I can make it easier and less risky for everyone involved.

“I want to set him up and see him fall, but I don’t want Harry involved. Blaise already knows me, and thinks that I accepted his apology and actually wanted to make peace with him. I can get access to him easily and safely. If anything like that needs to be done, I want to do it myself. Will you help me?”

I guess I’ve done it now. Harry’s face is an enigma of its own, but the others look like they approve. It’s all nodding heads and murmured agreement. I don’t get immediate answers, but they agree to make initial plans and study possible ways to accomplish this when they can. Obviously, I take last priority over their work, but at least they’re willing to help…willing to try to give me a justice that the law never could. It’s enough. More than I had a right to ask for…and I still got it.

The white noise thingy is off, and it’s card games and comparatively mild cocktails for hours. Jazz and blues playing on the stereo, conversation and the subtle dance of personalities. I shine in situations like this, where charm and wit endear you to others. Social skills really are my forte, but not tonight. Tonight my stomach feels like it’s full of ashes and lye. My palms sweat and I can’t concentrate on anything.

Because Harry’s enigmatic face hides his displeasure, and I can feel it. It radiates off of him, invisible to others, but clear only to me. When the party is over, and the last stragglers leave…I’ll have Harry to answer to for what I’ve done and said. An angry Harry. I’ve never seen him genuinely angry at me before. I tell myself it won’t be bad. I say it over and over again in the back of my mind. Like a mantra, a prayer for peace that will come true if I just close my eyes and wish hard enough.

But I’m terrified anyway.
TBC!!!
Part 17

Big Chicago Part 17...by Samayel

Naturally enough, considering what they do for a living, not one of them got drunk. Only me. I discreetly numbed myself up really well, because unlike the rest of them, I know what’s coming. Harry isn’t red-faced or strutting around all pissed, but I can feel it under the surface. A stiffness. A forced kind of calm. Inside, he’s angry, and it makes my stomach knot up to even think of it.

Seven years. I’m pretty well conditioned to cringe and beg forgiveness or offer sex to buy my way out of a beating. Can I even describe how sickening it is to feel that urge cresting near Harry? There are people here. I can’t drop to my knees and fumble with his fly or drop my slacks and roll over here. My conditioning doesn’t mean shit anymore. This is different. Harry isn’t my trick, and he isn’t my owner. He’s my lover, and I don’t know what to do to make this better. When the last of them leaves, I have to face him…alone. I want to sneak away and curl in a ball until it’s over, but I can’t.

They’re getting up one by one, crowing over victory or moaning over losses, picking up chips and glasses and the like while they get ready to make for the door. I play the good host, and gather up things to take to the kitchen, since Maria and Therese went to bed hours ago. I can tell by the ice glinting in Harry’s eyes and the set of his jaw that he’s sending me a mental message. ‘We need to talk…soon.’

I scurry off to the kitchen after making nervous goodbyes to Dean, Parvati, Hermione and Ron along the way. The others don’t really know me that well…yet…but Ron gives me an odd look. He wonders if I’m alright. Hah. Am I alright? I’m about five seconds from a panic attack and I’m tipsier than all of them together. I wave him off with a smirk and wish him goodnight, and he heads for the exit with the rest of them.

I’m alone in here. Also drunk. My head is spinning and I’m sweating like a whore in church. How fitting. Harry is going to come in here…what…what will he do? I don’t know! It never mattered before! My stomach hurts. Who cares if someone that means nothing to you is angry? That’s what makes this different. Harry means everything! Bruises heal…bad memories fade…but not Harry. It matters now. I don’t want this. I’ll take it all back. I’ll do anything he wants if he just doesn’t hurt me…or worse…hate me!

Serves me right. Drunk and stupid and mouthy. My legs aren’t working right. I just dropped like a puppet with the strings cut. It’s hard to breathe and I can feel my gorge rising. All I can see clearly are the clean tiles of the kitchen floor. Panic and booze and nerves and bile is coming up. Jesus, I hate puking. Of course, I always cry when I vomit, mostly because I never vomit unless I’m violently ill and miserable, or very drunk. Not the best conditions for restrained emotions.

The tiny sober part of me in the back of my brain thinks: ‘How pathetic.’ This is how he finds me. On my hands and knees, spitting up bile and vodka on the kitchen floor, red-faced, weeping and shivering from head to toe. When I see his feet on the tiles in front me, all I can do is start babbling pleas for forgiveness and botched apologies. I’m disgusted even with myself, and that makes me cry even more.

“Holy fucking shit! Are you alright? What’s wrong? Let me get some towels. You need a doctor? Are you sick? Or was it just the drinks? Shit! Fuck. Hold on. Here!”
Towels are mopping up the mess I made on the tile, and a wet cloth is on my head. He hands a few paper towels and glass of water to me. I’m shuddering so badly I keep spilling parts of it, but it gets some of the bile out of my mouth. I keep sucking in panic breaths and trying to mop my face clean. He’s so good about it all, and I can’t even make myself feel better.

“‘m sorry. M’sorry! Don’t…don’ be angry with me! Please! Harry, I’m sorry!” The words spill out before I can compose myself, stumbling over each other like cheap drunks.

“God damn! I’m not THAT upset! You should have told me before dropping something like that on everyone. Okay? God! You made yourself sick over this? That cuts it. We’re seeing Doc Snape tomorrow. Can you get up? Don’t worry about me….worry about you. We’re just gonna get you to bed and I’ll get some aspirin, alright? Do you…do you want a shower…or a bath?”

I keep trying to stand, but my legs won’t do anything right. I try hands and knees, but that isn’t really working so well either. I can’t see straight through tears and puffy eyes, and my nose is so clogged that I can’t get a decent breath. I’m more than conscious enough to realize it when he picks me up and starts to carry me.

It feels good. Even like this. Even as bad as I feel right now, it feels good. He doesn’t hate me. He’s not really angry. He won’t hit me. Not my Harry. He wouldn’t do that. He keeps shushing me when I try to babble things. Some of them might have made sense. I don’t know. I know he kissed my head, which is flopped against his shoulder.

“Let’s just get the clothes off of you and then see what you’d like after. I can get the pajamas, or draw a bath…anything you like. We can talk later, okay? I’m not gonna yell or anything like that. You just surprised me. That’s all. I was afraid this was too much for you. I think I was right. Too much, too fast. I’ve still got some time off, and we’ll see Doc Snape tomorrow, and then just relax or shop or dine out. Sound good?”

“Mm-hm.” Stupid sniffles. I feel like a complete idiot. I get deposited onto the bed…softly, and he’s pulling at the laces on my good shoes. All I can think of clearly is a vague hope that I didn’t puke on them. Bile is hell on good leather. So humiliated. Drunk. Had a panic attack because I shot my mouth off after a couple of cocktails and Harry was only irritated over it after all.

It’s just…everything was so serious, and so real, and it’s all so much bigger than me. I wanted to feel like I knew what I was doing…but I don’t. Harry’s talking and I lost track. I think I just agreed to a bath. Water’s running in the bathroom and he just left to clean up the kitchen and bring water and aspirin.

I can breathe a little better. Enough to sit up, but it helps if I lay my head against the bedpost. Peel off socks and slacks. Ditch the nice shirt. Ugh. There are tears and snot and a little puke near the collar. Not really ready for walking just yet.

Harry brought water and the rest. I gulp the aspirin down. I do love cold, clean filtered water…the kind I haven’t had in years. No more disgusting iron and sulfur tainted, over-chlorinated crap for me. I’m not a stupid, ignorant, filthy prison bitch. I’m not. If I just keep saying it I can make it true. It has to be true.

“Okay then…you ready for the bath, love? Need a hand?”

My legs aren’t entirely steady, but I’m coherent enough to get a few words out while he lets me lean on him for support.

“I’m sorry…Harry.”
“You don’t have to be sorry. Don’t even think like that. You got way too worked up over this. Don’t know what the hell I was thinking. This was too much at once. You need some time to decompress. Just…trust me. No harm done.”

“Okay.” That’s about all I can handle saying at the moment. I don’t really want to touch off another crying jag, and I feel dangerously close to it still. The bath is only medium warm, meant to soothe rather than clean, and it looks and smells like he poured in sea salts and a few other things to scent the bath nicely. It does smell relaxing in here. Invigorating.

I slide out of my shorts and into my bath, and it really does feel good. Next thing I know, wonderfully adept hands are massaging my back and shoulders and neck. Maybe not as skillful as a masseuse, but still utterly wonderful. I lay my head back against his chest and just whimper a little when he hits the sorest spots.

“I’m so pathetic. I can’t…I can’t believe I fell apart like that. I really am so-”

“Shhh. None of that. You know what’s amazing? How adorable you are even when you’re a mess. That’s amazing. You feel like talking about it now?”

I sigh. With hands working on me I genuinely feel safe. He wouldn’t hit me. I’m not in the kind of trouble I used to get into. The instincts of a lifetime don’t mean shit and Harry is the finest man I have ever even heard of. I can talk.

“I had…too much to drink. I was just…really, really tense. All day…not just tonight. I saw the news, Harry. I know what it’s like out there. What’s been going on. I get…I get scared.”

He chuckled. I love that sound. It’s a safe sound. A happy Harry is good.

“I forget sometimes what it must be like to have a life different than mine. First it was training and war zones, then it was this. After sleeping in a tent while mortars go off and laying down covering fire while pulling wounded guys out of some hellhole, everything seems pretty blasé to me. It’s okay to be a little scared, but obviously you weren’t so frightened that you wouldn’t volunteer to throw yourself into the mix.”

It sounds so childish now. “Harry…I don’t…I can’t stand the idea of getting you into something…something I caused…and making trouble for you that you don’t need. I know…there are things we can’t say, but…it…God! It’s hell out there! When I think of what could happen! I just…I don’t want to make another mess that you have to clean up. You have enough on your plate, and I’m just this worthless lump that shops and eats and warms the bed…an-”

“Hold up! I wasn’t pissed at all before, but I am now!” The hand just stopped rubbing and I can feel the hair on my neck rise in apprehension.

“Don’t you ever…ever fucking say something like that again! How can you even think that? We’ve only just started…and the only thing that makes this place is alive to me is having you in it. I used to stay away from here because it was so empty. Just take off for a week or so and try not to remember that my life was empty except for my work. I smile when I think of coming here now. You think that isn’t important? And…we have time. Find what you want to do…and do it! It’s only been a few weeks! Less if you just count the time you’ve been here.

I don’t give a flying fuck about what you were or where you’ve been or anything you felt you had to do along the way! None of that means shit to me! All I know is I’m crazy about Drake here and now. So forgive me if I take fucking exception to the idea that you’re some kind of whore! I would never have a whore in my home…or in my bed…or anywhere else for that matter! So drop that
thought and leave it behind or I’ll…I swear I’ll…”

He’s red faced with indignation! He means every word of that! I haven’t got any business blushing over something like this. It feels good. To have someone who fights your insecurities, like a knight errant, tilting at your own private windmills in a noble quest to save you from yourself.

“Or you’ll what?” I can’t help but tease a little. A little happiness is bubbling up inside of me, and some of it just has to come out. “Would you punish me? If I was naughty?

“I’ll…I’ll hold out on sex! That’s what!”

“What! You wouldn’t! You couldn’t! I wouldn’t let you! You couldn’t last two hours with me in the room…if I wanted to make you have sex with me!”

“Think so, huh? Well it’s safer to just make sure you have to test that! Do us both a favor and don’t make me prove you wrong. Don’t ever talk about yourself that way where I can hear you… alright?”

I’m so giddy. Almost high. His words feel that good to me. I’m so insecure…so pathetically in need of approval. Logically I know this, and I can look at myself with honesty and know this to be true, but I can’t change it easily. I still feel my heart skip a beat when he makes it clear that he cares and reminds me that I matter. Even when I’ve done something that may not have pleased him, he’s so patient and good and worried about me. Me!

“Okay. No more talk like that. I promise. Some things aren’t worth risking. Especially sex with you.”

I flop my head back into his shoulder and just soak in the bath, enjoying his closeness and trying to push aside the ugly memories of my little collapse this evening. We’ll see Doctor Snape tomorrow, and he’ll probably give me some kind of tranquilizer for my anxiety, just like the people in all those commercials I hate. I feel stupid and ashamed, but Harry may be right. I didn’t handle this well, or I wouldn’t have wound up on the floor of the kitchen puking my guts out after drinking too much. God help me…I don’t want to become my mother! We’ll see how it goes. At least we can have a look at my scar and find out how long until he can remove it.

Harry rubs away the last of my stress…working the knots out of my shoulders and neck until I don’t whimper anymore. To my shame, despite my performance tonight, and my rather frayed nerves, I’m finding myself feeling very kittenish and horny all of a sudden. Being cared for and handled gently and attended to so well makes me suddenly feel empty for the want of him in me. I slip a hand back and take his hand in mine.

Kissing that hand is a pleasure all its own. It gives me a chance to really appreciate it. Strong and dark compared to mine, with heavy calluses and a little downy fur near the wrist. I kiss the center of his palm, and part with just the softest brush of tongue.

He takes the cue and kisses the back of my neck softly, finding his way up to just behind and under my ear. How does he know that it’s a place that induces instant submission and desire on my part? Instinct? If so, then his instincts are incredible. The faint, fluttering whisper of need I felt a minute ago becomes a cyclone in a matter of seconds, while capable lips work their way along soft flesh.

The bath gets left to drain, and I am treated like royalty, patted dry with thick towels while being teased in so many little ways. He just likes seeing me naked. I think he likes it even better when he’s clothed and I’m not. I wonder, for a moment, if my lover actually has a kink for that, and then he makes me forget everything else when his mouth surrounds my cock.
He is a deliberate tease, refusing me the chance to come hard and fast into a mouth that pleases so very well. To think that I used to feel uncomfortable about receiving oral sex! Ridiculous now. I think it might have been that I always thought of sucking a cock as a form of control. It always was for me. A man with his cock in my mouth answers to me and me alone. I never wanted to give power over me to anyone. I’m not big or strong or deadly the way Harry is, but I always had my own way to control others, and now, for Harry, I don’t care if I lose control and answer to another’s skill.

He’s been paying attention. I laugh a little and run my hands through his hair, because I recognize little things that he didn’t do before. He learned them from me. The careful flick and swab of a tongue that has no intention of bringing orgasm quickly. The hand that is firm and cautious, never giving too much pleasure, almost distracting you from the soft suction of lips and the warmth of a lover’s mouth. These are my greatest arts, and he’s using them for my benefit.

We make our way back to the bed, and I am still tipsy, but I am far, far better than I was an hour ago. Also…the word ‘horny’ doesn’t do justice to the state I’m in. It’s hard to push him over…because he’s built like a rock, but he relents and lets me take charge. I make myself comfortable between powerful calves and thighs, and deliver something just a little different.

He doesn’t understand it yet, but he’s getting the sloppiest, wettest head I know how to give. He probably thinks I’m still drunk, and maybe I am, but I can do this either way, and tipsy or not, I have a purpose. When his cock is dripping and soaked from base to tip in my spit, and he hovers on the brink of coming because even my sloppiest head is damn good, I make my move.

I haven’t done this since I was much younger, and it would be out of the question if we hadn’t been very sexually active lately, but before he knows what’s happening, I’m seated on his hips and guiding the head of his cock into me. I haven’t had a spit-fuck since I was in high school and desperate for sex whether lube was handy or not. It hurt, then, and it still burns now, because fitting something the size of Harry’s cock into my ass isn’t an easy project even under ideal circumstances.

Being a little drunk has its advantages, and being horny and determined helps a lot too. I ‘push’ outward and down, hard, opening myself to the moderately slick thing underneath me, and it makes its way in while Harry grits his teeth and clenches his eyes shut. It’s embarrassing to admit it, but this is probably the only kind of sex I can have that keeps the illusion of ‘tightness’ about me. I’ve had too much experience to even fake it anymore, but with only my spit between me and Harry’s cock, I feel as every bit as tight as the last time I tried this.

There won’t be any slam-fucking this way, not unless he wants to take me to the doctor tonight. Harry keeps still, just running his hands up my hips and thighs. I stick to small motions and rocking against the straining prick most of the way inside me. Letting it hurt is a way to vent emotions, and drive away dark thoughts. It’s real and alive and so am I. I crave closeness, and this as close as it gets, so much so that it takes real effort to keep going.

I can feel Harry’s thighs flexing with need while I grind myself onto his hips, coaxing him over the line, clenched tight around his cock and working it gently and steadily, knowing what the results will be…and they’ll be just what I want.

His hands tightening on my thighs and the muscles cording along his neck. The heavy pulse of the flesh inside me and the shudder that runs through his entire body. He’s coming hard while I keep moving, letting each motion carefully milk every last drop of come from him. I want all of it. I want his sensitive and freshly sated cock emptying its last droplets into me while he whimpers like a whipped dog because nothing feels as good as what I can make him feel. That’s what I want…
and that’s what I get. Nothing less.

There’s no reason to move from where I am, draped across his chest, still impaled on his softening cock. I’m tired and I don’t really care if I come or not. I wanted his pleasure, and I got what I wanted…I am content. The feel of calloused hands stroking through my hair and down my shoulders is more powerful than any pathetic orgasm. Being this close is what I crave…what I need to remind me that we’re together and safe and tomorrow really will come.

I feel sober again. He’s whispering sweet things to me, knowing full well that I lap up each honeyed word like a starving kitten face down in a saucer of cream.

“You think you can talk now, love? We can wait ‘til tomorrow if you like?”

The panic is gone, and I know I can deal with it all now. I know he loves me, and that he won’t hurt me to vent his anger. It gives me a confidence I’ve never had before. I don’t mind being totally honest.

It’s a breach of the first rule of queens everywhere: never lay all your cards on the table. No one should ever know exactly what you think and feel, because the mystery keeps them guessing, and that gives you the edge. Fuck rules. I have Harry. That’s all I’ll ever need.

“I was afraid. It might sound stupid, but when I saw the news…I saw how much was going on. I don’t want to add another complication, another risk when there are too many already. I don’t want to even imagine losing you over my petty grudge. I can’t even believe you’d arrange this much for me.

Harry…I don’t want to just take from you, and I know you want to give, but I want to do something to make this smoother. It isn’t just me getting even, it’s me showing that I can do more. I know Blaise, and I can get into his home and into his head easier than anyone else. Let me prove I can do this…please?”

He’s silent awhile. It is a lot to mull over, especially while I’m still on top him, enjoying the warmth and closeness, feeling his pulse against my cheek while I burrow a little closer to him, savoring the sensations it brings because he’s still inside of me.

“I don’t like it. You’d be at risk. If anyone caught on that you were playing him, you could get hurt. Maybe I don’t have the right to dictate all the terms, but I’m telling you honestly that I don’t want you involved that closely. Do you understand that I’ve only just found you? How long I’ve waited to feel this way for someone…anyone? It’s a fucking miracle that in this shitty world two people can feel like this…live like this and be content.

I don’t want that on the line. I don’t want to gamble on losing that. It’s a bet I wouldn’t take. Too much risk for too little gain. I’m going to ask you…just once…to change your mind about this. I can call it all off and we can do this another way. No harm, no foul. So it comes to this…are you sure that this is what you want?”

This is my time for silence. I am thinking carefully, even though I’m sore and tired and eager to sleep and forget tonight. It’s a question of what I want. He’ll let me have this…it make it clear that I won’t back down. He’d let me take a risk like this because he loves me too much to stop me or let me feel helpless by keeping me here. I’m really not his dirty little secret. It’s intoxicating to think these things, and even more so to know them as true. I have never been so blessed…I’m a fool to risk it all.

But then…I am a fool.
“Yes. I want to carry my own weight. I’m not saying I wouldn’t feel better if you were somewhere nearby in case of trouble. You could do that, couldn’t you? Just stay out of sight in case I need help getting out of there? We don’t even have a plan yet, but that Hermione seemed like someone who thinks fast. We’ll come up with something that’s safe enough to try…I’m sure of it. But…I want to do this.”

“Alright then. It’s settled. I don’t like it, but we’ll do this one like you want it. Just…next time you have an idea…try to give me a heads up first before you drop any new surprises on me…okay?”

“Even the sexy surprises?”

“Mmm…let me get back to you on those. I think I can handle that kind of surprise. Preferably as often as they can be arranged.”

The smirk is back in place, and I know that understated chuckle well. He’s happy, even if he’s not entirely pleased with my choice. That’s my lover. My Harry. Blaise Zabini…wherever you are…look out! ‘Cause revenge may be a slow train, but it’s coming your way now!

Well…maybe not exactly now. That perfect lover of mine is getting hard again, swelling inside of me and coming back to life, making me respond the same way against his stomach…and as good as I feel right now, a second round would go a long way toward making up for a night that started off pretty poorly.

What a terrible life. Insert your own sarcastic smirk. I’m going to be busy for awhile.

TBC!!!
This is more like it. The good life. Waking up with Harry, even if I am a little sticky and sore, followed by a shower and breakfast in his pajamas...my favorite pair, of course. Omelets with tiny slivers of onion, ham and red and green peppers, smothered with good cheese. Fresh juice and coffee. Thick slices of toast with sweet cream butter from Wisconsin. This is the way to take the edge off of a hangover.

All of which makes it a lot easier to cope with facing the fearsome Doctor Vampire today. At least he’s supposed to just give me a check up and look at my butt to tell me how long it will be until he can remove the scar. He doesn’t have any excuse to drain the blood out of me this time. The slight embarrassment of showing off my scarred ass is a lot easier to deal with than being poked with needles and tested for everything he can imagine.

Go figure? I spend years giving up my ass to everyone who wanted it and could afford it or had the strength to take it, but now that I’m free and happy, I blush at the thought of letting a stranger see it. Who understands these things?

Harry is in a good mood today. He seems energetic and even more chipper than usual. He was out of bed an hour before I was, exercising and using the sauna before showering and dressing. Per the usual, I loafed in bed until I felt like having coffee, then cleaned myself up and came to breakfast in his pajamas. I’m pretty sure the sight of me wearing them is part of his good mood. I like that.

Ron is en route with car, so he’ll be hanging out with Harry for a few minutes while I dress informally for the appointment. I have some comfy jeans and T-shirts, somewhere among the things Harry bought me. Sandals, a tiny, silver, hoop earring in my left ear, and a little gel for the scruffy look. Cute. Very cute. Poor Harry. The way I look, everyone will think he’s having his wicked, wealthy way with a teenaged boy!

It’s still weird. Looking in a mirror and seeing myself healthy and clean and well-dressed. You couldn’t tell by looking at me that I’ve been the places that I have...or that I’ve done the things I’ve done. The cute guy in the mirror doesn’t look anything like a prostitute or a junkie...but he was that and more.

Of course, at a glance, Harry doesn’t look like the kind of guy who kills a half a dozen or more people over the weekend...so there you go. Appearance count for precisely jack and shit...and jack just left town. It’s what we do that really defines us, not how we look. I still like looking good, but I haven’t done a lot of things that could be called good with my life. Am I really different? Now...with opportunity in my grasp...am I really anything better than a self-serving little tart who was blessed with good looks?

These aren’t comforting thoughts, but Harry appears in the mirror behind me and speaks, taking my mind off of heavier things. Just gotta love his timing.

“Hey, love. Ready yet? Ron’s here and...damn...those are...nice jeans.”

Ha! He can’t help himself. Staring because my ass looks great in these. I lean over the counter and sink, letting my hips roll a little, taunting him with the view.
“You like? You know…you could just…peel them off of me…if you wanted…and maybe…show me what you think of them…and me…by-”

“OH MY FUCKING GOD! Are you two always like that!? I can hear you from the fucking hall! Give it a freaking rest!”

Thank you, Ron. Always the buzz kill. Harry is red in the face from my little show, so at least I had the impact I wanted to before Mr. Driver shouted from the hall. Fucker must have ears like a goddamn marmoset! I snatch my shades off the counter and take Harry’s hand on the way out the door.

“Want a rain check on that?”

“Yeah. Definitely. We’ll see how those jeans look in a pile on the floor later. Right now, Ron’s right. Nobody will be happy if we’re late getting to Snape’s office. If he’s unhappy, everyone’s unhappy.”

“God…look at you snap to attention for a doctor! You could break him like a twig, but you treat him like the Second Coming.”

“He’s the best at what he does. He might be all crusty and mean on the outside, but you have to know him. He means well…really.”

“I’ll take your word for it, Harry, but the man gives me the shivers. It’s like he’s staring right through me. Ugh!”

Ron’s still blushing from hearing my conversation with Harry. He stomps down the hall with the air of one aggrieved. His discomfort is just as amusing as ever. Still, we get to the car without undue hassle, and Ron looks happy when he’s in the driver’s seat and on the road. Maybe that’s his ‘security blanket’. I wonder if I look like that when I play the piano…or when I’m painting?

Nah…I know what makes me look like that. I’m holding his hand and sitting beside him, and he has an arm curled around one of my shoulders while he lounges in the back seat. That’s my sense of security…Harry.

Doc Snape has a discreet townhouse in the suburbs. One of those rental types that costs an arm and a leg to lease. It doesn’t look like an actual office of any kind, and there are no signs or anything. He really must be a private doctor, working only for the company. If he had a practice, he’d have a normal office…right?

I only feel the faintest bit edgy while Harry and Ron lead me in. To my surprise, the place is remarkably modern and tasteful, in a minimalist kind of way. It looks like it was designed to feel stark and airy, full of room but still functional. Black and white dominate the color scheme completely, with occasional small hints of red here and there to add life. Hmm…from an artistic standpoint…it is kind of medical. Red…blood…life. God! Is he a vampire? I never met a real hit man until I met Harry…and I didn’t know anything about global conspiracies and warring factions until this week.

I’m just being stupid. No matter how uncomfortable he makes me, the man isn’t supernatural. What he is…is intimidating, and I can deal with that. At least he has good taste. I can cope with anyone civilized, and this place is as nice as Harry’s.

“You’re late.” The words come like sizzling acid, disdain in every syllable. Ron cracks immediately.
“I told you! One minute late! I swear to fucking God! I warned them.”

He’s standing in the door to an examination room. I still can’t believe he has one in his house! How convenient is that? We’re in a well appointed living room with gorgeous black leather couches and chairs, and he’s standing there with a scowl and an air of complete exasperation.

“Never mind. Let’s just dispense with the frivolities, shall we? You…Malfoy…in here. You two…take a seat…and try not to break anything or be particularly annoying while you wait.”

Harry lets go of my hand and gives me a kiss on the head, which sends Ron off to the corner to stare at magazines that probably don’t interest him.

“Alright, love. Go ahead…and don’t skimp on the details…it’ll help if you just tell him what you’re feeling point blank. Ignore the sarcasm, he’ll be like that no matter what you do…okay?”

“I’ll be fine. Thank-”

“Oh, for the love of God! You two are revolting! Mr. Malfoy…get in here and stop your snibbling. You’re supposed to be the sick one, but don’t afflict the rest of us with nausea by making us watch all of that. Move! Now!”

I hustle into the room, just loathing the way he makes me feel like I’m back in school. Sheesh! No wonder this guy doesn’t have a practice of his own. No bedside manner at all! The door shuts behind me, and I stand by the exam table quietly, waiting for orders, trying not to piss him off while he flips through some papers.

“I already had you down for a meeting later this week. A matter of scar removal, wasn’t it? Now you’re experiencing panic attacks. Excess anxiety? Well?”

“Yes. Yes…and yes.”

“Hrmmph. I saw that coming from a mile away. Tell me…have you been exercising?”

“Well…uh…some.”

“Some?! How fucking much is some?”

“Very little. Some walking on treadmills. A couple of times.”

“Yeah. As I thought. And the dietary recommendations I gave you? You ignored those too, right?”

I can’t answer. My last words came out like a bashful kid’s. I just nod yes to avoid the inevitable insults that silence would bring.

“I even know why! You’ve got your freedom. You’re living it up and enjoying it. Why suffer any inconvenience with luxury close at hand? You didn’t listen, because I’m sure you know what’s best for you…proven amply by the fact that you’re here…with me…again!”

He flops the clipboard onto the table and grabs his stethoscope and a blood pressure tester. I keep quiet and just follow his orders while he runs through the standard checks. I try to give clear yes and no answers to the rapid fire questions, and then he’s done, scribbling notes on paper again before he rounds on me once more.

“I’m sure you’ve heard of Doctor Phil? Daytime TV is usually a preoccupation for your age group.”
I have…I hate the fat, smarmy, fraudulent bastard, but I have heard of him, so I nod.

“WELL, I’M NOT HIM! I’m not here to kiss your sorry ass or stroke your pathetic ego for ratings! I'm not here to get famous or be liked! I recommended a diet that wouldn’t aggravate the tension that is natural for you to feel! I recommended exercise, which is the healthiest natural way to alleviate or at least mitigate the symptoms of stress! Ever wonder why stress tics manifest as involuntary muscle movement? Stress is energy…it has to go somewhere. If you bottle it up, it leaks out. You ignored what I told you…because it wasn’t ‘fun’ or ‘cool’…and now you’re reaping the results.

“All the advice in the world is useless if you don’t follow it. Medical science could advance a thousand years overnight, and it would mean nothing! People would still poison their bodies, permit their limbs to atrophy from disuse, and generally just fuck up the wet dream of life! You are no exception!”

He stomps to a cabinet and unlocks it. There are bottles and bottles of pills and liquids. He snatches one and I can’t help flinching when he turns.

“This…this is the lowest dose I can give you and still call them drugs. These aren’t very powerful, and they aren’t addictive. They will level off your moods a bit, and you should feel calm without losing coherence or clarity. One in the late morning after a meal, and one early in the evening, likewise after a meal.”

I get handed the pills while he taps at a keyboard and a printer starts humming. He snatches the sheet of paper that emerges and hands it to me with a sneer.

“A list of potential side effects, so read them this time. At this low dosage, most of them are unlikely to trouble you, but you should know what you’re putting into your body, and you should know what it might do. Idiot. Now…drop your pants and turn around…facing the table. We’ll see what we can do about this scarring of yours.”

Normally I’d make a smart remark to break the tension, but I can’t even imagine what he’d say if I said, ‘What? No candles or wine first?’ I’ve been known to make the occasional bad call in my life…but even I wouldn’t do anything as stupid as baiting this guy. It would be like rubbing myself in bacon grease and slapping a starving, rabid bear with my belt!

I just turn and numbly let my jeans drop. Lucky thing my thong doesn’t interrupt the view…the back of it is just a string, so there’s no reason to take it off. I can tell he’s irritable, but he’s so stiff and uncaring when his hand is on my skin. There’s nothing gross or sensual about it. Purely clinical. I still shudder a little. Couldn’t help it. It isn’t Harry, and in my book, nobody else should be touching me.

“Pants up and take a seat. It can be dealt with. It isn’t that deep or that serious. You said this was done with heated wire. It’s surface level only. We can do this today. It’ll take a little time, and we can deal with this right here, but I can say with certainty that, in a few weeks, it will be like it never existed. There may be a…what?”

“Today? Here? You have an operating room?”

“Yes! This place was furnished with what I required. I need assistance only for certain tasks. The rest I can do alone. A few local shots to guarantee you won’t feel anything and we can do this and have it out of the way before you go home. You’ll be sore for a while as you heal, but if you follow my instructions there shouldn’t be any complications afterwards. Besides…I’d rather do this before you take any other medications.”
“Oh…okay.” I hadn’t imagined it happening this fast. I guess it doesn’t matter…and since the scar is high enough up on my ass cheek I can still sort of sit down after this is over. Wow. Outpatient surgery AND same day treatment! Try getting that at the local hospital!

“Lose the pants and the shirt. Leave them here and go into the other room. Lay down on the table…on your side, keeping the scarred tissue up. I’ll be in after I prep a few things. I’ll need local anesthetic and a few other items.”

And that’s that. He walks out of the room and I’m left here looking at the door to the operating room, wondering what the fuck I just got myself into. Today I lose my scar. I peel off my pants and T-shirt and leave them on the exam table. My sandals are still on the floor. The temperature is comfortable but cool, and I’m nearly naked in a stranger’s house, but Harry is one room over and everything will be fine. Nothing is wrong…except that this is a really fucking surreal situation.

The operating room is stark and clean, with a tiled floor that is absolutely seamless. Everything is white or metal, and there’s a clean sheet across the operating table. There are powerful lamps and portable monitors plugged into the wall, but none of them are on. No beeps or hisses or anything. Just clean and sterile emptiness. I get on the table and try to get into position properly, but I still feel horribly awkward. The wait feels unending. Nothing to do except think…and I do too much of that normally!

When he comes in he has a mask and latex gloves on, and he already has a cart full of equipment waiting beside this table, so I guess it’s about to happen. I get swabbed with cold medical gel that disinfects and makes sure the skin surrounding the scar is pretty much sterile, then patted dry. I feel the small pinpricks of a needle, handled so carefully that I barely notice it. He’s careful and precise, and each step is done with the same cold and clinical air that he showed earlier.

“You’re nervous. Don’t be. I’ve done this for others more than a few times. We’ll need to wait a little while for the anesthetic to reach its full effect. If you have any questions, get them out now. Once we start, I’ll need you to be quiet and stay still.”

“How many things can you do? I never really knew a doctor before. Did you specialize in scar removal?”

“Hmph! No. It was not my life’s ambition to heal up the marks of foolishness by erasing bullet wounds. I specialized in general and thoracic surgery. PhDs in Chemistry and Pharmacology as well. I’m fully competent at surgeries involving your muscles or skin, but if you happen to get a brain tumor I’ll be happy to give you the number of someone more qualified.”

I just need to talk. Too nervous to keep quiet. I feel so exposed, even with a sheet draped over the rest of me, it’s still weird having my cold, vaguely wet, rapidly numbing butt pointed at a stranger who isn’t planning to have sex with me.

“If…if I can ask…how did you-”

“End up doing this? As if the pay wasn’t enough reason. It’s none of your damn business, but I’ll say this…Harry’s and my mutual employer did me a kindness some years ago. I’m afforded a certain luxury, and the ability to pursue my own research and advance my skills. Throw in making a fortune while I do it, and who would need more reason than that?

I’ll go out on a limb, and assume you find me judgmental and uncaring. You’d be largely correct. Imagine knowing full well that the application of a little common sense could solve much of the world’s problems. Then imagine knowing that it wouldn’t make a damn bit of difference, because no one wants common sense when it requires even a smattering of inconvenience. If I seem to be
manifestly indifferent to your feelings, it’s because I honestly can’t afford to care about them. My energy is better spent elsewhere. I’d suggest a similar attitude for you, since you obviously let your concerns override your body’s needs.

It might have sounded harsh, but what I told you was true, and I hope to God you listened. You want a fresh start? Want to leave the past behind? Your best chance at that is to quit the habits that got you into trouble in the first place. Take my word for it. Nothing will be improved by abusing your body. Remember those questions I asked the first time we met? They weren’t accidents. Cocaine and meth-amphetamine may have sounded like a fine idea when you first used them, but you abused heavy drugs almost weekly if not daily for just about two years before you went to jail. Throw in seven years of apparently starving yourself by eating like a bird, with food that wasn’t much good to start with, and your body is in no shape to handle stress.

A few weeks off and some good living isn’t an answer, Mr. Malfoy. It will take months of exercise and healthy meals. Minimal intake of sugars, no excessive carbohydrates or fats, and no stimulants or depressants. That means cut back the alcohol, switch to decaf with no sugar, ditch the fried or greasy foods and sweets, and work out regularly…preferably thirty to forty five minutes of moderate cardio exercise per day.

And Mr. Malfoy…sex and shopping do NOT count as exercise!”

I was afraid he’d say that. All I can do is sigh.

“I know…I know. It’s just…come on! Seven fucking years! Most people can’t even imagine where I’ve been. I just…I’m still getting used to this, okay? So the party’s over. Fine. I can deal with that. But Jesus, all I wanted was to feel alive again. Just for a little while. Is that so wrong?”

I can hear him exhaling through his nose into that mask he’s wearing. How can someone make the sound of air leaving his body ’feel’ irritable? Amazing.

“No, Mr. Malfoy. I wouldn’t call it wrong…if you grade on a wide curve and include the rest of humanity. I suppose that’s just what anyone else would want…but like usual…what you want isn’t necessarily good for you. Don’t expect pills from me forever. They’ll help in the short term, but I expect you to start building habits that will help you function before the pills run out. Don’t think your life can’t have luxury or pleasure in it…but learn to exercise some self discipline and moderation. If you can do that, you can enjoy the foods and activities you like, as long as you balance it with proper nutrition, healthy exercise, and solid coping skills. It should be time by now. Can you feel anything?”

“No. Nothing. Half my butt is numb, almost up my back. Guess it’s time.”

“Good. Stay still, stay silent, and this will be fairly brief and easy. Move around and you’ll be swapping one scar for another. Understood?”

‘Yup. Crystal clear.”

And that’s it. He works, I occasionally wince as I realize what’s going on, and it gets done. Basically he’s creating a new wound where the old one was, and making sure that it will heal normally, unlike the deliberate neglect my burn got last time, which guaranteed that it would leave a scar.

I stopped being Flint’s bitch the minute Harry broke Flint in front of me, but today…today I’m really free. A laser scalpel burned away the last evidence that a mirror could show, the last remnant of a life that got flushed down the toilet because of the things I’ve done and the choices I made.
The rest is up to me. The past is dead, and the shadow of it is buried in a clean, white, sterile little room in the suburbs.

I can walk right away, but I have a funny limp because half my butt is still numb. He gave me a list to give to Therese. Things I shouldn’t eat. I’ll be sleeping on my stomach and applying ointments and fresh bandages daily. When the shots wear off, this is going to hurt, but I guess I can deal with it. I’ve dealt with worse and I’m still here. Small price to pay to have a body that doesn’t carry Flint’s disgusting brand.

He talked to Harry too, after I walked out of the office, numb and vaguely dizzy from lying still so long. They were in there quite a while, and I could hear raised voices, so it couldn’t have been pretty. Ron kept his nose in a magazine while I leaned against a wall, not feeling sure about the safety of sitting down just yet.

“How’s your new butt?”

Subtle guy, our Ron.

“Aside from the fact that it just had a laser scalpel aimed at it for most of the last hour and it’s still almost completely numb…just peachy…thanks.”

“Hmm. Cool. I didn’t even know you had a scar there. Doc Snape did a good number for us both after New York. Harry and me, that is. The man’s good…cranky…but good. You’ll be fine in a few weeks. Trust.”

So offhand. He and Harry both got hurt. Probably after the attempt on Tom Riddle’s life last year. The one Hermione mentioned, and that we can’t even speak of aloud. Not even the guy’s name…as if he could pick the sound of it out of the air and home in on us. Paranoid…but I guess I can’t blame them. I know he means well, so I answer. It can’t hurt. The scar is gone and the future is mine…what can it hurt to just tell him?

“I got it in prison. I was branded with a hot wire for sassing my owner. He didn’t like being talked back to by his own prison bitch, so kicking the shit out of me and burning a capital ‘F’ into my ass seemed like a good way to remind me of who was in charge. I suppose it worked, but at least I’m rid of the fucking thing now.”

I wasn’t really fishing for sympathy…I swear it! The look on his face is naked horror. It’s kind of weird, being reminded that what I just live with makes other people cringe with shock. It shows what kind of guy Ron is at heart, when he closes his gaping mouth and clenches his jaw.

“That’s fucking horrible! The prick bastard. I had no idea it was like that for you. Too bad Harry couldn’t spring that asshole out of prison too…’cuz breakin’ a few parts off of him with a crowbar and a blowtorch would be a nice way to kill some time. Either way, glad you’re out of there and running with us these days.”

“Me too! Numb ass or no. So…change of subject…any subject but my ass for awhile. You ever gonna ask out Hermione? You looked like you were biting your tongue for most of last night. Just because I was tipsy, it doesn’t mean I went blind.”

Hah! That did it! He just buried his nose back in the magazine in a juvenile attempt to look completely uninterested. Poor guy reads like a cheap book.

“No idea what you’re even talking about. You must have soaked up one too many cocktails last night.”
“Oh? Come on! Who do you think you’re kidding? I’m a queen! We ARE nature’s matchmakers. We don’t breed, and we don’t hunt. This is our way of propagating the species…we help. You like her…you know it…admit it.”

“You’re completely off your nut! Just ’cuz you turned out to be pretty alright doesn’t give you a license to annoy at will! Cement truck…ring any bells? I can get one with a phone call! There’s a building foundation callin’ your name if you don’t drop it!”

“Touchy! Jeez! Relax…will you? I mean…from the way she kept eyeballing you when you weren’t looking…I just figured you’d at least know-”

Ron’s head just popped out of that magazine like a groundhog in spring. “What do you mean ‘eyeballing me’?”

“Just what I said. Every time you stuck your face in your cards, she couldn’t keep her eyes off of you. It was as plain as day from my end of the table. She must like you a lot. You could at least do something about it…like asking for a date.”

“Alright…Alright! I like her. Smart chicks are hot…and she’s the smartest one I ever met. You know she has, like, four different college degrees? And languages…she speaks so many I can’t even believe it! All that and she doesn’t act all stuffy and wear lab coats and stuff like that. She likes coffeehouses and music and normal things. She’s just…”

“Perfect?” I can’t help smirking when he realizes that he just folded completely and confessed everything in front of me.

“Yeah…but it’s none of your damn business anyways! Butt out! No pun intended. I’ll get to it when I get to it, alright??!”

“Okay, okay! Just-”

Harry finally wandered back out, gesturing for us to head for the car while he takes my hand and gives me a bit of support. Conversation is over for awhile, and just as well. I feel…I feel better. Surreal, but better. We leave Snape’s place behind, and the sky is blue and clear while we drive back in silence. Harry is pensive and restless, but he makes room for me to lay on my side in the back seat, letting me rest my head in his lap. His fingers keep idly stroking my hair.

Ron drops us off and departs, while I limp my way to the elevator with Harry. He finally speaks when we get inside.

“He really likes you. Doc Snape, I mean. I didn’t realize it until now.”

“You must be kidding me? Him? If that was him being friendly, I’d hate to be his enemy. I’ll know how good his work is after my ass heals, but I needed a new one anyway, after he chewed mine off for not following his directions.”

“Well…he kind of chewed my ass too. About taking care of you. Not like a pet…like a partner. He gave me hell about letting you ignore his recommendations and not thinking about what that might mean. He’s never given me that much grief about anything before. That’s when I realized that he must be worried about you…at least a little.”

It’s a bit stunning to think of Snape as anything but a mean spirited party pooper, but that’s my sore butt talking for me. The man just hides his good qualities under a very…very, very thorough layer of contempt and snide commentary. I’m not ready to call him a sweetie, but I think I feel something fluttering in my stomach that resembles gratitude.
“He’s right too. I didn’t take him seriously before, when he checked you out the first time. To be honest, I was just so glad to be here with you that I couldn’t have cared less. I wasn’t really thinking. When I come home, I kind of decompress and relax. I was thinking of you…I promise you that…but I wasn’t thinking of what might be best for you. I will…now. I’m eating whatever you’re eating, and that’s that. If Therese makes something for you, I’ll have it too. If you can’t have something, I won’t have it either…and once you’re healed up, we exercise…together. Sound good?”


Oh God!

How long before I can even think about having sex again?!

I take it all back! Snape is a demon-vampire from Hell! The numbness is fading, and the throbbing sensation of wounded flesh is taking its place. I know with perfect clarity that it’s going to get worse before it gets better.

At moments like this, thinking of the sex I was begging for this morning, but can’t even think about now, I realize that there are potentially worse situations than a little scorched skin. Namely, no serious sex with Harry until I heal up properly. Looks like the next couple of weeks or so are going to be only slightly cheerier than poisoned ice cream or puppies with cancer.

Yay.

Fuck.

TBC!!!
Dora Tonks flipped another page on the stack of reports and investigation notes, sipping the cheap latte with a faint grimace. It had gone cold. She’d been in the strategy room for almost 13 hours, minus a few breaks to use the toilet. Kingsley was doing the same across the table from her, picking through early reports from the first crimes and highlighting potential witnesses and informants to lean on again.

It had been sheer hell these last couple of weeks. Then the devil himself came to town. Rufus Scrimgeour, Special Agent, FBI. He’d brought his own fawning toady, that pipsqueak asshole Dawlish, along for the ride. The investigations into every mob related homicide in Chicago had been nominally turned over to his command, and the staff of the Organized Crime Task Force had been transformed from leaders into assistants overnight.

Well…assistants in the sense that they hit the streets and pored over the paperwork, picking through facts and possibilities, while Scrimgeour lunched with the mayor and glad handled TV crews all damn day. Even if they blew this case wide open, it would all go to Scrimgeour’s credit as a job well done. Additionally, his version of ‘pouring every resource into resolving this situation’ translated to ‘keeping every member of the staff on duty almost 16 hours a day’. Jackass.

At least she and Kingsley were nominally still among the chief persons assigned to this, but that didn’t really change much for them except shifting their role to the interpretation of information. Others were combing the streets, from flatfoot beat cops to detectives, and the tons of paperwork they generated all came here.

On TV, bless their fucking hearts, every cop solved the case in forty eight minutes, fostering the cheery illusion that crime was always committed by mildly retarded or otherwise fatally flawed losers. There was always a smoking gun or a witness that came forward, or the criminal would crack under questioning and tell all, always in dramatic fashion. This kind of thing made it hard to convince people that actual police work involved endless interviews, mountains of paperwork, and weeks of sifting through seemingly inconsistent information. The public clamored for a fast answer and high profile dramatic arrests…but when those happened in real life, it usually meant that the arrest had been hurried to appease the masses, and the person charged would get off on a technicality, and that was assuming that they’d even hauled in the right suspect in the first place!

This was the real work. Combing through tidbits of possibility, following up on questions that were asked again and again, pushing for one more shred of information that might carry you forward a little to the next step. Good, solid convictions came from hitting the proper suspect with the right charges for the right crime. It wasn’t easy, putting bad people away for a long time, but it sure beat letting them turn the world into a bigger hellhole than it already was!

It started with the prison riots. A man named Harry Black, who, upon further investigation simply did not exist, had been incarcerated for only a few weeks before disappearing after the riots. A handful of dead criminals who were due for early release had been all that was left behind. They were able to ascertain that SOMEONE had been there, and that the prisoners believed his name to be Harry Black, but the trail ran cold after that. It had taken several bribes in the form of luxuries for an injured prisoner named Marcus Flint to spill even the few details they had.
What a piece of work Flint had been too! A real, honest to God, unredeemable asswipe of the highest order, and they’d had to coddle him with the promise of a private cell in the ‘cripples ward’ with extra amenities for his cooperation. The worthless piece of crap had been smirking all the while, amused that he’d had something to hold over the cops questioning him, even while he was in traction and wrapped up until he was nearly mummified. Still, he was a living witness who swore that a dark haired, green-eyed man named Harry Black had been there after all, and he’d been beaten nearly to death by that same man weeks before the killings.

Other than that, they had fuck-all to work with. The ‘Black Angle’ was a dead end, and there were no witnesses alive for the later killings. It was possible that Black was entirely unrelated, and they had a string of other crimes to put their effort into. The peace of the streets had been kept, by only the narrowest of margins, but it was fraying fast, along with her own nerves.

They had a mystery hacker or hackers, who had penetrated city services and the power company with apparent ease, shutting off power during each of the first half dozen cases. Several other killings happened shortly afterwards, with no power outage involved. It was possible that rivals or copycats were using the confusion to eliminate enemies, but it was equally possible that the power outages were used only when necessary and the cases could still be related.

Multiple styles of execution had been used, primarily involving firearms, but there was no easy way to gauge the number of people involved. One at least, probably more, given the number of dead bodies found. Shotgun blasts had killed the Russians and the Czech, a knife had taken the life of a cartel playboy from Columbia, nine millimeter pistols were used in two separate cases, involving a trio of dead Chinese white slavers and bar office full of dead Italians. Chaos…absolute fucking chaos.

And barely anything matched up in any significant way. No records available for any Harry Black that could be accounted for in Chicago. They’d already checked the profiles and questioned a few men with that name already. Nothing. Every single one had an alibi. It had to be an alias, and a good one if it passed through the prison unnoticed, but that still left nothing to go on.

And Scrimgeour and the mayor were not patient people.

Dora felt the cellphone buzz in her pocket before the ringtone kicked off. Luna. Shit. It had been the same all week, but what could you do? She flipped the phone open, vaguely hoping that it was just the usual nonsense and that nothing serious had happened.

“Yes. Yes. Yeah. Uh-huh. Hey…HEY. I’m still at work, honey! We talked about this. This is what I do. This is very big, and I can’t come home until we finish for the day. Luna…Luna…LUNA, please! I know…I know…God damn it! Do you think I don’t want to come home? I can’t talk about this now! I’M AT WORK! I’ll see you when I get home…in a few hours.”

The cellphone snapped shut in her palm while Dora plopped her head down onto the table. She’d been a lot more patient at the beginning of all this, but it was the same thing every night. Worried call after worried call, pleas for her to come home, veiled hints that she was neglecting her family by doing her job and more. The worst part…the absolute worst part…was that it was at least partly true. And there wasn’t one damn thing she could do about it without leaving a job she’d striven her entire life to have.

She missed her lover, she missed her daughter, she missed stopping for coffee at one of the coffeehouses or galleries that Luna’s work showed at. She missed dinners at home, instead of Chinese takeout, and watching TV in her pajamas while curled around Luna after Diana was safely to bed. She missed sleeping more than five hours a night at best and taking long showers or baths instead of flying out the door in a daze. There had been cases that were high profile before, and
she’d had her share of late nights, but never, never like this.

Kingsley pushed a pin into the map he was working on, detailing the exact locations of crime scenes, as well as power outages and their times in relation to each crime. Dora was on the ragged edge, and to be damned frank, so was he.

“You know, Tonksy, if it’s any comfort at all, it ain’t any better on my side of the fence. Deirdre has been waiting ‘til I get home to give me an earful of what she thinks about all this, and lemme tell ya, it hasn’t been an earful of poetry! We’ll get through this yet. We’re two of the best in our field, and you know what? If worst comes to worst, maybe we get bumped back down the ladder and our rep takes a hit. Maybe they take us off this and put someone else in the hot seat, but we’ll go down fighting. Are you with me?”

Dora fought back the vague dizziness that came with being seated for hours at a time after very little sleep, and nodded grimly.

“I’m with you. Still in the game. Let’s go back over the bar scenario. We still have a couple of employees on the books there that ‘vanished’ right after the shootings. Let’s see what we’ve got and try to get the patrol boys to beat the bushes in Little Italy again.”

“Hey…you do know how to catch an Italian…don’t you?”

Dora cringed. The punch line would be terrible. It always was. Kingsley had many talents…but delivering great comedy wasn’t one of them.

“I’ll bite. How do I catch an Italian?”

“Tie a rope to the back of your car with a bowl of spaghetti on the end, and drag it through Little Italy.”

“Kingsley?”

“Yeah?”

“Eddie Murphy is sleeping soundly tonight, secure in the knowledge that his job isn’t in danger from you.”

“Hah! Well at least somebody is sleeping! It sure ain’t us.”

“Next pile, please.”

Kingsley handed over another stack of files. Dora winced even as she looked at it, remembering fondly the days when she still loved her job.

Remus Lupin hurried to catch the bus, dropping an almost empty cup of coffee into a nearby trashcan as he headed for the still open door of the bus. Just in time. Like pure luck. Another minute and he’d have been dialing up a taxi. Luck…he’d never really had much, but he seemed to be catching a case of it these days.

Maybe it was the pills, even if he did hate their tiny little guts. Something hard to define had been shifting for him. Waking up on time was easier. Getting organized wasn’t quite the chore it had
been, and to be honest, he actually felt...well...kind of cheerful just lately. Like anything was possible, if just stayed in the ring long enough to see it happen.

Whatever it was, Remus wasn’t complaining. The dumb bastard he’d been tailing for weeks had finally slipped up. The thing was, he hadn’t been seeing his secretary or anyone obvious. He’d been humping a girl from the local video store on the side. Remus had gotten the entire affair on film, and had been paid in full for his weeks of work. Several thousand dollars after expenses. His room at the Lucky Ace was paid up to the end of next month, his cellphone bill was paid off entirely, he’d gotten his best suit and his trench coat dry cleaned, and he still had plenty to send along to Dora and Diana.

Not that Dora really needed the money. She was the tops at what she did, and her salary wasn’t anything to scoff at these days, but Remus had tried his damnedest to make sure he contributed to his daughter’s well being and care. He was off the bottle, clear eyed and working steadily, and that meant the added bonus of seeing Diana for awhile. Maybe a trip to the zoo would be in order soon.

Throw in the fact that the cute Greek girl at his favorite morning restaurant stop had slipped him her phone number, and the fact that he already had a lead on a new client, and it had been one hell of a good week!

It was the kind of summer day where Remus carried his jacket in his hand instead of wearing it, because the heat of summer was making things a little sticky for everyone. The bus was packed, as usual, and Remus sat near the back and just smiled while he stared out the window. He’d been up and down these same streets a few hundred times, and yet today they looked cleaner and brighter than he remembered.

He’d choked down pills every day for weeks now, and that just had to be the difference. Who knew? Such a little thing, but such a big difference. They still made him want to puke just looking at them, but what the hell? You couldn’t argue with great results.

His cellphone buzzed in his pocket, and Remus picked the phone out and flipped it open.

“Full Moon Investigations, at your service, Remus Lupin speaking. How can I help you? Yes. I see...understood. Great...just say when and where, and I can meet you to go over some preliminary explanations of costs for hourly expenses and retainer fees for longer jobs. Yes, sir! We’ll see you there. Good bye.”

Remus grinned from ear to ear as he put the phone away. One hell of a week alright! Some British sounding lawyer wanted him for a standard person search. Easy as pie. The guy obviously didn’t know the area that well, or he wouldn’t have offered such a large fee up front, but Remus wasn’t in charge of looking out for other people’s money, he was in charge of Remus. Finishing a job with pay like this would put him far enough ahead to look at real apartments! Find one missing deadbeat dad and hello good living!

Whoever that Pettigrew fellow was, he had money to burn, and Remus could help him burn it. Nobody knew the soft underbelly of Chicago like he did. If the guy Pettigrew wanted was here...by God, he’d find him...especially with five thousand dollars advance and ten thousand more plus expenses on the line! For that kind of money, he could get them God’s home address if he had to!

The end of a cane arced through the air, connecting with the head of the plump, balding little
fellow in tweed.

“OOOOWW! I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m so terribly sorry, sir! I swear it! I’m working on it! Please! Patience, sir…patience. Remember your heart condition!”

“Bugger my heart condition, you miserable wretch! Incompetent! Pathetic! You abysmal little worm!”

The crack of it across the man’s head resounded through the hall. The old man could brandish a cane with best of them. He walked with two, needing them both since that unfortunate incident in New York. It had taken a lot of money and time just to get this much mobility back, but it was enough. He could still vent his frustrations on his employees and servants if he wished. Even in pajamas and a long bathrobe, hobbling along with his canes, the pale and withered gentleman still had an aura of power and clarity that others recognized.

Tom Riddle was vexed. Quite a bit past vexed actually. His solicitor, Pettigrew, had been tasked with hiring investigators to discreetly look for any of the Phoenix Corporation’s operatives, and the preliminary results were somewhat discouraging. Granted, they’d only just started, but Tom Riddle wanted answers. Once he had answers, he’d have targets, but until then he could only vent his rage upon his staff.

There was a limit to what could be imparted to law enforcement, at least through the channels available to him…unless he had something concrete to give them. Sending private investigators into the mix might get him a tidbit that the police didn’t have time for. He could also be a bit freer with the names and faces he wanted to erase…not that the hired help needed to know that. All he needed was lead to go on, and if the police couldn’t make use of it…well…there were people who could…and he knew them all.

Getting anything significant done in Chicago, from knocking a building down to starting construction on a new one, from zoning a business to acquiring a license to get started with one, took money. Not just a little money, but a lot of money. Just the bribes for mid-level officials and permission from organized crime in the area demanded a small fortune, but Tom Riddle had that. That wasn’t the point.

The point was that in the process to seemingly accomplish a major project, he’d spent weeks and weeks making deals and acquiring relationships with most of the significant players in the greater Chicago area. In just a few weeks, their total compliance with his interests had shifted to wary and reluctant stalling while they closed ranks, protecting their leaders and pointing fingers at rival groups. It was chaos, and his influence, newly won in this area, had been waning fast.

It was the Phoenix Corporation, and he knew it. It had their fingerprints all over it, but they’d hidden themselves well as usual. False names, carefully crafted aliases to account for living quarters and office space. All obvious trails had been erased, but they were here. They had to be. And that meant Potter.

'That arrogant little shit…Potter! Seventy-eight years on this rock, and that little bastard comes along and has the brass to think he can toy with me!? I’ll mount his skull on my fucking wall! I’ll find him…oh, I’ll find him. He’ll pay for New York…in spades. I’ll make him beg for a death as clean as the one his parents got!'

His attention returned to the cowering man in front of him. Loathsome little rodent that he was, Pettigrew was loyal, and made a fine third party to operate through. As a solicitor and lawyer with licenses paid for in both countries, he could act discreetly, allowing Tom Riddle to remain in the background as always, letting dummy corporations and non-existent organizations funnel his
money into projects that took his fancy.

“Don’t you think you’re irreplaceable! Get me those answers. I want names…locations…or even someone close to them. I want an ’in’, and we’ll let slip the dogs of war upon them this time! Get that obedient little dog…Malfoy. Wants to be a Senator? We can pour bundled contributions into every group that will back him. A few phone calls and I’ll have think tanks across the country babbling his praises! He’s got the mayor’s ear…we’ll get this back on track yet…at least we moved Scrimgeour into place. Handy thing, a call to the president. Let the federal boys pick apart the details, already seeing it our way. The people interrupting progress…they are the enemy! I’m telling you, Pettigrew…if you don’t get me what I want…and quickly…I’ll find someone who can! MacNair!”

Riddle bellowed for his head of security, who always waited nearby, small headset in place while he listened to reports from the men on the ground around the mansion. The huge black-haired man moved forward with the grace of a hunting cat.

“Sir!”

“Fetch my wheelchair! Take me back to my office! I’m done with this…this…refuse!”

“Right, sir.”

The man rolled the wheelchair into place and waited while his employer made himself comfortable, canes in his lap while he adjusted a blanket for his legs. Technically, it was beneath him to cart the old man around this way, seeing as he’d worked in contract security and various mercenary outfits for almost twenty years, but for what he was being paid, he’d have eaten a mile of shit without complaint. A few years of this and he could retire…possibly on an island that he’d own outright…preferably with a population of dancing girls and a giant freezer that would never run out of beer. He rolled the old man down the hall without a word while Pettigrew scurried off to get back to business.

“Good man, MacNair. Get me to my office. I’ve a few calls to make. I want Asian currency stronger by the end of the week. It’s time to pull some strings. And bring me a brandy. Not the swill I keep out for company…the dusty bottle in the back of the cabinet. I’ll make something productive of this day yet!”

“Right. As you wish, sir.”

'Potter. How much would it grieve that self righteous old bastard if he knew I’d scoured the earth of his favorite little protégé? Eh, Brian? You old codger! What have you got in mind this time? Think you’ll take me out of the great game, do you? I think not. I’ll make it to dance on your grave, and all the pathetic little dreamers of your ilk will watch and see the future shaped by my hands! Hmph. Potter. I see the last of that line erased…if it’s the last thing I do. Potter…'

MacNair rolled the old man down the hall. Riddle had nodded off again…price of getting old, MacNair supposed. He’d likely wake up in another hour, but he’d find himself at his desk with a brandy waiting for him. Aside from managing the personnel around the mansion, this was far, far from the worst job he’d ever taken.

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Neville Longbottom rather liked his life. He had a fairly nice cottage in a lovely neighborhood,
with just enough room to grow a half decent sized garden and still be able to landscape a bit in his
off hours. He didn’t have all that many of those, since Scotland Yard was a demanding mistress at
times, but he rose early every morning to take time with his children.

It wasn’t an unmanly thing, liking plants. He’d always rather liked making green things grow
healthy and strong, and he’d fancied that, in years gone by, he’d have made a fine country farmer.
Sadly, those days were largely passed, and England was a different place these days. His
grandmother had pushed him hard, raising him alone after his parents had passed on, and while it
hadn’t been easy, he’d made it into the respected ranks of England’s finest law enforcement
branch.

Neville was a man of only average height, and just a little soft about the middle, but still quite fit.
He had a friendly face, and was given to smiling a bit more often than some, but not excessively.
Never minding the troubles of any given day, he was generally quite cheerful, and well liked by the
vast majority of people who worked with him. In spite of this, he still hadn’t married, which had
bothered his grandmother to no end, but Neville was in no hurry to rush into anything. He might be
a bit overcautious, but in his own way he was methodical and plodding, inevitably accomplishing
each goal set before him. When the time was right, he’d see to that too. He just had other things to
do right now.

When the last of his ‘children’ were watered and spoken to, (Neville believed in talking to his
plants…not because they answered back or anything daft like that, but because studies had shown
conclusively that they responded to pleasant stimuli, and it was worth the effort to him just to see
them grow just a little stronger and healthier.) Neville washed his hands and made ready for the
trip to work.

It was always something, and while the paperwork involved was dreadful, it was rewarding to be a
part of an organization that genuinely did its very best to make a safer world for people to live in. It
was a more peaceful place these days, and he loved working with people who had made it that
way. It was very much what his parents would have wanted, had they still been alive to see it.

Terrorism, rife at the time then, had resulted in his parent’s tragic deaths when he was quite young.
They’d been traveling abroad for work, and he’d been in the care of a nanny when his father and
mother were caught in a pub blast that killed eight and injured eleven others. He might have
preferred botany or work as a naturalist or something of the like if he’d really done as he’d wanted,
but he was content with his lot, and rightfully proud of what he did for a living. He did it well, and
he was fairly sure that someday he’d see a promotion come his way. Terrorism was once again on
the rise in some places, and England had seen a bit of it too, but in the main, it was one of the safer
countries to live in this world, and being a part of making it that way was something to look on
with pride.

The music in the halls as he walked through the office complex made him want to tap his feet, but
he restrained himself while he nodded or waved hello to others on the way to his office. He’d
always liked dancing. Admittedly, his grandmother had been his teacher, but it had certainly paid
off in school when dances had been held. Shame that he hadn’t the opportunity to exercise his
talents in that department more often, but Scotland Yard wasn’t all parties and tea on the veranda,
and that was just how it was.

“Good morning, Susan,” he chirped, greeting his secretary on the way into his own office.

“Good morning, Neville. How are the little ones?”

“Not bad, not bad. I’ve a bit of pruning to see to this weekend, but otherwise green and good. And
you, my dear Ms. Bones?”
“Very well. There are two new files for you…on your desk. And a memorandum on top of them. I’ve got your itinerary ready after you’ve had a chance to have a look at them.”

“Tsk. Busy, busy, busy. Here’s to it being nothing of substance.” So many things they looked into these days. Most often it turned out to be nothing, but it was the price to pay for dramatically increased pre-investigation of rumors and possibilities.

Another day would go by, milling through endless possibilities, and if they were very fortunate, the majority could be dealt with by local authorities and a few phone calls. Occasionally he traveled about England with various partners, but unless something very serious was underway, his day would be spent here, and that was just how he liked it.

It would be a pity to wind up calling the sitter to look after his plants again, especially after that three week stint in London just a little while ago. He just hated leaving his plants alone so long, but what else could one do? Sometimes duty called…and Neville Longbottom always answered faithfully.

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“Ma…Ma….Ma?! Come on! Everything is fine. Don’ worry about it! The club’s a nice joint…no trouble…all legit. Nothin’s gonna happen to me. I promise. Maaaa!”

Blaise Zabini held his cellphone in one hand and a cigarette in the other while he walked through his townhouse in slippered feet and his good bathrobe. His mother was well-connected to one of the most powerful families in Chicago, and even as a widow in her declining years, she was treasured and respected by some of the heaviest hitting men in town. It had helped his ‘career’ a lot, having a mother with friends in high places, but there were times when his mother was just a little…smothering. She was worried, and when Mama Zabini worried, everybody worried with her…or else. She claimed her dreams were prophecies, and that ill fortune was lurking near in Blaise's future...and while some people believed that New Age stuff, but Blaise didn't. Even so...you have to comfort your mother whether you agreed with her or not, right?

“Okay…okay…okay, already!! I’ll get a couple of my fellas to stick around the place an’ look after me…maybe Greg an’ Vinny. I got no idea what’s goin’ on either, but I ain’t in on it…so I should be just fine. I run a nightclub, ma…it ain’t a big thing. Nobody’s gunnin’ for me, and I’m doin’ just fine. Relax, okay?”

It took a few more assurances and some solemn oaths about his undying love for his mother to get off the phone and back to his breakfast, but Blaise took his own safety fairly seriously anyway. Maybe calling Greg and Vinny and having them stay in the guest rooms for a little while wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

He finished off his eggs and toast, then gulped the last shot of coffee before heading for the shower in his bedroom suite. The teenage tramp he’d picked up last week was still out cold in the bed, snoring softly. No stamina. Nice ass though.

It was annoying…sometimes…keeping the bed warm with whatever seemed nice at the moment. Not that he didn’t get what he wanted out of it…but he didn’t really have anyone that ‘knew’ him. Not really. All the tarts he met these day were practically dead from the neck up…all attitude and no brains, just a good piece of ass with legs handy to move ‘em around. Not like Dee.

Dee had been smart. Funny…the right ways. Good in any kinda crowd, smooth and cool in any
situation. Classy. The kind of class you could take to dinner anywhere in the world. He hadn’t really seen it when he was seventeen…but what the fuck? He’d been seventeen! Who can see anything clear at that age? And the ass on that boy never quit! He’d fucked plenty of good looking guys in his time…but Dee…Dee was the kind of lay that stood out in your mind for the rest of your life!

Dee was back in town…and might just swing by someday. There were things to talk about…offers to put on the table. Taking a hit to his pride…well…it might just be worth it…to have the same person around at the end of the day. Cute sluts were good and all, but something better…something better would be nice…wouldn’t it?

TBC!!!
Chapter 20

Big Chicago part 20...by Samayel

“Harrr-yyyy?”

“Yeah, love?”

“It hurrrts! Could you please put some ointment on for me? Hmmmm?”

“Sure! Let me grab the tube and the towel and I’ll be right back.”

Oh yeah. It’s rough being me. Hah! Smirk if you want, but I am suffering…sort of. I may be pampered, but try to remember that I’ve been through three days without sex. This might not seem like torment to you, but to me, after all I’ve waited for, it definitely counts as pure torture. Three days!!! No sex!!!

Well…almost. You can’t count being face down in Harry’s lap this morning. I mean…it’s not like there’s anything else I’ve been able to do for the last three days. The only small consolation I have is that, even though my ass is killing me, there’s nothing wrong with my mouth, and a mouthful of Harry’s cock is the only thing that made this morning redeemable!

To top it all off, while I can’t exercise yet, Harry and Therese have conspired to ensure that I eat only healthy foods included on the list Snape sent along. I’m pretty sure Ron’s in on it too, so that rules out discreetly dialing out a pick up order for Malnati’s. I’d kill for just one slice of deep dish pizza! Just one!

Well…okay…I wouldn’t really kill, but I would cheerfully maim! I mean really! Soups and salads are wonderful, and Therese is a fabulous cook, but some things are just good because you know they’re bad for you. Like me! I think half my charm is rooted in the fact that people take a look at me and know there’s always a catch involved when someone looks this good.

I’ve been sitting here for three days. Not even sitting! Laying on my damned stomach or just limping to the bathroom. Last night I rolled over in my sleep, and Harry was fairly good about being woken up because I just started crying. I’m not ashamed of it. It wasn’t because of the pain. Pain I can handle, but I just suck at coping with inconvenience!

I mean…all this luxury, and it’s still a prison! I’m like…like the Prisoner of fucking Zenda, that’s what! I couldn’t sit to play piano, and I couldn’t stand to paint without aching furiously. My butt feels like it was badly sunburned, and everything I do makes it hurt. The ointment is part anesthetic and part antibiotic, and it just barely takes the discomfort down to a level where I can function and stay sane. That bastard Snape won’t dole out anything more powerful than aspirin, just because I used to be a junkie! Fuck! That was seven years ago! Now I can’t even jerk off, because when I tense a little or get excited, it makes my backside feel like it’s on fire!

I can’t do any of the things that make me happy. No sex. No alcohol. No simply wonderful foods. No painting. No piano. Oh…yeah…and in case I hadn’t said it enough…No Fucking Sex!

I remember the Greek legend of Tantalus, who was punished by being imprisoned eternally just out of reach of sustenance. It’s only bad because I’m so close to all the things I want, but I can’t have them. All I get is two little pills a day to relieve stress, and they work okay, but not enough to
make me stop hating this abysmal state of affairs!

Harry comes back in and takes a seat by the edge of the bed, while I just grumpily peel off the pajamas and let him pull the bandage away. He’s so good about all this, and the man has the hands of a saint, not a killer. The only torturous part is that, when he touches me there, in the places that don’t hurt too much, I want him so badly I can barely stand it. I have him all to myself, and all I can do is whimper occasionally and limp my way to the bathroom now and then! Insufferable!

“Easy, love. Relax for me. The worst of this will be over in a few more days. It’ll itch like hell for a while yet, but once this closes you’ll feel a lot better. I promise. It looks really good from here, but you can’t really take my word for it.”

“What? Why not? What’s wrong with your word?”

“I’m very biased…especially from back here. I may have been blinded by the magnificence from where I’m sitting.”

“Mmm. You can keep that up as long as you want! Flatterer. Flattery will get you…well, damn it, it’ll get you one hell of a rain check for as soon as I’m well! I hate this! And I want a pizza! And a cocktail! And some ice cream! Or gelato…oooo God! Gelaaatooo. Jesus, I’m pathetic. How can you stand me?”

For those who aren’t in the know, gelato is what happens when you go to make ice cream, and ignore everything that isn’t delicious. All that’s left is pure goodness. After gelato, ice cream is permanently passé. I hope Doc Snape is happy! This isn’t just raining on my parade…it’s shitting in my sherbet! Grrr!

“I said relax. Here, let’s switch to a massage now that I’ve got the bandage back on. That’ll sort you out for a little while. Try to remember that, once we get you into decent shape, you can have all those things again as long as you don’t overdo it.”

I can feel calloused fingers working knots out of my shoulders. Heavenly. I so don’t deserve this.

“That’s better. You’re gonna be fine. Oh…and Hermione is dropping by tonight. She’s got a few points to discuss about a preliminary plan.”

“Tonight!?” I tensed up all over again, which makes my butt sting even worse. “Oww! Damn it! Tonight? While I’m like this? I don’t want anyone but you to see me this way! I’m a mess! My hair is everywhere, and nowhere good, I’m in pajamas, and I’m miserable! Can’t she come some other time?”

“You’re adorable, we’ll put a sheet over most of you if you like, and it’s hard to get her away from the computers for more than a couple hours at a time. She takes breaks for sleep and food, but she’s usually monitoring several things at the same time. It’s amazing what she can do, but there are limits to her time. She’ll be here in a few hours. I’ll make it up to you later. We can curl up, with you on your good side, and watch a movie…or I could read to you like I did last night.”

Mmm. I think the reading again. I never properly enjoyed ‘White Fang’ until Harry read it aloud. Jack London had a real passion when he wrote that book, and listening to Harry’s voice was soothing in the extreme. Of course, what Harry doesn’t know is that, while he was reading and I was raptly paying attention with eyes wide, I was discreetly imagining him as a wolf, feral and potent, devouring me utterly, sating his hunger and slaking his thirst with me as his sustenance. I just shiver at the thought of him, and think of his teeth on my throat. Can’t help it really. I’m kind of vulnerable to flights of fancy when I haven’t been given a proper and thorough fucking in a
while.

“Oooo-kayyy. I owe them all for even contemplating doing this. I know it’s only possible because Blaise is ’connected’…and because of you, so if it means chatting while I look like this, so be it.”

“Attaboy. You’ll be fine in no time. First chance we get, as soon as you feel up to it, we’re going dancing. Someplace incredible. Sound good?”

“Sounds perfect!”

I can wait. I’ll have nothing but clean, healthy, pink skin back there soon, and Harry will never look at another man’s mark on my body again. I hate this, and I’m tired and cranky and sore, but I can wait…it will make life’s little pleasures so much sweeter when they come to me again.

Come. Coming. God! I’m stiff in the pajamas and face down on the bed getting massaged. When I wriggle too much…it hurts, but I just want to come!

These days just seem to last forever.

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Hermione’s quite the chipper one today. She just breezes through the place, smelling faintly of patchouli, looking like a college computer nerd turned hippie with attitude. She doesn’t look like a world class hacker working with a covert group that engages in counter-terrorism and espionage, but Harry gives a great massage when he isn’t shooting holes in mobsters, so there you go. At least my second pill kicked in and I’m not quite so anxious about my appearance and sore butt. She pulls an amused but sympathetic face when she sees me, bundled in sheets and laying on my stomach in a pile of pillows.

“Looks like you’re recovering nicely. You can have faith in Snape. He does brilliant work. Good to see you again. You were so quiet when I was over, and I haven’t got all that much time, but it’s nice to get a chance to sit down and really chat with you a bit in person. All we hear in the office is the usual glowing comments from Harry.”

Harry is out fetching some iced tea from the kitchen, being the perfect man he is, and I can’t help but grin when I hear that.

“He glows? He gives glowing commentary about me? Spill, girl! Tell me before he gets back! What does he say about me?” That gets a smile on her face. I love girl-talk. Getting the inside dish on what Harry’s like when I’m not around is sooo petty and callow and beneath me…but I love it anyway.

“Are you kidding? He raves about you when he gets half the chance. Mostly we’re all business. No time for anything else. He was always this quiet, enigmatic mystery, even when he relaxed. No personal life, no attachments, all business. Then he did the job at the penitentiary and it was like he changed overnight. He smiles all the time, sometimes even when we’re charting ‘jobs’. He still talks about the paintings you made. I didn’t get to see them last time. I promised I’d take a peek today.”

Mmm. Like food for the soul. I love compliments. He raved about my paintings, did he? We hung the one of him up in the den and study. Well…I watched while he hung it. My butt hurt too much to do anything but stand and watch for a few minutes while he fumbled with wire and hammer and nails, all while balancing on a chair. I love a man who’s nimble. No wonder he’s a good dancer.
I’m pretty sure I couldn’t hold a frame that size in place while stretching that way. And he does look good when he stretches. Ugh…bad thought. Company here…no need to get ‘excited’ about Harry now…especially since there isn’t a fucking thing I can do about it.

“Even while planning serious ‘business matters’? That’s sooo cute. You wouldn’t believe how sweet he is! Like an angel…but with brilliant abs and great biceps. And his butt’s pretty amazing too!” Hah! Made her blush with that one. “If you want, the paintings are straight down the hall to the end. Last room. Except the one I did of Harry. That’s in the den. He hung it up yesterday.”

Veiled terms are used when discussing the real nature of their work. No last names even get used. Without that nifty little box they use to guarantee against listening devices, all we can do is use the ‘business references’ Harry taught me. Not that they think anyone is listening right now, but they just never take chances. The others know what I mean, because they do this kind of thing all the time, but hey, I dated a mafia boy, and I had to keep quiet then too. With Blaise, the word ‘meeting’ always meant dropping off drug money, and ‘delivery’ or ‘package’ always referred to the drugs themselves. I can deal with it.

“Alright. I’ll check them out when Harry walks me out. In the meantime, I really ought to get down to business here. We agreed to make this thing for you happen on our own time. I’ve been able to squeeze in a little research, and Dean managed to start prepping some equipment that might be appropriate.”

“Understood. Let’s see what you’ve got cooking! I can’t wait to get on with this. Harry wasn’t exactly thrilled with the idea of my involvement, but he let it pass because I’m absolutely committed to making this quick and easy. So, is there a way I can make this happen personally?”

“Well, there is, and here’s why. I ran his name and pulled up all the material data I could about him, and there wasn’t a lot to work with. A small credit record, because he operates in cash mostly. Probably has most of it in a safe or something. No criminal record, but a few citations from the club. Little violations of city code and such. He paid them all on time, so there were no real hassles there. That said, I tracked his address and financial records, and while I don’t think I could do more than inconvenience him financially, there are certain other options available to us.”

She is a long-winded one, our Hermione is. I feel like I’m in a lecture hall, even though I’m in my bed and pajamas. I wanna get to the point, and Harry just came in with the iced tea and some light snacks. Nothing too exquisite, since he wouldn’t tempt me cruelly by waving food I can’t have under my nose, but Hermione doesn’t seem to mind and nibbles away while continuing her lead up to the plan.

“Mmm. Delicious. Anyway…one of the easiest ways to deal with someone who needs to ‘go away’ for awhile is to see to it that law enforcement has all they need to do the job for you. If there’s nothing legitimate to give them, something can always be manufactured, especially with our resources and the power of the information age at our fingertips.

Your acquaintance has excellent security, and while there are some indications of his having been online in the past, he obviously knows enough to stay disconnected when he isn’t using it, and he’s never done anything criminal while using it. I did manage to cross reference the address and building records of his home against the internet port for his computer, and I’ve pinpointed his computer to the bedroom suite. We could compromise the security of that computer if we can get you in there, undisturbed, long enough to upload a little ‘special program’ for me and then make sure the connection is stable for maybe five minutes or so. If we time it right, you’d be able to get out of there without doing anything more dangerous than that.

This is where Dean’s equipment comes in. You’ll need a small device, disguised as a cellphone,
which can be plugged into the computer quickly to upload my programming. Then you’ll need to make sure the internet connection is intact and operating for approximately five minutes while I do what I do. Standard to any job, we’ll have a very small GPS locator on you, so we can keep tabs on your location, and we have short range microphones that look like jewelry and don’t register on almost any scanners except the most sophisticated. Since you know him, I doubt they’ll bother, and I doubly doubt that, since Blaise has gone legit, he’d have the kind of equipment needed to detect it.

Further, we’ll supply you with a few methods to deal with any aggressors. We’ll have to stick to things that are easy to hide and won’t do any ‘permanent’ harm, as you requested, but at least that will guarantee that you have the means to stall for time while reinforcements come. Just in case. Specifically, there are substances that can make even big men very quiet and peaceful for awhile…if you catch my drift?”

Oh my God! I’m going to be James Bond! Or Jane Bond…I don’t know what I’ll wear yet, but I’m probably going to try something just devastating…as Dee, to keep Blaise’s attention on my ass and not my actions.

Maybe it’s just the tranquilizers talking, but I’m not that afraid of all this. I mean…shit…if I can sit all day in a cell with a mean spirited sociopath who thinks rape is a form of entertainment and still keep my cool, then I can definitely keep an ex-lover of mine occupied for a few minutes while I contrive a way to tinker with his computer! I was much more frightened of the idea of upsetting Harry than I am of this.

“This is…promising. I like it. Is it possible to discuss what my dear Mr. Blaise will endure? What have you got forming in that nimble mind of yours?”

She’s definitely not used to compliments, if a simple one like that can make her uncomfortable. It’s kind of cute. In spite of being my age, and experienced in a lot of ways that other people aren’t, I can tell that her self confidence is a kind of front. She’s the typical brainy bookworm girl, incredibly competent and knows it, but horribly socially awkward. Suddenly, I see why Ron desperately needs my help with this crush of his, even if he thinks he doesn’t. Two obviously mutually interested people, equally socially challenged, and equally unable to make a simple thing like a date happen, clearly need my gentle guidance. Cyrano DeBergerac, eat your heart out.

“Well, let’s just put it this way, Dee. You wanted suffering, and a lengthy stay with the authorities, preferably under circumstances as unpleasant as yours were. I can make arrangements that will place additional evidence where law enforcement can find it, with Blaise’s name and accounts tied to it, using almost nothing but the internet. Illegal pornography. The law is so violently strict about criminal sexual conduct that he won’t get a very fair trial, and that nearly guarantees his conviction. The more disgusting the crime, the more visceral the reaction from judges and juries, and the less they look at little facts that might result in his going free. Angry people make snap decisions.

If we use material that will offend the hell out of them, he’ll be put away without even the support of his own people, because even his crowd has its limits. There are things they tolerate, because they’re about doing business and making money, and there are things they don’t tolerate. This way we can destroy his reputation and connections, guarantee a swift conviction and a stiff sentence, and most of all, I’m given to understand that behind bars, the least liked prisoners are sex offenders. That should make his stay very unpleasant. Is that suitable to you?”

Dear God. It all sounded intriguing a second ago. Dangerous and fun and cool. She isn’t kidding. They’ll make Blaise a living target behind bars, even after I’ve finished with him. Assuming he lives through his first few weeks and makes a place for himself, he’ll be at the bottom of the
bottom. Most of the people behind prison bars are there for a reason, but by silent agreement, they all hate one thing more than anything else. Many of them were childhood victims of abuse, and if they find out what kind of porn Blaise was convicted for, he’ll either be a dead man or every man’s bitch before he’s been there a month! I want revenge, but do I really want this?

That’s when Harry speaks up, and I’m forced to listen. Green eyes are boring into me while he speaks calmly, but I know every word is laden with deadly seriousness.

“There’s a limit to how sure we’ll be of his conviction if we do it another way. There still aren’t any guarantees, but this is a fast and easy way to make this happen like you wanted, and we can’t devote a lot of resources to anything that isn’t strictly our business. Beyond that, the only certain, absolute way is to bring me into play, and understand this…I’d prefer that to having you alone in there for any length of time. Are you sure you still want to do this?”

I fought for this…for the chance to make this happen. I wanted to do something that would make this easier for them, and prove my worth to them…and…I guess…to me. Now I just feel sick to my stomach, and my mouth is dry in spite of the iced tea. I can’t inconvenience them any more than I already have without sounding like a petulant little waste of time. I’m backed into a corner by my own big mouth, and Blaise’s life is on the line…even more so than my own! What else can I do?

“Yes. Do it. As soon as I’m healed up I’ll be ready when you are. If that’s the best way to make me a part of this, then that’s what we’ll do. Count me in.”

I just destroyed a man’s life. Triumph never felt so much like nausea before. Pity…wouldn’t you know my conscience would act up just when I’m not allowed to use any alcohol to keep it quiet?

I got a second lecture from Hermione afterwards. It looks like, once I do this, they have to pull me into the organization for my own safety. New identification, a clean up of my records, and some very specific training in their protocols will be required. I’m still smarting from the realization of what I’ve put in motion, and my butt aches dully in spite of the medication on it. At least she relents a little and chats before leaving. Harry was in the gym before Hermione got here, and he’s just taking a quick shower. Hermione only has maybe another half hour or so to stay, and Harry means to be back in time to see her off. He left me time to chat and get to know her, since she’s one of his closer friends, and that suits me just fine.

Of course, this opens the door for me to change the topic to one more of my liking. I really need the distraction right now, since damning another human being to the hell I went through isn’t something I take lightly. We’ve already talked about her college majors and personal interests, which center on computers, language and politics. It’s time to bring up the topic of Ron.

“So…come on! You obviously know all about my love life…what’s going on in yours?” That produced a faint hint of blushing cheek and a hasty look away.

“Well…I’ve been very busy…with work and all. There just isn’t time for that…kind of thing.”

“You’re kidding me! You’re smart, fit and nice. Are you seriously telling me there isn’t anyone you think is worth going on at least one date with?”

“No…I mean yes…I mean…crap. Well, there’s this one guy, but…it’s complicated, you know?”

“Nothing is that complicated! Really…it’s all about this: what do you want…and how bad do you
want it? Either this guy is nice enough to be worth taking a little chance…or he’s not. So…who is this mystery stud?”

I wriggle forward on the sheets and stare intensely at her, grinning like the Cheshire cat. No one can resist that playful smirk, especially when I bring my eyes into play. She withers…score one for me! I knew she’d crack like an eggshell under a little social pressure!

“Okay, okay! You know Ron, right?”

I feign wide eyed amazement. I am such the skillful liar!

“NO! Ron? He’s adorable! He’s such a big sweet lug! All tough and manly with his chest puffed out, but such a heart of gold. He’s been so good to me since I came here. You couldn’t pick one much better than him!” She looks amazed and relieved, like she can’t believe her private opinion of him is accurate. How perfect!

“Really? You think so? I mean…he seems really decent…and he is…uh…well…you know…”

“Attractive…hot…sexy…a hunka-hunka burnin’ love? There’s your problem…you can’t even say you find him attractive out loud. We have to get you over that right away! I’ll say this though…it certainly explains that little show between you two at the poker game.” I love the mortified and yet curious look that gets.

“What? What show?! I mean…I looked at him…a few times…but that’s hardly a show!”

“Hah! You were looking at him almost every second that he wasn’t looking at you. He has to be just mad about you to have been staring at you with that big, lost puppy dog look all night.”

That took mortified to a new level. Still, after the initial shock and horror of realizing how obvious they both were in front of others, the curiosity strikes a moment later. Irresistible! I’m good. I wonder if Cupid is looking for a trial hire?

“He…you’re sure he was looking at me? I mean…I thought he might have, but…but…you never know, you know? He looked…interested?”

“I’ll say! How is it that you two haven’t gone out before? What’s stopping you? I’d bet just about anything that you two would make a great couple. And I’d also bet that there’s no way he’d say no to a date with you! Just ask him.”

“I couldn’t! I mean…God…it’s isn’t like I wouldn’t like to…but…I always imagined…Jeez, this is stupid! I always imagined that a guy would ask me out…not the other way around.”

Crap! I’ve got my work cut out for me. If I really were Cupid, I’d be peppering both their asses with Arrows Of Love until they both look like walking pincushions!

“I think you’re selling yourself short, but it is your life. This is the twenty-first century! Girls can ask out boys if they like. Even so…if he asked you out…you would say yes, wouldn’t you?”

Her eyes just narrowed with suspicion. I think I just got busted!

“You! You’re planning to give him a nudge aren’t you? You had us figured out all along! Did he put you up to this? Did he?”

“NO! He all but threatened to bury me in concrete if I brought this up with anyone but him! If Ron had any idea of the conversation we just had, Harry would have to get me three new identities and
move me out of the country! I just...you both obviously like each other...I have Harry in my life and I’m happy...it would be nice to see someone else this happy. I was bitten by the love bug, and now I just want to share. What’s so wrong about that?"

That mollified her more than a little. She stops bristling and relaxes, but she still looks irritated about being taken for a fool for this long. Obviously she’s brilliant, but when it comes the world of social interaction, I have her completely outmatched. Come to think of it, I’m about as handy with languages as she is...almost. If I brushed up a bit my Italian, Spanish and French would be fairly respectable. She’s the computer whiz though. I never bothered to learn more than I needed to surf the net for porn when I was sixteen. Programming the blasted things would be very, very out of my league.

“Fine! So he didn’t put you up to this. It’s nice that you want to help...but if he can’t get up the nerve to ask me out himself, then maybe he isn’t really someone I’d want to date. Ever think of that?”

“Okay. Alright. ‘Nuff said. Maybe I’m just terribly out of line and a terrible busybody who can’t help his overwhelming urge to give things a push in the right direction. So sue me. When will I see you again? How will we work out the finer details when I’m healed up and ready to start on this?”

“You’ll have to come into the office for a full briefing and some training sessions. I’d say give us a couple of weeks at the most. By then you’ll be healed up completely, and I recommend following Snape’s orders and getting some exercise. In the office we can discuss some specifics that can’t be mentioned here. Remember to tell Har...just a moment.”

The buzz of her cellphone interrupts us, and I’ve learned to dread cellphones buzzing here. She flips the thing open and answers hurriedly, suddenly as serious as a heart attack.


“Trouble in paradise?” I have to ask. I shouldn’t, but this kind of thing affects me too. Any information is better than none.

“You might say that. I have to run. Harry will be leaving too. We need a strategy session at the office immediately. It might take awhile. Possibly days. That’s about all I can say right now. It was nice talking to you...and just so you know...I like seeing Harry happy, and that means I like you. Take care of yourself, and I’ll see you again. A couple weeks at the most.”

I’m almost too crestfallen to respond. It’s one of those calls, and Harry will be leaving. He’s probably on the way here to change now.

“It’s a date. Too bad it isn’t with Ron...but that’s up to you, sweetie. See you then. Don’t worry about me...just make sure my Harry comes home soon, okay?”

“You got it. Peace!”

And she’s gone, shoving the phone into her purse and hustling down the hall. I can hear her saying goodbye to Harry in the hall, and I just dread what’s coming next. Harry comes through the door in a hurry and pops the closet door open to grab a decent suit. I get my goodbye conversation over his shoulder while he fumbles with his clothes.

“You know what’s up. Sorry...about this, I mean. Looks like we need to apply some more ‘pressure’ in a few places. This could take a little while. I hope you know I really wanted to be here...for you.”
“I know.”

I make myself crawl off the bed, careful not to roll on my bad side. I feel enough like crying without accidentally scraping my healing skin across the bed. I want to say goodbye on my feet. I meant for my words to sound comforting. They came out small and vaguely upset anyway. He hurries into his shirt and takes a break to deal with me.

“Damn. I don’t want this. I don’t want you to be here…like this…by yourself. I have to do what I have to do. Ron’s on the way. We only have a few minutes.”

I just slide into arms that will be missed. Soak up the scent of him, clean from the shower he took after exercising. They may have to last me a little while…all those little things about him that tug at my heart and soul. He has to go, and I have to wait, and that’s the way it is. I whisper my answer into his neck.

“It’s okay. This won’t last forever. Someday this will be done. We’ll go away. Somewhere perfect. There won’t be any more goodbyes, and there won’t be any waiting. I know it….and I’m okay. Just be careful. Try to remember that you’re my tomorrow, alright?”

After the last kiss, as my mind clears from the intoxication that comes from staring into those magnificent oceans of green he calls eyes, he gives me the promise I need to hear.

“I can do that. I love you.”

He’s gone a minute later, down to the garage to jump in a car with Ron already waiting in the driver’s seat. I know he’ll do everything in his power to come home safely, but it doesn’t change the fact that I’m here…and he isn’t. I have medicine for anxiety, and medicine to make the skin on my butt heal fast and clean. They don’t have a medicine for this. For the empty feeling inside when you know that the person your world depends on is walking into mortal danger.

Jesus, does my ass ever hurt. The tragedy…the real tragedy is that I didn’t even get to have fun making it feel that way.

Harry…come home soon.

TBC!!!
Big Chicago Part 21...by Samayel

He was right. It itches like hell, but the pain is fading fast. It’s been three days since he left, but at least he sent a message.


Eight words may not seem like much, but attached to a box of exquisite caramels and a dozen red roses, it’s practically Tolstoy’s War And Peace. He knew perfectly well how my next few days would go, and he sent these to take a little of the sting out of behaving so well.

Not that I really had all that much choice. Ron was busy too, and that meant no rides for a few days, even if my butt had been well enough to cope with driving around. Therese isn’t budging on my diet…and believe me…I tried everything, including mournful, puppy-dog eyes. I encountered the same level of robust success enjoyed by a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest.

Caramels, interestingly enough, aren’t all that bad for you, especially if they’re few in number. In this case, there are precisely four, but each one is a hand made masterpiece. These four little jewels of flavor cost approximately as much as a good pair of shoes. The smattering of sea salt across the top adds the final touch. When it melts in your mouth, sharp against the softness of the caramel, salty and sweet at the same time, it’s just pure heaven. Thank you, Harry. There’s a man who knows how to satisfy his lover…even from a distance!

I managed to paint a little more today, but I threw the canvas out afterwards. Didn’t flow right, didn’t feel right, didn’t take shape at all like I’d hoped it would. I’ll try something else later. In the meantime, keeping with the spirit of my visit to the irascible Doctor Snape, I forced myself to try some exercise. It isn’t so awful really, but after ten minutes I was perspiring enough to make the healing skin on my butt sting, and that was enough for me.

It hasn’t been all lounging in luxury either. Well, okay…it has been all lounging in luxury, but I still did something almost businesslike. Hermione called very briefly, via a secure line, and gave me permission to make an introductory call to Blaise when I felt up to it. Just something to prime him for a visit by me. She was still moving things into place online and offline before we’re ready to actually do this, and her time is very limited with Harry in the field, but at least she was able to spare a few minutes and coach me through some do’s and don’ts.

It was actually fairly obvious stuff, but I swear she should have been a teacher…because no one else could sound so smart and still be so stuffy about it. We’re the same age, but she makes you feel like a three year old who just got caught with a hand in the cookie jar. I hate that, but I can forgive a lot for someone who slips me a hint that Harry is just fine and due back before too much longer. Nagging about my diet and exercise, even if Harry asked her to do so, on the other hand, is just a crime.

Funny thing, a diet for a person who isn’t over or under weight. Makes no sense to me, but here I am, trying balance out my system with foods that will beef up my overall health and demeanor. The pills Snape gave me help a little. I get morose sometimes, wondering about Harry, playing maudlin little songs on the piano and stewing in my own boredom. The thready, breathless sense of panic doesn’t come through, so I know the pills Snape gave me were probably worth it.
Oddly, I can’t quite get irritated about the TV news. The little things, like advertising a news segment ‘that could change your life!’ and then saving that segment until the end of the broadcast. Anything to keep you hooked, and it is crass, but I just can’t quite care.

No news is good news. There aren’t any publicized killings attached to underworld figures, but every local homicide gets a lot of attention right now, even the ‘garden variety’, ‘run of the mill’ personal disputes gone wrong. The mayor has described his confidence in the new FBI led task force, and this Agent Scrimgeour looks right at home in front of the cameras, implying that the lull in violence is probably linked to the rising presence of law enforcement and the intense scrutiny on organized crime in the area.

He’s full of it, of course. I know why there’s a lull. Harry was busy here, with me, and they were making plans for later targets while I enjoyed my time with Harry. Somewhere out there, Harry’s getting ready to make a move, or more than one, and then we’ll see who brags about a lull.

At least the rest of the news provides a certain comedy. It’s always amusing to watch one channel assert that it will be a long, cold winter, and that oil industry experts are raising prices because the rising demand is sure to pinch supplies, then change the channel and watch another report pronounce that rising climate temperatures will lead to a comparatively mild and rainy winter. I kind of admire the nerve it must take for people to lie that grandly in public. Every way you turn, you get exaggeration instead of information. Sure…I wish they’d all check their facts and not carefully engineer their science to match their agenda, but that isn’t really up to me.

Comedy aside, I am terribly restless. Without Harry around, and with my butt still itching and stinging, I haven’t even bothered with sex lately. It just hasn’t held the same appeal without him here, but my body is perpetually reminding me that I was spoiled rotten for awhile and that it rather misses all the attention lavished upon it. It announces this by plaguing me with nearly constant erections at all hours of the day and night. Not to mention a few absolutely wicked dreams that nearly caused something I haven’t experienced since I was twelve or thirteen. The last one was particularly nice, since it involved me dreaming of spearing myself on Harry’s lap and just hammering my way downwards until I came onto his chest…and then I woke up with my dick twitching and come faintly trickling into my pajamas. That part wasn’t quite so amusing.

By comparison to previous days, I feel fairly good…not to mention desperately unfulfilled. Or perhaps just ‘unfilled’. Listening to violin concertos and reading Sartre in the den just isn’t an acceptable substitute for a good wicked fucking. I’m stiff in my pajamas, for like the thousandth time today, and just tired of waiting. I need privacy…I need a shower…and I need my ‘toy’.

Maria already finished cleaning the bedroom, not that I leave much for her to clean. I didn’t have much to take care of in prison, and I kinda picked up the habit of cleaning up after myself and taking care of the few things that are mine. It just goes against my instincts now to leave anything messy. Except the bathroom countertop. I love having everything I want or need within reach, and I want or need quite a bit.

At the moment, all I need is a rather serious toy from the closet and some lubricant. I let the shower steam while I strip, and I can almost feel a faint flutter of urgency. I really have no shame. It’s been days and days before that. After living with a sex drive that has been fed and nourished and gently nursed back to life, now I’ve been living like some celibate monk. Not fair at all, and now that I don’t actually hurt too badly for self pleasure, why should I deny myself?

God…even a finger working lubricant into myself is enough to make my prick go from semi hard to stone in a heartbeat! It really has been too long without so much as a quick jerk! Harry, Harry, Harry…if only I could borrow you for about five minutes, the hunk of plastic in my hand wouldn’t
be necessary. Hell…it isn’t necessary per se, but as they said on Queer As Folk…“It’s just not sex without something up your butt!”

It isn’t a lengthy process. The only thing that drags it out is my desperate attempt to delay letting my hand touch my cock. The slippery nudge of the thing between my legs, seeking ingress and slowly filling the emptiness. The hot water pouring down my chest while I bite my lip, trying to keep quite in case anyone is in the hall. Feeling that thickness moving slowly in and out of me, working against the place inside of me that cries out for contact. Maybe my skin hurts a bit when I back into the shower wall for support, but I just don’t care. I want Harry, I want to come, I want satisfaction and…and…

And then it’s over. I barely touched the head of my dick and my whole body clenched up while I came. I don’t bother sliding the toy free for a little while. I just loaf against the shower wall, sweating and a little dizzy in the heat. I needed it, but it’s so fucking hollow next to the real thing. At least the water and a bit of soap removes the lubricant and any trace of this little session. Little blobs of white sliding away down the drain…out of sight…out of mind.

That’s my evening. It’ll be me bundled in a bathrobe, watching a movie and some news before bed, looking at my roses and slowly devouring my candies. I really do wonder what Harry is doing tonight. Somewhere, out there in the night, he’s making things happen, none of them wholesome, and there will be hell to pay for whoever gets in his way.

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“GOD DAMN IT! We just picked up a tail! Black SUV. They must have had people nearby but out of sight! That cuts it! Do we hustle…or fight?”

Harry pulled the nine millimeter out of its holster and glanced back through the tinted bulletproof glass of the rear window. The SUV a few hundred yards behind them was gaining on them fast, and judging by the absence of lights or a siren, it wasn’t law enforcement. Ron needed an answer quick, to decide how to drive in this case. Fast escape and an attempt to outrun their pursuers, or cautious speed with an eye toward making gunplay easier for Harry.

“It’s past four in the morning in the middle of downtown Chicago. We just blew up a crack processing center. Fuck it. Let’s try to shake them if we can. I’d rather not leave a mess in the street if we can avoid.”

The staccato pop of semi-automatic fire cut off Harry’s words while Ron punched the gas pedal down to the floor. The heavy ‘tink’ of bullets rattled against the reinforced frame of the Lincoln. Ron and Harry kept their heads low despite the bulletproof glass, since even high quality materials could be penetrated by certain ammunition or powerful enough weaponry. Ron cursed under his breath while making a hairpin turn, dodging a minivan in the lane over from them while the tires shrieked and Harry slipped a fresh clip into his pistol.

“Fucking prick bastards! You have any idea what I gotta do to fix bullet holes? You know how long it takes to do a repaint?! Assholes!”

A second burst of gunfire sounded as the SUV squealed into place behind them and steadied enough for the man hanging out the window to aim. Two sudden spider webs appeared in the bulletproof glass of the back window. Ron cursed anew while pushing the speed back up.

“FUCK! Fuckers! Fucking fuckers! I hate replacing glass! Can’t you just kill these cockroach
fucks?! To hell with subtle! We’re doing eighty miles an hour and dodging traffic! This is NOT subtle! We hafta get the fuck outta here…with no tail…NOW!”

Harry sat calmly in the back seat, idly flicking his head back toward the SUV, then to the street ahead, then back through the undamaged portion of the back window.

“Okay. Let me slow them down for sec.”

The rear driver side window lowered at a button’s touch. Harry slipped the hand with the pistol out, then steadied himself carefully while the man hanging out of the SUV window yelled to his own driver and fired another burst, this time with bullets pocking the back of the Lincoln and smashing more webs into the back window. Harry grunted calmly while he aimed with all the precision he could muster. He paused while Ron weaved through stopped traffic at a light, ignoring the shrieking tires of suddenly interrupted traffic. Then he steadied his aim again.

Four shots sounded from the nine millimeter. The man hanging from the window of the SUV lost most of the top of his head, and two other bullets smashed through the front windshield of the SUV. The pursuers panicked, and a heartbeat later the SUV was screaming to a stop, twisting sideways, tumbling end over end into a jagged heap.

Harry pulled his gun and arm back into the car, straightened his shoulders calmly, and holstered the pistol. Ron brought the speed back down to just above legal, making a series of random turns and deliberately confusing moves to put them on streets unrelated to and far away from the ones they’d just been on.

“How’s that? Better?”

Ron smiled. The cool bastard was always so calm in the crunch. Trust Harry to ask that so casually after a gunfight at almost ninety miles an hour in the heart of downtown.


“Thanks. Pity about that first one. My aim was a little off on that one. That reminds me. Pencil in a visit to Snape after the office. He’ll have to stitch up my arm a little. I know I’d have hit the driver on the first shot if that round hadn’t tagged my arm.”

Ron’s head whipped back around. Harry’s black shirt was torn in the corner, and wetness was visible down the fabric of his right arm…the one he’d had out the window. Harry was calmly applying a makeshift bandage from the black bag on the floor.

‘Fucking Christ! Harry?! Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Don’t sweat it. Just a flesh wound, buddy. We’re not even in a hurry on this. If they hadn’t been amateurs it could have been a lot worse. They just got lucky while my arm was out the window. I’ll deal with it later. Just get to the garage first, right?”

Ron had his eyes back on the road, shaking his head in amazement. Harry’s voice didn’t even waver. The man was cooler than ice. Shot in the arm and not a sound of pain. Just quietly rolling gauze around the quick bandage he’d slapped over it. Fucking incredible. Then a sudden thought popped into his head while they slid down an alley to put them onto the quickest route to the garage.

“Dee’s gonna freak, isn’t he?”
Harry sighed. “Honestly, I’m hoping he’s so happy to see me that I can keep most of my clothes on while we say hello. With a little luck, I can make sure he’s really calm before he so much as gets a look at this. Maybe if I act blasé enough about it, it’ll rub off. Whatta you think?”

Ron chuckled. “Buddy…I think you’re screwed no matter how you slice it…in more ways than one. My money’s on you wishing that it was something easier to deal with…like Doc Snape catching you pissing in his coffee cup!”

“Hah! You’re probably right. Nothing to be done for it though. Somehow…being shot at isn’t nearly as unnerving as facing a ticked off boyfriend. Thank God he’s cute when he’s pissed! Who the hell am I kidding? He’s cute all the time, not just when he’s pissed off.”

They chuckled and joked, taking the edge off the stress while Ron eased the Lincoln down quiet streets toward the garage. Harry glanced down the street, staring at the road that led to a home he wouldn’t be seeing just yet. There were things that needed doing, and those had to be seen to first. Drake was probably sound asleep, alone, worried, sore and missing him.

It wasn’t the first time Harry had been wounded on the job. It was the first time he’d ever had someone who would be upset about it…and the first time his heart had ever thudded so desperately in his chest at the thought of his own mortality. He’d always lived for the rush of adrenaline, for the weird freedom that came of action instead of stillness. It was the first time he’d ever had something to miss dearly if he died. He was as cool as ice. A calm and perfect killing machine, unconcerned by the dead bodies left behind in the blasted ruin of a tenement basement full of rock cocaine, and unworried by the dead or wounded people in the SUV now miles away. However cool he’d been on the outside, for the first time, in the silence of his heart, he felt the fear of death. And felt it…because he was in love…and nothing could be more worth living for than that.

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Blaise Zabini held his cellphone to one ear, trying to drown out the noise from the two idiots in the kitchen.

“Blaise here…what’s up? Dee? Hey…Dee! Glad you called. What’s goin’ on?”

A clank from the kitchen distracted him for a second, followed by the raised voices of his so called guardians.

“Vinny, ya fuckin’ mook! Ya stir it counter-clockwise. The other way!”

“Nah! That ain’t it, Greg! Yer gonna fuck it up! Too much oregano! Just a pinch, you dago shithead! A pinch, goddamit!”

Blaise huffed with irritation. “Hang on a minute!” He slipped a hand over the phone’s receiver. “HEY! I oughta buy a bra for you two tits! That’s my Mom’s spaghetti sauce you’re fucking with! That recipe goes back two hundred years! Shame that recipe and I’ll whack the both of ya! Now shut up! I’M ON THE FUCKING PHONE!”

“Sheesh. Sorry, Blaise.”

“Yeah. Ditto. Go on. Talk. We got this.”

Blaise moved for the privacy of his bedroom. Ever since Vinny and Greg had shown up, it had been chaos. They were good chums, and he trusted them completely in a world where that didn’t
come easy, but still! Such a pair of fucking goombahs!

“Yeah. Sorry ’bout that, Dee. Nah…that’s just Greg and Vinny making dinner. Mom wanted to make sure I was okay, you know, with what’s been on the news and all, so I had the guys start stayin’ over for awhile. Just for Ma’s sake. Nothin’ goin’ on here. You okay?

Good to hear it! You know…I got Mom’s recipe for sauce here. Homemade pasta from the neighborhood. You could swing by if you like. You know, just for some eats and old time’s sake. Not tonight? Too bad…you’d be welcome.

Aw, shit…who the fuck am I kidding? Dee, lemme say this right now and get it out. I really feel like I owe you. I really do. Been thinking about you since you hit the club like a lightning bolt. I did you wrong, and I wanna make it up to you. Tell me you’ll come over some time. No pressure. Just dinner, some good vino, and talk.

I just don’t like the idea of you bein’ shacked up with some old guy you don’t even like. Let’s you and me get something going like the old days, right? Doesn’t have to be overnight or anything…just a start, okay?

Yeah? You like that? Oh…can’t make plans yet, huh? Cool. But you’ll call, right? A week or two? Good enough by me. You won’t regret it if you do! Awright…take care of yourself. Ciao, baby!”

‘Oh yeah. Go, Blaise, go! You still got the magic. Dee is back in town and he’s got you on his mind…even after all these years. Blaise, baby…you’re headed for the good life. Dee in one hand and a good drink in the other. Pure heaven!’

“HEY! Not the whole clove! Whattaya doin’, Vinny?! Blaise! It wasn’t me! He’s fuckin’ it up!”

“Greg! You dumb bastard! You bumped my stirring arm! Not my fuckin’ fault!”

‘Yeah. Heaven. Those fuckin’ palookas. Where was I?’

“THAT’S IT! I’m startin’ another pot an’ I’m doin’ it myself! You guinea fuckin’ wops! You call yourselves Italian!? How could even you two fuck up my mom’s sauce! Would you shit on a Caravaggio? Beat off on the fuckin’ Mona Lisa? Never mind! You probably fuckin’ would! Gimme that spoon!”

‘Yeah…heaven. But Dee is comin’ back. None too soon either! This house needs a shot of class. Fucking mooks.’

TBC!!!
My stomach just flipped again! Harry is almost home. It was a surprise. So little warning, which isn’t really unusual, but the last couple of days have been pretty quiet, with only hints that he might be back soon to keep me company. I was still in my smock from painting in the music room and busy washing my hands, which, after using oil paints, were an absolute mess. Naturally, perfect timing means that he’s downstairs and just buzzed Maria and I have about a cool minute left before he’s right here!

I can’t wait another minute! I’ve started to get good at coping while he’s gone…especially now that I can get around on my own better, but there is nothing restrained or calm about the way I feel when I know he’s nearby and it just a matter of minutes between our being together. It makes it simply unbearable. There isn’t even time to dress up for him…I just ditch the smock and wait quietly in the entry hall, grinning like an idiot.

I want him to see that I’m happy. I want him to know that I’m okay. When he left, I was still a wretched and miserable queen in pain, hating that I was going to be alone again. I want him to know that when he does what he must, I’ll be just fine. The pills don’t complete erase my anxiety about something like this. The dosage is so low that I’m still my usual, fluttery self, over-thinking every damnable, little detail. They do keep the edge off of the hysteria though, and I think I did really well the last few days.

I’ve exercised, behaved well regarding my diet (except for one teensy little tantrum I threw about not having so much as a snippet of sausage all week…and honestly, a life without sausage is almost like no life at all, so I think I did very well…but I still want a fucking pizza!), healed enough to be active and do a few of the things I enjoy, and even start the process of setting up a meeting with Blaise. I just finished work on Harry’s birthday present. It took the better part of the last two days, but the end product was well worth it.

Art is a reflection of life, and in this case, the life is mine. Therefore, the entire affair was poorly organized and well executed only because of pure luck and a dash of natural talent, but it came out looking good. Harry won’t see it for a little while yet, since we’ve got a little more than a week to go before he turns twenty-five.

So strange to think that I’m technically dating ‘a younger man’! Not my normal style at all. It was always older men that caught my eye…with the exception of Blaise…but Harry hardly gives the impression of youth. Something about the confidence…the strength and clarity he possesses makes him feel older and wiser. Certainly enough to make me respond almost subconsciously. Something about that aura of power and ability makes me feel safe, makes me know that it will all be okay. Makes me…

Jesus…I’m so horny I could jump him in the hall again! Thank God I’m wearing slacks!

And there he is. The door opens and he’s home and smiling, and my world melts so fast that you’d think I took the brown acid at Woodstock. I was going to be reserved and just a little dignified, but who the hell cares about that now…he’s home. I have him all to myself and I’m buried in perfect arms, drowning in the scent and feel of him.
“Missed you, too. You look like you recovered fairly well.”

Missed me, too? Mr. Understatement Of The Year.

“Mmmm…yeah. Just glad you’re home…now, if you haven’t got any very important business that
needs taking care of immediately, kindly follow me to the bedroom, where you’ll be getting rid of
those pesky clothes and fucking me until I have to write my name on the tag of my underwear just
to remember who I am.”

Hah! Got him with that one! The flared nostrils, the raised eyebrow. That perfect smirk and quiet
chuckle. They’re all mine again…and very shortly, they’ll be joined by the rest of him.

“Okay…but you don’t have to be so subtle…a guy might miss a hint that faint.”

I drag him by the hand while we make our way to a little privacy. I do love a smartass as subtle as I
myself can be. One little door behind us, with me closing it and standing between him and
freedom. Now that I’m relatively well, and he’s here and real and all mine for awhile, the tigress in
me is coming to the forefront of my being, and I won’t let my prey get away. Not that he could run
fast enough or far enough to get away from me, or that I would let him want to! This time between
us is written in stone, and nothing is stopping it!

I settle for rather melodramatically jumping into his arms, and true to form, he catches me
reflexively. That’s when I see it. The tightness of his jaw, the shift of weight to compensate as one
arm takes over for the other. The faintest hint of a wince of pain. It stops me cold, but it can’t mean
anything serious. Just a pulled muscle or something. But he’s avoiding my eyes. It’s all wrong. I
can feel it in the air around us.

“What happened? Are you all right? I’m sorry…I shouldn’t have just jumped. Let me down.”

He looks so sheepish it’s embarrassing even for me. A grown man and a killer to boot, looking
flushed and vaguely unsure of himself while he lets me down to the ground gently. Stammering
excuses that I don’t think anyone would believe.

“It’s nothing. Really. A scratch. Barely even that. Don’t worry about it. I’ve missed you so much…
let’s-”

“You…are…lying! You are so incredibly bad at it that it’s almost endearing, but you are actually
lying to me! I missed you…but someone else didn’t! What happened!? What’s wrong with your
arm!? Show me it…now!”

I can’t believe I just bossed him around! And it worked! I can feel my stomach going from those
happy, giddy flips of reunion into the ugly, sickening flips of faint and creeping panic. The jacket
peels away, and then the shirt.

His right arm. Near the shoulder. The bandage is fresh and white, neatly wrapped in gauze. It’s
real. It’s all real. Ever have one of those moments where reality slows down because your heart just
started pumping at a different speed while your brain takes a second to grasp what’s going on
around you? Yeah…this is one of those.

“Look…Drake, it really isn’t anything more than a surface injury. Snape barely even had to-”

“Snape! You had to see a doctor? Doctors don’t do ‘barely’! ‘Barely’ could be handled with a
band-aid! That isn’t barely! Harry…was it…did you get…”

“The bullet grazed my shoulder. Didn’t even really enter. Just ran along the side of me. I swear to
God! Snape looked at it and bitched me out for even waking him up! I’m not lying! I’m just fine, love. Take it easy and don’t let yourself get overworked about this. It’ll be ancient history in a few days…really!”

Those are panic breaths coming on, but not as bad as last time. I can handle this. I can maintain. Got pills working their mojo on my side, got Harry home and here in front of me. He’s alright. He’s right here. It’s okay. It’s not bad.

HOW THE FUCK CAN I BE BLASÉ ABOUT HIM BEING SHOT!!!

Can’t panic. Got to make myself busy. Do something. Anything. Anything useful. My legs are moving and I’m on the way to the bathroom without a word, and I can hear him speaking to me, following me in while I try to calm myself enough to speak without screaming.

“How the fuck can I be blasé about him being shot!!!

Can’t panic. Got to make myself busy. Do something. Anything. Anything useful. My legs are moving and I’m on the way to the bathroom without a word, and I can hear him speaking to me, following me in while I try to calm myself enough to speak without screaming.

“Drake? Drake…are you okay? What…where are you going. C’mere…if you need to sit down for a minute that’s alright. What are you-”

I turn the handle on the bathtub and let the water start to fill it. I think I’m delirious, but I can hang onto sanity long enough to do something useful and welcoming. I turn to him with a calm that is pure fiction, and I’m pretty sure the tremor in my voice was something he could hear and recognize as stifled panic.

“Harry…you must be tired. You should…soak in the tub for a bit. Let me go to the kitchen and get you a drink. When I come back, I want you relaxing in this tub, and I’ll join you and give you a proper welcome home. I’m okay. Just…give me a minute to get something cold for you…and I’ll be right back.”

He looks suspicious. He shouldn’t be. I don’t feel that dramatic. Overwrought…yes, crazy…no.

“You’re sure you’re alright? I just knew this would upset you, but I swear I’m just fine. You don’t have to worry about anything.”

“I’m fine. I just…I needed a minute to wrap my head around this. Would you like one of those import beers from the fridge?”

“Yeah. Okay. If you’re sure…”

“Just be in that tub when I get back. Being naked would also be good.”

I’m out of the room as quickly as I can muster, trying to walk steadily. Just…dazed. It feels like I woke up and realized that I’m in a strange place. Intellectually, I knew that Harry had been shot twice before this, but it isn’t the same as seeing the evidence that someone fired a bullet at him…and hit…or almost hit. Not the same at all.

I live in a pleasant world of music and poetry, roses and caramels and silk sheets. Bullets ripping through skin has no place in my world. Harry…MY Harry lives in that world every day that he’s not with me. That’s where he goes. Where bullets are ‘no big deal’. I’m a stray piece of lead away from being a widow. And I can’t even legally get married!


“Senor Drake?”

The note of concern isn’t lost on me. I put Maria off with a few glib comments about wanting to fetch something for Harry myself. She accepts it, but I think she knows I’m rattled as hell. Shit…
I’m walking like a zombie and shaking a little. I can tell because the beer inside the bottle is shivering. All I can say is, thank heavens for Snape’s little pills, or I’d probably be face down on the floor or puking my guts out by now.

Harry is in the bath, and the water in this tub fills fast, so he’s almost up to his wait, sitting on the edge of the tub trying to look relaxed for me. I know he’s worried about me, but I smile and put the beer and the opener down on the counter while I shuck my clothes.

How sad. I was stone hard when he first walked in, and now here I am with my balls practically pulled into my body cavity from panic. Makes the smile I try to fake seem just that…fake.

“You…”

“Shh. I know what I’m doing. I’m fine. Just let me get a few things and I’ll be right over.”

Bottle of beer. Opener for later. Soap…shampoo…some sea salts for the bath. Ready. I take my place behind him, and slip my legs around his back, seated on the outer edge of the tub, while he rests on the comfortable inner edge that forms a seat inside the tub. Now is the time for the beer to come into play. I turn it sideways and place it just along the back of his neck, then roll it gently against the muscles there.

“Oh! Damn! That’s…cold, but…good! Where did you come up with that?”

I use the bottle to massage his neck, taking a short break to throw in some sea salts and set the tub controls to activate the spa jets.

“I saw it in a movie once. I think it had Liza Manelli in it. Glad you like it. Scoot down a little…I need you closer to the water to get your hair wet enough to shampoo and condition.”

So obedient. Everything is alright. Everything is okay. He keeps that shoulder out of the water, but slides deeper into the tub and relaxes properly while I prop the beer between his neck and the edge of the tub. Touching him is comforting. Familiar and right. Safe and just as real as the life he lives outside of here. I need that balance right now.

I let hot water run down his head, trying to avoid the fresh bandage. Let my fingers work shampoo into his scalp. I’ve never really done this, but I’ve been to salons before, and having your scalp massaged is a pleasure that can’t go wrong. He looks like he’s relaxing. Not worrying so much about me. I can feel myself calming a bit now that I have something very tangible and physical to occupy me. This is better. This is good.

Rinse and condition, roll the beer along the tight muscles near his shoulders, avoiding that one horrible place where gauze marks him as off limits, rinse again and pop the beer open for him while I switch to using my hands. I can hear the sigh that comes when he drinks deeply and lets my hands work a little mojo of their own.

“God. Dee. That’s…incredible.”

“It’s supposed to be. I told you I’m okay. I was just…thrown off for a second. I’m alright, Harry. I’m just glad to have you all to myself for a little while.”

He believes it. Sinks comfortably into the tub, relaxing properly while I work on muscles that are slowly becoming less tense and more pliable. What I said was true…mostly, but then…I am a much better liar than he will ever know. When I want to be. He knows what scares me. I’ve been honest with him before. He doesn’t need to know how badly, or how desperately, I fear for him.
Sink into the water beside him. The door is closed and the light is hazy when the bath is full and steaming while the soft hum of the spa lulls away anything but the sounds of water lapping at the edges. He knows to be silent while I work soap into lather and pulls him forward, deeper into the bath.

This is intimacy. That my hands know every part of him as I clean him. It isn’t just that it’s deliberately sensual, it’s that, even without sex happening, I’m still comfortable touching every part of him, and he’s comfortable letting me do just that. A closeness beyond lust, past need and hunger, and into the realm of adoration. Love. I know that this is why I’m scared. Who would want to lose something they’ve never had before, after finding it in spite of everything that should have made it impossible?

But that doesn’t mean he’s off the hook.

Are my nerves rattled? Yes. But more importantly, my hands are sliding across clean, strong lines of muscles, dipping below the water and finding that he’s rising like the tide inside of me, and whatever I may have felt before, I’m feeling that fluttering sense of need and desire once again.

Note to self: Conditioner…not a perfect lubricant, but I don’t feel like waiting…or leaving and fetching something more appropriate. It’s enough trouble keeping his mouth occupied so he won’t talk and spoil the mood. I can feel in his kiss that he missed me. Like telepathy. A language that transcends the voice. Some silent relief inside him that tells me he is grateful to the core of being that he can be here, with me, again. And not just because I’m sliding onto the erection underneath me, biting his neck while I brace myself, making small hungry noises because I can feel it moving into me while I bear down, not caring if conditioner isn’t enough to smooth its way.

Strong hands running up my back while he whispers confused and grateful words of need. I can tell. He, in his own way, is sometimes scared of what he feels. The strength of it. The way it complicates. But it’s too powerful to just ignore. The time for that is past. We’re both in too deep to escape. We have to make our way together now, because nothing else would ever be enough.

Grinding myself onto his lap, warm and comfortable in the scented haze of the bath, as lazily content as any cat on any windowsill could ever hope to be. Just rocking myself easily on his lap, full of the luxury that is him inside of me, conscious of every small movement of the stiffened flesh that pierces me, and of the way my own prick tingles and pulses as it rubs against his stomach.

It doesn’t take long. Not for me anyway. I’ve missed him too much and for too long to maintain any semblance of control. The scent and feel of him all around me, the heat and thickness of his cock inside of me. It’s too much and then some. I’m wrapped around him, arms tight, face buried in his neck while I come so easily that it even surprises me.

He hasn’t come, and I don’t mean to let him…yet. I’m comfortable here, flopped across his, at rest on his lap, still penetrated by him and wrapped in arms that like iron. The bandage is meaningless. He got hurt, but not badly. I’ll be afraid no matter what, but I won’t let it take away my chance to feel this way. I won’t let anything take that from me.

The bath is draining and he’s still hard and ready for more. I’ve dried off, teasing him all the while…and that got me a quick second round while holding the bathroom countertop for support. I can feel the change in his confidence as I wind him up and make him want more. He wants to please me like this, cock slapping hard and fast into me while I huff and gasp, back arched like an alley cat in heat in the steam and mist of the room.

All I need is the briefest pause and I slip away from him and turn around, seating myself on the
edge of the counter, wrapping my legs around his waist and pulling him back into me while my tongue plunders his mouth. The skin on my healing back tingles and hurts ever so slightly, but I genuinely can’t be bothered to care. Nothing is better than this. Slick and ready for more and more, feeling like I’m starving when he isn’t in me, glutting myself wildly when he is.

I feel my body lifted effortlessly, swung around and pinned against the wall, knees almost bent tight against either side of my chest, his arms just under the pits of my knees and holding me steady while he pounds up into me so easily. He has the body of an Olympic athlete, and the endurance to match. He makes me feral, crazy with need and utterly out of control…and I love it.

This…this is what I’ve been missing.

He comes like a freight train, pounding me back into the wall while I bit down hard on the sensitive flesh behind the nape of his neck, mostly to keep myself from screaming so loud that Therese and Maria would know just how rowdy we’re getting in here. There will be time for more…and more…and more. Later.

How long has it been? Not sure. I forgot exactly when he got home this afternoon, but it’s well past dinnertime now. We’ve been celebrating, and we aren’t finished by a damn sight! Not if I have anything to say about it. I’m testing even his endurance, demanding little hussy that I am. My whole body tingles from head to toe, and I feel bruised and a little dizzy at the same time, but I’m drunk on the only luxury allowed to me, and I mean to indulge myself as shamelessly as I can.

Harry’s in the bathroom, and I can hear him pissing while he yawns. Not because we’ve been sleeping, but because I’ve been deliberately exhausting him. I’m just laying here, facedown, sticky and lazy, halfway to satiation and loving the soft burn that warms my backside. He’s come three times, always inside of me, and I had my turn in the bathroom awhile ago. My last few orgasms have all been of the internal variety, prostate stimulated until I’m screaming out for God, but I’m already in my god’s arms. I think I’m actually ready to come the traditional way again. Just the lazy thought of his mouth around my cock is enough to make me roll over and stroke myself the rest of the way to hardness, letting finders slip down to the slick place below, brushing softly against the sullen, bruised place that wait for his return. I feel high, giddy and delirious. So happy. In a minute he’ll be back, and we’ll…

The ring of the cellphone on the nightstand is jarring and out of place. I snatch it from the table and answer without a thought.

“Best sex ever…now interrupted…however can I help you?” Sarcasm dripping from every word.

A woman’s crisp Scottish brogue answers, chilling me to the bone.

“And precisely who is this?! What are you doing on this line?! This is-”

And then I can’t hear anything because the phone is snatched from my hand and Harry’s palm is over my mouth, pinning my head to the sheets! Reality just kicked in, and what I’ve done was unspeakably stupid. He isn’t even looking at me, his head is turned away while he speaks, but I can hear the edge in his voice. Terror. Stark, raw fucking terror. What I’ve done even frightens him. God help me! What the fuck have I just done?

“Ma’am! I am so terribly sorry. He grabbed the wrong phone. They look exactly alike. Please don’t be concerned…we’ll make sure that doesn’t happen again. No ma’am. Please tell him that all is well on our end. Business is very good.
“Thank you. I’m glad he’s pleased. We’ve been working very hard on this end. Things seem to be shaping up the way we expected. We’ve had some very positive signs just lately, and our ‘ideal goal’ may become feasible sometime soon.

“Thank you, ma’am. You really do have my apologies about the ‘confusion’. Please…I assure you that it will NOT happen again. What? When? But things are at a very sensitive stage right now. I don’t think…ah. I see. Understood. The arrangements are already made? Okay. We’ll be there. Tomorrow. Thank you. Good bye.”

The phone snaps shut and he’s still silent and tense, hand over my mouth while I cringe, wide-eyed with fright and almost wanting piss myself from the fear of what this might mean. He holds a finger over his lips while I nod that I understand. He needs my silence.

He moves the night stand aside, and slides a small panel in the wall open. I never even knew it was there. The safe inside has a combination lock. He swings the little knob back and forth to each number, and I can see the sweat from tension dripping off of his forehead. I don’t dare say a word. Jesus. What just happened? I never should have touched that phone. What did I do? I was so happy…I wasn’t thinking clearly…I missed him so much! I didn’t mean it! I want to scream!

The tiny click sounds and he opens the door. I see paperwork, bearer bonds that are probably worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, bundles of cash, a pistol, and a small box like the one Dean brought the night of the party here. He pulls out the small box and sets it on the nightstand, then pushes the button. This room is now secure for any conversation, and when he turns back to me his face is scarlet.

“How…I…”

“What the FUCK were you thinking! Do you have any fucking idea what you just did! GOD DAMMIT! You…you…”

I cringe into a little ball on the sheets. I know I’m muttering that I’m sorry, but mostly I just want him to start hitting me. It would be easier than dealing with what I just did. Anything would be better. I knew it. I knew I fucked up the one way I never should have. It’s bad and I can feel it. His hands jerk my wrists and he’s kneeling beside the bed, demanding that I look him in the eyes.

“Drake. I turned the white noise on because I have to say this now and there’s no time to waste. Do you understand what we’re involved in? I thought you did…but maybe I was wrong. That little fuck up is the kind of thing that could make them order me to silence you. Do you understand? Do you fucking understand that they might order me to eliminate a security risk? They didn’t…but they might. That was Mr. White’s secretary. His right hand. She has the authority to give orders on his behalf, and if she thinks you’re too big of a risk…this is over…we won’t be safe here.”

“They…they’d tell you to kill me?”

“I know what you’re thinking. I wouldn’t do it. But they might not ask me. They might keep the matter out of my hands entirely. What we’re doing is too big and too dangerous to risk. If I thought we had to, I’d run…with you. I’ve got hidden accounts all over the world, but even they can be tracked by the kind of people I work for. Drake…it’s down to this…

“They want us to come to England. Mr. White wants to meet you…and he wants to talk to me…personally. We have to decide this right now. If we go…I might have to pull us out of there in a hurry…if I even think they want you out of the picture. But I don’t think that’s the case, or I wouldn’t even risk it. Our other choice is packing a few things and running like hell. Sticking to non standard transport and making a lot of false tracks along the way. It won’t be easy, but I could
probably get us to someplace where we’d be hard to find.

“I think he wants to meet you…because of Zabini. Because I reported about you…favorably. Not because of tonight. I think he wants to recruit you. Make you a part of the Phoenix Corporation officially. Not doing what I do of course, but something to make your status with me less of an exception.

“Mr. White and I are very close. I didn’t mention it before, because the others were around, and this isn’t really for their ears, and I can’t name names without the white noise generator on. When my godfather, Sirius Black, was killed, he was working for Mr. White, the way I do now. My father’s job was more like security analysis, and his best friend was Sirius Black. They were both early employees of the Phoenix Corporation. When Sirius died, I was fifteen. I inherited both estates, but I was just a kid. There was no one to take care of me. Mr. White was the one who made all the arrangements. He took care of me when no one else was left.

“That’s why it’s different with me. That’s why I can ask this of him. To have you in my life. He’s like the only family I have, and I know he’ll make exceptions for me, because he might be one of the most powerful people in the world, but he’s a human being…and he’s my friend.

“But there are limits. I can’t say for sure that, if it was serious enough, if he really believed that you were a major security risk, he might not order a ‘clean up’. The last time this company had a breach of security, my parents got killed by someone Riddle hired. He won’t put everything at risk needlessly…not even for me.

“So that’s how it is. Either you go with me, tomorrow, to England…or we run right now and never turn back, but if we run, we’ll be hiding forever, and they’re damned good at searching. You fucked up, and you were warned about fucking with the program. All you need to know is that I love you, but this one is your call. If we head for England, it could be the best thing that ever happened, or the worst, and the same goes for running. I wish you hadn’t put me in a situation where I have to ask this, but what’s it gonna be?”

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So that’s it. I’m laying here hours later, unable to sleep, unsure how the hell he can be at rest when I don’t know if I can keep my sanity for another minute. I’m shit-scared and wondering what the fuck will happen next. I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but it won’t be easy.

I told him we’re going to England. Maybe to my death, or maybe to my rebirth, but I’m not running from my mistakes anymore. If I can pull off the meeting of a lifetime, just maybe…just maybe I can buy us a future that doesn’t involve destroying Harry’s ability to keep me safe.

But ‘just’ and ‘maybe’ aren’t enough to sleep on. They’re enough to leave me praying in the night, Harry’s breath on my neck, eyes closed while my head races with panic, wishing to God that Snape had given me stronger pills.

TBC!!!
So quiet. It’s been like this since last night. Barely a word between us since that fucking call. I know it’s as much my fault as his…the silence, I mean. The situation, on the other hand, is entirely my own homegrown disaster.

I still can’t believe I did that. I knew better, but it didn’t stop me. I was mad. Scared. Horny. Maybe a little delirious too. Harry was home, and I was happy, and then I find out he got hurt, and I panicked. I calmed myself down enough to properly enjoy having him home again, and just when I’m starting feel comfortable and right about the way things are, that fucking phone rang.

I hate that phone. It’s like competing with a secret lover that continually steals what is supposed to be mine and mine alone. I know it’s just a hunk of plastic and some electronics, an inanimate object that has no real intention or meaning, but to me it’s like a symbol of the life that Harry has beyond my reach. The place he goes to for days at a time. The life that could get him killed and make my world crash down in flames. I’m scared of that, and I think I have every right to be.

But I still know that I shouldn’t have done that.

We’re on a plane over the Atlantic. Comfy. A lot better than the one Ron flew to take us to Saugatuck. This is a private jet. Company owned. We took off from a small, private airfield this morning. It’s quite a bit different than the chartered flights my father used to arrange. The upholstery on the seats is wonderfully plush, the table between us is not that much smaller than the one we dine on at home. The carpets are thick and don’t show any real sign of wear and the whole cabin for passengers could probably only seat a dozen people. In spite of that, the staff includes two people who wait on us, preparing food and fetching whatever we require.

I only wanted a pillow. I’m sitting by a window, with Harry beside me. He’s reading a book and looks calm, but I can tell by the muscles along his jaw that he’s as tense as I am.

Colors are so vivid up here. Looking down at an ocean of blue and clouds that we just pass right through, swirling mist trailing around us as we fly toward England. We headed north first, making a huge arc as we head to a higher meridian, where the distance around the globe is less, and then we’ll turn slowly south again as we approach our point of arrival. Not to mention my destiny.

I don’t know what that is. My destiny. I could wind up being erased from human memory and buried in some shallow grave for proving that I’m unreliable and potentially dangerous to them. Harry said it wasn’t likely, since he’s valued not just as an employee, but as a friend and protégé. But I still wonder. Even if it looks like I’ll live through this, I can’t shake the feeling that I’m going to wind up being ‘offered’ a chance to leave Harry and start a new life in exchange for a pile of money. After what I’ve done, they can’t possibly want me with him.

But what else can I be? I think from my heart. I run with my instincts. I always have, and maybe that didn’t work out so well for me, but I’m not really used to living any other way. I’ve always gotten along and landed on my feet because I have just enough smarts and intuition to make a place for myself anywhere I go. I guess I could survive without Harry.

But I don’t want to. Not anymore.
I just keep staring out the window, conscious of every little sound in the cabin. Every creak of the metal from the huge wings of the plane, the faint and muffled remnants of roaring engines and wind tearing by us. I want to cry, but I just can’t. I took my pill hours ago, and it’s working. I’m lucid and calm…but I’m still miserable and afraid. Worst of all, I know I disappointed Harry. He believed in me. Enough to vouch for me and make an exception to his company’s policies. He fought to make a place for me beside him…and I risked everything because of a temper tantrum over that stupid phone.

He has to be regretting his choices now. Looking back at the decisions he made to make room for me in his life, and just cringing at the thought of the stupid little whore that just complicated everything. He was nice last night…after he calmed down…after I made my choice and prayed he’d respect me for it. I want to be brave…I want to be the kind of person that belongs beside him, but even I have my doubts about that now. How could he not feel reservations about me after this?

I’m wearing the best suit I’ve got, right down to the Italian loafers and belt. The tie is silk and just a little loose at the neck because we’re alone and I feel the need to breathe easy while I still can. My hair is as conservative as I can make it, and my solitary act of rebellion against this outward image of male professionalism is the adorable little thong I have on underneath it all. Not that it matters, since Harry certainly doesn’t look like he’s in the mood, but I need the comfort of knowing that at least one article of clothing on my body still reflects my actual personality. I didn’t bother to pack anything I’d normally wear, since this isn’t kind of trip where I’d feel secure shocking or surprising anyone. In fact, I expect it will take every ounce of willpower I have to keep from breaking down and begging them to let me stay with Harry.

That cut it. I can feel myself choking up and getting hot in the face. I need the bathroom. Thank goodness the seating in here is so spacious that I can get up and walk with incredible ease. Really…there is no comparison between coach and private travel. What they would charge for accommodations like this…hell, I haven’t any idea, but then…I’ve never traveled in anything less than style. Well, as long as long as you exclude police cars and prison vans.

The bathroom is wonderfully well decorated, and could only be called small if compared to the one at home. When you consider that I’m thousands of feet above the Atlantic, this kind of space and comfort is a luxury in itself. A splash of cool water to wash my face while I compose myself and take a few deep breaths, and I’m back in control of myself.

The mirror. So formal looking. If you didn’t know better, you’d think I was just another jet-setting corporate boy. Well…perhaps a bit slimmer and prettier than average, but still very respectable and clean cut. This just goes to show how meaningless appearances really are. I’m as much of a fucked up mess as my mother ever was. I’m attached to a dangerous and powerful man, I’m so stressed out that I needed booze or pills just to cope with the insanity of my life, and I wear the right clothes and try to make it look like nothing is wrong, because that’s what I’ve been taught to do. Pretend it’s all okay and take a few deep breaths, then go play my part like I mean it. Shit, the only real thing I know I feel is love, and I’ve gone and put that on the line or I wouldn’t be standing here worrying over it like this, in a plane, over the North Atlantic, shit-scared of what happens after we land.

Such is life. Or the end of it…maybe. Who knows? I just make my way back to my seat, because what else is there that I can do? Harry has his book, and I wish I’d thought to bring one for myself. All I can do is fluff my pillow a little, stare out the window, and wish I could fall asleep for awhile, just to escape the tension and trouble that comes of listening to my own thoughts.

“I’m sorry.”

My head swings to the right, and the book is in Harry’s lap. I’m lost in green that runs deeper and
shines brighter than the edge of any ocean ever has. He looks so calm, even with all that hangs between us, and I really do want to be lost in those eyes for awhile.

“Harry…I…”

“Don’t. I was wrong last night. I panicked. I shouldn’t have yelled, and I shouldn’t have…I should never have handled you that way. I…I don’t even want to talk about it, because just the thought of it makes me sick. It wasn’t right…no matter what you did. I know you slipped up, and that’s still true, but I swear to God…I just…I lost my self control for a moment…because all I could imagine was being told to part with you. I don’t think I can do that. Not for any reason. Please…tell me you understand…tell me…you forgive me.”

And then it’s gone. That crushing weight between us that stifled every breath, the vast gulf that made him seem so far away and unreachable. Gone in a heartbeat, and I can hear his heart beating in his chest because I’m wrapped around him, face burrowed comfortably against his chest, not caring a damn if a few teardrops get onto his shirt.

Breathing the scent of him deep into my lungs, feeling the heat of his skin through his shirt, warm and close and good while one of his hands is in my hair and the other is rubbing my back softly. Who cares about anything right now? None of it matters when I have this. My mother never had this! Maybe I am a mess, but it was worth everything to feel this…to call this my own. It was worth every mistake and every wrong turn and every minute of pain and loneliness…to find this. He loves me. Idiot that I may be, he still loves me. It doesn’t matter what happens, because that one all-important thing won’t change.

I must be crazy. No other explanation for it. We’re thousands of feet above the ocean, burning a trail through the skies on the way to who the hell knows what, and all I can think of is finding a way to fit in one last round lovemaking before we land and fate has us back in it’s cat paws once again.


He looks confused when I stand up. Perplexed looks as good on him any other expression he ever wears. I give a stupid smile and lean in to whisper the rest.

“Now or never. Wanna join the Mile High Club together?”

We didn’t pack much, but the carry on bag I brought has what I need, and the rest is up to Harry. I slip the tube of gel to him…let him worry about when to apply it. I just want him in that well appointed little room, pants around his ankles, nailing me hard enough to make me forget everything else for a little while.

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England is a lot prettier than I imagined. Of course, we aren’t at Heathrow, crammed into the heart of a busy capitol and world city. We’re at some ridiculously tiny private airfield, surrounded by green fields and rolling hills. The sky is a bit cloudy, but the sun is out in force and making the world bright and cheery. The breeze is perfect, and carries the scent of foreign fields with it.

I keep wandering the wrong way, or bumping into Harry when he stops too soon. In fact, it’s kind of hard to remember why I’m here or where I am for more than a few seconds. Not really complaining, mind you, since I was awfully demanding about an hour ago, but I swear…we’re lucky we landed safely, because I just got fucked so hard that he nearly put me through the wall of the plane. The things he said still ring in my ears, drowning out all those horrible thoughts that
dogged my heels most of the way here, and they're still at the front of my mind while we climb into the cream-white Bentley waiting for us.

'Drake, I love you. I love you so much. No matter what...I won't let anything happen to you. Nothing. Whatever happens, I will be with you.'

When you consider that I’m headed for the most important meeting of my life so far, and that I should be very serious and somber about this, in deference to the gravity of our situation, the fact that I’m so giddy that I can’t stop smirking is probably a little juvenile.

But then, what the hell? Fuck ’em. What are they gonna do? Shoot me?

Okay…well…maybe. Insert your own nervous laugh right here. I’m still giddy and sitting down is somewhat uncomfortable. My butt’s bruised and the thong that looked so cute earlier is chafing something fierce, so it’s hard to concentrate on anything but Harry.

We talked…after. He was upset mostly because he was scared, but also because I cringe when I think things are going to get violent. Especially with him. I’ve started to realize that, just because I believe in him and love him, it doesn’t mean that I’ve forgotten my instincts. Getting hit is something you get used to…something you learn to expect when dealing with alpha males. I usually use sex as a distraction, but I fall back on complete submission when I think I’m in real danger.

So logical. So analytical. I can look back at it and explain it all so very well. And it doesn’t change a fucking thing. My heart knows he wouldn’t do that to me, but the rest of me knows that powerful men use their power however they please, and my gut instincts won’t let me ignore them.

It makes Harry sick. I think he’s starting to grasp that I come with baggage that doesn’t go away, but he’s an angel about it. That’s the other reason I’m so daft, dazed and dreamy while we ride through the countryside in style. He’s the kind of person that can see how fucked up I am sometimes, in all the ugly little ways that a shitty life can make you, and he can still see through it and want me…want to prove to me that my instincts are all wrong, and there is something better out there, and that I have it. I’m holding it’s hand right now.

Knowing that, wouldn’t you smile even in the face of impending disaster?

Well, it looks like we’ve landed in the fairytale land of the Queen Mum. Pip-pip…cheerio and all that rot! What a view! This place is like a castle, the kind I saw in Europe when I was a kid. Not the imposing fortress kind, but the gated manor kind that came into style when the kings stopped letting their noble subjects have fortresses and private armies. Just gorgeous, set against a backdrop of green and rolling hills, low stone fences and thick but manicured hedges.

People are busy everywhere as we drive in, cleared by security and pulling through the gates. Landscapers and greens keepers, all people doing something and looking very businesslike about it. The closer we get to the entrance, the more we pass people who look like they know what they’re doing. Stables and a garage and outbuildings that must be for guests or employees. It’s like a damn village in here! Now this…this takes money! The kind that makes guys like my Dad and Harry look like poor country cousins.

Still…there are armed security personnel moving in and out through the bustle, and I know I saw mounted cameras at the entrance. There are bound to be more. This place may look all sweet and rosy, but storming this castle would cost a life or two at the least. It doesn’t feel dangerous though. Just…protected. The security men wave hello to the other people working, and nobody here seems to scowl or frown very much. It can’t be all that bad of a place, can it?
Harry leads me in after the chauffeur drops us off at the entrance. A butler, balding, gray-haired and bushy browed, is waiting for us and bows when Harry and I walk up. The man is dour and grim, but that’s mostly just the stiffness that comes of being a professional servant to the upper crust. He looks like the kind of person that notices a fleck of dust from a yard away and then discreetly chews out the maid that missed it.

“Master Harry. So very glad you’ve arrived safely. Dinner was delayed for your arrival, and will be ready in one hour. Accommodations have been made for you…and for your companion…in your usual suite. If you’ll excuse me, sir, I trust that you can make your way well enough, but I have a number of matters which must be taken care of…with dispatch…before dinner is served. Do enjoy your stay.”

So formal. Crisp and utterly unemotional. You get the impression that he considers the place his, and we’re just interlopers who came to mess the place up and make more work for him. Ugh. He totters off and Harry motions for me to follow.

“Come on…let’s go. Don’t mind Argus. He’s been here for half of forever, and he’s been crusty since the day I met him. The guy practically never sleeps, and he keeps the staff on their toes by threatening everything but death, but his only pride is in keeping this place running smoothly and looking good. Just…if you should happen to get a chance to go riding…and get mud on your boots…don’t track it inside the manor. Believe me, it isn’t worth going there. Let me show you the suite…there’s something you ought to see as long we’re here.”

He’s got me curious now. “Okay, okay. What’s the hurry? We’re already dressed for dinner. Are we going to be here long enough to ride? I’m still jet-lagged, you know? Well…and sex-lagged too. Kinda sleepy. Incredible digs though. Did you live here for awhile?”

I have to hurry beside him. At least I’m not trying to keep up in heels! I love a tall man with strong legs, but keeping up with one when he’s in a hurry is a bitch. He looks more boyish than ever, grinning from ear to ear as we walk down hallway after hallway and up staircases lined with red carpet. The portraits in here are probably worth a fortune on the open market. There’s enough of them to open a damn gallery right here. Amazing.

“You’re right. I did live here. Off and on really. After…after my godfather died. I was in military school back in the states, I was fifteen and didn’t know shit about estate management, even though I had two estates waiting in my name. I didn’t really have a home of my own, so when school was out…I came here. ‘Mr. White’ handled my estates and investments for me and gave me a place to live. Other than here…I don’t really have a home. I keep a few things with me wherever I go, but the rest stays here where it won’t get lost. The staff keeps my suite ready for visits when I can arrange them.”

“Damn! This makes my dad’s estate look like a backwater dump! Go you! You seem awfully relaxed. Am I right to guess that things are…okay?”

“I’ve just got a hunch. If it was bad, we’d have known as soon as we arrived. They held dinner for us, so it can’t be all bad. Everything seems normal enough, so I’m betting that you and I might get asked some difficult questions, but nothing worse than that. I don’t know for sure…but it feels good to be home.”

He stops at an ornate wooden door in one of the halls. No wonder he’s so fit, if he spent any time at all running through this place. The sloppy grin is still in place.

“It’s a little cliched…given that we’re grown adults and all, but…want to see my room?”
Cute. His confidence is rubbing off on me. He believes we’ll get out of here with our asses intact, so I believe it too. He turns the door open, and it’s like page out of history, spliced into the modern world. The bed is probably a hundred and fifty years old, but the posters on the wall scream modern teenage boy. He already fumbling with the huge trunk at the foot of the bed, turning the knob on a combination lock while I walk around staring at the room and its furnishings.

It’s so weird. Logically, I know that Harry has a life and a past and all those things, but locked into place in my mind is Harry as a commanding and powerful man, dangerous and yet civilized. I can’t imagine what he was like at fifteen. I know what I was like, and that puts a shiver right down my spine. At fifteen, I was a horrid brat, obsessed with sex and spoiled rotten, surrounded by luxury I barely appreciated, looking for every opportunity to enjoy myself or get off with the guy of my choice.

Okay…so maybe some things don’t change all that much. Still, my guy of choice is Harry, and I don’t want anything or anyone else, and I appreciate those luxuries now, damn it! Seven years in hell will give you a very refined appreciation for the good thing in life.

“There it is! Just like I left it. It’s my photo album. This and a few other things are all I keep here. I don’t really have a lot beside this.”

We sit on the bed while he tells me the stories behind the pictures, and I get a window into the past and a look at who my lover really is. Whatever else he may have become, Harry is just like anyone else. He had parents, and a life before we met, and feeling and thoughts and memories he hardly ever gets to share with anyone because of his work.

There are other pictures of his parents, apart and together. It looks like they met in school or college. Harry’s dad looks tall and a bit gawky, but his mother shares the eyes that I find so hypnotic. These are the people that combined to make him. They only exist on paper and in photos now. He never even met them. When you see his finger brush across the surface of the photo album, you can tell how much that loss is still a part of him.

There are other pictures, some just as informative in their own way as the ones of his parents.

“Who the hell are these people? They look nothing like you…and is that really you? You’re…tiny! And you have glasses!”

“Oh…well…yeah. Corrective surgery when I was sixteen. Those…that’s my mother’s sister’s family. They took care of me before my godfather came for me. I was kind of small for my age. I didn’t really grow until I was late into my teens.”

“So that’s who you grew up with? There’s only one photo of them. You were there for like…twelve years. What’s up with that?”

Wrong question. His jaw’s tight again. “Harry, I’m sorry…never mind, let’s try another page.”

“No. I should have said this to someone before now, but there was never anyone worth saying it to. My mother’s family practically disowned her. She was an intellectual and a firebrand, a radical compared to the lumps in the rest of her family. That’s how she wound up getting recruited in college to work for the early Phoenix Corporation along with my dad. When my parents died, the only people left to take care of me that were related by blood were her sister’s family. They didn’t want me. They made sure I knew it too.

It wasn’t like I didn’t try to make them happy. I tried. I guess I learned a few things from them after all. I figured out faster than most people that, you have to learn to like yourself, because you can’t
really count on anyone else to do it for you. They gave me a good solid definition of what a complete pack of assholes would be like, and I pretty much gauge right and wrong by just doing the opposite of what they would have done. The best day of my life was the day my godfather took me away from there.

I think my aunt knew a little about what he did for a living. My uncle was going to shoot off his mouth about it all, but she told him to shut up, which I think was just about the only time she ever contradicted him in public in her entire life. My godfather, Sirius Black, would have come for me if he hadn’t wound up in some shithole prison in Eastern Europe for almost a decade. He gave them one angry look and they were falling all over themselves just to get me packed and out the door.

He had his own little estate, smaller than this by a long shot, but he didn’t waste his money around. He…I guess he knew that I hadn’t been...treated well, so he took a lot of time just to be with me and pound it into my head that I was worth something. It’s amazing what knowing that you matter to someone can do to your outlook. I was a really quiet kid. Didn’t like a lot of sports or take any risks. I was so fucking self conscious of every thing I did. No confidence at all. Until him. I could always tell that I was the most important thing in his entire world. I wanted to be like him more than anything else.”

The man in the picture Harry points to is the essence of cool. Motorcycle, black clothes and trench coat, dangerous and civilized, just the way I like them. There are a couple of other pictures of him as well, always as dark and sleek as a panther, looking perfectly at home wherever he was…like the whole world was dancing to his tune. The last picture of Sirius Black shows the difference a decade in prison can make. He’s thinner, paler, more somber, but you can see something in the eyes. Like fire. Even hell couldn’t burn the soul out of him. His arm is around a skinny, gangly teenage boy with short dark hair and glasses. Harry’s looking up at him, and you can tell he’s as happy and carefree as a teenage boy ought to be. No more quiet, serious little shadow in the corner, keeping his mouth shut to stay out of trouble. No wonder someone who made him feel that way would be his idol.

“Sirius died when I was fifteen. He finally had to get back to work, and I had private school and staff to look after me, so he took off for Europe. The last time he was seen, he was getting into a car after a meeting with a Consulate official in Romania. We don’t know everything, but we know now that security on our end was breached. A lawyer that worked for the company got bribed or threatened and turned double agent on us, then ran for it. He was the one who leaked Sirius’ location to Riddle’s people.

No body was ever found, but we know how to connect the dots. The assassin we know entered that area at that time was better known in Spain, and she was one of the best hitters the Basque separatist movements ever spawned. She went private back in the Eighties, and she’s been smart enough to cover her tracks well after every job. I don’t care about her, or anyone else though. I want Riddle. He’s the one who pulled the strings. He’s the one who ordered the death of my parents, and the death of Sirius. He took away the people that mattered to me, and once I make him pay, I’m done.”

I point to the next group of pictures. Military school. He looks so hot in that uniform, bright-eyed, fierce and full of discipline, but there’s a dark side to it. I can feel it. The boy in this picture isn’t the happy kid from a year before. The discipline and eagerness hides the shadow of anger. Rage. The lust for revenge.

“Yeah. That’s me at the Academy. Fourth in a class of three hundred and twenty. I arrived there later than a lot of other students, but I took half again the usual class load to catch up. Also honored for superb marksmanship and hand to hand combat, leadership in field exercises my final year, and
long distance running. I was still angry. I channeled it into making myself stronger…strong enough
to get even someday. My ‘employer’ today was the only person left to look after me then. He told
me then that if I learned the skills on my own merits, he would find a place for me in the Phoenix
Corporation. I think he thought I’d quit or back out once I calmed down. He didn’t really want me
to make my life about killing people. He also said he wouldn’t help me get those skills, because it
was up to me, and if I earned it and still wanted the position, he would test me and see if I was able
to handle it.

I signed up for basic training a week before graduation, and since I was an emancipated minor at
seventeen, they let me in. I specialized and took additional training, and I was visiting every hot
spot in the world between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two. Then I came back and asked for the
job I really wanted.”

I just have to ask. “So what was the test?”

“Heh. Funny thing. He never actually got around to holding one. Mostly because the night I asked
him…I didn’t tell him I was coming. I penetrated the security here, knocked out a guard, stole a
uniform and a radio to keep tabs on the rest of them, slipped through the whole place untouched
and unnoticed, and woke the old man up in bed to ask my question. He re-examined his entire
security system because of me. After that, he decided I didn’t need testing.”

“Ha! I guess not! So I’m guessing you really liked it here, didn’t you? It just seems like you’re…
you know, younger here than I’ve ever seen you. Like you’re home.”

Harry looks at the window for a minute, then sighs and looks me in the eyes. “Kind of. Almost. I
don’t think this is any more my home than anywhere else, but it’s the only place left with some
memories attached to it. And people that I know and can safely interact with. This place is one of
the most secure in all of England. At least as far as being overheard goes. Interference has been set
up all over, and I have a freedom here that I don’t normally have. Still, you know the drill. Never
mention business unless I mention it first. If I talk…that means it’s safe and I’m sure of it. Got it?”

“Word of honor, love!” I give him a sassy little salute and put on a serious face that only makes
him chuckle.

“Your fingers were uneven, your hand was in the wrong position, your elbow was too low and that
was the most undisciplined expression I’ve ever seen associated with a salute…but if good looks
count for anything, you pass muster every time.”

I get introduced to the British term for kissing. Apparently, in this part of the world, it’s called
snogging. Sounds gross when you say it like that. Like some kind of activity that involves
coughing up mucous or something equally unpleasant. After all the books I’ve read, I always
imagined the English would have a slightly more, you know, poetic…term for kissing, but I guess I
can’t complain.

When we finally stop for breath, Harry stands and offers me a hand.

“Ready? Dinner should be almost ready by now, and remember, it will be okay. I’m with you no
matter what. Understand?”

And I really think I do. Maybe my instincts make war with me now and then, but the rest of me
understands one hundred percent. We’re on the way to dinner, I’m strangely calm, and I just
realized something else.

In all the confusion, I never took my second pill. Looks like I feel this good all by myself. Thanks,
Harry. You don’t even know how much you do for me.

TBC!!!
“When we get to the dining hall, don’t stand on formality too much. All we do is go to the head table and stand at either side of his chair, which is in the center. The long tables are for the staff that choose to or have to live here, and he usually dines with them. I know it isn’t normal, but trust me, Sir Albus is not normal.”

We’re striding toward the dining areas at a fairly relaxed pace, but I still get winded trying to keep up and talk at the same time. Harry keeps prepping me for what I’ll encounter when we get there, hoping to take the edge off of the culture shock.

“Sir Albus?”

“In here, in his home, he isn’t Mr. White. His name is Sir Albus Brian Wulfric Dumbledore the Fourth, and he’s a decorated hero of the Second World War. He fought alongside the Dutch Resistance, penetrated Nazi intelligence, was personally responsible for preventing the assassination of two members of the royal family, as well as several Cabinet Ministers and ambassadors who were traveling abroad. He was knighted by the King back in the Fifties, he trained most of the counter intelligence personnel that were active during the Cold War up until the late Sixties, and there isn’t a service medal or citation in this country or a few others that he hasn’t been honored with.

The man is largely considered a national treasure, even if he’s widely held to be a little ‘eccentric’. Most people have no fucking idea how connected to the world he still is, and that’s the way we keep it. He’s just a very wealthy old soldier from the upper class, he’s ninety-eight years old, and that’s all we treat him as until we’re alone with him, right?”

Eep. Well…that’s one hell of a fucking resume! Makes ex-junkie, hooker, drag queen and jailbird look pretty boring by comparison.

“Wow. What else? Is there a way I should address him?”

“Sir is just fine for starters, until he tells you otherwise. Oh…one thing. The staff and guests all stand until he enters for dinner and seats himself. He didn’t ask for it, but they started doing it over a generation ago, so it’s a household custom now. Don’t worry about heavy conversation yet. He won’t say anything critical in front of others. He’ll almost certainly invite us to his study and den after dinner, and then interview us separately. Probably me first, since he hasn’t seen me most of this year, and frankly, I missed him too. He’s like my grandfather, even though I don’t actually have one. Don’t take it personally, but the first person he’ll want to see is the person closest to him. Okay?”

“Got it. Holy crap…”

The dining hall is huge. Three long tables running lengthwise down the room, enough for almost sixty people to eat in comfort, or more if necessary and people squeezed a bit. Various members of the staff are already drifting in and taking position, standing behind chairs and chatting amiably in hushed polite tones. Harry gets several smiles and nods as we move toward the head table at the front of the room, and all I get are looks of curiosity.
A huge, bearded man smiles from ear to ear and grabs Harry into a hug as we approach the head table. He’s literally twice Harry’s size, and probably nearing eight feet tall. Harry pounds the man’s back and finally emerges from the huge beard his head was buried in momentarily, and all I can do is stand back and just accept this as normal.

“’Arry! Good to see ya! ’Ow’s Americer treatin’ ya then? Ya know we missed ya here, something awful. Ya look just grand like always. An’ who’s this then?”

“Good to see you too, Hagrid. Things are alright. Business as usual, and plenty of it. I missed you too, and I wish we were staying here for a real visit, but this was just a quick hop across the pond for a conference. Hagrid, meet Drake…Drake…Hagrid. Hagrid is the gamekeeper, stable master, and veterinarian here. There’s no one better with a sick animal than this man right here.”

His hand completely swallows mine, and I can’t help the shiver when I realize that he could break me like a twig if he really wanted to…or even by accident! He frowns when the shiver hits me, and I feel terrible about the way his face falls.

“Don’ worry bout it, lad. Been that way all me life. Doctors said it was a pituitary thingy in me run haywire. I was most of a foot taller than me Da, an sixty kilos heavier, afore I was out of middle school. Throws people off, right at first, it does. Always has. Think nothing’ of it, right?”

I can’t help but smile sheepishly. He is endearing in an enormous, oafish way that you can’t entirely resist.

“Thanks. It must be nice…taking care of different animals. My family never had any pets in the house. Just horses in the stables. I did have a goldfish once, but after a thunderstorm, I found it on the table beside the bowl. Looked like it got so scared it jumped right out in the night. I remember giving him a proper burial in the backyard though.”

“Aww. Thas’ a nice thing to do for a pet. Poor thin’ probably spooked by the lightning.Oops… almos’ time for supper. You lads should be up by the Master’s seat. Great man, Mister Dumbledore is. Yessir…hardly a better soul to be found anywhere in the world! Go on, then lads…don’t let me keep ya!”

Everyone is standing behind seats and the chatter has died down to whispers. Harry leads me up to the head table, where we stand behind chairs on either side of a carved masterpiece. The main seat is almost certainly an antique, and the carving on the jet black wood looks like it was a lifetime’s work to complete. No way to say what this would fetch in an auction house. Tens of thousands of dollars at least.

And then he’s striding in, with the slight assistance of the prim woman at his side, holding his arm while he uses a handsome old walking stick. My first impression? Tall. Even slightly stooped with age, he isn’t all that much shorter than Hagrid. He was probably incredibly imposing in his day. Not seven feet tall, but somewhere a few inches short of it if he could stand straight. Then he looks over at Harry…and at me, and his eyes twinkle merrily, like a modern day Santa Claus. So blue. His hair is as white as snow, and he has a neatly trimmed Van Dyke goatee. His nose is almost ridiculously long, and bent just a little to one side near the middle, crooked like it was broken in a common brawl, but it doesn’t take away from his aura of alertness and dignified power. If he’s ninety-eight years old, I only hope I have that kind of mobility seventy years from now.

As soon as he reaches the table, the woman by his side moves to the far edge and takes the seat to one side of Harry, while the rest of us take our seats now that Sir Dumbledore has taken his own. The hall is full of the sounds of clattering silverware as people make ready, and servers are emerging from the kitchens with platter after platter. His head is already turned to Harry while the
food arrives, and I’m amazed by how clear his voice is, even if he sounds tired, the way the very old always do. He could have been an actor on stages with a voice like that, and been heard clearly in the back of any hall anywhere.

“Harry! It’s just good to see you again. I do hate thinking of you, far away, wrapped up in business. You can’t guess how much I wish it were otherwise, but needs must when the devil drives, I suppose. You look very good, my boy. Very good indeed.”

“Thank you, sir. It’s good to see you too. The visit might have been unexpected, but we had a few days off anyway. I’m just as glad that we could spend a couple of them here before getting back to work.”

Then his head turns to me, and I feel like a bird trapped in the gaze of a cobra. Those eyes look right through you, like they can see your soul and every flaw and deficit inside.

“And you must be Mr. Malfoy, of whom we have heard so very much, and every word of it so very interesting. Never a dull moment when your name is on the tip of everyone’s tongue.”

It’s said with the faintest hit of wry amusement, and I’d swear the corner of his lip is twitching, hiding a smile that would show whether he was teasing me or not. The bastard has to know how nervous I’ve been! I hope he’s just trying to put me at ease!

“Yes, sir. I…I hope I haven’t been the cause of too much concern. I’m very grateful for the chance to be here, with Harry, tonight. It’s an honor to meet a real, live hero in person…much less enjoy a banquet in your home.”

“Heh. Hero, you say? Ahhh. Harry’s been telling stories, hasn’t he? Well, those were difficult times, but long past. We’re all heroes in our way. Some a little less obvious than others, but all of us able to make a difference in our way. Oooo…here comes the first course! Enjoy, Mr. Malfoy, enjoy.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you.”

The soup is fairly normal fare, but good. French onion with good cheeses used in the making of it. Loaves of fresh bread and dishes of butter are being brought as well. I can’t really stuff myself, unless I want to splurge on my diet while I’m here, but I’d feel guilty if I came home knowing that I’d done nothing on this trip but break every rule I’ve been setting for myself. That…and Doc Snape would probably disembowel me if I came back, got sick, and he found out about me goofing off and ignoring his orders again. I’ll go a long way to avoid suffering his wrath again!

Such a nervous situation, but I feel alright. Harry is just on the other side of Sir Albus, and this is all so tranquil. Just happy people eating and chatting quietly while they dine. It’s when the main course comes that I finally notice something amiss. They bring the plates to us one by one, servings of beef that look good, but then…I’ve heard a lot of warnings about the quality of British beef…as well as their near total inability to do anything decent with it when they cook it. I was just glancing around, a little edgy about gambling on the beef, when I noticed his plate. All the meat has been cut for him.

His left hand. It hasn’t touched anything or left his side since dinner started. It’s still resting on the table, while he dines, one handed. The fingers are curled just tight enough to close around his walking stick like before, but that’s about all. He noticed me staring! Shit! I’m so rude! First Hagrid and now this! And with the old man himself! Damn it!

He smiles ruefully, tilting his head in a gesture that feels like a muted shrug.
“The cruel eld doth palsy. The price of long years I suppose. A man cannot expect to cheat Death of his due forever, and I’ve already made quite a good run of it. Needn’t worry. It hasn’t really diminished my enjoyment of life in any meaningful way…although…I do rather miss clapping. It seems wrong to never applaud something when the occasion seems right for it.”

He delivers that statement with the same twinkling eyes as before, and I can’t help but smile a little. It’s almost frightening, the way he disarms people so easily.

“I see. I’m sorry, sir. I can see where applause would be something to miss, and I didn’t mean to stare.”

He leans in conspiratorially, and I wait for him to speak again, made curious by the smirk that forms from the corner of his mouth and rapidly spreads.

“And Mr. Malfoy?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Don’t deny yourself the pleasure of a good meal because of concerns about the quality of the meat. Neither the beef, nor the man who directed its preparation for us, are British, so I suspect you’ll actually enjoy it, and in defense of my homeland, there are certain dishes in which the appropriate preparation of beef is actually quite a specialty here.”

I just turned red from the tips of my toes right up to the roots of my hair. I cannot believe the old man actually read my fucking mind. Un-fucking-canny. I’d be creeped out by it if I wasn’t so impressed! I take up my knife and fork and brave a sliver just to follow his lead. He was right. It really is delicious, and I haven’t had a good cut of beef in awhile.

There’s a fine line to tread when selecting a cut of beef for a proper steak. Some people get on the kick of eliminating as much fat as possible, but this isn’t any favor to the flavor. The flavor is in the fat, which keeps the meat tender and juicy as it melts, and fat caramelizes easier, transforming into pure flavor when it’s done right. Good for you? Fuck, no! Delicious when spiced just right? Oh, hell yes!

It isn’t entirely fair to the British to ridicule their beef. The truth is that, on an island with limited resources, cattle are usually for milking, and for the production of cheese, especially Cheddar, at which the English excel. Renewable resources, because there just isn’t enough room for cattle to graze easily, and not enough room to grow the crops needed to feed large herds of beef cattle. The consequence of this is that, since beef is comparatively rare, they just don’t have a lot of practice serving it in innovative…but to mention tasty…ways. Since this is delicious, I forbear.

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It feels like Harry’s been in there forever. Outside of Sir Albus’ private offices, there’s a small waiting room, where all I can do is sit in a comfortable old lounge chair, the kind that old fashioned gentleman’s clubs once sported, and just wait for my turn. The only other person in the room is the secretary and assistant, the same one who helped him into the dining area, and when she greeted Harry formally, I knew she was the woman on the other end of the phone last night.

I know she disapproves of me. I can feel it hanging over her like a cloud, just waiting to rain all over me. I feel like I should say something, but what to say to a person who already knows I’m an impulsive idiot? I already proved it beyond doubt last night. I’d love to make it all better with a
nice conversation, but I know nothing about her. Just that she has a desk and a nameplate and a computer she’s tapping away at incessantly. Minerva McGonagall. She looks like an old fashioned school teacher from another century, right down to the cameo brooch closing her collar. Almost-white hair up in a bun so tight that it practically has the same effect as facelift surgery. Severe. That’s the word I’m looking for. She looks severe.

Fuck it. When there is no politic way to open conversation, just go like a spear for the heart.

“Ma’am?”

One eyebrow lifted. She fixes me with the kind of gaze you usually get when you’ve just belched loudly during church services.

“Yes…Mr. Malfoy?”

“I just…I thought I should apologize for the confusion. It was you I spoke out of turn to…last night…wasn’t it?”

“That would be correct…Mr. Malfoy.”

“So…for the record…you have my apologies. It was my mistake, and I just thought I should personally assure you that it won’t happen again.”

“I should certainly hope not, Mr. Malfoy.”

Total brick wall. Nothing. The woman is like polar ice. Damn. At least I tried.

“Mr. Malfoy?”

“Yeah?”

“Honesty and frankness will serve you very well here. Do…how do they say it…’run with it’. I’m sure you won’t be waiting much longer.”

Huh. What do you know? Maybe I haven’t lost all my charm after all. Then the door opens and Harry comes out…smiling. It’s going to be fine. There’s no way he’d be smiling that way, looking perfectly relaxed, if he thought things were bad. All I have to do now is manage this one little meeting with the boss, and everything is smoothed over. I can manage this. I want to hug him…but McGonagall is in the room with us. Probably better to play it cool. I settle for touching Harry’s hand and looking into his eyes before I go in.

“He’s ready for you. Relax. Have a good chat, alright. He’s in a pretty cheerful mood too, so I think you’ll have a good time. At least an interesting one, if I’m any kind of guesser. Ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be. See you when I get out. And Harry?”

“Yeah, love?”

“Thanks. I was worried before…too much. I think I can handle this just fine. But thanks.”

He knows what I mean. I get a nod of approval as I turn to go. He knows that the reason I feel safe is because of him. Because he’s near and full of confidence, I can believe that everything is alright. There’s no telling how panicked I’d be if I didn’t have him here, constantly reminding me that things will turn out for the better.

Nice. Plush. Tasteful. Daddy probably wishes he had an office this classy. Old world class, not
modern. Everything in here is antique, except for the computer, fax/modem, scanner, printer and other techno goodies. I can hear Bach playing somewhere. He must have a good sound system wired in here where it can’t be seen. I take a seat across the desk from the old man, and he just smiles while he reaches for a glass dish of candies, smiling like a kid when he holds the dish out to me, blue eyes still twinkling like before.

“Lemon drop? They’re quite good. I suppose I could offer a glass of brandy as well, but between you and me, I prefer the lemon drops.”

So weird. So casual. This isn’t at all what I expected, but I can’t say I feel any more apprehensive than I did at dinner. I’d rather like a candy…but I’m a little more full than I’ve been in almost a week. Also…I’m just a little leery of taking candy from old men. Call it a survival instinct if you will, and try to understand that it comes with having lived as a whore. It just isn’t good policy to put things in your mouth unless people have already paid to put them there.

“Normally? I’d love them…but I already fudged on my diet a bit today. I’d rather not push my luck.”

The dish returns to its place while he plucks a candy with his good hand and unwraps it with an impressive one-handed display of dexterity, then he pops it into his mouth and smiles.

“Ahhh yes. The diet. You’ve been experiencing a bit of anxiety, haven’t you? Momentary lapses and such. It occurs to me that, despite the best of intentions, you might have bitten off a little more than you can readily chew, Mr. Malfoy.”

“I prefer Drake if it’s all the same to you, sir. And yes, it’s been…a little surreal. Sometimes. I’m sorry if that caused some concern. Please…I didn’t want to make trouble for Harry. That’s the last thing I want.”

“Mmm. And yet…” He sounds distracted and perfectly calm, but there’s the faintest edge to his voice. Serious, but I can tell he’s trying to make me comfortable while he touches on the subject I should worry about the most. Believe me…I appreciate the effort on his part. I try to remember that Harry was smiling when he left this room. It can’t go to badly…right?

“I know. I wouldn’t have said anything…inappropriate, sir. You have my word on it. I know I acted hastily, but…”

“It’s alright…Drake. Perfectly normal response in a most abnormal situation. You may not realize it, but that really has very little to do with why you’re here. Be frank with me, if you can, because I mean to be frank with you.”

The gloves are off. The bell just rang. Something tells me that this is more serious than he let Harry know. I’m not apprehensive anymore…now I’m genuinely fucking nervous. My palms…when did they start to sweat this much? My tie is too tight, and my neck prickles under the collar. I don’t want to look or act nervous. Just got to keep it cool a little longer.

“Okay. Thank you, sir. Then can I ask why I am here?”

Again that mellow smile. His eyes are like blue ice. Every time my gaze meets his, I get lost the way I do with Harry. The feeling is different, because with Harry I just melt into a puddle and I tend get desperately horny. With this man, I feel like I’m being weighed and judged, but all I can do is answer as honestly as I can and wait for his next move, panicked and as helpless as a moth drawn to batter itself against a window that bars its way to the light.
“I do loathe sounding clichéd, but I’m afraid it can’t be helped. Drake…Harry is very important to me, as is the cause toward which we all labor. Anything that threatens that purpose presents a very serious problem. I’m aware of your past, and of your problems, and quite honestly…you present a rather thorny issue for me.

Harry needs his mind on his work, both for his safety, and for the safety of our goals. I would never do anything so gauche as to issue crude threats, so let us resolve this in the most civilized way. I can ensure that you are very, very well taken care of, in every way that suits you, enough so that you might live out your days in absolute comfort, anywhere in the world. All I ask is that you leave Harry, and make no attempt to contact him in the near future, and do not disclose those things you’ve learned regarding the Phoenix Corporation and its activities.”

Oh God! I’d…I really thought he wouldn’t ask that of me! Harry was happy! The words just echo in my head like a slammed door in a long empty hallway while my heart thuds in my ears. What do I say? I screwed it all up. This isn’t the kind of person you just say no to! He really wants me gone…like Harry said could happen.

I can feel the panic coming on. The bass drum pounding of my pulse, the perspiration working its way out of every pore of my body and making my skin feel hot and tight. The irregularity of my breath while I try to look calm and keep my vision steady. I wish I’d taken that damn pill! Help! Fuck! Can’t…can’t let this happen here! Not now! Not here! If I’m weak, they won’t ever let me stay with Harry! I have to…hold on. Say something. These people aren’t impressed by histrionics and fainting spells, and puking all over his antique desk probably won’t win me any awards either! Talk, god damn it! Move your fucking lips, Drake! NOW!

“Sir…I…”

“Think of it, my dear boy! Wealth beyond anyone’s capacity to exhaust it. Every creature comfort one could imagine. All yours and yours alone, never able to be taken from you. Anything can be arranged. A life as an artist, since I’m told you’re quite the painter? Or perhaps a quiet life of leisure on an island? Anything at all. That would neatly solve both my problem and yours, without any conflict of any kind. Wouldn’t that be more amenable…than the alternative?”

Judgment Day. Zero Hour. I want to scream. Or cry…or pass out. Anything but speak. This is for Harry. And for me. I don’t want any of those things…if I can’t have Harry to enjoy them with. Death is better than that. I’ve come too far, too fast, to lose the only thing matters to me now. When hope dies, when everything is gone, there is a place where nothing else can be taken from you. A place where you have a strength you might go your whole life and still never know you had…until you find yourself there. And then the words come.

“No. There is only one…thing…I…want. Harry. I understand that I made a mistake, and if there’s another way to pay for it, I’ll pay however you like. But I won’t leave Harry. Not now…not ever. If you…if you have to do something…with me…do it. There is nothing…I repeat…NOTHING…that means more to me than him! Not money, not comfort…not even my fucking life. It’s all worthless without him. Keep your islands, and your cash, and do whatever you have to do…but Harry is mine, and I’m his…and that’s final.”

I can’t believe I just said that to one of the most powerful men in the world! He looks completely unperturbed, and vaguely curious…or amused, while I can barely keep my vision from slipping out of focus. My nails are digging into the fabric of the chair I’m in because I’m so fucking tense I want to explode, and I think I just wrote my ticket to hell by crossing the wrong person at last.

“I see. Well…you’ve made yourself entirely clear to me, Mr. Malfoy. I’m afraid you’ve left me
with precious few choices. I suppose an ‘alterative’ is called for now.”

So clinical and calm. His hand is opening the drawer on the desk. He can’t…! Not here! In his office? He’d kill me here?! I’m going to die! He must have a gun in there! Harry couldn’t possibly get here fast enough to stop him! I want Harry! I want a kiss! The scent of him on the pillow. I want one more fucking minute of life with him! My breath is sucking its way into my lungs for a scream while my heart palpitates…

And he pulls out a large manila envelope.

And slides it across the desk to me.

“I had to be absolutely certain…of your intentions, Mr. Malfoy. There is no room here for the uncertain. If you will not be parted from Harry, then I’m left with no choice but to place a different offer on the table.

Welcome to the Phoenix Corporation, Drake Malfoy. Let us see where we might be able to employ some of your less arcane talents, eh?”

“Oh. Yeah. Sure. As soon as I’m done having my heart attack…you perfect bastard!”

Wait…did I just say that out loud?

Fuck.

TBC!!!
Big Chicago part 25…by Samayel

“Hah! AHAHAHAHA! Heh! Oh dear! Not the worst thing I’ve been called in my many years of life! Relax, my boy! Your only enemy is fear itself…not me…I assure you of that!”

Okay…I suppose I can take my hand off of my mouth and let my eyes stop bugging out. He’s laughing. That can’t be bad.

“I’m so sorry, sir! I really, really didn’t mean to say that out loud, and-”

“Think nothing of it! You weren’t nearly as inventive with your invective as Minerva is when I forget to finish my paperwork in time for her quarterly review. And you may call me Brian, if you wish. I have a few other names rattling about as well, but that one serves best. Frankly, I’ve had so many in my time that I might well have forgotten a few of them. I suppose I’ll have that brandy while you look at the contents of that envelope.”

“Oh. You know what? I’m starting to catch a little of that English spirit. Bugger the diet. I’ll have a small brandy after all. I think I need it.”

I am sooo not kidding. My heart is still pounding and I think I’m going to have an adrenaline headache later. I didn’t mean to say that in front of him…but Jesus Christ! My life flashed in front of my eyes. Twenty-five years is hard to fit into a few seconds, and the sad part is that only the last few weeks stand out as incredible!

“Here, here. The important thing, Drake, is moderation. Moderation in all things…especially moderation…as the poet, Robert W. Service, once wrote. Inside that envelope you’ll find what we know about you, and then a very brief contract, necessarily obscure, which you will have to sign. Then we shall discuss your history, and perhaps a measure of your future, as well as diverse other matters that may strike me as we chat. Alright?”

“Oh. Okay. If…if I can ask…”

“Feel free. In here there need be no secrets. Elsewhere is another matter, but speak your mind as you wish.”

I can hear the decanter clinking and liquid tumbling into glass snifters. I close my eyes for a moment and try to pull myself together before I push my luck.

“Was it absolutely necessary to scare the hell out of me?”

Blue eyes over the edge of a glass. He hands me my brandy, and I can tell he’s deadly serious again.

“It wasn’t my intent to terrify you, whatever you may think. It was my intent to tempt you…test your resolve as it were. Given what I know of your health and background, you’ve shown exemplary courage…and asset of which the world is in desperately short supply. Had you swayed or hesitated overlong, leaving me with the impression that you could be easily purchased, I would have been disappointed, and yet relieved. As it stands now, there is much that must be seen to
regarding your employment. Just trust that it’s a welcome complication.”

Something is getting clearer to me. The panic is fading, and my brain is working overtime again. There’s something he isn’t saying…but I know it’s there, just beneath the surface.

“It wasn’t even about me being a part of this…was it? This wasn’t because you wanted to hire me. This was about Harry. Wasn’t it?”

“Check and checkmate, my dear boy. It has a great deal more to do with Harry than it does with you.”

He sips his brandy while I sip mine in astonishment. A glance at the bottle confirms my suspicions. Napoleonic. This brandy is older than he is! And still incredible! Even the stuff I snuck out of Daddy’s liquor cabinet was swill next to this.

“You see, Drake, Harry is…different. Perhaps, given my business affairs and the nature of the Phoenix Corporation, of which you shall shortly learn more, it is foolish for an old man to make exceptions when so many lives are at risk. But, alas, I fear I must be a fool after all.

I haven’t any children of my own. When I pass from this earth, all that I have accomplished will be the same as dust. Lost in memory within a few generations, a blip in the history texts of the future. Harry…Harry is very dear to me. More important than the work he does, more significant than the usefulness of his many talents…I do not want him to be alone. Even if common sense dictates otherwise.

I did not clamber and scrabble so far in this life, only to tear away from others a chance at happiness and companionship. There is much I would sacrifice to leave a better world than the one I helped to make years ago, but Harry’s happiness is not mine to trade. And so…here we are.”

I knew it! He was testing me to see if I was fit to be with Harry! The rueful way he smiles and hangs his head while he sips the brandy…the quiet, but understated tone of voice. It all says that he cares even when he shouldn’t, or can’t afford to for business reasons. I don’t know what to say.

“Cat got your tongue, does it? That’s quite alright. You can just read the contents of the envelope while I talk. I admit to having become more than a little long winded in my golden years. Once again, the price of age.”

It’s surreal. I’m looking at my life in black and white. So much information. Things I never imagined anyone would care to record. It’s all there, and they dug it up just to make sure it was safe for Harry to have me around. Where I was born, where I was schooled, and every small assessment, for good or ill, along the way. Letters from teachers. Pictures from the paper. The blue ribbons I won for English Dressage while riding one of father’s Arabians.

You can actually see the shift in my life happen. There’s a slight blur in my sophomore year, with occasional tardiness but grades still consistently high, and then midway through my junior year it all changes. Absences, reprimands, tardiness and unfinished schoolwork. I had been on the fast track to the Ivy League…and then I was a high school dropout, homeless, and a prostitute. Until Blaise came along.

He’s here too. Just a copy of a picture of us. Taken at a nightclub entrance when I was seventeen. We looked good together. I looked cool and happy and young…but I already looked a little worn. Frayed around the edges. Like I’d been to war and seen the face of hell, and I was pretending it didn’t exist now that I had good clothes and good food again. If that kid in the picture had known what was coming, he’d have run far and fast to get away.
Medical records from the prison. My mugshot and files from when I was booked and charged. The paperwork from the courts. All here. And then it ends with Snape’s reports. The vampire took notes! All those psych questions to sort out my condition are here. Every little detail I shared is here…and his conclusions.

‘Brilliant, but erratic. Highly analytical, with a marked talent for arts and languages. A survivor with a strong sense of opportunism, but with what I suspect is a moral voice that doesn’t readily waver. Self-indulgent, albeit little more than anyone else these days. Potentially co-dependent, with an inclination toward high anxiety. Exhibits classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress. These things aside, given that he possesses a fine, if underused, mind, the young man seems to have a solid grasp of what is expected of him in this situation, and with suitable training may be gainfully employed, to his benefit as well as ours. Whatever makes your Golden Boy happy. Don’t expect me to do these interview/assessments on the fly again. This is not my department.’

That jerk! Self-indulgent! Just because the last seven years have been complete shit and I wanted a pizza and a cocktail now and then? Argh! I could just spit! Then I remember that the boss is still talking.

“Harry does not want all of what I can offer. He could easily become my heir, take from me the mantle of these affairs, but I’m afraid he only wants one thing now. That would be…you. I suppose I’ll find someone else, or several ‘someone elses’, if I must. The Phoenix Corporation will continue…though I’m fairly sure I won’t be at its helm all that much longer.”

I tug at my tie nervously, now that I know I won’t be condemned for it. I’m still sweaty and itchy from the aftermath of a near panic attack. Plus…I hate tight collars on boy clothes.

“Drake…there isn’t any reason to stand on ceremony here, though I appreciate that you dressed for the occasion, but there’s no reason not to be yourself while you’re here. It isn’t as if those of us, whose opinions on such things might have meaning, haven’t already seen pictures of your preferred attire.”

Is he saying what I think he’s saying? He can’t be serious! The smirk and casual attitude says he’s sincere. What would they have thought of me if I’d come here in one of my outfits from home?! It’s such a personal thing. I’m not used to talking casually about it with anyone but a lover or a friend, and I’ve seen precious few of those for a long while.

“I didn’t want to scandalize anyone. Harry is very important to me, but you already know that. I just thought it would be better to go with a more formal look.”

“Needn’t worry for my opinion of you, though it might be awhile before we meet again. It’s a useful thing, being able to seemingly change genders before the eyes of others. As a matter of fact, during the War, when I was attempting to slip out of Germany without drawing undue attention, I crossed a river by night, and having drenched my clothes while hurrying to avoid a patrol, I made use of some clothing that I found drying on a line nearby. The tragedy is that I apparently made a rather homely maiden. I must have passed a dozen soldiers and failed to generate as much as a whistle of interest. Quite a bruise to my ego.”

I can’t help but laugh. The brandy is superb, and I’m going to be safe, with Harry beside me, and taken care of in a way that won’t be injurious to my health. What a strange and wonderful old man.

“All right. No standing on ceremony. Next time I’m in this part of the world, I’ll bring my real wardrobe, but I might as well warn you…by then…we might need another plane to haul it!”

“Hah! A timely comment. I think I should tell you a little about what we really do here, before you
sign your name to that contract. The Phoenix Corporation is quite legitimate, and exists primarily as a means to exploit the rather lax scrutiny of international corporations. Through the auspices of a privately held company, it is possible to move money and personnel around the globe with comparative ease, and this allows me to strive toward my primary goal. Impediment to goals is intolerable to the well-financed, and their influence has guaranteed that corporate travel and shipping enjoy a level of scrutiny far less intrusive than one might expect.

You should understand by now that, while we are engaged in a covert war with the Enigma Corporation and its founder, Tom Riddle, there is more to the Phoenix Corporation than just that. Tom was a pupil of mine many years ago, and I fear that my tutelage and recommendations ultimately led to his rise to power and current wealth. Had I realized then that he possessed such a ruthless desire to control and dominate, even at the cost of innocent lives, I would have ensured that he remained insignificant for the remainder of his days. Alas, hindsight is always clearer. Then he was just a gifted young man, exceptionally capable and with a penchant for impressing his seniors.

“I created this enterprise for two reasons. The lesser reason was to oppose Tom Riddle’s growing influence, and this much you already know, but I’m afraid the world’s problems are quite a bit more vast than the machinations of one wealthy man run amuck. Tom Riddle is only a symptom of a much greater and more terrible disease…one which has afflicted mankind since its inception. While I wholeheartedly desire to see the mistake I unleashed in the form of Tom Riddle erased from the cosmic tally, there is a greater work which we must undertake and see through to its end.

“Greed, Mr. Malfoy. It’s a perfectly natural thing, a never-ending desire for more than we already have. It is the culmination of our species’ desire to thrive and survive. I am and have been as guilty of it as anyone else. Unfortunately, the stakes of the natural game have changed. We are unquestionably atop the pyramid of the food chain, unquestioned masters of our domain. We no longer have any enemies of consequence…save for time…and our own selves. The greed that made us struggle against a natural world that once fought back has won us our place today…but that same greed is our undoing.

“Our population, unchecked by predators, war, disease or any instinct to maintain modest numbers, has grown astronomically in just my lifespan. Our technology too has leapt forward in just the space of generations. The whole of human history, millennium piled atop millennium, has never witnessed such a complete and overwhelming explosion of population. Only now have the once abundant resources of this planet become stretched, divided between those who are fortunate enough to have, and those who have not.

“That brings us back to the crisis of greed. Feudal lords and ancient satraps once lived lives of outrageous splendor, while those around them dwelt in penury. That was the way of history. The strong thrived, and the poor served in exchange for what little they could barter for their services. This aside, with simple resources so plentiful, it was possible for the majority of people to at least meet their basic needs and subsist. That situation, long the norm, is beginning to change.

“Resources are not inexhaustible. Fresh water and arable cropland are dwindling in comparison to the need for same. Energy to power our lives and lifestyles does not come from nowhere at all. The world is both growing larger, and yet, inexorably, smaller at the same time. We are all affected by these changes, even those of us insulated by wealth. The key difference is that those who possess wealth, and whose needs are comfortably met, do not see a crisis at hand…yet.

“In these last few centuries, exceptional greed could be characterized as the whimsical behavior of the very few and very rich, living in excess and spending their wealth for their amusement. On the bright side, at least they were spending it. Whether as Roman noblemen lavishing their wealth
upon temples and stadiums, or feudal lords and churchmen building great cathedrals and castles, the wealth was constantly redistributed. From the bottom, to the top, then back to the bottom again. This seemingly endless cycle has been fatally interrupted.

“The capitalization of wealth has changed the dynamic entirely. It is possible by speculation and investment to accumulate enormous wealth, all without a single product created, or a service rendered, or more than the fewest possible people employed. This wealth exists purely upon paper, created to accommodate the persons who mader successful speculative investments, whether those investments have real value or not. The wealth moves upward, but barely descends. When too great an amount remains frozen and does not work its way back into hands that will use it, the system begins to shudder and break down. Western culture in particular has constantly reinforced the validity of this process, lauding it in our advertisements, incorporating it into our urban myths and national characters, and letting it become the foundation stone of our politics.

“Please don’t mistake my meaning, as I myself am an ardent capitalist, and a great believer in the natural evolution of human behavior dictating that systems of exchange must exist for goods and services, but I’m afraid there is a limit to what any system can bear. We have sold for generations now a bill of goods that cannot ultimately be paid for with simple sweat. Consumerism, and the feverish need to consume as much as possible, as lavishly as possible, has been taught as a way of life and settled upon the backs of those who can ill afford it. We teach the hunger to acquire and to use, but we do not teach the responsibility to manage. A recipe, in short, for utter catastrophe.”

I agree entirely, but I use smaller words on average. Not that I don’t like the way he thinks, since he acknowledges things that most people with lots of ready cash won’t even say out loud, but I do have one niggling problem…my own conscience.

“So…would now be a bad time to mention that I really, really love to shop?”

HAH! It might at that! Ahhh…Drake…small wonder Harry enjoys your company so. You give a rather long-winded old man more than his measure of laughter. Aply put, and in all honesty, I rather miss the days when I could handle more than the occasional jaunt to Harrod’s. The experience is somewhat embittered by the knowledge that I have more than contributed to the problems which ail our entire world. Not just by permitting Tom Riddle his successful start in this world, but by my own investments and choices during my rather long lifetime. I do not exempt myself from our planet-wide epidemic of conscience, but I am, in my way, trying to make amends.

It would, in the normal course of things, fall upon our leadership to make those changes which are necessary to ensure our collective future well-being. Sadly, the epidemic short-sightedness of our culture of consumerism has reached every level of our society, and our political and religious institutions are no longer agents of social justice, or of needed change. They are instruments of the status quo, and they do not profit from sudden changes. Thus, they make a few small noises at appropriate times, but little of consequence. Likewise our many forms of media, almost entirely owned and managed by conglomerates, none of which desire bold statements about their own behavior needing modification. Thus, near silence, or at best, badly muddied waters which even a bright person might fail to see clearly through.

Pollution, the hallmark of industry, has run utterly out of control. Chemical toxins have damaged the freshwater supplies we have, the air we breathe, and the food we eat. Some are even placed into the food after its harvest, added in the form of complicated chemicals intended to sterilize, enhance and preserve, their full effects never tested carefully or with an eye toward the effects of long term exposure. The laws we have passed against the pollution of air have been carefully engineered to exempt the most powerful and influential nations and businesses, encouraging governments to buy ’carbon credits’ from nations that lack industry and letting businesses take
advantage of special exemptions, without actually undertaking much needed changes that are becoming more and more critical with each passing year. The carbon issue may be cloudy, but while it has been the source of debate, much of the attention once granted to very obvious poisons has been diverted and undermined until pollution is as much a problem as it ever was, if not more so than before.

Our future is looking frighteningly uncertain, as the ice from our poles quickly dwindles away, adding water to the ocean that hasn’t been present since before the last ice age. Routine weather patterns have been disrupted worldwide by the changing temperature and salinity of our ocean currents, the consequences visible in the number and intensity of storms on both hemispheres. The holes in the ozone layer linger, the temperature averages for various places fluctuate wildly, growing just a little steamier or cooler each year in places where those averages once ensured stability, every year raising the specter of mosquito-borne illness, pandemic, and species invasion or extinction.

With rising oceans comes shrinking coastlines and saltwater intrusion of aquifers, crimping desperately needed freshwater supplies, while populations will still increase as long as food supplies allow it. And when food supplies no longer allow that…then…then we will see the crisis very plainly, and the excuses of yesteryear will ring very hollow in the ears of the hungry. And so…what can be done? What can we do to change all of this? What can stop this calamity of apocalyptic proportions from happening? Have you an answer for us all?”

Talk about being under the gun! Like I know how to solve the world’s problems!? Come on! Last month I was a prison bitch, I’ve already had the shit scared out of me twice in two days, and more than anything, I’d like a good hard fucking and a nap, because I’m jet-lagged, tired, and tense, and nothing mellows me back out quite like having Harry pound me through the mattress and into the floor before bed. Still, I have to say something. He’s looking at me with his glass raised in his good hand, one eyebrow cocked and awaiting my reply.

“T’im sorry. I don’t know what would help. I don’t have an answer. I wish I did.”

The old man sighs heavily, deflating almost in front of me, then shrugs his shoulders and takes his seat with an air of defeat.

“Alas…neither do I. I was hoping you might. And that leaves us with what I am doing. The only thing I know for a fact can be done. Aside from paying for research and building a consortium of like-minded investors to fund these projects, I have only a few ideas that might delay the inevitable.

Perhaps I know nothing of how to save the world from itself, but by God, I will use what is left to me to buy the human race just a little more time to figure it out. Perhaps someone else will find the answers, but I can ensure we have the ability to survive just a little longer.

Water. Around the world, we are building desalination plants on a larger scale than have ever been built before. They will operate independently, delivering their product for free. Some for irrigation of croplands, and some for drinking. Wherever we can, I have people working on alternative energy sources, and researching ways to maximize food production by means that aren’t vulnerable to sudden changes of temperature or precipitation. Likewise the removal of pollutants, and means by which to reverse a portion of the damage we have done. I doubt it will be enough, but if I can buy this world just a little more time, it will have been worth it.

My legacy will probably never be known to any but a few, most particularly since my aims run counter to the interests of those who place profiteering ahead of the survival of humanity, and must therefore remain secret, but I will know that I have tried, and that shall have to suffice. They will
continue to profess ignorance of anything gone awry, and proclaim uncertainty about the necessity of change, as if by merely saying that the sun does not rise, the morning simply won’t come. To preserve their conscience, they must cling to the lies they have told to preserve their comfortable state of ignorance, but I, and others, will push forward without them, not for glory, or profit, or any material gain, but for the survival of our species. That we not fade into the long dark of history, a cosmic joke, a failed experiment of carbon-based, bipedal mammals.

So I ask you this, Drake Malfoy…would you work in silence for a cause such as this? The rewards are more than adequate, but more importantly, you would be beside Harry, albeit working in a far less dangerous capacity.”

Damn. He really means to do it. He’s wealthy enough that he really could make those things happen. Free water from the oceans, maybe enough to take the edge off of their eventual rise. It wouldn’t solve everything, but it would help. Water means crops means life is still possible. It could be done. Harry and the rest of them fighting against Riddle suddenly seems so small, even if it is a hundred times more dangerous than researching cures for society’s ills.

Maybe I’ve gone too long living a life with no meaning beyond seeking my own pleasure. I’m a creature of comfort and I know it, but that doesn’t mean I can’t do better. I can have Harry, and everything else besides, and still be doing something that has a real purpose…not just getting rich or getting by.

“Yes. Absolutely yes. Not just because of Harry, either, but I admit to that being the biggest part of it. Keep Harry, fight evil, get rich, and do it all while helping to save the world? I’d have to be crazy to say no to that. I’m all yours, signed, sealed and delivered. Here’s the contract.”

He takes the contract back and files it neatly, then holds out his good hand. A handshake and a smile, and I’m a member of the Phoenix Corporation. Hello, new life, meet Drake Malfoy. For the first time in my entire life, I have a real job, which is a lovely change of pace from a long career based almost solely on my willingness to put out in exchange for money or protection. It feels pretty good, too.

“Congratulation, Drake. Welcome aboard. As for your actual employment terms, I was thinking of something along the lines of translation work in the offices, alongside the remarkable Miss Granger and Miss Patil. The program for translation of data is presently headed up by the utterly remarkable Ms. Chang, here in our private offices, but she's fully capable of walking you through your duties by long distance communication. They could certainly use your help, given the sheer volume of information through which they regularly sift. I think we can arrange for some refresher courses in French, Italian and Spanish for you, as well as some computer training that will avail you well in your new work. Does that sound like an amenable use of your natural talents?”

“God, yes! I know it might sound boring to some people, but languages were always like a puzzle to me, and I always loved puzzles. Keeps my mind busy, and I like that. I do need that brush up though…I’ve only read a couple of books in French since I met Harry, and while I did speak a little Spanish and Italian over the last seven years, it wasn’t anything really challenging. Just jailhouse chatter. This means I’ll always know what Harry’s up to, right? I don’t think I could worry more than I do now, knowing next to nothing…so that’s bound to help too. I won’t let you down…I promise!”

“I’m sure you won’t! I have confidence in you, Drake, and speaking of your name, there are some arrangements we’ll have to make regarding your identity. Drake Malfoy is too well known in Chicago to simply vanish…you’d be recognized, and for the time being, that name will have to suffice, but we can arrange for a separate ID, one through which we can employ you…untraceable,
and which will allow you to travel without undo attention from law enforcement. I’ll let Harry work out the specifics with you, and we’ll have the new ID ready for you before your training is complete.

“Much of the rest you already know. The reasons why we never speak last names aloud in unsecured areas, the subjects we never speak of directly, and absolute silence regarding our ‘business’ to those who aren’t employed by The Phoenix Corporation. There will be other lessons during your training, but you’ve already learned the most important lessons, and shown that you can follow them…within reason.”

I blush. I know he’s obliquely referring to that little gaffe I made on the phone. I didn’t say anything dangerous, and that’s probably the only reason I’m not running for my life along with Harry now. I know the stakes of the game in a way I never did before. I think it helps, knowing how important all this really is.

People might ask why all the secrecy is called for, but I understand. They hack the intelligence files of every major nation to track Riddle, and most countries would be furious. Stopping a criminal shouldn’t be a crime, but I know how the world works, and sometimes the criminals are so far above the law that only an equal power can fight them. No one is opposed to saving the world, but there are ways to profit from NOT doing it, and creating a vast supply of free water would disrupt a lot of speculators and their investments in the future scarcity of water. They would stop at nothing to protect those investments, because billions of dollars would be on the line. Competition is one thing, but being bankrupted because of a massive charity effort is another.

Many companies and consortiums buy up water rights, usually in places where people have so much water that they don’t realize what might happen when it finally starts running short. They pump the water out of the ground, bottle it, ship it all over the country and make a mint doing it, but they don’t pay for new local wells when the old ones can’t draw deep enough anymore. Like usual, the little guy gets screwed, and the big guy walks away laughing. Dumbledore just happens to be a bigger guy than the water speculators, and if they got wind of the screwing they were going to get, they’d use every trick in the book to stop him.

“I was a little overwrought, and I’m not denying that Doc Snape has a point, but I promise you…I am getting better, and I’ll give you my very best. I won’t put Harry at risk, and you can count on that.”

He smiles mildly, blue eyes holding me captive. His good hand is playing idly with an old watch made of gold, hanging on a fancy chain. It just swings back and forth while we chat. Back and forth. The brandy must have gotten to me a little. I feel comfortable and full of hope. Well fed and no longer panicked. The jet lag is still kicking my ass, and I can’t help feeling sluggish while lounging in a nicely cushioned chair and sipping brandy. Back and forth. His voice is comforting…calm and serene, full of wisdom.

“You’ve had a troubled time, my boy, but that can be dealt with eventually. You’ve done very well, and I understand precisely why Harry is fond of you. Relaxed? You should be, and no harm will come to you here. I believe in you, and you will make a fine addition to our team. I am sorry about some the blows that life dealt you. So much talent, so much ability and verve, all left unused while fate’s cat paws batted you to and fro.

You’re too tense, little dragon. Your troubles overwhelm you sometimes, and they put you and all of us at risk. You deserve help with that, not condemnation. I’m going to help you. Are you relaxed, Drake?”

Sleepy. I nod. The watch just keeps swaying on its chain of gold, and I’ve only ever felt this
peaceful in Harry’s arms.

“Good. When you feel tense…when you feel like the stress of a moment is too much to bear, I want you to recall this moment…this feeling…and bring it back to yourself. Deep slow breaths. Total calm. You can make decisions when you feel this way, and they’ll be better choices than some of the ones you’ve made under duress in the past. Don’t let fear own you, because fear is just an illusion. Your own strengths…those are real. When I snap m fingers and call your name, you will awaken, and this last part of our conversation will be lost in the haze of memory, but this feeling of calm will come back to you when you need it most, and you will know that you can do whatever you must. Understood?”

Another nod.

“Drake?”

The snap of fingers and I’m alert again. I must have gone all drowsy on him! God, how embarrassing! A little brandy and I’m practically facedown and snoring. Pathetic!

“Sorry, sir! I…I’m jet-lagged still. Other end of the world and all, you know? I can’t believe I nodded off while we discussed my contract.”

“No need for apologies, Drake. I wouldn’t have kept you up so late, had it not been for the pressing need to address all this. If you’d like, I’m sure Harry is eagerly awaiting your company, and this old man has monopolized your attention quite long enough. Do have a good evening. I’ll see you and Harry again before you depart.”

I stand and make a little bow, trying to mimic the bows I’ve seen people give him here, and he smiles mildly at my fumbled attempt. I really must be sleepier than I thought.

“Thank you, sir, for everything. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Very well. Good night, Drake.”

“Good night, sir.”

On the way out, my eyes catch a tattered black and white picture. A sliver of his history, one of only a few in the room. The tall boy must be him. The nose isn’t bent, and the back isn’t bowed by age. The hand that no longer works is on the shoulder of another young man, this one shorter and obviously blond, even in a black and white picture. Rakish smiles on two gangling boys in their late teens. There’s something about it…something odd and familiar between them. Like they’re laughing at the world and treasuring a secret only they hold.

Dear God! Is he? Like Harry…and me? I can’t help but turn back to him, and I can tell he sees the question on my face before I even speak it. He looks sad. Tired and careworn, but resigned.

“Yes. The answer is yes, Drake. I told you that I would never want Harry to live a life without the warmth that comes of companionship. I understand perfectly what that must be like, and I would never wish such a thing upon another.”

“May I ask…?”

A simple nod and a gentle smile. “Who was he?”

“His name was Gellert. His family came to England well before the war. I was home from university, ill-suited to a life without intellectual peers, and he became the dearest friend I have
ever had.”

“What…is it alright to ask what happened?”

His gaze turns to flint in a heartbeat. I wish I hadn’t asked. I should have just kept my mouth shut.

“He joined the Nazi party and returned to the continent before the war took hold. He was a scientist and an economist without peer. He was very high among their ranks when the war ended. I engineered his capture, attended his trial, and testified against him. He was hanged for crimes against humanity, and for participation in genocide.”

Not exactly the happy gay bedtime story I’d hoped for! He waves off my apologies and tells me it stopped mattering long ago, but I know he’s lying. I understand something else now. This is why I’ve made it this far. This is why he made such an exception for Harry. I can’t imagine what it must have felt like…to do what he did…to lose someone that important…to be the reason they’re no longer among the living. We part with a few words, because there’s almost nothing I could say that would sound right. My solace is that Harry is waiting for me in Minerva’s office outside, and the smile on his face is just what I need after a night that has managed to encompass stark terror and outright joy in less than an hour. The hallways are huge and empty while I keep his hand in mine and stroll quietly.

“I take it that things went well?”

“You know they did. And by the way…you are SUCH a bastard for letting me go in there without knowing that he’d test me! I was terrified! It’s a damn good thing you’re worth all this…asshole.”

That muted chuckle I love so much is back. The corner of his mouth is curled into a smirk.

“I knew you’d pass. I never doubted it for a second. As soon as he told me that he was going to put an offer on the table and test your resolve, I told him it wouldn’t work. You proved me right, and I knew you would. Looks like we’re both pretty good gamblers, doesn’t it?”

Well, there goes being mad about it. The fucker knows exactly what makes me melt inside and love him more than ever. I can’t bring myself to dislike that.

“Okay. Granted…but you still ought to offer something more than words. I’ve been traumatized…I deserve some very, very serious comforting.”

“I think I have just the thing for that. Let me show you the way to the garage. There’s something I rarely get to enjoy there, and I think you’d like it too.”

“Lead on, but I’m curious about what could be in a garage that I would enjoy so much. I planned on the bedroom, but I’ll follow your lead.”

In the back corner of the garage, which is simply enormous and surprisingly empty except for a few magnificent antique cars in vintage condition, is a lump covered by tarps. Harry pulls the tarp away with a smile, and now I know why.

“It’s gorgeous!”

“I know! This belonged to Sirius. It was his bike. A lot of what he left to me was auctioned off, because he didn’t care about his family’s old stuff, and none of it meant anything to me, but I kept a few things to remember him by, and this was one of them. How do you feel about a ride? Got extra helmets and jackets in the crate over there.”
And that settles that. I ride behind Harry, on a motorcycle as big and black as the night itself, tearing through hills that smell like peace and heather. The creak of leather jackets. The roar and vibration between my legs while I cling to Harry’s warmth in front of me. The wind tugging at me as we purr our way along empty roads lit only by the moon and stars. He was right. This is good comfort.

I never thought of England as being anything like paradise, but I guess my paradise brought me here with him. The top of a high and grassy hill beneath the stars, curled in a nest of our discarded clothing, sated and lazy, naked under the summer moon. Tomorrow there will be farewells, and another long flight to home, but tonight…tonight there is only Harry…and me…and the eternal enigma of the future, tinged with the strength of my hope for the best.

I can live with that.

TBC!!!
So many things. What a life to live. I barely have time to think. I used to have nothing but time to think. Now I train, and the thoughts still come, but I’m almost too tired to form them properly.

Seven years of watching television in silence, absorbing only the tidbits of pop culture and news that fell my way by chance, keeping my thoughts to myself because it was safer than showing any nerve. That was my life. That was hell. This…now…is supposed to be heaven.

I just never imagined heaven involving so much exercise.

Along with lovely new ID cards, passports and personal effects, I’ve had to memorize a separate personal history, drilled on the details until I can recite them like I believe them. Deacon Malloy only exists as an employee of the Phoenix Corporation, and will only come into play when I need him. And that isn’t all I’ve been up to lately.

Language programs. Harry’s computer has been my office for the last week, running me through upper level Spanish, French and Italian lessons, building up my outdated and little used reading skills for fast translation. It helps that I’m good at languages naturally, but six hours a day is enough to give me a headache…in any language!

Then there’s the exercise room, and Harry is a hard taskmaster. Snape may be one mean SOB, but Harry is half drill sergeant at heart. I run and work out until I can barely move in the morning, then I get my shower and breakfast. My butt has been healing fast, and the red and irritated area where I used to have a scar has faded a lot more in just a short while, but it still smart when I sweat…and although I’ve often claimed that I would never do anything as common as perspire…when Harry puts me through the paces…I sweat like a nervous whore in church, and I can’t help it. I’m sure Doc Snape would approve…since this entire affair involves me being sore and miserable.

The goal is that, should anything bad happen, I should be ready to run at a moment’s notice, with Harry at my side, and not be useless baggage that needs looking after. Fuck, I even agreed to this, believing that about myself and wanting to change it, even while Harry protested that it wasn’t true, but I never imagined anything as specific as my whole body hurting while I flop into bed every night!

I’ve been to the ‘office’, too. I’ve seen where Harry’s crew works, and where I’ll be working very soon. The old warehouse it’s hidden in is just a façade, just like the building I live in now. Inside, it’s a fortress of hidden rooms and a maze of old, unused machinery. The elevator inside leads down to the basement level, where the real office is tucked away…along with a state of the art computer system that would make a university research facility blush with pride. The security is tight, and Harry already warned me about forgetting to use my pass card at each entrance. The protections outside are all non lethal, allowing them to quickly get rid of anyone knocked out by the gas canisters that discharge if you don’t use a pass card properly. Typically, bums and squatters wind up getting driven to a quiet place and dumped off, still sleeping, only to wake up with their memory muddled by the gas, unsure of what the hell just happened to them. Either way, nothing I’d want to tamper with.

There are reams of recordings stored by computer, including wiretapped conversations from around the world, and memos from the internal offices of security and intelligence gathering groups.
around the world. Sophisticated programs break the information down and separate critical issues and potentially valuable transmissions, which are only checked and verified by hand after being filtered through lots of software. This is where the translation work comes in. High speed, high pressure scanning of lots of documents, one after another, sometimes in multiple languages during the same day, since priority isn’t determined by language group. It isn’t French one day, German the next. It’s whatever looks important at the moment, and you might go through a dozen languages in a day. Well…if you’re Parvati or Hermione, or one of the other people who work at different hours of day or night. I only know a few of the Romance languages, so I’ll get a mix of those and English at first. I might have to broaden my knowledge of local dialects before I have real value, though.

In the meantime, while I’m still training, I’ve had to face one ugly little task that I hate above all others. If I didn’t love Harry, I would never do this. Some things are easy for some people. Like golf. Some like it, some don’t. This is one of those things I hate, but even I see the basic purpose behind me learning this kind of thing. It’s just that, deep in my heart, it really is something I never wanted to do.

I have to learn to shoot a gun.

Daddy tried to take me hunting a few times. Mostly for birds and small game. It was less about eating and more about hanging out with power players and bigwigs while you blow away anything with fur or feathers. I hated it. I always missed on purpose, because I never really wanted to be responsible for killing anything. Plus, they lug the carcasses around like trophies, crowing about what a fine day it was, and all I remember was looking at the bloody corpse of something that had been flying or scurrying around that morning, and thinking that their eyes looked empty. That was my introduction to the concept of death. One day, something is alive, and then it isn’t, and nothing can change that. Maybe I don’t cope so well with existential angst, so I devoted my energy to pastimes that aren’t potentially fatal to anyone but me.

Until now.

It’s business. We might, theoretically, have to shoot our way out of here at some point, even though there are emergency tunnels that lead to vehicles in nearby buildings, as well as to the sewers. We could get out without a fight, if we really wanted to, but I wouldn’t always be here. What if I were alone at Harry’s and my place? If I were on the street and no one was handy to protect me? If Ron got hit and I was suddenly alone? I hate these thoughts, but they’re things I have to think about now. I don’t want to be without Harry, and I won’t break my word to Sir Albus. I signed on for this, and I’ll do what I have to do. Even if I hate it.

On the bright side, I did manage to pick the smallest, cutest, most effeminate model of pistol that was available, and even Ron sighed and shook his head when I picked it out of the weapons locker. I guess Harry prefers nine millimeter pistols, which are the standard issue for law enforcement, because it makes it hard to identify the user, and making the whole world a suspect makes his work easier. I’d never seen Ron take his pistol out of his holster until we used the target range for the first time. It’s like a goddamn cannon in his pocket. The fucking thing was a foot long if it was an inch, and next to the tiny, cute little thing I picked, it looks even more ridiculously big. All I could do was raise an eyebrow and ask, “Compensating much?”

His reply, chillingly enough, was, “No…not really. I just like knowing that, if I hit someone with this, just once, my problem with them is solved…permanently.”

I work with such fun people.

As it turns out, I’m not really that bad of a shot, and the recoil on this model is very mild, so my
wrists can handle the slight kick when it fires without completely spoiling my aim. Not bad really. I don’t like the idea of ever using it, but I’m not required to carry it with me all the time. I have forged special permits for it, all legal looking and backed up by Hermione’s ability to change the local records for such things. My records might be a little shady, but Mr. Deacon Malloy has never had so much as a parking ticket.

A little practice and...well...I might be able to hit a person with it from a distance of more than fifty feet...if I had time to aim carefully and the weather was clear. Not like Harry. He unloads a whole clip, one handed, into the target at the maximum range, looking distracted the whole fucking while. When the paper target finally reaches us, there’s only one hole. One big hole. An entire clip of bullets went just left of center, right where the heart would be, in a grouping less than two inches wide.

I have the coolest boyfriend ever. Scary...but cool.

Speaking of same, we were only parted for one day since my training started. This time, I know all the details. I was there while it was planned, but I was quiet and stayed in the background while Hermione ran computer models of the location and Harry chose his time and place for execution.

A day later, he was back in my arms, and a mafia don was dead, shot through the head, right through a ‘bulletproof’ windshield, by a single armor piercing round, while his limo left his guarded home. His relationship with contracting firms hired by the Enigma Corporation might never be fully known by the rest of the world, but other families will slowly get the picture. Every group approached to push forward on the downtown revitalization project is losing people fast, and when they back off and sever ties with Mr. Riddle, they suddenly stop losing people. The people who haven’t figured this out, the cheap dime store gangsters that don’t have the brains to plot a burglary, are busy killing each other in record numbers, blaming each other at random for the recent deaths. It’s chaos theory come to life in Chicago, and Harry is the butterfly that started the storm.

But today, none of that matters. Today is different. Today is special. This is Harry’s twenty-fifth birthday. He made mine the best birthday of my life so far, so how could I do any less for him? This won’t be a day of sit ups and push ups, of burning abs and tired legs. It won’t be spent firing rounds into targets, or memorizing my fake credentials and history for a name that never really existed. It won’t be spent in front of a computer screen until my eyeballs burn and my head aches from trying to turn French or Spanish or Italian into English on the fly. This day will be different from all the others, because most days, and it might sound shallow to say this, are about me...me...me! I like them that way, and Harry knows this about me, and loves me that way, so it’s all okay. But not today. Today is about Harry.

It isn’t yet six o’clock in the morning, and my head has been whirring all night. He’s always awake before me, but I woke early today. He’s had to push and prod to keep me moving this week, but today I have a motivation that is even stronger than any mere responsibility. Harry deserves a special day, as special as the one he gave me, and that’s what he will have.

But first...I have to find a way to get out from underneath his arm. I like his arm. It’s nice. Well muscled without unnecessary bulk. Very comforting when it’s curled around me at night. It’s just astonishing how perfectly I fit here, spooned into his chest. How could I resist wriggling my way back into his chest? I guess waking up at the same time wouldn’t be such a bad thing.

A moment like this can’t be purchased. It can only be absorbed. Right now I know how much I really have. This closeness...this warmth. You can’t get this in a store. Admittedly, shopping is a nice way to kill some time, and it certainly gives me a warm fuzzy feeling inside...but not like this.
I’m safer here than anywhere in the world. I have everything. I have Harry. All of him. More so than anyone else ever has, and in a way that transcends anything I’ve ever known. This isn’t just a special day for Harry. It’s just one of an endless string of special days for me, all made better because I can wake up here, like this, with him.

Also… I like the rather ferocious morning erection pressing into my backside right now. No complaints whatsoever. Makes me think a little more wriggling might be pleasurable, if not absolutely necessary. Also makes me think that, with a little contortionism, I could do away with the bikini briefs that are separating my bare ass from the hard cock I mean to make use of this morning.

Originally, I meant to make Harry breakfast before he woke up. I think he’ll like this better. Besides, I may know good food, but I’m a lousy cook. I know he’d love me just as much if I showed up with lame eggs, burnt toast and orange juice, but I think my new morning scenario is more of a win-win.

Mmmm. God, I’m like an alley cat in heat when I get like this! He’s still breathing those soft, even breaths just behind my ear, blissfully asleep, and all I can think of is how good it feels to rub back against that heat and stiffness inside his boxers. I haven’t even moved his arm, my briefs are shoved down to just above my knees, and the sensation of his boxer-wrapped dick rubbing between the cheeks of my ass is unbearable. It isn’t enough! I mean, it’s supposed to be about Harry today, but I’m kinda having more of a ‘me-centric’ moment here.

And it isn’t as difficult as you might imagine to slip boxers open one handed with my back turned. This may say some unflattering things about just how much experience I have in bed, but just call me goal-oriented and lets leave it at that, shall we?

That’s more like it. Bare flesh, wonderfully hot, rock hard and just incredible between the cheeks of my ass. I can feel every last little detail, right down to his pulse while it throbs behind me. When it brushes against me, you know perfectly well where, it makes the little hairs on the back of my neck rise with apprehension.

Damn. No way to reach lube without… wait. Unless…it isn’t like I haven’t done without anything but spit before, and under infinitely worse circumstances than this. Oh, how I envy what Harry’s about to wake up to…and soon. I can reach back with one hand fairly easily, and that’s enough. Enough to work a couple of fingers about, soak them again, and work some more. Let’s face it, I have experience on my side, and lots of it.

And then it’s time to bring that hand around again, and start slicking him. I can hear him stir a little while I wrap my hand around him, especially around the head. Even in his sleep he can feel that. I get a stubbly chin brushed against my neck, and it’s just the kind of thing that makes the need in me flare to life even more dramatically than before. A funny thing about being a bottom through and through. Your cock can be stone hard, and the idea of just grabbing hold of it and tugging away until you come just isn’t enough. You suddenly feel empty inside, and only one thing will make it better.

Feeling the tip of him against me, poised for entry while I shiver a little, makes my stomach flip and my pulse race. Makes my face hot and my head cloudy, because I can’t think of anything but what I want. What I need. What he can give. Nudging back, and it isn’t easy, because spit isn’t quite enough to make it quick, but I don’t care about a little discomfort right now. That doesn’t matter. What matters is that I can feel it moving into me, closer and closer to making that emptiness go away. More, and then I can feel the difference. He’s waking. The arm tightens a little, then loosens. The breathing changes. He’s just a couple inches into me, and I can feel him
shift a little.

“Mm…ss’ wh’? ‘ey? Hmmm. That’s…niiiccce. G’morning.”

He can’t see my smirk, but he ought to be able to feel it run right through me. I move my hips slowly, savoring the feel of him moving into me. Warm lips meet the nape of my neck, and I push back almost unconsciously, aware of the soft burn of friction, and not giving a damn.

“Happy…birthday, Harry. Love you.”

The lips pause, then caress again. “ Very happy. Kind of…getting that impression…plus some. Mmm. Love you too.”

And then he’s back at work on my neck, making me work my way onto him out of sheer desperate frustration, and even I get surprised by the little sounds I make when I get so worked up that I can’t control myself very well. He isn’t pushing hard, just letting me do as I please, at least until I slip a hand back and grab at his hip. Then I can feel him push in response, making the last inches sink in faster than before, making it hurt in a way that I need right now. The fabric of his boxers and the soft fur of his groin are close and tight up against me, and he’s moving slowly, inside of me, and the emptiness that made me so frantic a minute ago is forgotten in the space a few wild heartbeats, replaced by the conscious, palpable awareness of him all around me, in me, surrounding me completely.

There isn’t a lot of room for movement like this, but I don’t think I want anything wilder. I don’t want the staid, traditional in-out, on my back or on my knees routine. I want this. This exquisite closeness, every little movement something needy and precious. It isn’t hard to pull his arms around me, given that he relents and lets me do whatever I want. He reads my moods so well, takes charge or lets me do as I want, always depending on what I need or want at the moment. That’s why he’s really mine. That’s why this feels so good.

Little thrusts, my body flexing back against his, wrapped in him like a living blanket, meeting every push with my own hungry need. It’s like pressure building behind my eyes, making my breath short, making me hazy and confused and…God what his teeth do to my neck is enough to make anyone insane!

Time is nothing. It blurs and shifts and passes while I hover on the brink of satisfaction that won’t come easily because this isn’t one of my usual positions. My cock is aching, but when he tried to touch it I had just enough strength to pull his hand away and keep him wrapped around me. If my knees were any tighter together they’d be fused shut, and the prickly heat of perspiration and frustrated need is making me slick against the heat of his chest behind me. I can hear a lover’s whisper in my ears, and every word is like nectar.

When it comes, it’s because I’m as frantic as he is, grinding hard in search of something that needs to happen and happen soon. Pushing back against the short, hard thrusts he makes into me, mewling with a hunger that would make me ashamed if I could bother to care at a time like this. Bracing, but not really painful, because there’s comparatively little friction involved, and just a building pressure in me that moves through me, choking off thought and speech until my I can feel it pound through my groin in a rush.

“Ha…Har…ry….keep…I…mmm…nngh…AAAAHH! AH! AHHH!”

So I’m not exactly articulate at a moment like this. Hey, do you quote Shakespeare when a ten inch cock has been pumping the ever-loving fuck out of you for the better part of a half hour? I think not!
I can feel him let go a heartbeat later, tense and gasping, mouth clamped to my neck while he clenches his eyes and comes hard and well. Normally I’d taunt him by working my ass for every last drop, but the urgency is gone, spilling out of me in little droplets that roll down the side of my cock and onto my leg, and the maddening need has shifted to a drowsy lassitude that makes me want to just let him hold me for awhile. We both need a minute to recover, given that we barely woke, and I don’t want to move. I want him in me, like this, just awhile longer.

“Love you.” I do like hearing it, especially like this, even if I feel a little awkward with my briefs around my knees, his cock up my ass and come still trickling down my waist. I chuckle a little when he kisses me just behind the ear.

“I was sooo going to serve you breakfast in bed. At least…that was the plan.”

“No one complaining on this side of the bed. I like this plan just fine.”

Do I know my man or what? And the lips are busy just behind my ear again. No complaining here either.

“Now this…is the best…birthday…I’ve ever…had. Mmmm.”

I let his hand slip down finally, mostly because I’m too weak and shaky to dispute anything he wants at the moment, and also because what he wants is pretty agreeable to me, seeing as he just softly wrapped it around my flaccid cock, letting warm and calloused skin surround it, completely ignoring the stickiness of the moment. He doesn’t mind. I can tell by the way he keeps…keeps…oh! I can feel the difference when he starts stiffening again inside me!

It’s going to be a very long morning, and a very good birthday, and he hasn’t even opened his first present yet. Happy birthday, Harry. Breakfast can wait.

TBC!!!
Oscar Wilde may be long dead, but his one-liners will last through the ages. I think he would have liked that. That blasé and yet sparkling commentary has been emulated by generations of queens with attitude, and what a legacy to have left behind. I probably won’t leave anything so significant after me, but I can live with that. Especially like this.

Harry has been in high spirits all day, and I have been chiefly responsible for making him that way. I never really made it out of his pajamas, in spite of breakfast and a lengthy lounge in the library after he opened his presents. Some of them were admittedly hurried, but one was received every bit as well as I could have hoped.

The portrait.

Canvas, oil paints and hours of labor you can measure in quantities like dollars or days. The look on a lover’s face when they see what you created, wholly inspired by love and admiration, is a completely different story. I admit that I put a lot of effort into making this particular work my best, and it was well worth it.

The man in the suit is striking enough, even half in profile, but the eyes and the set of the shoulders tell you everything. The impression of force and vigor, tempered by the implication of a weight being willingly carried, however much a burden it might be. It hints at resignation, power that simmers and waits to be used with precision, and intensity. It is Harry…or as close as my talents could come to making him live on canvas.

Next to the self portraits I made, it stands out handsomely as a breath of happiness and health. Which tells me that, at the time that I painted the others, my self image wasn’t exactly a glowing review of me. What I wonder now is, how many changes would be found in my self portrait now and in the future? Will it always evolve, as I have, molding, shifting and changing to meet every new circumstance? Harry will always be my inspiration, because with him, I see myself through new eyes.

Potential. I see it now. Some of it. His words by the little German deli were prophetic, and he is here to see them come true. In a way, that’s his real birthday gift. There are a lot of things about myself that I don’t like, or probably shouldn’t like but just can’t or won’t change, but I don’t think…I don’t think I feel the contempt for myself that I once did. The person Harry met in that prison hated every part of himself bitterly, despising the weakness that made his life into a living hell. That person is dead. I’m still figuring out who the hell I am now, but all I need to know is that Harry will still be here when I work it out.

I came from heaven, where the angels sipped champagne and worried over brand names. It was a long way to fall…but I’m learning to stretch those wings again, and I’m not even scared of how high I might fly.

No workouts today. Just lazing in the library in pajamas in the afternoon, soaking up coffee and tea. (Sadly, it’s decaffeinated, because Snape’s orders about stimulants are still in effect. My anxiety gets worse when I’m hyper and jittery, and while we might bend the rules a little tonight, we won’t break them in anything less than grand style.) I read a wonderful little volume of Wilde’s
critical essays while Harry hung his portrait and glowed with pride. He more than loves it, and it shows. Wilde became dear to me the first time I read ‘The Importance Of Being Earnest’. It’s timeless, in part because anyone who ever hid their sexuality and lived that double life understands the sense of exhilaration and freedom that comes with a new persona. The presumptions attached to where you’ve been and what you’ve done just slide away, and you can reinvent yourself, shedding your skin like a snake.

The significance of a story about a man who lives two lives isn’t lost on me now, either. Everything is different now. My life in no way even resembles the fucking tragedy that it used to be, and even if memory haunts and dreams betray, when I wake up and open my eyes, I open them to look upon paradise.

I have every right to be proud, too. This morning’s sexual Olympics were not the limit of my talents, even if they were pretty amazing in their own right. It might sound just the slightest bit whorish, but even though we got fairly vigorous in the shower earlier, I’m not a damn bit sore, and even though it’s only been a few hours, I can feel the vague and creeping urge to indulge myself a little more calling to me like some siren from the rocks. It’s hard to be anything but kittenish on a day like this. Well fed and rested, sexually replete, and free to properly enjoy being the lazy, sensual creature that I really am.

And then there’s the night to come. I can finally dress up the way I want to and feel right. It’s been all business lately, and there was little point is putting effort into my appearance. At last I can get out on the town a little, even if we won’t be going too crazy with it. Green Dolphin Street is on the menu tonight, and any place that mixes live jazz with a top drawer menu is well worth dressing my best for!

What a night. What a life. It was good to bend the rules, even if they were only very small bends. A little wine with dinner, a few items from the menu that aren’t quite what the doctor ordered. A late night dancing and looking my very best. None of these are strictly good for me in the way that Doc Snape would define good, but sometimes the best thing for you is to let the rules slide away for a little while.

Of course, shooing Ron away from the car for a while so that I could hitch my skirt up and impale myself on Harry’s cock in the back seat wasn’t anything that Snape forbade…but damn, was that good for me too! Ron grumbled all the way home about cleaning the upholstery, but it was worth it a hundred times over. It was Harry’s birthday, and the rules can go to hell for a day, because tomorrow life goes back to normal, and the things we have to do and plan take over again. This was our time, and our freedom, and we deserve this.

On his birthday, he thanks me for everything, which is still perverse to me, because I can never imagine myself being worthy of thanks for anything, but I’m getting the idea…slowly and surely…that I’m earning this place I’ve made for myself, just like I earned all the other places and situations I’ve lived in and lived through. It’s just…I’m not used to it feeling this good.

Tomorrow I’ll be training again, exercising before breakfast and studying here and at the ‘office’, adapting to yet another change in a life that feels like it hardly ever involves anything else. Tonight, well…tonight I’m right here, feeling the even rhythm of his breath on my neck, wrapped in arms that soothe away worries, and basking in the glow of a good night spent with the one I love.

And knowing I deserve it…that makes it all the better.
“He really is a little workhorse, isn’t he?” Ron mused quietly to Harry, all the while watching as Hermione drilled the slim blond on computer protocols and shared notation for comments that would be recognized by the others in the lab.

Harry didn’t really take his eyes off of his work, which at the moment consisted of a table covered by a single enormous blueprint of Blaise Zabini’s home. Exits and entrances had been circled in red ink, and the location of the primary power line and fuse box had been noted as well. Not that a home invasion was being planned as an absolute, but since Drake would be in there, completely surrounded by Zabini and his cronies, Harry had insisted on drafting a complete plan for extracting Drake at the first sign of trouble. Unspoken was the fact that, if it came to that, Harry would have to kill everyone in the house except Drake, just to ensure the absence of any witnesses that could trace involvement to Drake. Harry scribbled notes in the margins of the blueprint before nodding softly.

“Yeah. He really is. You saying you approve?”

Ron blushed faintly, then clenched his jaw with an air of resigned irritation. “Well…yeah. Except about my upholstery. You two really need to knock that shit off. I mean, do you even know how stereotypical it is for a new couple to hump every few minutes like happy little gay bunnies? That aside, I’ll admit to this…he looks like he’s proud to be here, and he really works at fitting into the job here. So yeah…I approve.”

Harry smirked mildly, tracing the outline of an air duct with his fingertip while he answered. “Cool. Of course, this has nothing to do with you and Hermione finally going on a date because he pushed both of your buttons?”

Ron’s faint blush shot to instant crimson. “Subject closed for discussion. You so totally have my permission to just drop it. Preferably off of a cliff.”

“Heh. C’mon. You know you’re happy. She’s happy. Why be secretive? No one will think you’re less macho just because you’re in love.”

“No…really…it would be completely alright if you shut the fuck up. I don’t ask for the inner secrets of your love life. I just clean up after them! Upholstery, dude, it’s not a bedsread! Can’t just shove it in the wash and call it a day. Things between Hermione and me are just fine, and that’s all you need to know. Please…forget I said anything. I’ll even disapprove if we can just move on and get down to business.”

Harry chuckled. Drake turned his head from his work and smiled from the other end of the room. Harry looked back with a wink, then turned his head back to the task at hand. ‘He loves the sound of that. Even here, in all this mess. Note to self…chuckle more. Maybe even laugh.’

“Fine, fine! You and I will be in the car down the street about a block and a half away. We’ll be wired for headset communication, you with the standard rig and me with the throat patch mic and earpiece. I’ll move to the outside back of the building as soon as Drake is indoors. The most obvious entrance is here…or here. Tentatively, I’d say I’ll wait to enter the back yard until you give me the signal. In the event of security alarms or motion detectors, I don’t want to give any advance notice of my presence. If I have to, I’ll go in fast enough that I’ll still have the edge while they wonder what the hell is going on.

“In a scenario like this, we’ll be going for speed. I’ll move room to room, ‘cleaning’ anyone I see until I’ve got Drake safe. You’d be coming straight to the front entrance while I work the building.
Once Drake and I are out, all that matters is moving away quietly and quickly…no pursuit allowed. That means terminal force if necessary, and Dean has cooked up some new countermeasures to discourage followers. I’ve got three maps from Hermione covering possible routes home to keep us away from an obvious path of retreat. Those are for you, and just so you know, you’ll be playing the chauffeur again, in case any cops stop and inquire about an expensive car parked with a driver waiting. All clear?”

“Crystal clear. Pretty straightforward. What’s Dean got for us now? Anything I’ll have to train for? At least his instructions never read like the ones for hooking up my stereo.”

“Well…nothing too complicated, but one of them can’t be used while driving, so I’ll handle that. The other items will become part of our standard ‘black bag’ equipment, so after this job, you’ll get briefed on them so that you can use them alone. You know what an EMP is?”

“Huh? Emergency Medical…no wait…what the hell is an EMP?”

Harry smirked wickedly. “Electro Magnetic Pulse. Dean’s rigged a miniature version for us. It disrupts electronics as soon as it’s triggered. Shuts off cars, computers, communications. Non-lethal and safe as can be…unless the guy near it has a pacemaker. If you time the charge right, it could stop a pursuing vehicle without having to resort to gunplay in public. Very handy. And that’s not all! We’ve got a short range microwave emitter that will fry circuitry in any modern car with an onboard computer that controls the engine. A little less safe for humans, and I wouldn’t want to miss with it because there’s no telling what might get fried off by a thing like that.”

Ron shuddered. “Brrr…weapons that kill cars. Bad. I hate them on principle. Good for us, but it still makes me queasy just thinking about it. You got any idea how hard it is to replace or repair the onboard computer for a new car? It’s a lot worse than cleaning the upholstery because you had a good date night!”

“Well I wasn’t planning on using it on any of our vehicles! I’m just glad we’ve got some new non-lethal tricks up our sleeve. You know we have a strict policy of not engaging in combat with local law enforcement if we can possibly help it. These might just save our bacon before we’re through here.”

Harry rolled up the papers and handed Ron the marked maps that Hermione had prepared, with a glance back at the blond head currently focused on the computer in front of him. Ron took the papers with a nod and headed back to his own desk, rarely used but still ready when he needed it, and started his estimates on possible response times by law enforcement and safer, faster routes through local traffic. Harry was tense, and Ron knew it, but there was nothing to be done for it. The tension was rooted in having a boyfriend who was about to frame an ex-mobster for revenge, all because he’d rather expose himself to risk rather than ask for a simple execution.

Nope. Nothing tense about that. Poor bastard.

Harry took the lift down to the ballistics lab and target range. Oddly, weapons practice was calming for him. The simple routine of cleaning, sighting and firing them was mind numbing and vaguely comforting. His mind could concentrate on other things while his body went through the well trained motions of the task at hand. Here he could think, and his thoughts weren’t entirely peaceful.

“What the fuck was I thinking? I can’t believe I’m letting him do this! He seems like he’s fine with it, and it isn’t like he hasn’t been taking this seriously…but I just can’t help it…I hate this. I’ve never been this nervous about anything. Now I’m suddenly thinking about all the wrong things at all the wrong times. I should have said no…or no, I shouldn’t have. Fuck’
Harry calmly emptied the clip of the 9mm into the target, then placed it on the small counter and picked up the snub-nosed .38 revolver. A traditional police weapon, the .38 had been largely phased out as criminals began to use a wider and more powerful array of firearms. As a result, law enforcement had upgraded its side arms to keep up with the increased threats, and the 9mm with its larger amount of clip fed ammunition had become the new weapon of choice. Still, Harry wasn’t one to let a once sharp skill go to waste, and a little practice with a revolver was worthwhile just on general principle.

’When I found him, I could tell he’d let himself be a dependent if I let him. Tempting…because he’s so fucking beautiful. So smart…and funny…and not from this fucking world in bed. I could… I could make him do anything I want. He’d do it, just because I told him to. Who wouldn’t want that? Someone who fixates on you…only wants you, depends on you for everything and hangs on your every word. Jesus…it’s every man’s pipe dream! Naturally, I managed to completely fuck that up. Oh, no…Harry couldn’t have a boyfriend that does exactly as he’s told and stays quietly uninvolved. I had to want him to be well. Whole. Complete. Doesn’t that just complicate the ever-loving fuck out of things?’

The grouping of shots was nearly perfect at shorter ranges, but with the target at maximum distance he’d missed his mark several times. Not by a great distance, and certainly close enough to kill with, but nowhere near his usual par. Harry grimaced and removed the spent ammunition from the revolver, then loaded it again. Six bullets. He’d keep going until he was back on par.

’I finally get something I want, but this isn’t all about me anymore. I was alone for so fucking long. The others always thought those little vacations I took involved getting laid somewhere. A normal guy would have just met someone and had some fun. No strings, no hassles. Not me though. I just had to complicate things by waiting for love. They’ll never know how much of a sap I really am. Drake was a beautiful mess in there. So much potential, practically snuffed out of existence and just barely flickering like candlelight. I couldn’t…I couldn’t ignore it. He’s got to be who he is. What he can become. I can tell him what to do…but I can’t tell him what to be. This is who he is. He wouldn’t have done the things I have. He wouldn’t kill. I guess…I wouldn’t want to change that…even if it means going through this.’

He unloaded six rounds, all within an inch or two of the center. Almost perfect. Harry snorted derisively. ’Isn’t that just like life?’

Dean’s footsteps echoed faintly behind him. The tall, slim man was carrying his clipboard and still wearing a white lab coat. Harry pulled off the heavy plastic ‘earmuffs’ that muffled most of the shattering noise of gunfire, and turned around, grateful for the break in his concentration.

“Hey, Harry. My team just finished assembling the last of the equipment you wanted for this gig. Everything has been tested twice, all in working order. We’ll be going over it with Drake in a few minutes. I’m headed upstairs. See you there.”

“Okay. Cool. Thanks, Dean. I know this wasn’t a standard mission, so the extra effort is appreciated. Be there as soon as I put away a few things.”

“Ciao.”

And Dean was headed back to the elevators. Harry leaned back against the wall with a puff of breath, then stared at the ceiling, taking the deep slow breaths that long years of training had taught him, bringing his mood completely and utterly under control. His heartbeat slowed, and in less than a minute he was as pacific and mellow as a sleeping infant. If his thoughts and feelings sometimes ran wild, he didn’t allow them to show on his face or in his behavior. Not here.
The guns were quickly cleaned and returned to their lockers, the used target sheets pulled from the line and dumped into the trash, and the headset he’d been wearing to dampen sound was hung next to the others. It was time to work out the particulars with Drake, and make sure he knew how to make effective use of the equipment he’d be carrying in to Zabini’s house.

Hermione’s show, I guess. It’s a funny thing, seeing her listened to so seriously by men who carry guns and kill people, while she wears scruffy old blue jeans and a tank top, her hair tied back by a faded bandanna. Score one for the hippy-chick. Dean is here, and Harry and Ron are at the other sides of the table. We’re the only ones here at the moment. The rest of the staff is working at their stations, while we convene here to figure out exactly how and when I’m going to make Blaise pay.

“Okay…Drake, this is the layout of the house I pulled from the city records. The largest room in the back left corner of the house was intended to be a master bedroom suite, and it’s only a guess, but it probably still serves that purpose. There are guest bedrooms and storage rooms upstairs, but the primary rooms are probably still following the original specs for the building. Kitchens, bathrooms, etcetera…that kind of thing is likely still the same even after many years.

The master suite or the study are the most likely places for a computer. I tried to hack him and make this easy, but as you already know, he stays disconnected from the net when he doesn’t need to be, and his router and security equipment are top flight. I can break in very easily if you make sure he’s connected for at least five minutes or just load the contents of the disc I’ve prepared. This way we have two opportunities. One is simple and is based on you getting permission or just making sure he’s online while I’m ready and waiting for him, and the other just uploads what we want onto his computer.

Second, you’ll be well equipped so that we can stay in contact with you at all times, and our equipment is better than anything these guys would have seen. You should be perfectly safe even if searched or checked for wires. Dean…if you could take over?”

Dean stands up and opens a small case while I try to keep my head clear. Four hours of trying to translate Interpol communications and scan for any oblique references to this operation or Riddle and the Enigma Corp. is fogging my mind. When you immerse in a foreign language, it becomes part of you, and even dominates the way you think and express yourself. That’s the nature of language, it subtly influences your frame of reference, and snapping out of it afterwards is tricky on short notice.

Of course…it is my ass on the line, so I think I can manage to pay careful attention to this, even if it gives me a headache!

“First off, you’ll be carrying a GPS tracking tag that’s small enough to go completely unnoticed. We could pinpoint your location anywhere in the world, so you’ll be covered even if something happens and you have to leave the house. Nothing short of a miracle would allow its detection by people who aren’t actively looking for it and don’t know exactly where it is.

Second, I’ve wired up some good looking bling with a microphone that could pick up a whisper at twenty paces. Again, it’s so damn small that I could fit a few dozen on a fingertip and still have room left. The signal is discreet…they won’t pick it up with anything short of the kind of equipment we can afford.

Next, we have self defense. We can’t do anything obvious, so guns are out, and we all know that they’ll be looking for things like that. If the help he keeps is any good at all, they’ll at least pat you down and check your purse for serious weaponry. Instead of guns, we’re sticking to chemistry.
We have one pill capsule, quick dissolving powder with no taste, that can be dropped into a drink easily. It’ll put a man of average size to sleep in a matter of maybe ten minutes, especially when mixed with alcohol. The most intense effects really last about a half hour, but the sleep that comes afterwards is heavy and might last quite awhile if the subject is tired anyway.

You’ll also have one ring with a paste stone that comes off with a hard twist, and underneath it is a poisoned spike less than an eighth of an inch long. One poke with this and paralysis should set in seconds later. Interesting side note, it’s related to the toxins made famous by voodoo practitioners, extracted from the venom of certain fishes. It’s harmless, but the effects last for hours, shutting off the part of the brain that allows you to command your own limbs. You can see and feel and hear what’s going on around you, but you can’t move. I recommend you only use this if you have to leave in a hurry or are in serious danger.

Also, I’ve loaded a small perfume mister with a mix that will drop a man in a seconds and leave him sleeping like a baby all day. There’s enough in it to knock out a whole cocktail party, so I can’t see you needing more than a little even in a worst case scenario. Remember to hold your breath and back away after you use it, or you’ll be playing ‘sleeping beauty’ too!

Finally, we’ve got a sharp little blade that’s hidden inside this lipstick. Don’t use this one for touch ups, just bring some from home. You really don’t want to cut yourself on this one. It’s surgical steel and it can slice through a tin can like it was butter. Not really meant for fighting, but it might come in handy if you keep it tucked in behind your belt. Never know when you might need to cut your way free of something, right?

Finally, we have the disc itself, which I’ve conveniently labeled as a burned copy of club mixes. The first track on it is actually some hip hop I loaded on, just in case someone were to actually listen. Ideally, this allows you an excuse to load it into the computer, claiming that you want some music you like in the background. While it plays, the rest of the information on the disk will be silently moving into place, thanks to Hermione’s programming. Is all of this clear?”

I admit to being impressed as hell. Frankly, I feel like quite the Mata Hari, with my purse full of poison and my sneaky CD full of viral code and illicit porn. They’ve planned for every eventuality, and knowing that Harry will be right outside is comforting…except for the fact that, even though no one has said it, if this goes sour all of a sudden, I know Harry will come in and kill everyone except me.

Sobering thought, isn’t it?

Other lives are in my hands. If I screw this up, they all die, not just me. Anybody with Blaise that night is at risk of losing their life if they hurt me, and none of them even know it. I remember Vinnie and Greg. They were Blaise’s best friends from school. They lived the high life because they stuck by him and earned their place. Not exactly original thinkers, but nice enough guys in their own way. They were always nice to me when I was with Blaise, and the idea of them dying just because I got caught doing this is a lot more unsettling than I like.

But it’s really too late for that now. There’s only one answer to give.

“Understood. I’ll concentrate on getting access to the computer, maybe right after dinner, hinting that I’d like some private time with Blaise. Find the computer, either in a study or den, or in the master suite, and then get my ‘music’ and make sure there’s a connection. Ideally, load a drink for Blaise and get him to take a nice nap while I let the comp load up. I already worked out an excuse to just drink and talk, but I don’t really want to talk about it here. It’s enough to say that, I think he’ll respect me enough to leave me alone when I imply that I haven’t come for sex. He isn’t all bad, so I’m almost sure it will keep him off me. Last, my cover story has been that I’m a ‘kept boy’
for a wealthy older man, and that covers my needing to be home at a reasonable hour. If we time this right, I should only be there a couple of hours, and then I’ll have a taxi pick me up and drop me off two blocks away, where Ron and Harry will pick me up as soon as the taxi is out of sight. Sounds like everything is in order.”

And that’s that. One phone call later, a date will be set and the clock starts ticking toward the end of Blaise’s carefree life. Maybe I’m a son of a bitch for doing it this way, but I wanted this, and now I’ll have it. Blaise Zabini is going down.

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“Hey! Dee, good to hear from you. No, things have been great here. Don’t mind all the bad press, that stuff has nothin’ to do with me. It’s been all aces here. Just Vinnie an’ Greg an’ me. Like old times, especially if you come around. Think you can get free for dinner some night? Nah… weekends no good for me…gotta watch the club. Keeps the staff on their toes when I’m around. Weekdays are great, though. Yeah…that works! Thursday, huh. Sevenish? That works for me. This’ll be nice. You might not believe it until you try it, but my cooking is nothing to scoff at these days. I’m in the wrong business…I think I should have opened a restaurant. It’ll be good to sit down and actually catch up. I got a few things to say…and I think you’ll like them. Okay…we’re on then. See ya later, kiddo. Looking forward to it. Ciao.”

Blaise leaned back in his office chair, the antique leather kind that swiveled just as well as any modern one, but carried an air of old style class that he loved. He pulled a Cuban cigar from his humidor and snipped the end off, then swirled it in cognac before he moved it to his lips. The spark of a match and with a few deep draws the end was smoldering nicely. Fucking heavenly.

Life was a very sweet thing.
Congressman Lucius Malfoy closed the doors of his office, having only just shooed away the last of his assistants and campaign personnel. No matter how important his campaign might be, some matters required the utmost of privacy. This call was one of them.

In the world of politics, there were three kinds of people. There were those who did not matter, and they were the largest category. The vast majority of people had no value of any kind, and no significant input save for their single vote. That vote was easy to acquire through the standard party lines and a little well groomed charisma, and once those little votes were given, the relationship between voter and elected promptly ended until the next election cycle. It wasn’t the substance that mattered with these people, it was the image, the quotes, and the ‘perception’…not the reality.

The second group was made of those people who did matter, and there was a surprising number of them. Sometimes a real estate executive, other times a union representative. A respected artist or actor, or a little known lobbyist with good connections. The chairman of a charitable foundation or the chief of the local police. In their own small way, these people had clout. They had a small measure of influence, and that made them valuable. Useful. Worth the effort of dealing with from day to day and week to week.

The third group was different. It was much, much smaller. The third group was made up of those who TRULY mattered. It was a tiny club, occupied by a handful of people that had no boundaries, and to whom words like ‘state’ or ‘country’ meant absolutely nothing except abstract differences of location on a map. With these people, the rules were simple and clear no matter where they were, and no matter who they were dealing with. They had connections far beyond the norm, and wealth that made all things possible. These were the people you always made time for.

People like Mr. Riddle.

At precisely 2:15 pm, Lucius Malfoy sat at his desk and opened a small bottle of Johnny Walker Blue Label scotch. He sipped it neat, no ice, and savored the warm feeling that came of knowing that his future was about to be made into a concrete certainty. To date, he had enjoyed two discreet conversations with that repulsive little lawyer that worked for the Enigma Corp., Pettigrew, but given that his ability to get things done in Chicago depended on his level of interest, he hadn’t devoted the whole of his time and effort to getting the Downtown Revitalization Project back on its feet. The personal involvement of Mr. Riddle made certain rewards possible, and allowed the opportunity to make a good impression on one of the people who truly mattered. That was worth putting the whole of his influence behind the project! TV soundbites were one thing…but with the right motivation, Lucius knew he had enough influence to make a very serious difference.
That was the secret of American politics, and in many ways, politics the world over. It was a game of treading the fine line between people's interests. A fine example was immigration. The people who didn’t matter hated it, and wanted it severely restricted, and would vote for anyone who would promise relief from the perceived tidal wave of economic competition that came from arriving immigrants.

Then there were the people who did matter, and these were split down the middle, some benefiting from low cost, migrant labor, and others opposed to it for various principles. Generally, they just wanted to make their constituents happy, one way or the other. For some it was patriotism or the rule of law, for others, obvious bigotry, but it didn’t really matter what motivated them.

And last came the few who truly mattered, and their word was law. Immigrants and migrant labor reduced average wages and costs, without the sticky attachments of pensions or medical care. Economics dictated that a niche would always exist for foreign workers, and economics always won. Instead of the obvious border being the source of cheap labor, people were being shipped in from impoverished countries around the world, working in hotels, restaurants, casinos and other establishments. All with proper visas, all completely legal, all paid less than an American would expect or charged for room and board, which cut their wages down to a pittance. The obvious targets for politicians and pundits were people with a different skin color, who couldn’t speak English fluently. Less obvious were the people who looked just like the sons or daughters of your neighbors. It was the image…never the substance.

The game of politics was brinksmanship at its finest, finding ways to move legislation that would never become law, but appeared to please the masses, so that you could claim honestly to have ’tried’ on their behalf. You could create impotent, un-funded restrictions and ridiculously mild penalties that satisfied one camp, while doing next to nothing to change the actual situation. All it took was a little time to draw attention away from any given hot-button issue, and a new bone to throw in front of the media dogs, and yesterday’s news was dead and forgotten.

The little people went their way, convinced that they’d won a great victory, or frustrated but at least grateful to their champion. The ones who mattered would either be ecstatic or outraged, and some needed a little finesse to keep them from turning completely against you. The real players, the Tom Riddles of the world, got precisely what they wanted, and the Lucius Malfoys savored the thrill of the game, and enjoyed the rewards it brought. Money was only a scorecard, but the game was the oldest game in the world…power. It wasn’t Riddle’s wealth that really mattered…it was his influence. A few favorable phone calls, and half of Washington would be lining up to back Lucius’ candidacy. Now that was worth some extra effort!

‘Senator Malfoy. God, but I love the ring of that! The last springboard. City alderman, congressman, senator…and there’s only one last pinnacle to climb after that. It’s been a good, long while since a proper Midwesterner took the country’s helm. Here’s a toast to lofty goals!’

The last of the whiskey slid down his throat, sweet, smoky fire that took the edge off of long office days and endless handshakes and phone calls. Then the phone rang. Once…twice…and a heart beat before the third, Lucius raised the phone to his ear and leaned back in his seat with a smile.

“Good afternoon, sir. So very good to speak to you in person at last. Yes…I understand your concern. I think we all want what’s best for Chicago, and I can certainly take steps to move things forward…assuming, of course, that this is something you’d like?

“Very good, sir. Yes. Yes. As it happens, I’ll be dining with the mayor and the police commissioner tonight. Ahhh…and Mr. Scrimgeour will be there? I see. Well, you can rest assured that, with the city’s finest working toward a common goal, we can find ways to bring this project
back online.

“Ah…hah….so you have heard of my candidacy? Well…the support of someone of your stature
would be very, very welcome, sir. Really? Well…with that kind of support on the line, I can
promise you that the whole of my attention will be on getting things in line here.

“As you wish. Good afternoon to you, sir. We’ll look forward to hearing from again. Good bye.”

Lucius put the receiver down with a soft click, then smiled like a Cheshire cat. He’d already
prepared a list of calls he’d have to make. Now that he had the promised support of one of the
world’s most influential men, he could put all of his pieces into play. Alternative contractors to
replace the ones who had pulled out of the deal. Pressure he could level against people who wanted
to become uninvolved but could still be persuaded. Rewards that could be offered to lure the
hesitant back into the fold. Lucius Malfoy had fully entered the game…and Lucius always got
what he wanted.

“…This is complete bullshit, Fletcher! You’re telling me you’ve got nothing? Not one damn thing?
Remember…you owe me, and I can drop a dime and see your ass fired in a heartbeat!”

Remus was putting the pressure on his favorite inside man, a droopy faced little weasel that had
been busted filching money and other valuables from the evidence storage rooms. Fletcher had
been suspended, investigated, and eventually demoted and pushed off to the records department
despite being past his prime and notably ungifted. The man’s only real knack was for disappearing
when trouble was afoot, and that had made him a survivor during past staff cuts. He was almost
retirement age. The threat of being fired now was one that really hit home.

Fletcher leaned across the table of the greasy spoon diner they were eating lunch in and grabbed
Remus’ sleeve, eyes bulging with desperation.

“C’mon! Please! I’m telling ya’…I tried. I know I owe you…and you know I wouldn’t hold out…
not on you! I looked everywhere I could. All I could get was this. The same stuff you already got.
DMV records for a bunch of Potters. Social Security on the same ones. Credit checks. Court
records for all the local ones. Nothin’ new. I wanna help ya’, but I did what I could…not my fault
there’s nothing new to tell, is it? Don’t do this to me, huh, Remmy?”

Fletcher was a liar, a thief, and worst of all…still a cop…even after all the mistakes he’d made. He
only had his job because whenever they could afford to, cops looked out for their brothers and
sisters in blue. If you wore the uniform, you knew the rulebook, and you knew which rules were
rules, and which rules left a little room for imagination. He’d been a good beat cop, and even
decent junior detective, before he’d gone dirty. Remus and others that had known him had all made
statements that had protected Fletcher from being fired or even charged with theft or larceny.
Remus couldn’t say he trusted the man…but he believed him. Fletcher wanted to ride out his last
few years peacefully, then retire with a pension. He was almost certainly telling the truth.

“Okay…okay! I’m just a little frustrated at the moment. I get a big payoff on this job if I can just
find this guy. Problem is, he’s slicker than puppy snot on a rubber doormat! No one has anything
on this guy. No pictures. No computer records. No credit record. All I’ve got is what I’ve started
with. One blurry, black and white picture of a young man with short, dark hair and a scar on his
head. Harry Potter, age 24 or 25 now, white male, black hair, green eyes, maybe 5’10 or 5’11, 170
to 180 pounds. Out of all the Potters in the credit and phone records, and off the state and national
records, none of them match the one I need. I’ll tell ya’ what, Fletch. If you come up with more, or catch a little useful office scuttlebutt by keeping your ears open, there’s a bonus in it for you. A good one. Okay?”

Fletcher sighed and let go of the sleeve he’d been holding, then dived back into his soup and sandwich.

“Okay then! Mmm. Good soup. I can do that. Hey…I ain’t got any paperwork on this…but when you said office rumors…it got me thinking. They were looking for a guy named Harry Black. Black hair, green eyes. Had something to do with that prison riot last month. Right before every punk hood in the fuckin’ city started shooting at their neighbors. I could keep my ear to ground, see if they’re connected.”

Remus paused a moment. He’d read about the prison riots in the paper…along with the endless articles and news coverage of the recent mob killings. He hadn’t heard the name Harry Black brought up once. It had to be one of those pieces of inside information that didn’t get shared with the press. That meant it was probably a very, very shaky lead at best, the kind that needed more work before it could even be mentioned on the news. Still…black hair…green eyes. It was something to think about.

And that raised questions as well. If it was the same guy…why would some weasely British lawyer want the location of a man wanted for questioning about a prison riot? Something in the puzzle was missing…like most of the fucking pieces, but Remus could just feel it. Sometimes, detective work was all intuition…and other times it was strict science. Today it was intuition.

“Okay. Get me what you can on Harry Black. Good enough. I’ll drop the usual payment off at your house. The bonus is still on if this turns out to have any connection to what I’m working on. You know I’m good for it.”

Fletcher nodded his head, then tucked back into soup with gusto. “Okay, Remmy. You got it.”

The TV behind the diner’s service counter was blaring. An Asian teenager with a tattoo had been mistaken for a gang member in a neighborhood that had experienced a recent killing, and was hospitalized in critical condition after being assaulted by local gangers with baseball bats. In another neighborhood, police in riot gear and a SWAT response team had been called in after two rival gangs had entered into a full time turf war, resulting a two hour shootout with five deaths, three hospitalizations, and seven arrests. It was the same every day. It got worse and worse, and the summer heat just kept sizzling. Remus had taken to carrying his coat instead of wearing it for the last week, and there was no end in sight.

Something had to crack soon. Hopefully…it would just be this case. Still, at least the soup was good.

Seamus Finnigan smirked while he worked. He couldn’t help it. He was basically a happy person, especially since he loved his job. The Royal Navy had been good to him, and he’d been good to it. Some people imagined a life of ships and travel in the navy, others still joked that the British navy was still ’run, sodomy, and the lash’, but in truth, it was a far more modern place than the historic picture often painted of it. Especially if you were an intelligence officer and an expert in computer espionage.

Admittedly, he’d joined up with the notion of traveling around the world, but his natural gifts for computer science and programming and his high test scores had put him on the fast track for an
intelligence job, and when he’d realized the difference a career like that could make in his pay…well, that was just one more reason to smile. Still…it would have been nice to travel around the world…mostly because other countries all had women, and women were always interesting, here or anywhere else.

After all, he was twenty five years old, a top specialist in his field, a commissioned officer, and as fit and well trained as the Queen’s finest could ever be. With all that going for him, why wouldn’t he want to crown the experience with a more active dating life? Sadly, he spent much of his time in front a computer, decrypting or debugging this or that. It was a challenge every day, and Seamus liked a challenge, so that was alright enough by him.

Today it was a series of heavily coded messages from Japan. Yesterday it was a new virus that was launched from Tanzania. The day before it had been Eastern European communiqués being scanned for ‘code words’. Always different, always exciting in its own way. Even if it meant lots of office time and occasional weird shifts depending on the priority of the situation.

That aside…meeting some cute girls would be nice. Just the thought was enough to make him smirk. That, and the I-pod he had tucked into his left ear was playing a little number by Shane MacGowan and The Popes. Seamus whispered along while his fingers rattled the keyboard furiously.

“Cohoya! Ya’ fucks! Come hell or high water…I mighta fucked yer missus, but I never fucked yer daughter…Fa-diddly-aaah…Fa-diddly-aaah…”

‘God bless ya’, Shane. The ugliest man in Christendom, and still a fuckin’ poet right down to his socks. Also…probably gets more girls than me. Lucky devil.’

And then it was time for the next file, and then the next, but Seamus was still smirking. The same as always.

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“You can’t be serious! Sir! We’ve done everything we could do. You’ve read the reports we’ve turned in, and the conclusions are the best we could offer. I’d go as far as to say that there isn’t a person here that could have done more than we have. Don’t take us off of this. Not now!”

Kingsley tugged gently at the sleeve of Dora’s coat, and the reminder of his presence grounded her. She’d put too many hours in, and was tired right down to her bones, and frankly more than a little emotional about the implication that they’d failed. The meeting room was quiet for a moment while their superior nodded calmly.

“Dora, no one…and I mean no one, is saying that you haven’t done all you could. This entire situation is a tangled mess, and I’m not saying that anyone could do better. Sometimes a fresh mind puts things together a different way. You’ve been at this since it started, and you’ve both been troopers, but we need some changes, and we need some breaks. You’re not being dropped out of the loop on this. You’ll be doing field work just like before, and Agent Dawlish will be coordinating all of this from now on. I figured you’d be happy to get home before ten o’clock at night for once, and frankly, you both need the break. Have looked at yourselves? You both look like hell. The only thing you’ve done is your best…and I’m not forgetting it. Alright?”

The slim federal agent across from their department head nodded, then gave an oily smirk. Dawlish stood up and opened a file folder, one of dozens that had compiled their findings regarding potential links between killings.
“You’ve done very well, and I’m sure I’ll be very satisfied with the results of your investigations into more specific cases. There have been fifteen arrests since this started, and while we have managed to thin the ranks of local crime syndicates, when they’re not thinning their own ranks, we haven’t yet gotten one solid scrap about how this started. Just some nebulous connections between a man who appears to not exist and a prison riot. It’s our opinion that this case needs a new direction, and I think I can provide that. Your chief and I need to have a little meeting now, and we have a lot of ground to cover. I hope you’ll be professional enough to let this rest without further histrionics?”

Dora simmered in her own rage for a second, hating the snide implication of un-professionalism. As if this asshole had any idea how things worked here? Or what her working relationship was like with her boss. Kingsley broke the tension with a broad smile and a nudge at her shoulder, addressing them calmly.

“You pompous little air-headed, ass-kissing, glory stealing, no-good miserable cock-sucking son of a bitch. There. I feel better already. How’s Starbucks sound? You look like you need a break. We’re out of here at five-thirty for the first time this month, and you need to relax. It ain’t like you didn’t give ‘em your best, Dora. We got nothing to be ashamed of…’cause that smarmy little asshat won’t make any more progress than we did.”

Dora Tonks took a series of deep breaths as they entered the elevator.

“Okay. I’m fine. Just…god dammit! What could anyone have done? All we’ve run into are dead ends and red herrings. It’s like shoveling smoke with a pitchfork in the wind! Something is going on here, and I can just ‘feel’ it. There are connections between events that we just can’t see, and there’s nothing to prove it, but I’d swear this whole mess has been orchestrated somehow. I just can’t prove it. I really wanted this one, Kingsley. I’ve never dropped the ball before. Not on the job. No matter how you paint it, this still feels like failure. I’m just not used to it.”

“Me either! But we’re still on the case. No black marks on our record. Just a little bruise to the ego. I can live with that. Besides, if I get home before seven, Deirdre’s gonna dance for joy. Try to keep an eye on the bright side of things, right? You miss Luna, don’t you?”

They were back in the halls and headed for the front entrance before Dora slowed her pace enough to speak calmly again. It was a good thing Kingsley had long legs and endless patience.

“Don’t I know it, Tonksy! I haven’t heard you wax poetic about the virtues of a girlfriend with a pierced tongue in almost a month! You gotta give a straight man his vicarious thrills, ya’ know?”

Dora chuckled for what felt like the first time in weeks while they strolled out into the summer
heat. Trust Kingsley to break up the tension just when it was most needed. An iced mocha was suddenly sounding really, really good.

“Yeah, yeah. You guys and your lesbian fantasies. Let’s go. Maybe we won’t be the ones who break this wide open, but it won’t be because we didn’t try.”

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“YOU…YOU INSIPID LITTLE SHIT!”

Peter Pettigrew cringed as the paperweight Mr. Riddle had flung crashed into his arm. The old man was almost apoplectic with fury, wisps of white hair fluttering on a nearly bald head, eyes bulged with rage and mouth pinched into a tight line when not opening for shouted insults.

“Do NOT tell me you have nothing! I am paying a fortune for information, and I am getting excuses! I did not pay for excuses! I paid for information! I could train a monkey to replace you for all the good you’re doing! And don’t you think you’re irreplaceable! I’m sick of your sniveling! Get out! Get out of my sight or I’ll dispose of you myself! GO!”

Peter fled the room in a hurry, passing MacNair in the hall outside. It was like this more and more lately. Fits of temper that showed how the old man was slipping. Especially since New York. No gratitude! No gratitude at all! After the New York debacle, who had made every arrangement? Who had secured a new location? Who had managed every whispered request and made every pertinent phone call? He had…that’s who!

A lifetime ago, he’d met a man who simmered with power and confidence, the whole world at his fingertips and dancing to his tune. It had seemed like the key to a life of luxury. Now he slaved away for a bitter, hateful, old wreck of a human being, threatened with death almost weekly, and sometimes daily. And the old man was just crazy enough to do it!

Had it all been worth it? Turning his back on the Phoenix Corporation, slipping information to Riddle until he’d been forced to flee, signing a deal with this living devil just to secure a living for himself where his former employers could never find him?

He had to find Potter! Everything else had become window dressing. Only Potter’s death would put him back in good graces with Tom Riddle. Back to manipulating the transfers of funds and making discreet contact with Mr. Riddle’s endless connections around the globe. Back to meetings in the finest board rooms and executive flights and five star hotels.

He had to find Potter. Unfortunately…Potter didn’t want to be found.

Peter wrung his hands nervously as he headed for his office and his secure line. It was time to up the ante. He could raise the promised bonus to fifty thousand for the investigator that brought him what he needed. That ought to make some ears prick up, and it certainly ought to make some of them use ‘unorthodox’ methods for acquiring information. Greed was a great motivator, and he knew that to be a fact. The only one stronger was fear, and Peter had plenty of that, too. More than enough to keep him working thru dinner. Enough to keep him talking ‘til his throat was hoarse, and enough to keep the phone up until his shoulders ached while he passed the receiver from hand to hand.

Harry Potter would be found. Somehow…somewhere. One way or another. And then Harry Potter would die, no matter what it took to make it happen.

TBC!!!
“Okay. Let’s do it.”

Traditionally, when that phrase has been used while directed at me, it’s meant that my thong is around someone’s neck, my ankles were over their shoulders, and that person’s cock was about to make me their sole purpose for a little while.

Which makes reaching for the door handle, on the way to step around the block and frame my ex-lover for the seven years he stole from me, well…somewhat out of the ordinary. Not to sound too droll about it, but planning vengeance is quite a bit different than executing vengeance. The difference is very obvious now.

Harry and I have already had our ‘moment’. The rest is silence. I know what to do. He knows what to do. The time for chit chat and love words is past. This is the time for action, and I’m out the door and letting heels clack on the sidewalk as I head for Blaise’s doorstep.

Nice neighborhood. Not too far from Halsted St. and the Boystown district. Relatively safe and well patrolled. Round the corner and a few houses down puts me where I need to be. Nice. You wouldn’t look at a nice building like this and think…’Hey…a mobster’s home.’ Tasteful old brick, probably redesigned in the last ten years to make it saleable in modern times. But the twin doors at the top of the porch steps look like antique reproductions. Very nice touch of the old. The knockers are real brass, and anyone inside who didn’t hear that would have to be deaf.

I admit I’m nervous. Who wouldn’t be? It’s raced through my head for hours that I’m a damned fool for doing this. I talked my way into this corner, and now it’s mine to deal with. Good thing I took my pill an hour ago. I may be a bit rattled, but I feel oddly calm. Harry is my morning. Here, now, I say goodbye to the night of the past. I hear the rattle of a small chain…and then the door swings open. Vinny.

“Heya, Draky! Long time, no see! C’mon in. Ya’ look great.”

Vinny’s the same as ever, a man of few words…because he doesn’t really know that many of them, but he is loyal, and that speaks well of anyone. Stocky…fatter than I remember, but the suit he’s wearing is pretty decent. He must be making decent cash as someone’s heavy whe he isn’t looking after Blaise.

“Sorry ’bout this. Gotta do it. It’s the rules, ya’ know. I mean…uh…yer outfit’s pretty skimpy there, so I’m guessin’ no problem there, but I oughta check that purse out.”

I hand it over with a smirk. “No sweat, Vin. I understand. That’s just the way of the world, right?”

I peel my coat off while he paws through the contents of my purse, mumbling an apology all the while.

“Nothin’ personal, right? Just…lotsa crazy stuff goin’ on these days. I knew you were all right though. I mean…it’s you. Ya’ wan’ me to take yer coat? Or jacket?”

I get the purse back, and it is a rather tiny accessory…and as I suspected, wearing an outfit that was
equally tiny got me out of being frisked. It isn’t that different from what I was wearing when I got
busted, but a lot more modern and up to date. I know perfectly well what Blaise likes, and this outfit
was chosen to make it hard for him to think clearly.

The mini-skirt is black leather, but done pricey and well, not the dirt-cheap hooker look. The top is
barely enough to cover my strapless bra and falsies, but leaves plenty of pale, tight midriff and
shoulder to look upon. I’ve been a little lavish with the make-up perhaps, but Blaise always liked
that more than Harry does. The thing was, I was always witty and clever…and I can look one way
and be another. I can play the game and be the pretty little tart, and then turn around and show who
I really am inside. I wonder if it’s the irony that attracts him, or just the thrill of getting both worlds
in one package. The slut in the bedroom, the perfect companion everywhere else. Does Harry want
that too? Not that I’m complaining, but there are times when good looks just aren’t enough…and I
wonder what my strongest suit really is.

“No thanks, sweetie. I’m not wearing enough to want to peel off more than I have to. I’ll keep the
jacket for now.” He’d have searched that too…but there aren’t any pockets on it, and it doesn’t
leave a lot to the imagination.

“Cool. So…follow me. This is the entryway, over there’s the living room, we’re headed for the
kitchen and dining room, and Blaise’ll be out any second now. Greg’s got dinner almost ready.
You remember Greg too, right?”

“Of course. As if! Just because I was away for awhile…it doesn’t mean I lost my memory.”

“Well…uh…there was something we both wanted to say. It’s…it’s just…uh. Shit. See…no one
figured you for going to the mattresses and staying quiet. I mean…you weren’t really a part of the
family, if you know what I mean. We all thought Blaise was crazy when he sent you, ‘cause we
didn’t expect you to cover for anybody else.

“So…I guess it comes down to this. You earned your place. You’re family here, because you
protected us, when a lot of people wouldn’t have. That took a lot of guts. So just remember that
you got more than just Blaise looking’ out to make sure you’re okay…right?”

Well…color me fucking stunned. Declarations of admiration and loyalty were not expected. It’s
easy to imagine them not giving a second thought to what happened to me, since I was never really
‘one of the boys’. I was Blaise’s boy-toy, and that bought me a certain place in this little clique, but
I never even considered the possibility of Greg or Vinny caring about where I wound up.

“That’s…that’s sweet, Vinny. I appreciate it. Really. So…Blaise has a decent little place here,
doesn’t he? Kinda big. You know…for a single guy.”

Drop the hooks into the water…and let’s see if the fish are biting. Vinny leads me down the hall,
stopping at the door to what must be the kitchen. I can smell garlic and good sauce wafting through
the air.

“Well…uh…yeah. True…it’s big. An’ quiet. Uh…before we go in…just…’yknow…we were all
wonderin’ if you might come back. There’s plenty of room here. Easy livin’. No business like the
old days. It’s all club work now. Everything above the board, right? Blaise would like it if you let
him make things right. ‘kay?”

I bet he would. I want to be angrier than this. I want to hate them all, but the fuckers aren’t making
this any easier. It’s much too late to back out now. I’m walking into the last supper…and this time
I’m Judas with a grudge. I don’t want thirty shekels. I already have everything I could want. I
wanted Blaise to know a grief like mine. I wanted an eye for an eye. I hate that this drama is
But there’s only one answer to give, and I give it with a winning smile.

“Oh, okay.” And then it’s dinnertime with the man I came to destroy.

Ron sat in the limo, earpiece nestled into place and microphone positioned at his lips. Every word spoken near Drake relayed to him, but his broadcast line was only to Harry. One word. That was all it would take to send Harry into the house with guns blazing.

Harry had already slipped out into the night, moving through tight little alleyways that hid his presence. There weren’t many backyards in this neighborhood, and the ones that could be found were small. By now, Harry had probably positioned himself near this Zabini guy’s place, and was likely perched like a cat, just waiting to pounce, or to slink away into the darkness. It all hung on which signal Ron gave. If Drake called for a ride, it meant the mission was either accomplished, or a complete washout. Only if the microphone picked up the sounds of danger…like voices raised in anger, or a cry for help from Drake, would Ron give the order for Harry to enter the house. It was a responsibility that Ron had only occasionally endured, but he was comfortable with it, his attention fixed on every word of conversation and every clink of glass or silverware.

“That was delicious. The company wasn’t too bad either. Someone a little more intuitive might accidentally get the impression that you put some effort into all this.”

I say it with a smirk, and Blaise shrugs in an off-handed kind of way. It reminds me a little of Harry. The same sense of being comfortable with who they are. The same confident exterior. They’re very different people, and Harry is a better man in so many ways that I could never count them all, but I can see what I like in both of them so clearly right now.

I was younger then, and a lot stupider, but I had good taste even when I was making bad choices. It was a good meal, and Blaise kept the heavy talk out of it while we ate. I can appreciate that. It’s an Italian thing. Business after food. Never let a serious discussion spoil a perfectly good meal. But the meal is gone, and the wine is good, but I can’t drink more than a little because I need my wits about me.

“So here we are. Maybe I did put a little more effort into this than usual. You’re worth it…and not just ‘cause you look good. Dinner’s done…we’ve got a little good vino…you alright with a little serious talk?”

“Yeah…I suppose. Inevitable, right? Lots of water under the bridge with us.”

“True enough. Down to business then. This business with you living with some old guy…it just doesn’t sit well with me. The way I see it, you’re owed…and owed a lot. You shouldn’t be doing anything you don’t wanna do. Not anymore. Now…we both know how things went down back then. I made a choice. You took the hit. Maybe it doesn’t mean anything now, but if I could do it over again, I’d a done it all differently. I wouldn’t have let you go.

“I’ve been killing time. You know. Just getting by and making do. The minute you walked into my bar, I knew what I’d been missing all these years. It all made sense. You know I’m no priest, and I
didn’t take any vows of chastity, but nobody has lived here since I moved here. Visitors…sure…but nobody ever took your place. Not in any way that ever counted.

“What I want…is to see you living as good as you deserve. No strings attached. None of this bullshit with you living with some old guy you don’t even like. Not after what you did for me. I know I never asked you to do it, I just set you up for the fall, and I know the time since then and now couldn’t have been easy. What I’m saying is, there’s a place for you here if you want it. Always.”

I knew it would come to that. He was going to ask it more directly than before. He never liked making a gesture without a certain style to it. The right time, the right words, the right ambience. He’s more polished now. Not just a high rent teenage dope pusher with a taste for good living. It’s funny. If I’d never met Harry…if I’d gotten out after seven years with nothing to my name and no future…or even if I’d just taken the two grand in that envelope and asked Ron to drop me off downtown…I’d probably say yes.

I probably wouldn’t forgive him though. Just say yes, get a few good fucks, and steal everything he’s got before I cut town without warning and start a new life somewhere else. It would have been a tempting offer.

But next to Harry, Blaise just doesn’t measure up. You can see the weaknesses in his character. The lack of self discipline, the selfishness, the arrogance. I wouldn’t have looked for those differences before. I’d have seen opportunity, and taken it, but it wouldn’t really have moved me inside. And that’s why I can recite these lines like a professional, and move the conversation to the bedroom. A hesitant, nervous look is called for here. The kind he knows I don’t often make. I emote discomfort, and it isn’t hard. Because some of what I’m using is the truth, the best weapon of all.

“Blaise…I…I don’t know. I want…I’m sorry. I don’t want to talk about this…out here. There are things…I have to say. They’re not easy. I could use some drinks before we talk about this…stuff.”

The analysis of sounds in the background of my earlier phone conversations with Blaise indicated a high likelihood of a liquor shelf or cabinet in his bedroom or study. The seats in there are leather. We could tell by the creaking, squeaking sounds it made as he sat down or moved. This will get me where I want to go, and it’s so easy it almost makes me ashamed. He sees the look on my face, and he knows what I have to say won’t be easy to hear. At least he has the nerve to hear it.

“Uh…yeah…sure! We can head to the den. Greg’ll clean up in here as soon as he hears the doors close. C’mon, this way.”

It turns out that the best estimates were close to right. The master suite includes a spacious bedroom and I can see an adjacent bathroom through it’s open door. On the other side of the room is a small office and den. Old leather seats, and a liquor cabinet…AND the computer! I move straight for the liquor, while Blaise is pointing out the way to the bathroom. I can hear him chuckling in the background.

“All top shelf. No cheap hooch here. Knock yourself out. The mini fridge is in the bottom half of the cabinet. Orange juice, limes, cream…all the usual mixers. What the hell…just throw me together some Johnny Walker on the rocks, alright?”

“Sure. Nice digs, Blaise. I like this place. I could get used to this.” I say it smoothly enough, in spite of the fact that my hand is shaking while I let the powder drift out of the capsule and into his drink. It dissolved in a heartbeat with only a little shake of the ice, and then it’s gone. Mixed with hard liquor like this, it’s a safe bet that even Blaise will be out cold or at least nodding off in about
fifteen minutes at the most. As for me, I make a big show of pouring vodka into it, but the screwdriver I mixed for myself is actually ridiculously weak. Blaise couldn’t have seen how little I actually put in.

I could ask about putting the music on, but the door to the bedroom suite is closed, and even though the entry to the den is open and we could be seen if anyone opened the bedroom doors, I still think I can wait until he starts nodding off, and let his last memory of me be me acting like I’m worrying over him. If he gets too rowdy, or paranoid, I’ve still got my ring. One pinprick and he’ll quiet down in seconds. The computer is right here, and with a few quiet minutes to myself I can sort this out once and for all. We take our seats after I pass him his drink. I can’t help leaning forward nervously, hunched over the edge of the seat. I guess it helps my acting that I really am nervous as hell. Even Blaise looks worried, but still calm.

“Hey…relax, kiddo. It’s okay, really. I know you might…you know…have some things to say that aren’t too nice. I know I deserve ’em, too. I’m not Mr. Hardsell here. No pressure. My hospitality is yours whether you say yes or no, ’kay? So just say what’s on your mind, Dee.”

“Thanks. Blaise…you can guess what it was like…in there. People talk about it, but you can’t really make anyone understand something like that. It’s…just…I’m where I’m at because…I need a place where there aren’t any…demands…on me. I can’t handle that kind of thing just yet. It was bad. Worse than I can say. I don’t know if I’m ready for something…new…or not. That’s why I’m just an ornament for someone with money right now. I don’t think I can handle anything else…yet. But if it means anything, you don’t know how tempting you make all this sound.”

“Oh. Yeah. I…uh…I guess I can understand that. Jeez…Dee…I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say.”

That’s the telling moment. He’s so confused. Blushing with embarrassment. It’s dawning on him that I went through hell, in every kind of way, and the knowledge that he hadn’t even given the matter consideration before now is what makes my pulse race. Not with tension or fear, but naked anger. He deserves this. What’s coming to him is his by right. He earned it. Maybe I’ve bounced back from it all a lot faster than I make it sound here, but that he never stopped to imagine what I was going through…I’m almost tempted to call out for help and just let Harry kill everyone here!

“I’m sorry was good enough. It was what I wanted to hear. Wouldn’t it be nice if that made everything better? It’s something though. That was then, this is now. You wouldn’t mind me dropping by more often, would you?”

He’s been sipping that drink deeply while we chat. He even looks a little muddled. It won’t be long before the drug overpowers him. Then I’m free to act.

“Nah…no. You’re always welcome here. I’d like to see more of you around these parts. ‘Specially if you can make it over to the club now and then. You really know how to work a crowd. Nobody quite like you, y’know.”

I can hear it. The faint slur in his voice. The pupils are dilated like he just had his sixth or seventh cocktail and can’t remember what he was going to say next. I keep the conversation light, and try to smile a lot. He gets distracted when I smile. I act my part, and he’s fallen for it…hook, line and sinker.

“S…jus…y’know…miss’d ya. Sil…still…fine. You are…”

It’s hitting hard now. SHIT! He’s noticing that something isn’t right. I can see the panicked look in his eyes as it dawns on him that he shouldn’t be this drunk after a couple glasses of wine and some
high grade scotch. He’s trying to lean forward and stand.

“Dee…dee dee…’elp…need…Greg…or Vin…somethin’…’s wrong. Shit…call…’elp…”

He’s mumbling, and no one could hear us, but when he lurches to his feet, my beautiful plans die a terrible death over one detail I hadn’t even thought of before. The nearly empty glass of scotch and ice tumbles from his hand…

…onto a hardwood floor.

In the quiet between us, I hadn’t imagined that a falling glass would make that much noise, but it hits hard and shatters, scattering bits of diamond brilliance and liquid while he slumps down and flops onto the floor in an ungainly sprawl. Fuck! If either of the others heard…everyone here would be dead!

My heart kicks into high gear, and blood screams through my veins like a banshee, and everything could descend into chaos in a just a few more heartbeats! I don’t know what to do! Footsteps? Are they coming? WHAT THE FUCK DO I DO?!

I may never know where the calm that just came over me came from, but somehow, someway, I know I can find a way to get this done without death in the mix. I am the calm in the center of the storm…and I know what to do.

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“What was that?”

Greg turned his head from the plates and dishes he’d been scrubbing in the sink and listened a second.

“I dunno. Broken glass? You go check it out, wise guy. I’m up to my fuckin’ elbows in dishwater here. Loaded with loot an’ he don’t install a fuckin’ dishwasher. Go figure. Probably just tipsy and dropped a glass.”

Vinny nodded and shrugged, the stepped out and down the hall. The sound had been faint, but the old house wasn’t well soundproofed. Everything carried through vents, and like all old houses there were creaks and groans in the night that could have woken the dead. It was probably nothing. He stopped at the door to Blaise’s suite.

“Hey…uh…Blaise? You okay?”

No answer. That was more than a little off. Blaise always answered. Vinny leaned in close to the door, listening intently, eyes squinted with concentration and brow furrowed with sudden apprehension. Just the sound of something…moving. The creak of a leather chair. A grunt. Something felt ‘not right’ about it, and Vinny generally trusted his instincts when he wasn’t just following orders.

“Blaise? I’m comin’ in for a sec, okay? Just checkin’ in, right? What are you…”

Vinny turned the knob, the door creaked open and revealed the tableau in front of him. To the left, the bed was empty, the room undisturbed. To the right, his eyes swept along until they settled on the leather chair. The leather chair with its back to Vinny, where Blaise’s dark curls rested, and where Dee’s hands were twisted through the dark locks.

Dee’s legs were visibly sprawled around the arms of the chair, and his head bobbed almost a half
foot over Blaise’s, eyes screwed shut, mouth slack with pleasure while the pale shoulders were pressed so close that Blaise must have had his face clutched to Dee’s chest.

Vinny felt the blood rush to his face. Dee was bouncing up and down, panting softly and muttering things even with his eyes closed and his head tipped back.

“God! Yeah! Fuck! Blaise…Blaise…so…sooo good. Ahhh…ahhh…mmmmm…yessss!”

Vinny quietly shut the door, painfully aware that a grown man didn’t have any business blushing like a schoolgirl. When he got back to the kitchen, Greg turned his head away from the dishes.

“So? What’s up?”

“Nothin’ we’re old enough to know about, buddy. I’m thinkin’…Blaise has the situation under control…if you know what I mean?”

“Ahhhh. Those two…I swear. Just like old times.”

“Pretty much. Betcha anything Blaise is smilin’ tomorrow.”

“No bet. That one’s a given.”

Those poor dumb bastards have no idea what I just went through to save their lives! Admittedly, it was a moment of inspired brilliance on my part. Do you have any idea how hard it is for a queen who weighs less than a hundred and thirty pounds to drag an two hundred pound unconscious man into a chair?! It’s fucking murder! Plus jumping onto Blaise’s lap and peeling my top off just in time! Time for a whisper into the mic, I think. Ron and the rest gotta be wondering what they just heard, and all I had time to broadcast was a whispered plea for patience.

“All is well. I repeat…all is well. Stand by.”

They can’t communicate with me here, I can only broadcast out, so all that’s left is to load that CD into Blaise’s computer and let Hermione’s program do its work. The real bitch is flopping Blaise’s carcass across the rolling office chair behind his desk, and then rolling him over to his bed. I’ve spent a lot more time having clothes peeled off of me than peeling them off others, although I am unusually handy with zippers and flies. It’s harder to peel clothes off a nearly unconscious person than I’d ever imagined.

Of course…the final touch is a little of my good lipstick, in the color I’m using now, right around the head of Blaise’s cock. It’s so weird, holding it in my hand, flaccid and unresponsive, while I artfully smear just a little where he’ll notice it later. Hope he thinks we had more fun than we did. Just for good measure, I spray a puff of the perfume into his face while he’s breathing softly, just to guarantee he stays asleep for a good long while. It’s not even ten o’clock yet.

With Blaise sorted out, all I need is the CD back and the computer off. The next time he signs online, the programming tucked in here will do the rest for us. To keep with the impression I’ve given the others, I run a little water in the sink of the bathroom while I pinch my cheeks to make them a little more flushed. Muss my hair a bit, get my skirt and top a little askew, and try to adopt the expression I usually wear whenever Harry has just put me through my paces.

Elapsed time, somewhat more than half an hour. Good enough. Time to say goodnight to the rest of my audience. I stagger through the hallway with my best dippy smile, purse and coat slung over my shoulder like an afterthought. The perfect picture of an exhausted tart, fresh from a fast, hard
fuck. Vinny and Greg are playing cards at the kitchen table, and wave politely when I stumble in, hanging off the kitchen door like I’m tipsy as hell.

“Heyyy…mmm…Blaise is sleeping…and I called for my ride already. I jus…I thought you toe…you two should know…thanks for the great dinner. I’ll see you again soon, ’kay?”

Greg plays escort to the door this time, since they have to lock it back up after I’m out. Silent as ever. Vinny was always quiet too, but Greg makes a brick wall look like a chatterbox.

“G’nite. See ya later, Dee.”

“G’nite!!” I giggle and stumble a little, then wobble my way down the porch on my heels. When the lock clicks behind me, I still don’t change my act. I stumble on down the street, around the corner and just a little farther, until the sleek black car rolls up beside me. I have the uncomfortable memory of a hundred cars like this, sidling up to me in the night, windows rolling down to reveal lonesome men with money waiting to be spent, but this car is different, and that life is long gone.

So long, Blaise. The next time I hear about you, it should be nothing more than a blip on the evening news after they take you away. An eye for an eye, a life for a life. Tomorrow I’ll think about right or wrong…about revenge and forgiveness. Tonight…I want a long, hot shower…and enough time with Harry to make the memory of having to touch you again drift away.

Good night, Blaise Zabini.

TBC!!!
It’s so cool in the air of the night, but the car is warm, and I’m quite in the crook of Harry’s arm with nothing to say as we depart. Tonight, debriefing. It never waits. That’s the way they do it. Planning, Briefing, Mission, Debriefing. All so professional. It puts a pretty spin on drugging a man and loading his computer with evidence of a crime he never committed. The anger is gone as we move through town in a car that slides along like oiled silk. It’s started to rain.

Droplets smear the windows, and soft sounds of water on tires is barely audible outside. The refraction from streetlights makes the water shine like a million diamonds, like shards of glass on a hardwood floor. I cleaned up the mess, made everything look nice, and I got away with my ass intact. I should be cheering. Why do I feel as hollow inside as if I’d actually killed him?

Hermione estimated that it might take a week or more before the tips she’s left for the Vice Squad get acted on. When they investigate, they’ll find records of equipment transactions that have been falsified, all for film and recording equipment. A rented studio, a storage locker, all rented by Blaise, and while the hard copy paperwork won’t exist, the computer records of the company will show that he’s been in the business of selling the stuff for about a year. If they get nothing else, the files hidden in his computer will carry the day for the cops, and that alone is worth a fairly long term in prison, especially since internet crimes can easily be treated as federal crimes, since any crime based on interstate or international communication falls under the jurisdiction of the feds, just like I did.

He could tie me to this, guessing at it, suspecting, but Blaise knows me as the helpless kid who uses his cute ass to make his way in the world. He could only make the most random guesses about where I’ve been or who I’ve known since then. For Blaise, I’ve disappeared, and even the cellphone records have been altered to remove my calls. He has nothing, and by the time he could realize what must have really happened, he’ll be in custody, awaiting trial, and police are very unsympathetic to pleas like ‘I was framed.’ Everyone is guilty to a cop…it’s only a question of what they’re hiding.

Is this how Blaise felt? Sitting somewhere safe and sound, wondering what was happening to me because of his choices? Maybe it is…maybe it isn’t…but like everything else related to this little scenario, it’s too late to matter now.

“Are you alright?”

Harry’s voice breaks the silence. He gave me space and silence for awhile, but we’re almost to our headquarters now, and it’s going to be time for debriefing in just a few minutes. No more time for thinking quietly, or reflecting on the way my little drama has played out.

“Too many thoughts. You know how it is. I’m just glad it’s done. It was only tense for a minute or two at most in there. I’m fine…don’t worry for me, love.”

I say it with a smile, and we both know he’ll worry over me anyway. My time doing fieldwork is done, and we’re pulling into the empty shell of a building that welcomes being left alone. The resting hulks of machinery that haven’t run in years slide past us. The automatic entrance closes behind us, and the movement of the car triggers a set of small lights that illuminate our path to the
It all goes down in black and white. Questions while I explain the night step by step. Right down to the lipstick on Blaise’s dick. No detail is left unrecorded, and I get congratulations for the fast thinking that kept the evening from turning into a bloodbath. It would have been easier if Harry had just slipped in and killed them all, but in spite of the hassles, I still got the job done, and the atmosphere is celebratory. They like me, and it shows. I don’t feel like a whore that was brought here on Harry’s say so, I feel like a member of a team, and no one touches on the subject of where I came from, even though the entire job was rooted in it. I am content.

So surreal. An office party in the basement of a ruined warehouse, surrounded by millions of dollars in computer equipment and communications gear, drinking champagne with a team of people who are willing to commit any crime to make the world a better, safer place. Oh, no…my life’s not full to the fucking brim with weirdness!

And then it’s closing on midnight, and we drift away one by one, because tomorrow is just another day and there are no holidays here. Riddle is at work somewhere, making deals and buying power, and until he’s either dead or out of this town we’re here doing what we do. Life goes on…and on.

Harry is cheerful, full of small touches that remind me he’s near. A hand at the small of my back, or a fingertip brushing against my cheek. He doesn’t do public affection much, because he’s a lot more reserved than I am, but the car isn’t public…if you don’t count poor Ron. Still, I get my kisses and Ron is feeling generous enough to not interrupt with acid commentary. I still don’t feel right. I want that shower…or better, a long, hot bath! With Harry at the end of it. Maybe I feel dirty for what I’ve done, but it’s not the first time I’ve felt that way, and I can be very good at putting things behind me…in more ways than one! Home is heaven, and there isn’t much that hot water, a little good product, and the warmth of Harry’s arms can’t scour away.

“You really did do well.”

He’s washing my back, while I just flop forward and let him, lost in the hazy comfort of safety where only the sound of water dripping from us is heard. I don’t feel much now, just a lazy desire to be pampered, secure in the knowledge that I’m loved…and desired. The past is dead…and I just buried the stinking remains, and even the memory of the stench of it is being driven away by expensive bath oils.

“Maybe…but make me forget it anyway. Please?”

He does it so well, every little thing I need and demand. I make a question of my flesh, and he is the answer. I need pain to expiate my sins, and he can give it when he truly believes that it’s what I want. And I believe it…and I want it, but it doesn’t mean that I can’t tell how much he dislikes this. I can feel his discomfort, even while he makes sure that I get what I ask for. The sick, dark feeling inside of me doesn’t dissipate easily. The truth is an ugly thing, as warped and bent as we all are. I can see the truth reflected in his eyes…when he stares only at me. The fact that Blaise was no Christ…makes me no less of a Judas. I’m no better than him in the end, and if Harry knew the little things of my life as I do…

He should. He deserves to know. And if I loved him any less, I would never voice my fears. The first rule of queens is to never place all your cards on the table. Never wear your heart on your sleeve. I can be sore and spent, hollow and shaky, curled in his arms, quiet in the aftermath of what we’ve done tonight, but I know what I should say, and because of what I feel for him, I can say things…things I’ve never told. He wanted to know the things you can’t learn in a file…and now he will.
“Harry…I’m sorry…”

“What? For what?”

“Shhh…just listen. About tonight…what we did…why I…have to get this out.”

I can feel the arms slacken a little around me, the intentness of that gaze on the back of my skull, but I don’t want to look at him while I say these things.

“I played him. Like I play everyone. I’m sorry I did it…like that. I’ve always done that. Being beautiful…is a tool…or a weapon for me, and it’s never been any other way. That’s the kind of person I’ve been. I think that’s who I am. The way I played Blaise was the way I’ve used everyone I’ve ever been with. To get what I wanted.

I was tired of Pansy having all the bragging rights about what she’d done with boys. When summer came around, just before I started high school, I prick teased the kid that had hired on to take care of the grounds that year. He was only a few years older than I was, and I’m not even sure he was gay to start with, but after I’d spent a few weeks tanning around him, he was…adaptable…enough. I used him to get rid of my virginity, then threw him away. Worse…when he was too nervous to keep doing it on a schedule that suited me, I just blackmailed him until he gave in and did what I wanted. I never even opened the letter he sent at the end of summer. I threw it away, because he’d served his purpose.

There were others too. Always what I wanted at the moment, whether it was someone else’s boyfriend or not, whether they actually liked me or not. That wasn’t even a consideration. They were either useful…or they weren’t. I guess that made it easy later…to work tricks and get what I wanted for as little work as possible. I played that game with everyone. Even Blaise, even then and not just this time. He was a free pass. A way out of trouble and bad times. The only difference was that he played me first. I pined over him, hated him, missed him…but I also know that…if enough time had gone by…I’d have tired of him too.

I’ve always used what I am…what I can offer…to get what I want. Even with you. I could taste freedom on you. Safety. Something better. I use sex for everything. For gain. For solace. To remember. To forget. I just thought…I thought you should know what isn’t in the files. You should know what I hate…about me. There aren’t that many reasons to believe me, Harry…but I won’t play you. I love you…like no one…and nothing else I’ve ever known.”

Silence. Then lips on the back of my neck, warm and soft. The voice that whispers to me in serene and confident, and makes the last oily traces of the ugliness inside of me melt away.

“I don’t need a lot of reasons. I only need one. I believe you…because I love you. What you are…is not what you have done…or been…or anything else. You are…now…here. Be whatever you want. Change whatever you want. I’ll still be here. Just…be…yourself, whatever form that takes along the way. I love you.”

And that’s the end of a chapter of my life. A page turns, a scene closes. The spiteful little creature that used sex for power isn’t dead. Not really. He is evolving though. Changing like a caterpillar, cocooned in love, able to nurture changes within and without. Becoming more than he imagined was possible. What will emerge when the transformation is complete? Or will it ever be complete in this lifetime? Is life just an endless series of changes of the self, shifting and morphing in every situation, struggling to adapt to every new environment? Perhaps. That’s the only answer I can give myself. Maybe I’m exhausted of the uncertain, the unknown, and the unknowable, but I can have the concrete and real in my arms every night, and every morning. I am loved…and I am content.
Blaise Zabini rubbed his head sullenly as the morning light stabbed through the window, muttering to himself in Italian. The hangover he had was the stuff of legends, and he could barely remember anything after dinner with Dee the night before.

‘How the hell did I get that bombed? I can hold my liquor better that that! Not like I had an empty stomach or anything. Damn…I gotta piss.’

He slid out of the large and comfortable old four-poster bed that dominated the back left corner of his personal suite and stumbled toward the bathroom. He also normally recovered from a night of indulgence faster than this. It was definitely off for him to be feeling this logy after a few drinks and…

Lipstick. He was holding his dick steady while letting his bladder slowly empty into the toilet, and there was lipstick on his dick. Blaise couldn’t help smirking, even though the effort of smiling made his headache worse.

‘Sonofabitch. Even drunk off my ass I got a little action. I guess he couldn’t resist the old charms after all. Ahh…my head! Hope those bozos got coffee ready. Better throw some whiskey in it too. I need a hair of the dog that bit my fuckin’ head off.’

When Blaise finally left the bathroom, after a shower that was long enough and hot enough to have parboiled a meal, he threw on his favorite bathrobe and drifted toward the kitchen. He had a nice dining room, but it was really only for company. The kitchen had a counter and plenty of room, as well as a small table. Most mornings, Vinny or Greg could usually be found soaking up coffee or making a little breakfast, and this one was no exception, especially given that it was already fairly late in the day.

“Gimme that coffee! Ow…an’ aspirin…and the whiskey…the Bushmills. I fuckin’ hate the Irish, but they know what the fuck to put in their coffee. Ugh.”

Greg just smirked while opening cabinets and fetching the things Blaise wanted, but Vinny chuckled and spoke up.

“Good night? Didn’t expect you to be such a sourpuss today…seein’ as you got your groove on the minute the rest of us were outta sight. Figured you’d be all smiles.”

Blaise raised an eyebrow. “So whatta you know about it? Just a hangover…but when did Dee take off?”

“Last night. You don’t remember? You too were going at it almost as soon as you left the table! Man…seven years ain’t changed much. He was on you like cheap soup on a pricey tie. I accidentally opened the door to your room…cuz’ I heard a glass break, or I thought I did, and what an eyeful I got! When he left last night, he looked like you put him through the wringer, ya stud. Wobblin’ around, smiling from ear to ear. Little guy was half done in, but I’m thinkin’ he’ll be back for more.”

Blaise smiled and shrugged while Greg handed over the Irish coffee and two aspirin. “What can I say boys? When you got it…you got it. Next time I’m skipping the scotch on the rocks. Didn’t mix too good with all the wine I had at dinner. Did the receipts come in from the club while I was out?”

Greg nodded, then pointed to a manila envelope on the far counter. “Yeah. Right there. They
dropped it off at nine. You want some eggs?”

“Nah. Not yet. Stomach’s no good right now. I’ll run the paperwork and just soak up some more coffee for awhile. I’m thinking’ lazy day today. Count up last night’s till, maybe have a little lunch later, maybe call Dee up and make sure he knows he’s welcome to come on by again…and maybe we’ll drop in tonight and keep em’ on their toes at the club. Always good to know the boss is watchin’, right?”

Blaise shuffled down the hall, envelope in one hand, coffee in the other, savoring the aroma of high end coffee blended with good Irish whiskey. He sat down at his computer desk, unfolding the envelope and sorting the contents while the soft hum of the machine starting up filled the background. While Blaise clicked at keys, calculating numbers and making entries into spreadsheet columns, programming that didn’t appear in any visible file silently worked in the background, a ticking time bomb, waiting to leave his life a blasted ruin.

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“Dora! Let’s get moving! They picked up the bartender from that Italian club execution back at the start. The guy had been hiding out at his uncle’s place, but a hot tip phoned in and fingered him for a small reward. He’s still getting booked, and it looks like we’re doing the interrogation. Finally something that might drop a lead into our laps.”

Dora snatched the coffee off of her desk and grabbed her coat. Kingsley was unusually perky this morning…which was probably almost directly linked to Deirdre being in a better mood now that they’d gone back to almost normal shifts. Maybe Dawlish and Scrimgeour were glory hounds, but they had their own staff handling the work that had really been more than two people could handle. It was good to get home at a decent hour, even if the sting of being moved out of the top slot for the investigation hadn’t completely dimmed.

“Great! You drive. About time something new happened with this mess. I got absolutely nothing out of that security guy who was off sick during the night of the construction yard killings. It seems too convenient, but he’s got a record so squeaky clean that I just can’t picture him as dirty.”

Every day a different bundle of records came to her desk, and some got shuffled off to other teams for follow up investigation, but Dora and Kingsley pulled key interviews and interrogations, assembled timelines and issued reports, and at least their names were still right in the heart of the biggest task force event in living memory. Even so, the piles of paperwork in their respective offices were getting out of control. Even as she left her office and hurried down the hall, an old man from records was pushing a little cart toward her office with a delivery of new files she’d requested.

Fletcher slowly picked out the files earmarked for Detective Tonks’ office from his cart, then brought them to her desk. No one was too close at the moment, and it was the first time in days that he’d made a delivery of files to her or Shacklebolt without anyone present. Keeping the same bored and businesslike demeanor, Fletcher flipped open file after file, neatly placing them on her desk after committing as much to memory as possible. It wasn’t much, but even the little bits he picked up here and there might be enough to get that little bonus that Remus had been dangling in front of him. Anything about Harry Black. Anything at all. Even a few words might be worth a few dollars.

At the bottom of the pile of files were handwritten notes. Tonks’ own case notes. Paydirt! Maybe it wasn’t a goldmine, but it was information that had never reached the press, and wasn’t even widely known by anyone outside of the Organized Crime Task Force. Remus was sure to put a decent price on these, especially if he still put a lot of stock in his own ex-wife’s work! Fletcher’s face never showed his excitement while he put the files carefully back in place and returned to his little
pushing his was from office to office, delivering file after file.

Hermione sat at her desk, or rather, her desks, since with a rolling office chair with a smooth swivel action she could manage three monitors at the same time, rolling from one to the next with ease, printing or forwarding file after file to the others in the office. Her work was less about translation that it was about recognizing and prioritizing information. She acted as a hacker only when necessity called, and generally only translated when there was spare time or a slow period in the office. Most days were like this one, hustling from monitor to monitor, scanning reams of data and earmarking the ones that were of interest. Phone records, wiretaps, legal events, deaths, corporate announcements, money transfers and on and on endlessly.

The great events that moved the world weren’t the ones that people laughed or cried over on television, they weren’t debated over on cable TV news shows, and they weren’t even known to any but a handful of people in the world. Small things added up to make big things, but small things often went unnoticed. That’s why Hermione had always made the effort to find the small things along with the big things. Somewhere in the mix of the two was the truth, the knowledge of what moves people were making when they thought no one was looking. And Hermione was always looking.

What separated Hermione from most people was her intelligence. With an IQ approaching 200, she was formidable at every field she applied herself to, but that wasn’t the key to her value here. Loosely put, she was an adept ‘pattern reader’. A person who could assimilate enormous amounts of information, and still make accurate guesses at the meanings hidden in the flow of words and seemingly unrelated events. Some folks just called people like her ‘media gurus’ or ‘computer whizkids’ because they had no idea what it meant to possess an intelligence that set you apart from most of humanity. The hard part was that it didn’t make you any less a creature of emotion or desire. It just made you smart. It also occasionally made you bored, since the only way to challenge yourself was to push the boundaries of your abilities right to their edge, and Hermione’s boundaries were hard to reach.

It was possible to do her job, and do it well, and occupy most of her mind most of the time, but there were moments...like this...when thoughts of Ron stole in and captured her attention completely. It wasn’t that he was gracious, or perfectly proportioned, or scintillatingly brilliant, but something about him...just...felt...good. The way he blushed or stammered when she was too close, or the way his eyes widened when she spoke to him suddenly, making him look for all the world like an enormous child whose universe could only center on one thing at a time. The fact that she’d long since noticed that he only ever had that look when she was the one speaking, and that he was suddenly deaf to everything else in the world. That was a gift only he had ever given her, and it had to be something worth snatching after, even if things like love seemed like mist that could never quite be grasped.

Then a series of words that might have been meaningless to anyone else met her eyes, and Hermione’s attention snapped instantly back into place. Harry Black. Harry Potter. Random searches. All in vain, but lots of them now that she took the time follow up the number of requests for information that had cropped up over these last weeks. From an amazing number of sources too. Almost all in the Chicago area. A little research showed that both police and federal agents, as well as private investigators, were following up leads that Hermione had long ago ensured only met dead ends. What was important was that they were all asking the same questions...at the same time. Someone had tipped them off, and that hinted at Riddle pulling strings and moving the little information that he had onto the market.
There were other concerns as well. The would be senator that happened to be Drake’s father was rattling his saber and making a lot of noise lately, and some of it was reaping results. Contractors were on the move, deals were getting made, and new firms were signing on to the Revitalization Project in surprising numbers. Many of them were strictly legit, which meant that executions couldn’t be used as scare tactics. The Phoenix Corporation didn’t kill people over small bribes or questionable hiring practices. When dealing with murderers, violence was a practical and efficient solution, but as more and more ordinary citizens entered the mix, targets became scarce, and new ways to discourage Riddle and frustrate his goals would have to be found. Congressman Malfoy was at the center of it, like a spider tugging at the strings of a web, playing the peacemaker adeptly and getting things done with a speed that would have surprised anyone who didn’t know how deep his pockets really were.

Somehow, the Congressman would have to be dealt with, and if he was really tied to Riddle, as Hermione suspected, he might be their best chance at pinpointing their enemy by tracing his communications to the source. It wouldn’t be easy even if it was possible. Riddle knew all the same tricks that they did, and when he communicated directly, which was rare, it was always via mediums that were hard, if not impossible, to trace. In the meantime, Harry would have to be used strategically when possible, but keep an even lower public profile than usual. It wouldn’t do to have him spotted on the street corner by a pair of eyes looking for the enigmatic Harry Black.

That settled it. They needed a strategy session, and the sooner the better. Congressman Malfoy would have to be observed much closer than ever before, and some kind of intervention or red herring would have to be set up to draw attention off of the names Harry Black and Harry Potter. For now, Harry would have to switch to yet another false ID that had been prepared long in advance. It was a waiting game now. How long before someone on one of two sides finally made a critical mistake? If Hermione had her way, Riddle would be in hell long before a slip-up occurred on her watch. It was time to call in the others.

Especially Ron. Something about the big lug even made meetings less about work and more about fun, a thing with which Hermione had surprisingly little experience. She hummed a Grateful Dead tune while she fired off a memo to the relevant staff members, then grabbed her cell phone and started dialing. The Enigma Corp. was one step behind them…and by God…that’s where the bastards were going to stay!

TBC!!!
Part 31

Big Chicago Part 31…..By Samayel

“Tell it again. From the top. The whole story.” Kingsley’s voice was a soft rumble, calm in the face of the annoying little man they were questioning.

The bartender had been cooperative enough, mostly terrified that, having been fingered as the lone survivor of the bar killings, he’d soon be listed as the suspect. It was good to let him think that, but it was clear that the weedy, greasy little man had almost nothing to do with it, and had probably survived solely because of his total unimportance.

“Right, right, sure…whatever you want. Like I said, and I swear…on my mother’s grave…should anything particularly fatal ever happen to her…God forbid…I was cleaning up after my shift. I locked the doors after the boss and the boys came in. They go in the office, I start cleaning up. You know how it is. I don’t ask questions…I just do my job, so I ‘overlook’ anything goin’ on that isn’t related to taking care of the bar.

There was no one left inside. We only had two or three patrons in the last hour we were open. They’d all left before I started cleaning, honest to God. So I’m cleaning, maybe five minutes at the most, and I get the bucket an’ mop and head for the bathroom. I just barely start moppin’ the floor and the next thing I know I got a guy behind me holdin’ a rag over my mouth. I thought I was done for! All I saw was a black glove and his arm in a black coat. Then the lights went out. I came to maybe half an hour later, layin’ on the floor with a headache, and when I go into the office to tell what happened, everybody’s dead as dead gets.

I panicked. What the hell would you do? I’m in the business of not asking questions, but I know what kinda people I work for…and they don’t like messes. So I ran. Went to my uncle’s place. I begged him to not tell anyone I was around, but it looks like some nosy old broad saw me through the window and phoned me in to you guys. I’m no killer! You gotta know that! Look at my record, man. I never did anything worse than a B&E when I was broke after high school. I did the time in county and stayed clean ever since. I ain’t even had a parkin’ ticket! I swear to God!”

Dora’s phone rang in her pocket, breaking the routine. Kingsley slumped back into his seat, while their interviewee simply rubbed his hands along his face, grateful for the break.

“Go ahead, Officer. Don’t let me…you know…be a nuisance or nothin’…right?”

Dora frowned mildly while she pulled the phone out and checked the incoming number. The name slipped from her mouth like growl before she could stop herself. “Luna…Kingsley…forgive me. I’ve gotta take this.”

“No sweat. You do what you gotta do, Tonksy. I’ll keep laughing boy here company for awhile.”

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“No sweat. You do what you gotta do, Tonksy. I’ll keep laughing boy here company for awhile.”

Dora stepped back to the corner of the room, trying to keep the conversation as private as possible. Luna had never grasped that police work wasn’t the sort of job you interrupted with phone calls at random, and while sometimes the calls held important tidbits of information that Dora needed to hear, oftentimes she would listening to a rambling speech on whatever crossed Luna’s mind at the moment…and that could be anything.

“Luna…Luna…Luna…please…damn it…I’m sorry…I am at work. I need you to get straight to the point. Okay…Remus called…I get it. I’ll call him later…fine. I am at work…I need to go,
The phone snapped shut and Dora turned back to the two men at the table, blushing when she realized that her irritation had made her louder than intended. The bartender smiled toothily.

"Whoa…that’s so cool. Lesbian cop, eh? Like in the movies. Hey…speakin’ of movies…I got this friend…more of an associate…who makes movies…and does photography. I don’t know if you ever thought about being a model, but…y’know…the whole lesbian cop thing would be really hot. Nothing illegal, though…strictly high class art shots…but nude, right?"

The look on Dora’s face was enough to make the little man stop smiling a heartbeat later.

"Never mind. It was terrible idea. Back to the story…right?"

Kingsley chuckled softly. “Yeah…back to the story. Smartest thing you’ve said all day.”

--------------------------------------------------------------------

I can call the week that passed a good one…and I would sooo not be lying. So many things to get used to, but I’m learning. I hate mornings…it’s like my religion…but after seven years of waking up when everyone else does I guess I’m okay with structured, routine schedules.

Harry has been off duty all week, but I haven’t. I suppose I should be upset, but he goes into the ‘office’ with me every day anyway. We wake and play and work out, shower and eat and dress, then let Ron take us to work. Then we come home…our home…where I can paint or sketch, play piano or read at my leisure…or just fuck like bunnies until dinner. Not surprisingly, I haven’t read or painted as much as I could have, given the options that are available to me, but I still like to practice at the piano after dinner. Maria has begun to look at us in amazement, since I don’t think she ever imagined it was possible for two people to spend that much time locked in a bedroom. Therese, on the other hand, just rolls her eyes and huffs with annoyance whenever one of us gets ‘that look’ in his eyes and we wind up slipping away with only a hint of discretion. They can be as amazed or as annoyed as they like…as long as I’m getting laid this much…and this well!

Harry has had his ID changed to another alias. James Evans. Hermione put in overtime changing computer records and deleting or altering files in databases that held records of Harry Black or Harry Potter. We haven’t gone out much lately, mostly because I’m working the same shifts as everyone else, and there’s been an awful lot going on, but also because Harry is laying low while they figure out ways to change the nature of his involvement.

It seems that my very own, dear, old Daddy has been up to his usual tricks, but this time he’s taking his cues from Mr. Riddle and the Enigma Corp. As a result, we’ve been here with our ears and eyes fixed on every snippet of news we can get, all to piece together an action plan that revolves around balking the Enigma Corp and frustrating Riddle enough to make him lose his temper and leave us a clue we can really work with. Call me invested in the process, but if Harry can do this one last job, he’ll be able to quit this and leave it all behind. A life with no more complications would be his and mine, and I’d endure a lot worse than excess hours at the office to achieve a goal like that!

I haven’t even had time to spend the earnings from my first payday. Officially, Deacon Malloy earned his salary as a translation consultant to the Phoenix Corp., and I’ve never been paid so much for anything, legal or otherwise, in my entire life. At the first opportunity that presents itself,
I pretty desperately need some shopping-based self indulgence. Lord knows the only other thing I’m still allowed is sex.

And I have so truly NOT suffered a lack of that!

It’s hard to find myself worried over my father’s sudden involvement in Riddle’s game when I can wake up in a tangled pile of sheets and limbs, still practically reeking of sex and sore from the night before, and then start the morning off with a warm-up fuck before we even make it to the shower. I feel…sated…content…complete. It really hasn’t been that long since my life was an endless line of terrible days, but this life makes all of that fade and disappear so easily…when that perfect cock glides into me like silk, like it was fashioned in heaven, made just to accommodate me and fill my every need, and I can grind my body back onto it, savoring the way Harry groans beneath me thrusting up desperately when he comes inside of me as hard and hungry for more as I am.

I stopped taking the pills a couple of days ago. I don’t have the same feelings of terrible apprehension lately. Routine is grinding away the rough edges of what I think is my fear of change, and I feel like the anvil of doubt has been lifted from my chest. Harry is here, and safe, and all mine. My work has a meaning. My work. I love saying that! I didn’t have anything that could be called work before! I had…”my trick”, or ‘my keeper’. I don’t have to fuck a stranger I hate to keep myself alive. I get to have the sex I want, with the man I want, as often as I can make him hard for me…and the only annoying side effect is that I haven’t been this giddy since junior high!

Doc Snape noticed the difference too. When I got my check up, he didn’t do much more than nod and occasionally grunt while scribbling notes, but when it was finished and the numbers were there in black and white he had a few nice things to say…by his standard.

“Color me fucking stunned. Looks like you actually listened. I’ll have to give Harry a lollipop for doing what he’s fucking told for once. Your numbers are good across the board. We’ll try some time without the mood stabilizers. If nothing seems wrong in two weeks, that’ll be the last of that. Keep to the diet until then. I’ll lift a few restrictions then if you’re still in good shape…assuming you can exercise a little moderation and stick to the rest of the rules. Don’t let it go to your head…and stop smiling so damned much…it’s annoying as hell.”

Like I said…by his standards, that’s a glowing report, highlighting the admirable self restraint I’ve shown for weeks, and I should be proud of myself for following through on all the recommendations for my well being.

And that brings me to here. The office. My workstation. French, Italian, Spanish and English communications, each culled from the vast stores of worldwide transmissions, each with just a few key words that piqued interest. Of course…most of them are complete crap. Ordinary comments made by ordinary people, memos between departments on everyday business, and copies of emails phone calls that have no real relevance. A few items get kicked up to Hermione or Parvati each day, since I still have trouble getting the feel for what is or isn’t important, but I’m getting better as I go, and I don’t get headaches the way I did the first week I spent in front of a computer monitor. I’m adjusting.

It doesn’t hurt that Harry broke down and took a rare picture for me, then framed it and had it waiting for me with a single red rose at my desk. I understand now why he has so few pictures. He can’t afford to leave behind lots of evidence. The few that were taken when he was in school years ago are still out there, but they’re connected only to Harry Potter, heir to two fortunes, decorated soldier and wealthy, jet-setting corporate titan. He hasn’t allowed new pictures to become attached to any of his other ID’s, except for the slightly rough ID pictures themselves. Each one looks so
different from the others. Different facial expressions, different haircuts, and different posture. Each carefully calculated to evoke a unique personality at first glance, and even the details shuffle around a little. A little less weight, an inch or two of height. Little things, but just enough to keep people off their guard.

But I was worth bending the rules again. I like the picture. He’s smiling broadly…genuinely. He’s smiling because Dean is taking the picture and it’s just for me, for here, so that I’ll have one of the only pictures of him around. When we’re here together, Harry is usually handling some of the Farsi and other Arabic documents to take some of the work off of Parvati, or downstairs on the pistol range. I’ve practiced that too, and honestly the only part I like is having Harry step close behind me to coach me through effective posture and how to aim carefully before firing. Not to mention keeping my wrist steady when it fires. Not to harp on the subject of limp wrists, but they don’t come limper than mine, and steadying a pistol is tougher than it sounds. Still, I’m at least good enough to hit a target in the torso, so theoretically, if someone stood nice and still less than twenty feet away, they might be in danger!

Honestly, some days I wish that acerbic wit could kill. I’d be the deadliest hit man alive.

But this isn’t bad. I can poke fun at Hermione and Ron for making eyes at each other, take a break for some snuggling and lunch with Harry, and make a small fortune doing it. No complaints. Then Hermione drifts by with an all business look on her face.

“Staff meeting…all strategy this time. I think we’ve got some workable plans.”

Everyone gathers around the large table in the center of one of the meeting rooms here. It probably used to be a managers office almost eighty years ago, but now maps of Chicago are spread out and the lighting is clean and sharp, allowing everyone at the big table to see easily. I admit to serious interest, because Hermione is the one who will finalize Harry’s next moves. This does have an impact on me, but Harry’s next to me now, still smelling faintly of gunpowder…and expensive cologne. Comforting, but surreal. Hermione is talking, a study in contrasts, brilliant and forceful, dressed in blue jeans and tie-dyed T-shirt, looking like a throwback from another time, talking like a woman twenty years ahead of our time.

“We’ve got several things on the docket today, so forgive me if I seem hurried here, but I have a lot of irons and the fire right now and we all need to get back to work as soon as this is over.

First off, we’ve discussed the possibility of a shift of styles. Our initial campaign concentrated our efforts on criminal organizations loosely involved in the sale, control, and transition of property connected to the Urban Revitalization scheme currently backed by Riddle and his cronies. Our disruption of their efforts has been successful, resulting in near complete chaos in the underworld, and their almost total withdrawal from the project. Leaders of various organizations have rushed to sell property to legitimate, unaffiliated real estate groups, even taking a loss on them to hurry their un-involvement. They’ve realized that Riddle is a poison pill, but the project is still stumbling forward, and as long as Riddle is getting part of what he wants, he’ll keep playing. We haven’t won yet, but we have gained some ground.

Here’s why. Recently, and not surprisingly, Congressman Lucius Malfoy involved himself in the process to a much higher degree than mere public support. A flurry of phone calls out of his office and home have been at the center of a push to move legitimate contractors into position on the project. This expenditure of effort can’t be without reward, which means he has a personal stake in the game. With a run for the Senate being probable in the near future, I’d say he’s looking for the credit on this, but I also suspect to a high degree that he has had direct contact with Riddle, in part because Riddle has the clout to make a Senate run nothing more than a fictional contest with
Malfoy’s success assured beyond doubt.

They’ve figured out the game we ran in New York. Our policy prohibits the taking of innocent lives, and only under the most extreme duress do we even take direct action against law enforcement and politicians. Central to our secrecy and security as an organization is that we, as much as possible, do not involve ourselves directly in the processes of governance. We steer people and situations to the conclusions we support, eliminate obstacles or create them, disrupt activity or communications by Riddle or his cronies, but we do not kill at random, we do not take innocent lives, and we do not kill without due consideration regarding the target. As a result, Riddle’s people have moved the game into the hands of perfectly normal citizens, and to a certain degree this ties our hands.

We’ve plotted a new series of actions we can take to disrupt the project, without civilian casualties. The most immediate is repeated computer attacks against records regarding ownership of property, and against records for zoning and construction permits. Then there are more direct physical attacks against the specialized equipment needed to undertake the work on site. That’s where Harry comes back into play. Last, I mean to undertake attacks against payroll, records and data essential to the operation of crews. All of these are delaying tactics, but I suspect that if Riddle has shifted gears to legitimate contractors and political favors, he’s already frustrated.

This brings me to the next point. Harry’s change of ID was made necessary because Chicago is crawling with people looking for him, both in law enforcement and in private investigation. Riddle managed to get his hands on a backdated photo of Harry at age nineteen, but it isn’t high quality, and the differences between his appearance now and then are enough that we haven’t got much to worry about. The important fact is that all this information came into people’s hands at the same time, and the communications I’ve interrupted all suggest a very high price placed on identifying Harry. They want Harry out of the game…badly. If we keep the pressure on and prove a connection between Malfoy and Riddle, hopefully in the form of communications that can be tapped, or through a meeting with participants that can be identified and followed, we might be able to wrap this up before the summer is out.

All I’ve managed to piece together so far is a connection between private investigators and British lawyer cutting the checks through a dummy corporation. The name Pettigrew came up over and over again. We all know that name. Riddle’s favorite stooge is finally making himself more public than ever. It was inevitable that we’d see the connection between a search for Harry and Riddle’s henchman, and that makes it a safe guess that Riddle just doesn’t care if Pettigrew gets caught in the crossfire. I doubt that Riddle will make any direct calls or contact so soon after having done so before, but at least we have two very solid leads to work on.

The would be senator, Drake’s father, is candidate number one. We’ll be arranging bugging operations against him, and if it’s possible, I think Drake might be of great help in this, especially if we can bring him into play surgically, just once, when no one expects him. I’ll be working on tracking down Pettigrew, but he covers his tracks well and knows how to stay out of the limelight, so I’m not holding out a lot of immediate hope. I’m working on it.

In the coming weeks, Harry will be employed against the targets I’ve outlined here, as soon as most of the equipment is moved into place and is easiest to sabotage. I’ll have an action plan drafted for placing surveillance on Congressman Malfoy by the end of the week, and we’ll determine then whether it’s opportune to use Drake toward this purpose.

That brings me to the last item on the list for today. The Vice Squad is finally moving on Blaise Zabini. I thought you might want to know. I dropped as much into their laps anonymously as I could, and I’ve observed their progress through a little active snooping. It looks like they’re ready
to move in…and soon. You can probably catch a little of it on the news if you’re lucky. This kind of bust always makes good headlines, but I can’t imagine that having any impact on sentencing. Best guess is that, even with a decent lawyer, at least several of the charges will stick, for a minimum of at least two to three years jail time…if he doesn’t get an incredibly generous judge, and those are an almost extinct species. It’s unlikely he’ll go for a jury trial, because juries are biased against these kinds of charges, and any lawyer, even a public defender, will advise him against risking the wrath of random strangers. The Vice people have already moved on the storage locker and rented warehouse space I set up in Blaise’s name, and I spotted several fishing expeditions against his computer. It won’t be long before they move on him, now that they’ve assembled enough evidence to merit a warrant for a search. Congratulations…short of a miracle…Blaise Zabini will be enjoying a lengthy stay in the custody of the state or federal institution of the judges choosing."

It breaks up into specifics and questions for awhile, fingers pointing at marks on a map, Harry making notes on points of entry to various work yards. This is what I do, what I’m a part of now. We scheme, and then we execute. Harry is uncertain about my seeing my father again, but he leaves the idea in my hands, just like before.

This is different. This isn’t some hollow revenge I’ll regret in the middle of the night, wondering if I’ve done right, or just lashed back blindly at someone who shouldn’t matter anymore. It needs to be done, and I think I want to see him. Not to get even, just to say goodbye. I could plant a bug in the room while I do it, but it isn’t just for that. I want him to know I’m alright, coming out ahead even without his help or doing things his way. I can get access to him for more than a few seconds, and close another door on the life I’ll be leaving behind while I do it. It all fits. This I can do, better than any of the others.

Do you believe in coincidence? I’m not sure I do. Not anymore. Everything has a purpose, or a connection, and the struggle is to find it in all the confusion. Everything connected, the end meets the beginning. Like the mythical Ouroborous. The snake devouring its tail. The circle of infinity. I’m leaving behind what I knew…again…like I’ve done before. A lot of times. Everything I’ve ever done or been has led to here, to this, and I have no regrets anymore. Daddy will know that before I go. As for Blaise…whatever happens now is out of my hands.

What really matters is the hand under the table. The calloused, warm one that gives a small squeeze just to tell me that he’s there no matter what. With that to come home to, I am fearless. I think that for the first time in my life, I have the confidence to believe that it will turn out alright, and that I deserve the happy ending the story books promised when I was a child. Thank you, Harry. You think you know what you mean to me, but it’s hard to imagine anyone ever really understanding how much you’re changing who I am…and how I feel about myself. More than flowers or chocolates or a new life where misery has no place…that feeling is the real gift you’ve given me, and I never tire of finding new ways to show that I appreciate every last bit of it.

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“What the fuck!?”

The expression had come from Blaise’s mouth a dozen times already. A perfectly normal morning. Sleeping in while Vinnie and Greg made breakfast. A knock on the door and Vinnie answers it. Cops everywhere. All at the same time, armed to the teeth like they were taking down a terrorist cell or a crack gang, shouting, booted feet, smashed doors and bodies in black everywhere.

Vinnie and Greg were in separate rooms, likely handcuffed on the floor just like Blaise himself.
He’d heard the shouts when they’d found Vinnie’s gun, and despite the fact that they were let into the house voluntarily, so far they’d acted like they’d had to fight their way in under heavy fire, and were in mortal danger every second. In theory, they might have been, but in all seriousness, they’d been in Blaise’s home, ripping it to shreds, for almost half an hour while screaming questions at the tops of their lungs, and the only three occupants were cuffed in separate rooms. At this point, pretending that they were ever in danger was beginning to look a little silly.

“I said it before and I’ll say it again! I own a club! The Firehouse! That’s all I do. It’s all legit! I pay fucking taxes like everyone else! What the fuck?? What’s this even about? You keep saying I know…but I don’t know shit…and when I talk to my lawyer…the bunch of you are fucked!”

Someone shouted from the den, voice filled with a kind of sweaty-palmed eagerness that sent a nervous shiver down Blaise’s neck.

“We got it. Tons…from around the world. Looks like we’re almost done here.”

Greg had been sitting in the kitchen, hands cuffed behind his back, still wearing the apron he’d put on while throwing together breakfast. He’d spent the last half hour answering questions the way he always did…minimalist style. He was the cook and housekeeper. Blaise didn’t do anything but run a nightclub. Vinnie was home security because of all the violence on TV lately. Greg didn’t admit to any knowledge of any activity beyond keeping the house looking good and making breakfast and dinner. The other gun they found in the house wasn’t his. He was just an employee making breakfast. When they asked about porn, Greg stared in confusion and just said, “I’m a cook. What the hell are you people talking about?”

They bought it. His name was taken down in all the reports, and they might tie him to the gun at a later date, but they had nothing on him, and didn’t bother anyone but Vinnie and Blaise. Vinnie didn’t have a permit for his pistol, but that was all they had on him. Blaise…they were dragging Blaise out of the house after letting him grab a handful of clothes, while cop after cop hauled out electronics from the den. Blaise was still proclaiming his innocence…loudly…while he was led out to a car. Greg stayed silent. He knew what he had to do. However this shit had happened, Mama Zabini needed to know. He had to stay cool, make it through this, and make it to her place as soon as he could. She could help Blaise and Vinnie with a phone call. It was gonna be alright. Something was wrong about this whole mess, but Mrs. Zabini could make it right.

Never minding that he was trying to cooperate and make this easy, the men leading him seemed determined to make it hard to keep pace with them, and wound up keeping Blaise off his balance the whole while, using every stumble as an excuse to pretend he was being difficult. When the door to the car opened, Blaise probably shouldn’t have been surprised by the hand on his head that guided him in…which suddenly shoved him forward into the edge of the car’s roof. His left temple connected hard and fast with metal frame of the car.

“FUCK! Goddammit! You assholes! What the fuck was that for?!”

Once Blaise was shoved the rest of the way into the car, the door slammed shut behind him while he tried to get the stars out of his vision. There was probably going to be a bump on his head the size of an egg before another hour went by.

“You prick fucks! I’ve been nice about this shit so far. I’m a businessman, not some cheap fuckin’ hood! That shit was police brutality, and I’ve got the lawyers to prove it! I’m gonna own this town before I’m finished with you assholes! What have I done to deserve this shit, huh? You tell me…since you’ll be paying for it!”

The car was already in motion, the streets moving by one by one…but Blaise suddenly realized
that the last turn they made wasn’t in the direction of the police station. The scenic route. Three words every criminal dreaded. A polite way to say that the detour they were taking would lead to somewhere quiet, and that by the time Blaise made it to being booked at the station, he’d be in no shape to talk his way out of it. The words ‘resisting arrest’ and ‘disorderly conduct’ would excuse whatever had happened, like a carte blanche to exercise whatever force was needed to bring him in. They probably wouldn’t hurt his face, because visible evidence of abuse was frowned on…but there was good chance he’d be pissing blood by the time it was noon.

The cop in the passenger seat turned and showed the ugliest smile Blaise had ever seen. Not physically ugly, but the kind of leer that showed the soul of a man who had no qualms about torturing another human being, and who loved the irony that his badge and gun gave him the freedom to do this without the risk of punishment.

“Pucker up, sweetie! We’re gonna make a little stop along the way. Hope you like rough trade, fag boy, ‘cause you’re gonna wish you’d never been born. Hey…Joe…he’s all quiet now. Think he’s getting the picture?”

The driver barely growled under his breath, but Blaise could make out the words that came first.

“Child-molestin’ son of a bitch. They should just let us kill him.”

Nothing came to Blaise’s mind for an answer. Just empty shock. This shit was real. It was some horrible fucking mistake, but it was still real. There had always been a way to make things work out, a way to cut a deal, a little wiggle room in every situation. This was different. This was two men he couldn’t buy, a car he couldn’t stop, and a drive that would end with him flopped across the ground in some empty warehouse while boots and batons hurt him in places that people couldn’t see in a mugshot photograph. A shiver ran down Blaise’s spine, and a hot, tingling, tightness curled around his gut while his pulse pounded in his ears. The feeling was new to him, and when a sheen of sweat broke out across his body, Blaise realized it was terror.

And for the first time in his life, Blaise Zabini was truly, certainly, absolutely terrified…and he was right to feel that way.

TBC!!!
Remus sipped his latte slowly, still not sure if getting anything with caffeine was the hottest of ideas. Dora seemed like she was in a fairly good mood, and even though it was an unusual place to meet, at least for Remus, the atmosphere was cordial enough.

To be specific, it was his first time in Gaia’s Aerie, a lesbian erotic art gallery and coffeehouse in Chicago’s large and culturally diverse gay district, and the only disrupting part of it for him was looking across a table at his ex-wife while sitting next to a huge glossy black and white photo of a statuesque woman with heavily pierced nipples. Tastefully done…but not quite Remus’ element.

Also, Dora’s girlfriend, Luna, was on a ladder just a few feet behind them, carefully hanging a new oil painting for her upcoming show. A symbolic representation of a slice carved from Eve’s apple…which happened to strongly resemble a woman’s labia. Remus wasn’t really up on the ‘modern art thing’, as he called it, but he was fairly sure that anything that made him blush at this stage of his life wasn’t what he thought of as traditional art.

Still, Luna was always nice to him in a doe-eyed, hippy-ish kind of way, smiling even when she rattled off the occasional diatribe against law enforcement and its connections to whatever powers spawned all evil in the universe this week. She never seemed jealous or uncomfortable, and she was often so matter of fact that it was frightening and comforting at the same time. One thing was always true…Luna never lied, and you could count on that. Small wonder Dora was with someone like that…a few years with a secretive, depressed closet alcoholic could do that to a person.

He always felt sheepish near Dora now. Embarrassed about the past, but still connected to it by more than memories. Diana was walking and talking and a complete wonder…but she was a constant reminder of what he’d almost had for a life and let slip through his fingers. Not the cheeriest thoughts, but at least he’d seen so much more of her just lately. Trips to the zoo had been full of wide eyed wonder and squeals of joy. The aquarium had been a complete success, in spite of the brief embarrassment of a potty related accident that really had more to do with Diana’s stubborn desire to keep staring at a new fish instead of making the journey to the toilet. One thing Remus had missed out on was the diaper years, and his experience at freshening up a five year old in a men’s room was severely limited. Even so, it had felt like being a proper parent….which was everything he could have hoped for, even if it was only for a few hours on a Saturday afternoon.

Dora was still beautiful, in her determined, quirky, brilliant way. She and Luna made an odd couple, one just above average height, athletic and deep breasted, hair clipped short-ish and yet still hinting at femininity, the other slim and vague, long hair falling back stick-straight and chatty compared to Dora’s seriousness.

“Remus? What’s up…you’ve been staring at the walls for the last five minutes. Don’t tell me you haven’t seen the occasional naked woman…I know better…for a fact.”

Dora nipped at her mocha with a mild smirk while Remus tried to focus his concentration for a second.

“Yeah…I mean no…oh, hell. Not used to a place like this, I guess. Fish out of water, right? It’s cool…sort of…just different. I just didn’t want to talk shop right off the bat.”
Dora smiled. “It’s okay…next time we can meet in the park if you like. I just wanted to pick Luna up tonight before we get Diana from daycare. This was just perfect timing for a little shop talk before the day’s done. Sorry it took a few days to meet, but what did you want to say that wasn’t fit for a phone?”

“It isn’t really unfit…just sensitive, you know. I have this client, and it’s a big job, with a top end payoff if I get the info he wants on this guy. Big money…the kind that really sets things right for a guy. I don’t wanna miss out on this, but it’s been tough going. The kicker is that I’m competing with damn near every P.I. in town, and the rumor is that nobody…and I mean nobody…has found anything worth the big prize yet. That’s unusual enough for starters, but here’s the real twist.

I heard through the grapevine that the guy I’m looking for has at least a few similarities to a guy you might have been looking for…in that prison riot case from last month, right before everything got crazy on the streets. I can’t name my sources, but I was told that a fella named Harry Black was somewhere near the chewy center of that mess at the federal penitentiary. Now all I have is a name…Harry Potter, and a photo…here. Does this bear any resemblance to the guy you’re looking for?”

Dora took the photo from Remus and squinted just a little. “Little blurry…but he looks too young…is this up to date?”

Remus grinned. “No…it’s not. Add maybe ten years at the most…probably more like five. Just a little above average height…black hair and green eyes. Athletic build. If your Harry Black is my Harry Potter, we might both walk away with a little something that could be useful. That’s why I wanted to meet instead of chat. One, I have no proof and nothing but a hunch, and two, I needed your eyes to give this a once over. The tricky part is that I have no data, I repeat…none, on a Harry Potter or a Harry Black that meets this description. So what do you think?”

Her eyes kept gliding across the picture, making minute calculations based on sketches and vague descriptions from witnesses. Dora sighed.

“I’m not sure, but I do know that no one mentioned a scar or glasses. Eye surgery is pretty normal these days, but plastic surgery? Doesn’t seem likely.”

“Even if the guy in question is supposed to be some sort of CEO playboy? I haven’t got credible confirmation, but that was part of the source information I got. Young, maybe twenty five, athletic, black hair and green eyes, lots of money. The story I got is that he knocked up some debutante and just split, and her dad wants him found so that papers can be served on him, but the fishy part is how much money has been spent on this. Most of the P.I.’s in Chicago, all on the same job, hired by the same guy…a British lawyer named Pettigrew, at the SAME time as your Harry Black turns a prison upside down to whack a few big time cons that are due for parole. I know each little part isn’t that much, but altogether? Something just seems fishy.”

“You’re right. I don’t like it. It just seems off…too connected in little ways to be nothing at all. Maybe it is nothing, but it’s something to look into. I had my own theories about the prison and some of the first underworld executions right after that, but they didn’t sit too well with the FBI suits running the case now. If it was anybody but you, I wouldn’t share this and you know it, but since you brought this up, let me throw some questions your way, okay?”

“Yeah! Hit me with your best shot.”

“We had a lot of weird events that all tied into the first killings after the riot…little things that hinted at big things, but we couldn’t make a solid connection. It’s my hunch that they mean more than people think, but I couldn’t prove it in a court of law. First…power outages on the nights of
the first killings, targeting specific neighborhoods for exactly the few minutes it would take a killer to leave the scene. No cameras or other evidence left behind. Second…computer records from the prison referring to Harry Black completely disappeared, and even though he was supposed to have been transferred to the SuperMax facility, no one ever heard from him again. The guy just disappeared like he never existed in the first place. Third…within a few weeks of these incredibly clean, execution style killings, all using different methods, different guns, and targeting different organizations, the power outages stop and the gangs start killing each other off on their own.

“Remus…I think somebody deliberately ignited a multi-gang war. I just haven’t got a reason why. No motive…except dead gangsters…and that’s a lot of effort for something like that. Plus the computer hacking required to knock out the power grid for specific times and places…as well as wiping out records from federal computers? I have nothing to connect either Harry Black or Harry Potter to any of this…except for the prison riot. It all starts there, but how would it connect to here? Any ideas?”

Luna had stepped close to their table, listening raptly while they chattered out possibilities, suddenly speaking up with her usual cheery and matter of fact tone.

“Sounds like a struggle between extra national corporate entities using hired guns and organized crime as a proxy for a greater struggle over world domination. They don’t bother with armies and laws anymore…they’re above those…so that’s the way they settle disputes now. I thought everyone knew that?”

Dora and Remus rolled their eyes and restrained their smirks. Luna and her conspiracies. What a freaking trip!

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Greg Goyle knocked politely on the penthouse suite door. Mama Zabini has been devastated by the entire situation, and Greg was pretty sure that she’d even believed that her own son was guilty. He’d tried to contact her immediately, but when Mama Zabini told her people that she wanted no visitors, there were no visitors, and that was that.

Meanwhile, Blaise had been stewing in the city jail and getting shuffled over to county for no explicable reason except that the cops liked making him hard to find. Vinnie had been released on bond with a couple charges for weapons infractions, but nothing serious, and Greg had been knocking himself out trying to keep tabs on where Blaise was all while continuing to try to reach Blaise’s mom. Basically, it had been nothing but a bitch of a couple weeks.

He’d seen Blaise once the first week, three days after the raid, and the poor SOB looked like the cops had just run him over with the car instead of just a little rough handling. Turned out that after getting the ‘slow ride’ to the station he’d been dumped in a cell with a couple angry redneck bastards with a grudge, and then the guard mentioned what charges he’d been brought in on. He was in no shape to fight back after a police beating, and the two bastards had worked him over twice as bad as the police had, all before Blaise had ever seen a lawyer.

And that was another matter! Blaise’s lawyer was mostly for taxes, zoning and business law…not criminal trials, and Blaise had only reached him by phone once, and had gotten a number for a lawyer that specialized in criminal defense. After that, he’d been whisked out of the medical ward and bounced back and forth between county and city jails, with the excuse being ‘overcrowding’. Sounded legit enough to most people, until you realized that it was awfully silly to move the same people back and forth again and again when keeping them in one place might speed up their court
date and cost the state less money. That’s when you could tell that they really meant to rail someone. By the amount of effort they put into making him hard to find!

He’d seen Blaise a second time…the day before yesterday…and Blaise had been coherent enough to repeat one thing, even through lips that were swollen and cracked while they healed. 'Get to my ma!' It felt wrong to say ‘I’m trying’, but that was all he could say. He could tell by the look in Blaise’s puffy eye, the one he could still open, that the guy knew his own mom didn’t believe in him. How do you look a guy you’ve known all your life in the face and just mumble excuses? You don’t…you tell him you’re on it, twenty-four seven as long as it takes, and then you hustle your ass to get results.

And that led to Mama Zabini’s door, with the polite guy from the ‘old school’ beside you to make sure you didn’t say anything that might upset Mrs. Zabini. He was polite because he was the real deal, with nothing to prove, and could break legs or sink a guy into a cement foundation without even blinking an eye. Nobody…nobody was rude to Mrs. Zabini.

“Mrs. Zabini? Uh…I’m sorry to bother you, but it’s really important. I came because of Blaise. He wanted me to see you. I waited to be, you know, respectful, ’cause you said before that you needed some time. But he really needs your help. I’d never come askin’ favors of you, but this is for Blaise. May I come in?”

Greg wasn’t used to long speeches, and just knowing that the guy next to him was listening for even a sign of disrespect made Greg’s skin prickle with sweat and try to crawl right off of him. Her voice could be heard from behind the door, muffled but still clear enough to make out.

“Just…go away. My son is dead to me. I don’t want company. You’re a good boy…but go away.”

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You heard the lady of the house. Sorry, kid. Take off.”

Sweat was forming on Greg’s head while his pulse pounded in his ears. He could hear the knuckles beside him crack lazily as a reminder that he’d be leaving on his back if he didn’t play nice. Blaise was stuck in some shitbox getting his ass kicked by cops and cons alike, and Greg was stuck in the middle, sweating like crazy in an air conditioned hallway, freaking out because he didn’t what to do.

It wasn’t really a plan…because Greg wasn’t so much the planning type. It was more of a collapse. He hit the floor on his hands and knees and got out the words he’d meant to keep private, knowing he had a matter of seconds before he was dragged out of here by his collar for a stunt like this.

“On my beloved father’s grave, I swear to you Blaise was framed. I know he didn’t do it! I swear to God! You gotta believe me, Mrs. Zabini! I would never, never lie to you. Blaise was legit! If you’ll hear me out…I swear to God you’ll URK!”

One huge hand was around his throat, the other was already jerking his arm back into a lock while he was dragged to his feet. Game over. There was no fighting a guy like this, because the next step was the hospital. Greg struggled for a breath of air while he was dragged back down the hall, listening to the irritated tones of the man holding his throat.

“Punk ass kids. No fucking respect. We’re takin’ the elevator, kid. Be nice and this won’t hurt too much. One thing though…I already dislike you…so please…piss me off some more.”

Like a vision of heaven, the door to the suite opened and a woman dressed entirely in black emerged, chin upright and defiant, eyes hollow with grief but still bright and alert.
“Let him in, Vito. Gregory… I have known you since you were just a baby. You’ve never sworn on your father’s grave idly. Come in…and tell me these things you say you know. Pray that you don’t give a woman false hope, or you will be apologizing to your father in person!”

‘I did it! Thank fuckin’ God…I did it. Blaise, buddy…we’ll get you out of this jam yet!’

Mama Zabini’s exact age wasn’t even speculated on out loud. Blaise was her only child, but she’d had a string of husbands in her time, and been the beautiful flower at the side of men of great power and wealth, but she’d outlived one after another. She hadn’t remarried after her seventh husband had passed away of a heart attack, and while Blaise had been growing up she had been rumored to take a lover now and again, but she had never married since, and had always been devoted to her darling child.

No mother wanted to believe ill things of her child, but a mother knew things, and few were blind to a child’s faults even when they weren’t spoken of aloud. Blaise was gay…enough to break a mother’s heart, knowing she’d have no grandchildren from her only child, and she had coped well enough in her own way. Blaise had been fond of the good life, he was proud of his family name and had wanted to be the big shot someday, just like his father had been in his day. He’d been reckless, with the lavish suits and the pretty boyfriends and the drugs that all the young kids liked these days. Still, a mother could love her son just the same.

The boys were always pretty things, as pretty as girls, always young, as young now as they had been when he was just old enough to live on his own. A mother noticed such things. Blaise kept his private life private enough, but there was nothing that failed to reach her ears. Even from a distance, she always knew how her son was doing, and who he was with, and where he was living and how he conducted himself. Always such pretty young boys.

And then this. She’d never dared to think such a thing might be true, until this…this disaster. A fluttering feeling in her chest had told her that this worst of nightmares was real, and that her only child had done the unthinkable, the intolerable…the one crime that even the majority of his own people would never support. It wasn’t unheard of, but it was rare, even in this advanced day and age, when old morals that had forbidden the sale of hard drugs were dead and gone. Anyone who dared to rise to his defense would be suspect, or might find their friends turning on them for supporting such a person. In truth, her own stomach turned at the mere idea of such things. It was easier to push it all away, to forget, to grieve for a child that was no longer worth calling her own.

But…if Gregory was speaking the truth… hope sprung to life and commanded her. It could be true, and not just an idle fantasy that came to her in moments of utter despair. Could Blaise have been framed? He wasn’t in ‘the business’ anymore, even if he had connections and an important family name, but he had been framed once, set up to take the fall for his work as a pusher. He’d slipped the noose by sending one of those pretty boys of his to take his place, and he’d kept his freedom ever since, but could someone have held such a long grudge?

Gregory sat when waved toward a chair, earnest and nervous even while he rubbed his neck and caught his breath. Mrs. Zabini was bringing iced tea of all things, and it seemed so out of place in this den of luxury and comfortable isolation. She seemed weirdly calm… for a woman who had been grieving for almost two weeks… even minutes ago.

For a woman of middle years, Mrs. Zabini was still striking at first sight, even with streaks of gray in raven black hair. She was statuesque, and almost mannish in her confidence where other women were demure and docile. She was also widely reputed to be a woman who did not tolerate fools, and who could bear a long, long grudge. Greg may not have been the ‘plan type’, but he was definitely the ‘live to see old age type’. He would never disrespect a friend’s mother… but Mrs.
Zabini was owed more than just everyday respect.

“Talk. Now. Tell my that my son did not do this…and make me believe you.”

Greg took his iced tea and cleared his sore throat hurriedly. “I lived there. For weeks. With Vinnie, too. We went to the club, we followed him around everywhere. He never…and I swear to you…never…did anything like that. The cops said he had a warehouse locker full of equipment. We’ve known him since we were kids and we’d never heard of it. None of us even knew why they were there until the cops started askin’ real crazy questions. I mean…we all knew it is with Blaise…what kinda club he runs…the kinda people he dates. But he never did anything that woulda hinted at that. They said he was makin’ movies and sellin’ em on the internet. He don’t even own a camera. Not even on his cellphone! I’m just sayin’…we woulda known. I’d swear to it, and if I’m wrong…if I’m wrong I don’t care what happens…but I ain’t wrong. Not about this.”

Mrs. Zabini listened quietly, impassive even while her thoughts raced and danced. A thousand questions rushed to the tip of her tongue, a thousand possibilities better than the reality she had perceived until this morning. Guilt…for not believing better of her own child…even if he was gay, anger…that someone might have engineered such a thing against her only child, relief…that her son might be blameless in this…this calamity.

“You swear…but it isn’t proof…you have nothing to show his innocence, but you vouch for him. Such loyalty is admirable. It will take more than that to help him, but you do give me hope. There are things I can do…they will be done. I will do what I can…and if you see him first…tell him that I will see him soon. What do you know of his dealings…does he have enemies of whom I should be aware? Who would do this to him? Who could? Anything, however small, that you might know…it could help me to speed his freedom.”

Greg sighed with relief. It was a sure thing now that Blaise would be better off, even if they couldn’t get him free right away, the word would come down to treat him right, and even cops knew when to behave if they had a good enough reason.

“We just don’t know, Mrs. Zabini. Everything was going good. The club is legit…right down to the last dollar…he does the books every day like clockwork. We haven’t had any trouble. Not from cops, or other gangs, or anybody. He keeps a little powder around…for personal use…but he doesn’t deal drugs anymore. He’ll introduce people to other people, but he stays out of the risky business. He was even thinking of…you know…settling down a little. Takin’ up permanent housekeeping with Dee…you remember him? The one that took the fall for Blaise back when he was dealing? They were pretty tight since Dee got outta the joint…it was even looking like Dee was gonna be movin’ in soon.”

Greg could be a little slow, but he saw the flick of an eyebrow and the hardness of flint in Mrs. Zabini’s eyes. It took just a second to put it together before she asked the question herself.

“I don’t think Dee did anything…hell…I don’t even think he could make that kinda thing happen. He just doesn’t have that kinda clout. He only got outta the joint a couple months ago at the most. An’ he was nice when he came over, like he wanted the old days back. He had it for Blaise real bad back then, and he was just the same now. I don’t see how he could get that sorta pull with the DA and the cops and set all this up in just a few weeks. Nah…it just don’t seem right. I think somebody from the old days just hates him. Maybe one of the people that set him up before. Somebody with real clout an’ a long grudge. But Blaise…he’s in a bad way, and the cops have him bouncing back and forth so his lawyer can hardly find him while they lock him up with whoever they think will kick his ass the worst. That’s why I begged. We gotta get him outta this…soon…or there ain’t gonna be enough of him left to send to trial!”
Mrs. Zabini kept her own counsel in all things. Greg was a good boy, a loyal friend, but even small things, the sort of things taken for granted, could lead the way to answers. There were many things she would need to do, and seeing to Blaise’s safety was the first, but there would be questions to ask later. Questions placed in the ears of people who could move mountains when they needed to…and they would move mountains if she asked them to do so. She rose from her seat and stroked the young man’s hair with the caress of a loving mother, then kissed his brow.

“Very well. Go. See him if you can, tell him I will find a way to help him…and rest if you are weary. Things can be done to aid him. You have my thanks, Gregory. I know your father would be proud of you…such a good man you’ve become…to be so loyal to a friend…to my son. Go with God.”

“Yes, ma’am…thank you…thank you so much. I’m just glad I could help. Bless you, Mrs. Zabini…I know Blaise will rest easy the minute he knows you’re lookin’ out for him. Thank you.”

A minute later Gregory Goyle was gone, down to the ground floor and back into the world of cars and noise and people while Blaise Zabini’s mother sat in the cool silence of her suite, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, imploring the heavens for some guidance and steeling herself for the arrangements that would have to be made. Her phone would be her constant ally for the days to come, and there were so very many people that she would need to help her child…but when time permitted, there was one other person she would need to see. Someone who did not travel, whom she would have to seek out and pay respect to accordingly. There was someone who could answer questions even when others could only offer guesses. She would need…the Strega.

‘Motherfuckin’ bastards…again. Fucking again! Every time…every fuckin’ time I get patched up…they pull this fuckin’ shit! It never fuckin’ ends!’

He’d been out of the doctor’s care for less than two hours. They’d taped the gash over his left eye, set and bandaged his nose, cleaned and dressed the worst scrapes and small cuts and even…miracle of miracles…given him a painkiller that was almost worth a shit. He’d been out cold for most of the day after that, and allowed to rest up until the doctor was sure he was stable. Then they dumped him back into population. He was back in the city jail…among the temporary holding places for people who had been charged and arrested but hadn’t yet been tried and sentenced. If his lawyer hadn’t been a sniveling piece of shit, if he’d been able to reach the guy he’d been referred to, if they hadn’t been making him so hard to fucking find…he’d have posted bail and been out of here by now. At this fucking rate he could have been assigned a lawyer by the state and gotten things moving faster, but a state appointed lawyer was the equivalent of saving the cops the trouble and just shooting yourself in the face. The whole situation was fucked.

And that led to here. A new cell. New cellmates. New bullshit. Blaise knew perfectly fucking well that he’d been framed, but the question was who…the cops, his own people, one of his many ex-boy toys, or even Dee, though it didn’t seem fucking possible. It didn’t matter right now, but it would matter soon. What mattered now was that no one here cared if you were framed…and most of the time they only cared about what kind of connections you had.

He had none. There wasn’t much to be proud of in jail, and people had a way of turning their shame into their pride. A killer was worthy of respect…a rapist took sex where and when he pleased…a drunk or a junkie was feeding a habit and did what they had to…but there was no social ladder for gay nightclub owners charged with the crimes that Blaise had been charged with. He was a free target, connected to no one, held in contempt by all, and when a guard drifted by and
mentioned his charges casually to the men near him, the steely looks of opportunistic hatred were uniform.

‘You. You we can hurt. No one will care. No one will punish us. No one will look for revenge.’

That was what he saw in their eyes. They weren’t even restricted to nights. No one admitted to witnessing anything. They just didn’t care enough to be bothered. In the morning, if he couldn’t get up, the guards would haul him off to the infirmary again, and the process would start all over.

This time was going to be different. Worse. He could already tell, even through eyes that were puffed and blurry. The tall, black man in front of the others was no lightweight arrested for DUI or domestic charges. In a week or so he’d be on the way to a penitentiary, where he’d probably been sent several times before. He was a wall of muscle, head shaved and gleaming under cheap fluorescent lights, and what was coming next wasn’t going to be an ass-kicking by some generic redneck with an attitude. The first punch had sent his head spinning while he slid to the floor, and he’d lost the will to fight back days ago. If he’d walked into this place in good condition, he might have had a chance to prove himself, but he’d been limping his way along since he got here, never given a chance to heal well enough for it to matter. The end of this was already a forgone conclusion…all that was left was to wait for it to be over…wait to wake up in the infirmary again.

“All you spaghetti-eatin’ motha-fuckas stick together. Little bird told me you was mafia, but they won’t touch yo ass now. You don’t look like no ‘made man’ to me. So tell me…Mr. I-talian ‘Made Man’…how’s it feel to be made into a bitch?”

It was going to be worse…much worse. There was a place where you could go no lower…where anything like hope was dead. You either broke and crumbled into a million tiny shards, or you ceased to care what came next.

Blaise Zabini lifted his chin and smirked, showing white teeth streaked with fresh crimson blood from the torn lip that had reopened from that last punch. Then he shrugged the shoulder that hurt the least.

“How does it feel to need three promotions just to become a fuckin’ prick piece of shit…fucker?”

‘I’m gonna regret that in about five seconds, but the look on his face was fuckin’ worth it. Aww…shit. This is gonna hurt…

And it did.

TBC!!!
Muscles like iron that grind lean and hard against you. Clean, but calloused hands that caress at all
the right times and just the right ways. Respect mingled with desire. A wonderful stiffness, a sword
of flesh, plunging deep and fast, making the heart pound and the breath quicken with unspoken
need.

A boy could get used to this.

Someone perhaps a little more circumspect than I might say that I’ve been just the slightest bit
whorish of late…and that Harry hasn’t been much better. That someone would probably be right…but fuck ‘em…we’re happy.

When you think about it, it becomes a little clearer. Harry restrained himself for years, unwilling to
settle for sex without meaning. I spent seven years hating myself for who I was, what I’d done, and
where it had gotten me. If anyone has the nerve to gainsay our right to this, they should be
sentenced to death by a thousand tiny cuts…then shoved into a pool of lemon juice. Our dues have
been paid! In grief and gall and loneliness, in waiting for some small moment of solace. Starving in
a desert of the real, parched for just the smallest droplet of love, the real water of life. We’ve
earned this…and that we enjoy it so often and so freely is just luxury piled onto luxury…and we’re
not one fucking bit ashamed of being happy about it!

“Come on, love. Hermione has the cameras offline for a complete system upgrade and test. We’ve
got half an hour. Only the exterior perimeter defenses are operational. Total privacy upstairs in the
warehouse…and just try to tell me you hate the idea when you know you wore that outfit to drive
me crazy. Go on…try.”

Okay…he’s got me. Not just because when he grins like that and his eyes are sparkling with
hunger I can’t possibly say no because my stomach just turned to water and my head gets cloudy
while all the available blood in my body rushes straight to my groin. He’s got me because he’s
right. I never feel completely comfortable in boy clothes, and since we had just a little time off…we went shopping…twice. I could lie and say this outfit was just a random choice, but it shows my
shoulders and neck off so well. He knows that show is for him. My Harry is no one’s fool.

But the feel of his breath on the back of my neck makes me glad I tucked carefully before leaving
the house…or everyone here today would see me leaving with a very undignified bump in the front
of this tight little, red one-piece number I’m wearing.

Lunch breaks were a stranger to my vocabulary until just a few weeks ago…but you won’t hear me
complaining.

The past week has seen so many little events, some mundane and dull, and some special only
because they were ours to enjoy together. Doc Snape took me off the pills officially, and gave me
most of my dietary favorites back. While the basic planning for the strike against the Urban
Revitalization project took Harry’s involvement, the rest is in Hermione’s hands. The worksite for
the development is under observation, and the trucks and wrecking balls and bulldozers are
arriving steadily and moving into position. When the time is right, Harry will strike, but the time
hasn’t come yet, and my visit to my father will be executed beforehand, mostly to keep it
seemingly unrelated to events at the worksite. A simple bug will be dropped in Congressman Malfoy’s office, wherever I see fit, and then I can chat with him as long as he’ll allow and just go.

In the meantime, work has ebbed just a little, and the free time has been glorious. The people here know me. I’ve started dressing as I like, but always tastefully…never gaudy or clubby at work. I had to get permission to re-pierce my ears, but it was worth it. They frown on identifying marks that can be recognized from one identity to another, but because of my unique ability to be either gender, which is held to be of value, I was able to have the healed scars of old piercings from years ago reopened. The first posts will come out soon and I’ll wear what I like when I like it, but for now I have a set of steel posts in each ear, as well as the hoops hanging from the current holes.

My tongue was another matter…and only Harry knows about that yet…I’ve just been conspicuously quiet around the others lately. What they don’t know won’t make them snicker about my insatiable desire to make Harry’s eyes roll back in his head.

We’ve been cautious, using Harry’s new ID and mine when required, but we’ve been able to dine out and shop and just make the best of life a few times before things gets complicated again. Soon enough, duty will call, and my visit to my father and Harry’s midnight visit to the worksite will make us too busy for this kind of play. Better to savor it now while we can.

“Are you sure this will be okay? No one can…oooh…oh God….Haa…Harry…mmm.”

He’s on me like ants on a picnic, hands on all the places I love…the curve of the hips, the small of my back. His touch is so electric for me, because I’ve never felt him touch me this way with anything but naked and honest desire. He knows it pleases me, and that’s exactly why he does it. Not just for himself, but for me. Can anyone hate that?

The plastic on the old metal desk crackles behind me and my mouth is firmly planted on his neck, mostly because it feels just a little strange to be doing it here, in abandoned silence, surrounded by dusty old machinery and plastic coated old furniture. The desk (or maybe it was a work table) was probably only left behind because it weighed a ton and no one could steal it. The other reason I’m keeping my mouth busy is to prevent my getting noisy…which I sometimes do when Harry is involved. Who am I kidding? ESPECIALLY when Harry is involved!

The moment he parts just enough to slip that mouth down to just below the lobe of my ear I slither a hand into the front of his pants. Yeah…I’m brazen…we’re a couple…so what? It’s his turn to groan against my neck while I give a gentle tug inside his slacks, and when he pulls away for a gasped breath, I’m slipping downwards, fumbling for only a moment with the zipper and revealing what I’ve hungered for since he first whispered in my ear. Long, thick, warm and scrupulously clean…the faintest hint of pre-come glinting at the tip of the head. Stiffened and slightly reddened with aching need for what I can give…and I give.

As if I’d ever deny the both of us this pleasure. Hah! Ridiculous. But I am an artful tease. Fingertips that barely caress but neatly steady the length in front of me. I let my lips just ghost across the warm skin along the side, flick my tongue against it with the whisper-soft gentleness of a snake. I love that he’s patient and understands that this is my pleasure as well as his. It isn’t to be completely rushed, even though we only have a little time between us.

I brush the head of it across my cheek, and I love the fiery feel of sensitive and heated flesh against my own. When my lips part and wrap their way around just the head, suckling gently, the groan from above is the reward I crave before going further. He knows relief is at the edge of reality, waiting to manifest with the help of a willing and eager mouth and a little well placed surgical steel.
There are so many intimate things in human sexuality. So many levels of closeness. You hear about people who would never even consider the idea of oral sex…they even recoil and show disgust when it’s mentioned. How sad. Can I describe what it means to take a lover’s most sensitive part into my mouth? To savor every small sound he makes while I lavish him with every pleasure I can offer? People speak of dominance and submission, and in the eyes of the immature what I do is considered an act of submission…but we know better, don’t we?

At this moment, I am the center of his universe. I can make this last for seconds, minutes or hours, and Harry is utterly at my mercy. I have the whole of his being thrumming with need and waiting at my beck and call…and they call me submissive? This is power. More intoxicating than any drug or alcoholic beverage…pure and unadulterated control of another…and I love it. When he can’t take another second of it, and I can feel the muscles in his body ever so faintly tensing with the first signs of immanent orgasm…then I tear myself away. Now it’s time for my needs to be fulfilled, and he’s more than ready.

I’m up right in a flash, back turned and one-piece pulled up to show off the little black thong that runs only the barest string along the back. Legs spread and back turned, one finger pulling that conveniently small string out of his way. I don’t even want the clothes off or care about the effort of standing this way with heels, I just let the desk give me the support I need and show him where I want him…now…and he’ll know to do the rest.

Gentle at the first, careful to let me work my own way back, easing onto the flesh I only just soaked with saliva seconds ago. He waits, teeth gritted with the tension of a lover teased to the brink, until he’s sure I can handle it all, speared on the spit-slick length of his cock and grinding slowly. His hand is warm on the small of my back, pushing the one-piece higher, another hand steady on my hip while he draws back slowly, then pushes forward with a speed that flirts with cruelty because he knows I want it, and when I hiss with pleasure and arch my back he knows I can take whatever he dishes out.

Hard slaps, the sound of thighs, damp with my spit, striking one another. He can’t see my face like this, but he has to know that my eyes are rolling back in my head while I treasure every last inch tunneling through me. He won’t last long like this, but it doesn’t matter. I already lost control who knows how long ago, and I’m barely conscious of the trickle of come inside my thong, too lost in the haze of pleasure that comes over me when he’s inside me, powerful enough to hurt, skillful enough to always please.

And yet he surprises me at times. Pulling from me when I know he’s so close, flopping me across the desk on my back, heels dangling and ankles held up and safe in his hands.

“I want to kiss you when I come.” And I’m pinned in that embrace for those final thrusts, each against the place inside me that lights my skull on fire and makes me shudder even when I’m spent. I can feel it when he comes, every flex and pulse, aware that his seed is filling me even while my lips work hungrily against his. Paradise. Lazy and spent in the seconds afterwards, sweating and yet at rest, still in the position of our climax.

Fuck! What time is it!?

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Ron carried the coffee cups with a steady hand. Range practice had been fun, but time with Hermione when she wasn’t overwhelmingly busy was better. The only downside of his weapon of choice was the extra kick when it fired, which could diminish accuracy if you didn’t stay well practiced. When he wasn’t repairing or maintaining the handful of vehicles that were in regular use, it was essential to keep his skills up to par. Sure, he was nowhere near Harry, but who the hell was?
Some people were in a class of their own. Still, the pistol range provided an awe-inspiringly good way to excuse extra office time…with Hermione…and besides…the coffee was always the expensive foreign stuff.

Hermione glared at the screen with faint irritation. Simple equipment checks and upgrades were important, but desperately boring, since they largely involved waiting for results while handling lower priority paperwork. No real excitement, and nothing even remotely resembling a challenge. Another sixty seconds or so and the security system and cameras would be back online, with a greater sensitivity to lighting and a faster response to remote controls than before.

Ron’s steps could be heard even on the carpet. The man was no ninja, but he was put together fairly handsomely. And you couldn’t very well disapprove of a man who fetched coffee on request without so much as a wrinkled nose or grumpy look. It was nice…being waited on for once.

Hermione pursed her lips, mind whirling through a thousand well trained feminist responses to the implied pedestal upon which she was placed by some man’s affections…then discarded the entire mental library of them with a smirk. Some things just felt right.

“Thanks, Ron. You’re too sweet. Or just sweet enough. Mmmm…I needed that. Security is almost up…we should have cameras back online in a few seconds, then I can take a short break before…ahhh…here we go. One…two…cam three, four and five online. Six through nine online…ten onli-….oh. Oh my.”

“FUCK! HOLY MOTHER OF GOD ALMIGHTY! MY EYES! SOMEONE GET ME A WIRE BRUSH SO I CAN SCRUB MY FREAKING BRAIN! DON’T THOSE TWO EVER TAKE A BREAK?!!”

Hermione stared wide eyed at the screen that displayed camera ten’s field of view, gulped nervously and remembered to bring her coffee to her lips while acting calm. A sip later, while Ron was brushing his own spilled coffee off of his coat and slacks, back carefully turned to avoid exposure to any more of Harry or Drake’s antics, Hermione was still staring.

She’d never seen passion before. She’d once rented a pornographic movie, wondering what it was all about, still in college and uncertain of whether sexuality held any real importance in the life of an intellectual. It had been a horrible disappointment, but slightly educational. No one in the movie had looked as if they’d found some rapture that would be unreachable in any other way. But…on camera ten…two people were utterly fused as one, completely lost to anything but the other. It was…hypnotic…beautiful…and slightly disconcerting.

“Goddammit! Man…I’m gonna hafta go back to the garage and change these. Are they done yet? Is the cam off?”

“Uh-huh.” Admittedly, the noise sounded like an affirmative answer, but Hermione was still staring at the screen in amazement and hadn’t really heard the questions at all. Ron turned around.

“AHH! God! It never ends! It never fucking ends! What the hell! Turn it off…for the love of God and Man…just turn it off already! Please!! I’m beggin’ ya!”

“OH! Heh…sorry…sorry. There we go…uh…so…what are you doing this weekend?”

Ron’s towering rage dissipated in a flash, replaced by total confusion…and a general sense of relief that the offending screen was blank.

“Uh…nothing that can’t be moved back. You?”
“I’ve got a date.”

“What? You do?” The crestfallen look of shock and hurt was pure and puppyish in its innocence.

“Well, yeah…with you. Or don’t I?”

Ron forgot all about the coffee, and forgot all about the less than pleasing images so recently seared into his brain…and smiled.

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The fat man was fresh in from Moscow, fringe of snowy hair curled with expensive oil, nose red from years of good liquor. The woman on his arm was the envy of many, slim and pale, long dark tresses slithering down shoulders like snowy alps, her dress as black and shiny as the crude oil that had made his fortune. The dress was on the floor now and they rolled on the bed of a five star hotel in Brussels, her kittenish giggles almost out of place coming from a woman with such a normally cultured and haughty air about her.

Such sweet perfume! And not merely the wisps of the pricey stuff he’d purchased for her, but rather the perfume of her body. He was a lusty fellow, even past his prime, and the scent of a woman still aroused just as fiercely as it ever had. When she clambered atop him, knees on either side of his head, and mounted his waiting mouth, he savored the feel and texture of her skin, the warmth of her aroused flesh, and let himself enjoy the treasure offered to his tongue.

The woman heaved and moaned, her accent European for certain, but hard to place. Her laughter echoed in darkness while her thighs flexed with pleasure. Though the man himself was hideous, she was aroused. She was stark naked, less than half his size, and seemingly totally unarmed. No guard, however well placed outside, could have guessed what was to pass between them.

Intimacy was a marvelous thing. She adored it, but not like most ever would or could. She adored intimacy such as this, because she was here to kill him, and they would spend these last seconds together. She would be the only witness to his most intimate moment…death. It didn’t matter who he’d offended, all that mattered was that hundreds of thousands of Euros were hers in exchange for his life, and the manner of his death had been left to her.

Along her scalp, woven through hair, was a single slim blade, more a needle than a knife. It was pulled free with an artful and practiced grace, as well as a kittenish glee. Her thighs flexed tightly for just a few seconds while steel slammed through his skull at the tender place behind the ear, and with a few shudders and gasps, each muted by her nether mouth, the fat man died beneath her. Her orgasm came in silence, eyes gleaming with pleasure while she stared into blank and lifeless eyes, pulse racing while she savored the moment of completion.

Another city, another identity, another kill, another fortune. She enjoyed them all…but the intimate kills were always the finest. The guards would find him in the morning, and they’d wonder how the woman in black had disappeared from a room on the fifth floor, and they would never know that she’d been through this very hotel four times in her life…always by a different name when she returned. These were the secrets of her trade, and the assassin kept her secrets well. Bellatrix Lestrange never rested long, not in countries she’d worked in before, but she would always come back to the places where the powerful met and reveled…because those were her hunting grounds in the game of life and death she so adored.

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He was tall, but not so tall as to stand apart among other men. He was also powerfully built, not in heavy or obvious bulk, but with quietly corded muscle that hid comfortably beneath his clothing. His hair had been a sandy blond when he was younger, but had ended up a steel gray, save for a few patches along his thick sideburns. His gaze could be cold and frightening or warm and endearing, depending on what he wanted people to think, and any trace of his native tongue had left him in the decades since he was a boy.

Northern Ireland had been a hard place in the Sixties, and he was a product of his times…and then the times had left him behind, a remnant of war that no longer needed warriors. How fortunate that his skills still had a market. Killing had been a way of life, and while he was older than some in his trade, he wasn’t the oldest, and this was his way of life still.

A bathhouse in Morocco. A visiting Turkish delegate. A few wealthy men gathered in privacy for the comforts of the old world. Their privacy had been assured so that they might speak freely, and their rendezvous hadn’t been announced or even widely known. There were guards, but they were of no consequence. The bomb had been put in place more than a day ago, less than a day after they had made their plans to meet.

He stood in the alley, thumbing the switch in his pocket. If he tripped it here, the blast would cover him in rubble from the wall. He only remained near out of a desire to know what became of his enemies. Not that it was personal, but he preferred the jobs where he could be closer to the target. He could work this way when asked to, eliminating targets in a haze of smoke and falling rubble, but it wasn’t nearly as interesting as seeing their eyes when they died. He’d never liked bombs, but the irony was that he was a skillful hand with them…and in a way, a bomb had brought him to this lifestyle.

His older brother hadn’t set the bomb, but all that mattered was that someone thought he’d been involved. He’d watched his older brother dragged from the house, to the back of an alley, where close range shots were muffled by rags and bullets smashed kneecaps into shards of jagged bone. Liam had hanged himself a few months later, sick of being a cripple and a figure of pity in a family that could barely afford to feed itself. Staring at a bloated face and bulging eyes, hung above a wheelchair, proof that Liam had wanted to die badly enough to hitch and tie the rope himself, the boy had learned what the man now knew.

Life was cheap…and there was no fairness in this world that you did not make for yourself.

He was down the street and almost out of sight of the building when he tripped the switch in his pocket and sent a handful of strangers to hell. Tomorrow he’d be in another country, pockets full of currency and Swiss account fat and full, dining on steak and stout while he waited for the next job. His sideburns would be gone, his hair would be dyed, and he’d go by another name, but the operative called Fenrir would be quietly enjoying the benefits of his trade.

TBC!!!