Managed Care

by gleefulmusings

Summary

As the citizens of Port Charles gather to mourn the loss of the beloved Robin Scorpio, Kurt Hummel arrives in search of the brother he never knew he had. In a town filled with secrets, lies, and betrayals, he's going to fit right in.

Notes

This story takes place the day following Robin Scorpio's death. I had outlined and began writing this prior to the current arc on the show, which pretty much echoes what I had planned. This means they should totally hire me as a writer.

Kurt has been SORASed and is approximately twenty-eight years old. He is the only Glee
character who will appear as a main character. Two others will pop up, perhaps even intermittently, but this is Kurt's show. He will be pursued by a variety of men, and while there is an endgame in mind, it won't be revealed for a while. If the sudden bisexuality of established characters offends you, abandon ship. If they're hot with tight bodies, they're fair game for the fair Kurt.

Some casting notices:

Lucky Spencer as portrayed by Greg Vaughan
Carly Benson as portrayed by Laura Wright
Kate Howard as portrayed by Megan Ward

Know that I'm not a great fan of Sonny, Jason, Sam, or Lulu. Take that as you will.
Carly was bored, which was never a good thing for anyone.

Slumped over the check-in desk of the Metro Court Hotel, she debated finishing her paperwork or calling the hospital one more time to see if there was an update on Jason's condition.

She hadn't called in at least three minutes, so it was entirely possible it could have changed.

She knew full well that her behavior was bordering on stalking, but was unbothered. There were worse crimes than stalking and, since she had committed most of them, she should know.

Plus, it was fun driving Sam up the wall with constant nagging. Jason's new wife had to be made to understand that, marriages aside, Carly was Jason's best friend and had been for years. As such, her relationship with him trumped what she was sure was a temporary commitment soon to be annulled due to temporary insanity.

She sighed and glared at the stack of paperwork silently demanding her attention. She enjoyed being the co-owner of the most glamorous hotel in Port Charles, but having to do actual work was very annoying. She had always been allergic to work.

Ignoring the evil work, she searched her mind for other people to harass.

Jax, her most recent ex-husband, was off on yet another business trip and wasn't accepting her calls. Another ex-husband, Sonny, was off licking his wounds after his most recent bust-up with Kate Howard, his girlfriend du jour.

She bit her lip. She supposed she could call Sonny and once again harangue him for believing he could make a relationship work with anyone but her, but he should've known that already and she was tired of telling him.

She huffed, left the desk, and threw herself onto one of the lobby couches, pouting. Marty, the manager, rolled his eyes in exasperation. She smirked at him. She knew he loved her.

There were no guests to check in; her children were busy, in school, or being cared for by their nanny; Jason was probably still unconscious; and two of her mortal enemies were at work and being allegedly productive members of society.

She then sat straight up, furiously blinking back unwelcome tears.

One mortal enemy, because the other was dead.

Robin Scorpio was dead.

It still didn't seem real.

What also didn't seem real was how angry she was over Robin's demise. It just didn't make sense. She and Robin had delightfully been appalled with one another for almost two decades. Every time they crossed paths, verbal slaughter, intimidating threats, and the possibility of actual physical violence ensued. Now, there was nothing.

The hatred she and Robin had shared was one of her most enduring relationships. And wasn't that just pathetic? Still, she didn't know how to function in a world without Robin in it.
Even worse was that the mousy little doctor had gone off to the great beyond doing something all noble and selfless.

Usually, that would have been the cause for much heckling and gloating along with inappropriate laughter about how she had finally defeated Robin, but even Carly didn't have the stomach for that now.

Robin had died so that Jason might live, and though she had despised the woman, Carly knew Robin deserved her respect.

That just left Elizabeth, the town martyr.

Of course, that contentious relationship was now very much mitigated by the fact that her daughter's life had been saved by Elizabeth Webber's sacrifice.

As nasty and cruel as she was - and Carly knew she was a hardcore bitch - she just didn't have the heart to attack Elizabeth as she once had. She too knew what it was to lose a child, and though Michael had come back to her, those years without him...

She sighed.

Also, the truth of the matter was that fighting with Elizabeth was always a hollow endeavor. She ridiculed the woman for being the town sweetheart, but even she knew she had always been slightly jealous and bitter toward Elizabeth.

Okay, maybe more than slightly. Whatever.

Elizabeth was a beautiful woman - stunning, really - and the only one who didn't realize that was Elizabeth herself, which was just really freaking irritating.

Seriousy, she would gladly kill to have that girl's skin.

Plus, Elizabeth was smart. Book smart mostly - you didn't become a surgical nurse by being an idiot - but there was also a street smart girl buried deeply beneath the surface. Sometimes Carly would get glimpses of that girl during their fights, of the old Lizzie of whom she had heard tell but had never truly met.

She wanted to meet that girl, the person Elizabeth had buried under layers of compassion and understanding and...and...goodness.

Carly scoffed with disgust.

Robin had always been self-righteous and thus easy to dismiss, but Elizabeth had made more than her share of mistakes. She also took responsibility for them and punished herself far more harshly than anyone else ever could. So, though Carly won when Elizabeth fucked up, she still lost. It was a bitter pill that had been lodged in her throat for way too long.

Elizabeth was gorgeous, smart, nice, and had a good job. As much as Carly didn't want to admit it, even to herself, Elizabeth was also a pretty damned amazing mother. She took care of her kids and worked full-time. She owned her own home. She had put herself through school and had never depended on a man for anything.

Carly knew for a fact that Elizabeth had been the breadwinner when she was married to Lucky. She also knew how badly that had rankled her cousin, who was way more misogynistic than he even realized. Elizabeth hadn't touched a penny of the trust Jason had arranged for Jake.
It wasn't martyrdom and it was beyond self-reliance.

Elizabeth had integrity, and it was just gross.

Most disgusting, however, was how forgiving Elizabeth could be. She had forgiven Lucky for screwing around on her, endangering their children, being a junkie, leaving her with a pile of bills to pay, and assaulting her.

Carly would have just killed him.

Elizabeth continually forgave those who fucked her over left, right, and sideways, always being the bigger person. Well, that was sweet in theory, but the reality was the people who hurt her never learned from their mistakes and kept repeating them. Thus, Elizabeth was always being hurt and did nothing to stop it. Carly might have felt sorry for her, but Elizabeth had brought a lot of it on herself.

Christ, grow a set already.

Elizabeth had made a lot of wrong choices, but because she usually made all the right ones, her mistakes were so much more glaring and thus easier to exploit.

So that's what Carly had done. She had denigrated Elizabeth for the same choices she herself had made. She had lambasted Elizabeth for keeping Jason from his son but, deep down, she wished she had done the same for Michael and Morgan where Sonny was concerned.

The one thing she did honestly regret was calling little Cameron a bastard. That had been beyond the pale and Carly had known it at the time. She had never apologized and probably never would, but it bothered her. After all, in the end, who was she to call anyone that word? She was the byproduct of a transaction between a hooker and a john. Michael had been conceived out of wedlock; hell, most of Sonny's kids had been conceived out of wedlock.

Carly knew she wasn't the best mother, but she tried. She fought for her kids and defended them always. When the men in her life had called her a good mother, she never gave it much consideration, but when Elizabeth had called her that...well, that had meant something.

She glared sullenly at the coffee table.

Fighting with Elizabeth never made her feel better, and though she excused her own behavior to countless outraged people, in the end, all it did was alienate her from them. Jason, Lucky, Nikolas, Luke, Laura, Bobbie, Jax; they all loved Elizabeth. Even Sonny had at one point.

The only ones who didn't were the other women in Jason's life, because they knew he would always love Elizabeth the most.

Now Elizabeth had lost Robin, her best friend, only a few years after losing Emily.

Carly had never had any use for Robin Do-Right and Milquetoast Emily, but even Elizabeth didn't deserve all the suffering she had been made to endure.

"So why don't I just leave her alone?" she muttered.

She then gave an exaggerated blink.

She would leave Elizabeth alone, she decided, or at least not antagonize the woman.
Not when there were other more worthy targets.

Like Sam.

Carly grinned.

Sam was nothing more than a tired hooker who got a few lucky breaks and then rubbed it in every other woman's nose. She might be married to Jason now, but Carly knew that would soon change. She had her doubts about who the father of that baby really was. Also, she would never believe Sam's tits were real.

Her grin brightened.

The truth of the matter was that she would much rather have Jason be with Elizabeth than with Sam, so why not make that happen?

Of course, Elizabeth might no longer want Jason. She certainly didn't seem to enjoy being around him anymore.

Well, this was more confusing than feeling guilty about Robin.

Carly didn't like guilt and didn't believe she should be subjected to it, so it had to go.

How best to accomplish this, however? It was too late to make up with Robin, and she wasn't positive she would even if she could. She supposed she could hang around Patrick and offer to help with Emma, but people would talk, and he didn't deserve that.

She could try being nicer to Alexis and encouraging the relationship amongst their children. After all, Kristina, Michael, and Morgan were siblings, but then she'd have to include Alexis' other daughter, Molly, who was a living reminder of her father, Ric, a man Carly still wanted to kill in the most painful manner possible. Further, Alexis was such a neurotic mess that Carly knew she'd end up running the woman over sooner rather than later.

Kate was out. Too much of a bitch. Really, Carly should have found that enthralling, but she didn't care for bitches who were bitchier than she herself was.

Courtney was dead, Brenda was thankfully living on another continent, and Lulu was too busy mooning over Dante, Sonny's eldest and shortest son. Really, when would that girl learn?

Maxie was a possibility, but was so flighty, she was sure one stiff wind would send the girl flitting across the country. Plus, Maxie was beginning to adopt Spinelli Speak, which gave Carly a migraine.

As much as she enjoyed living her life on her own terms, it was also pretty lonely. She had no real friends other than Jason, and she often got the sense that Jason only tolerated her, especially since he had married that shrewish Real Doll. That was something she'd rather not consider, though, so she pushed it out of her mind.

Still, she wanted to do something. Preferably something unexpected that would cause a lot of surprise, chaos, and salacious gossip.

She sat up straight, grinning maniacally.

Catching the look from across the room, Marty shivered and went home sick.
Elizabeth!

She would make Elizabeth into something she could stand, transforming the woman into her new best friend. Hey, why not? Even though they hated each other, they had a lot in common. Jason for one. Also, Carly was really getting fed up with Sonny, and Elizabeth had passively disliked him for years. That alone would be worth at least three months of gossipy lunches!

Hell, Elizabeth was one of the few women in this town who hadn't slept with Sonny, nor did she have any desire to do so.

Elizabeth had been married to Carly's cousin, Lucky, and thus understood what a freakshow the Spencer family really was.

Elizabeth was a nurse; Carly had flunked out of nursing school.

They had both lost children, had suffered horribly unfortunate miscarriages, and had been terrorized by Faith Roscoe and Ric Lansing.

Elizabeth liked Jax. She had even carried a child for him, who had sadly not survived.

Elizabeth got along great with Carly's mother, Bobbie.

Elizabeth had a brother, and so did Carly.

They were practically twins! It was fate!

She nodded to herself, beaming like a lunatic.

This could totally work! Sure, she'd have to swallow her pride and suck up at the speed of light, but it would be worth it. Jason would appreciate her efforts, Jax and Bobbie would be proud of her, and it would drive Sam up the wall.

If she managed to prove herself, Elizabeth might even run interference for her with Jax, and Carly would be happy to do the same for her with Lucky, who was going all emo again.

There would be lunches at the hotel, play dates with the kids, the shredding of souls, and shopping at the promenade.

Carly would be insisting on that last one. Elizabeth's off-work attire was tragic. What did it say about your taste when your best outfit was hospital scrubs?

She shook her head ruefully.

Best case scenario: she and Elizabeth became friends and a lot of people would faint from shock. The worst case would be that they would come to hate each other even more than they did now, but since Carly didn't see how that was possible, it was a moot point.

Besides, it wasn't as though she needed Elizabeth's permission to be her best friend. She would just do it, and Elizabeth would go along with it because Elizabeth never wanted to fight with anyone.

She nodded to herself. She totally had this.

Carly was jerked out of her self-congratulatory thoughts when the double doors of the hotel were thrown open and several of her porters pranced inside, carrying or wheeling a truly stunning line of designer luggage she instantly envied and vowed to search out on eBay later that night.
She watched with jaws agape as carry-on after garment bag after suitcase after steamer trunk was hauled inside.

Who the hell owned such finery, and why hadn't Jax alerted her that a VIP was checking in today? She would have had the staff polishing every surface until it gleamed! She wanted to be judged on the basis of her hotel, after all, because it was fabulous and so was she.

Just as she was working herself up into a frenzy of bitchery, the gayest gay who had ever gayed sauntered his way into her lobby.

It was, for Carly Benson Quartermaine Corinthos Alcazar Jacks, instant fruit-fly love at first sight.

Obviously, this was destiny's reward for her kinder and gentler attitude toward Elizabeth. Not only would she get a new best girlfriend, but a new best gay friend, which everyone knew was the only accessory worth having!
Kurt Hummel was so far quite unimpressed with the Metro Court Hotel and had no qualms about sharing his feelings with the unfortunate desk clerk.

"A junior suite," Kurt drawled, repeating what he had just been told was reserved in his name. He peered closely at the clerk's nametag. "Mandy, I specifically asked for a two-bedroom suite. I don't sleep in my clothes, nor do I sleep with them. I require one bedroom for my wardrobe and one for myself."

Mandy bit her lip.

Kurt frowned. "If you do not have a two-bedroom suite available, Mandy, please call another hotel in the area which can accommodate me."

As Mandy struggled for a suitable reply, Carly took a moment to appreciate the storm of fabulousness which had just blown into her hotel like a category five gay hurricane. This guy, whoever he was, looked about sixteen years old, but was traveling alone, so she deduced he was older than he appeared.

His skin was absolutely flawless and she would soon be demanding he unveil his secrets to her. It was bad enough living in a town with Elizabeth Webber and her Princess Snowflake skin, but now she was going to be upstaged by a dude?

Hell no.

The hair was exquisite. Perfectly cut and arranged to highlight his amazing bone structure, it gleamed like mink beneath the ambient lighting. It swayed ever so slightly with his every movement before immediately falling back into place, thus avoiding Scary Meteorologist Hair. The look screamed money and Carly saw dollar signs flashing before her eyes. No way was she letting some other hotel get their meathooks into him.

Next was the wardrobe, which looked as though its bearer had strutted right off a Milan runway. He wore a fire engine-red trench with black stitching, which she recognized as Gucci couture, that stopped mid-thigh and was cinched around an obscenely small waist. He filled out the shoulders nicely, however; pads were definitely unnecessary.

Beneath the trench he wore a royal blue classic Oxford with an outrageous paisley tie knotted in a Windsor, which miraculously included every color on his person in a pleasing manner. The slacks were black gabardine that looked so fine as to be linen, and the shoes were black leather and square-toed, with a slight heel which made his already amazing legs appear even more endless.

She wanted to jump and mount him.

In lieu of what would probably be deemed a most unwelcome advance, she glided smoothly behind the counter, advised Mandy that she would take it from here, and sent the girl on a break.

"Good afternoon, Mister Hummel," Carly said, beaming, "and welcome to the Metro Court Hotel, of which I am co-owner. My name is Carly Corinthos and please trust me when I say that we are more than capable and happy to accommodate you in any way you require."

She extended her hand, which he immediately captured in his own. She marveled at his skin, how smooth it was, yet the strength in his grip - thankfully not condescending in deference to her
gender - indicated this boy was no milquetoast. Good. Since she had more balls than most men she knew, the last thing she wanted or needed was to be confronted with yet another weakling.

"Enchanté, madame," he murmured with a Parisian accent as he leaned over her hand and gently kissed it.

She felt a blush rising up her neck and cursed herself for it. Just when she was about to remove her hand, he tilted up his eyes to meet her own and it was all she could do not to gasp. As it was, she was helpless but to stare back.

Widely spaced and almond-shaped, what could only be described as feline eyes unflinchingly met her gaze. They were a color which she had never before encountered and was sure didn't occur in Nature until this man's birth.

She swallowed and fought for a reply. A corner of her mouth lifted as she leaned forward. "What makes you think I'm not a mademoiselle?"

He raised a brow. "Because what man in his right mind would allow someone so exquisite to languish on the vine?"

It was so totally unfair and wrong that he was gay and she didn't have a penis.

She'd settle for having his baby.

Carly had no compunction about keeping Kurt in the lobby while she had an underling throw a guest out of one of the penthouses. A cleaning team would then perform a sandblasting miracle while she escorted Kurt to his room. She was more than happy to act as his concierge for however long he would be staying.

She had sent the porters ahead of them with his luggage and had assigned one of the housekeepers to act as maid until Kurt no longer required the service.

As they ascended to the top floor, she began her subtle interrogation.

At least she hoped she was being subtle. It really wasn't her forte, after all.

"What brings you to Port Charles?" she asked. "Business or pleasure?"

Kurt grinned at her. "A little of both, actually. I'm relocating to your fair city and, with your permission, will be staying at your fine hotel while I search for a new house."

She smiled. "My permission certainly isn't necessary. We're happy to have you with us." She paused. "Have you found a Realtor yet?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not, but I'd welcome any referrals. This all happened at the last moment, you see. On a lark, I applied for a position at General Hospital. I hadn't heard anything after several weeks and so had forgotten all about it. I was just about to take another position in Geneva when the chief of staff called me and apologized. Apparently my application had been misplaced and she hadn't seen it until that day. She offered me the job and I accepted without really thinking it through."

He shrugged. "The next thing I knew, I was subletting my flat, putting various things in storage, and renewing my passport. Now, I'm here."
Carly blinked. He offered a lot of information in a very succinct manner, which she appreciated. "I know a few agents. I'll have a bellhop deliver a list of the more reputable ones."

He nodded his thanks.

"Are you looking for anything in particular?" she asked.

"Not really," he said after a moment of thought. "I would prefer a single-family home with a decently-sized yard and a garage." He hummed in thought. "I'm something of an amateur chef, so a fully-equipped kitchen wouldn't be remiss." He shrugged. "That's all I require, really."

"Budget?" she asked baldly.

He smirked, eyes sparkling with mirth. "Why, Ms. Corinthos, is that your subtle way of asking me how much I'm worth?"

Carly didn't even bother trying to feign modesty. "Yeah. I mean, I can tell you have money. That luggage set of yours cost more than my first new car and you didn't so much as blink when I quoted the daily price of the penthouse. Plus, the stunning wardrobe.

"Trust me when I tell you that I've lived in every section of Port Charles, so if you're serious about a house, I can help you. If you're not, don't waste my time."

"I like you," he said after a beat.

She laughed. "You'd be the only one in this town who does."

Something flashed in his eyes, something she recognized but couldn't exactly define.

It was pain, she finally realized. Old pain. He understood - at least in his own unique way - what it meant to be ostracized in a community.

She was startled that she felt acknowledged in some small manner, that perhaps he might understand her in a way no one else ever had. She was sure that he felt that acknowledgment, as well. That acknowledgment, however, came with a price.

Once secrets, spoken or silent, were shared, it was a lot more difficult to hide those aspects you had once so carefully concealed in order to protect your true self.

Both were flustered and temporarily ignored each other, staring straight ahead at nothing.

Desperate to change the subject, Carly cleared her throat. "I have a gay brother. His name is Lucas. He lives in Seattle. Maybe you know him?"

Kurt swung his head in her direction, eyes wide. "Yes, of course. Gay Lucas from Seattle. Sure!"

They stared at each other for a long moment before both burst out laughing. Tears leaked from their eyes and they had to hold each other up to keep from falling over. The chime dinged and the doors opened, revealing the penthouse floor.

He wiped his eyes. "I haven't laughed that hard in...I can't remember, honestly. Thank you for that, Ms. Corinthos."

She threaded her arm through his. "Call me Carly."
Carly had dismissed the newly-appointed maid in lieu of herself helping Kurt unpack. Because she totally wanted to check out his clothes. She also wanted to know what size he wore, because he had a better figure than she did and she wasn't sure how she felt about that.

"So what are you going to be doing at General Hospital?" she chirped.

He blinked. "I'm a physician," he said slowly.

She blinked in reply. "Aren't you, like, nineteen?"

He sneered. "I'm pleased to know my youthful appearance - on which I've spent quite a lot of money, thank you - has passed muster. I'm twenty-eight."

She stuck her tongue out at him. "In what? Reverse dog years?"

He snickered.

"So you're an intern," she guessed.

He shook his head in amusement. "I'm a full-fledged doctor type person."


"Forensic pathology."

Her eyebrows all but shot off her forehead. "You're a coroner?"

His nose scrunched. "Not at all. There's a distinct difference. I endured years of specialized training to be able to call myself a forensic pathologist and it's a title in which I take considerable pride."

Carly had to sit down. "How?" she demanded.

He arched a brow. "Excuse me?"

"Years of training," she repeated. "You're twenty-eight. I might have flunked out of nursing school, but I can do math. Four years of undergrad, four years of medical school, than a residency and a specialization, right?"

He nodded as he began hanging his clothes - those clothes! - in the walk-in closet. "Correct. I studied biochemistry at the Sorbonne and then went on to St. George's University to obtain my medical degree."

She winced when he mentioned the Sorbonne, recalling Robin and still surprised by how much her former nemesis was preying on her mind.

"I performed my residency and fellowship at the Mayo Clinic, and then moved on to Johns Hopkins for my specialization in pathology and subspecialization in forensic pathology."

She stared. "Are you a genius or something? Some kind of savant?"

He chuckled. "Not at all. I'm merely an overeducated, overachieving dilettante with an eidetic memory." He shrugged. "School came easy to me. Real life, however..." he trailed off.

She understood and felt it best to shift subjects slightly. "You have a photographic memory?"
He tilted his head. "There's a bit more to it than that. I remember not just everything I've seen or read, but everything I've heard, smelled, and tasted."

"Huh." She exhaled. "I'm not sure if I should jump you or run away screaming."

His eyes widened. "Hopefully neither!"

She sighed. "Definitely, totally gay, huh?"

"The gayest," he confirmed, "and let's not pretend that it doesn't thrill you." He smirked. "You think I don't recognize what's happening here? You've decided I'm going to be your new gay best friend."

She huffed and crossed her arms defensively across her chest. "You don't know me."

He laughed.

They lapsed into a companionable silence which pleased both of them. Kurt continued putting away his belongings as Carly flitted about the suite adjusting things to her satisfaction.

It scared her, how at ease she felt with him, but she was also flailing. She didn't know how to interact with a man when sex was off the table. Flashing some cleavage and a bit of leg wasn't going to work with Kurt. She instead would have to rely on her wits, her intelligence, and her sense of humor, and, frankly, she was concerned she would be found lacking.

She also felt like a complete dingbat because she was so already invested in a relationship with a complete stranger, one who was obviously richer, more intelligent, and more sophisticated than herself. What the hell would he find interesting about her?"

"How long have you lived in Port Charles?" Kurt asked, jolting her from her thoughts.

She actually had to pause and consider her response, frowning. "About half my life." She shook her head. "Wow."

"So about twelve years then?"

She beamed. "This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Two hours of pleasant if banal conversation and a room service delivery later, the real meat of their friendship began to form.

"Tell me about Port Charles," Kurt said.

"What do you want to know?" she asked.

"Everything. Who are the major players? What are the best restaurants and clubs? Where's the best dry cleaners? Coffeehouse? Bookstore? Boutiques?"

Her eyes gleamed. "Shopping! You definitely came to the right person."

He grinned.

"As for the major players around here, let's break it down."

He nodded.
"First you have the Quartermaines, one of the oldest and most established families in the city. If Port Charles had royalty, it would be them. The head of the family is Edward, an obnoxious old fart who's probably bordering on senility. He's the CEO of ELQ."

Kurt pursed his lips. "I think I actually own some of their stock." He shrugged a shoulder. "Well, inherited it, I should say. I've heard of the company, but don't really know what it does or who's who."

Carly nodded. "Edward has two legitimate children. His daughter Tracy, who I'm sure was Medea in a past life, has two sons, Ned and Dillon. Both prefer to remain as far from her as possible. Ned has one kid, a daughter named Brook Lynn. Edward's son Alan, who has since passed away, was the former chief of staff of your new employer. His wife..."

"Monica Quartermaine," Kurt guessed. "She's the one who interviewed me."

"She took over after Alan's death," she said. "She's a cardiologist and a huge bitch."

"Joy," Kurt drawled.

Carly hesitated a moment and then sighed. "Well, my perception of her is admittedly skewed. I was married to her son and her other son is my best friend. She doesn't like me." She left out the part where Monica probably had just cause.

"So what should I do?" Kurt asked. "How should I act around her?"

She gave careful consideration to the question. "Do your job to the best of your ability and Monica will be your greatest champion." She looked away and sighed again. "She and I will never be friends, but she's a good doctor. If I had a heart condition, I'd want her treating me, and she would, because that's the kind of person she is."

She licked her lips. "Monica hasn't had an easy life. Her marriage to Alan was...stormy, but they truly did love each other and his death almost destroyed her. She's lost three of her children; actually, all four if you count Jason. She's in recovery for alcoholism and survived breast cancer. She's a tough old broad, I'll give her that."

Kurt studied her. "You respect her."

"I suppose I respect her capability."

He nodded and decided to let it go.

"You have to be good, or else Monica wouldn't have hired you," Carly added. "Do your best to live up to her expectations and everything will be fine. She sincerely loves that hospital. It's her life now and she cares for it like another child."

"And the rest of the Quartermaines?"

"Monica and Alan had three children: A.J., to whom I was once married and is the biological father of my eldest son, Michael; Jason Morgan, who was...a lot like you, really, before his accident, and then he went through an entire personality change; and Emily Cassadine, who was murdered a few years ago."

She was confused as Kurt's face rapidly lost all color.

"Emily's dead?" he whispered.
"You knew her?" asked a floored Carly.

"Not really," Kurt said faintly. "We had spoken a few times on the phone, but I wouldn't say we were friends."

"Then how..."

"Nikolas. I've known Nikki for more than half my life." Tears sprung to his eyes. "How could he have not told me about Emily?" He closed his eyes. "And Spencer's lost another mother."

Carly stared. Had he known Courtney as well? She was afraid to ask. Dwelling on Courtney was never a good idea for her.

Kurt was quickly segueing to anger. "Stupid, foolish man," he muttered. "What the hell is the matter with him? He always has to be a martyr." He threw up his hands and growled. "He's such a...such a...prince!"

"Are you one, too?" Carly asked.

He waved a dismissive hand. "Technically, I'm a duke, but that's neither here nor there."

"You're royalty?!"

He shook his head. "Nobility. There's a distinct difference. Ask Helena about it sometime."

Her eyes all but bugged out of her head. "I'd rather not." She paused. "You know her, too?"

He chuckled mirthlessly. "Far too well."

Carly snorted. "Does she also hate you?"

"No," Kurt said carefully, barely suppressing a shudder. "She's actually quite fond of me, which is far worse."

She blew out a breath. "Yeah, I can see how it would be."

His brow furrowed. "Are you a Spencer?"

Her eyes narrowed. "How did you know?"

He shrugged. "It was a logical guess. The only people other than the aristocracy with whom Helena associates is Luke Spencer's family."

She stared. "This is common knowledge?"

He nodded gravely. "Oh, yes. So when you asked me if she hated me also, I figured you were in some way a Spencer."

She eyed him. "You're good. Yeah, Bobbie Spencer is my mother. She's Luke's sister and is the Head of the Nursing Department at General Hospital."

"Wow," he said quietly. "So you're a member of a core family and were once married into another."

She snorted. "And I was married - several times, actually - to another major power broker in town: Sonny Corinthos."
He nodded. "I suspected as much."

"You know him, too?" she barked.

He shook his head. "I know of him."

He stared hard at her for a very long moment and it took everything within her not to squirm under his scrutiny. He must have found what he was looking for, however, she must have somehow passed muster, because he stood, crossed, and sat down close beside her. She found that she welcomed the intrusion.

_God_, he smelled good.

"I have some associates..." He stopped and shook his head. "I have _friends_, ones whom I consider to be family, who are connected with that world and have dealt with your ex-husband on more than one occasion."

Her eyes widened.

"I don't know specifics about their business and I don't want to," he hastily added, "but I do know a few names. Sonny's is one of them."

"Are you under their protection?" she asked in a low voice.

He nodded. "Should I inform Mr. Corinthos of this?"

She bit her lip. "I'm really not sure. Give me the night to think about it."

He nodded again before giving her a grateful smile and placing a hand over hers. "Thank you, Carly."

"Tell me about yourself."

He laughed. "What would you like to know?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Really? Just like that? I ask and you tell me?"

He smiled and nodded. "I like you, Carly. I trust you."

She studied him for a very long time. "Why?"

He stood, crossed to the bar, and poured them each a scotch. He returned to his seat and handed one to her, which she took and immediately downed.

"You're strong," he said. "My whole life, I've been surrounded by strong women. I know women. I understand them. I know how they think, what their words mean, and what their silences convey. I know how to read them." He stared into her eyes. "I can read you."

"And what is it that you see?" she asked.

He took a sip of his drink. "As I said, you're strong. Perhaps one of the strongest people I've ever encountered. I respect that. Accompanying that strength is the inability to suffer fools gladly, or at all. You've got a mouth on you, one that probably gets you into trouble on a regular basis, and you can be a real bitch with a penchant for cruelty."
He raised a brow. "How am I doing so far?"

"Pretty well," she admitted.

"You can be self-absorbed and condescending, and can take care of yourself in a physical altercation. You most likely have few friends who aren't men. You distrust other women and are suspicious of their behavior. You're easily jealous and quick to anger."

She was just about to open her mouth when he cut her off.

"You don't love frequently, but you love fiercely. When you love someone, you will kill anything or anyone which threatens them. You won't even think twice about it." He took another sip. "That's another trait I greatly respect."

She blinked.

This changed everything.

She had been planning on walking out of this room tonight with an adorable gay moppet as her new sidekick with whom she would go shopping and gossip. He would dress her and they would go to events where they could judge everyone in attendance. They would throw Oscar parties and ridicule what celebrities thought passed as high fashion.

But now...

Now she had a scarly smart, mobbed-up, almost psychic grown-ass man who could read her like an open book and liked what he'd found.

She found she was much happier with this revision.

He liked her.

He liked her.

He liked her.

Kurt grinned brightly. "Let's have a sleepover!"
Carly really didn't understand what was happening.

Kurt had somehow hijacked her evening with his mysterious gay ninja powers and, before she knew it, she had called the nanny to ask her to stay with Josslyn for the night. Sonny had Morgan for the weekend, and Michael was off doing...whatever it was he did.

Ever since her son had confessed about his rape, Michael had become more and more withdrawn. Maybe she had been wrong to push therapy so hard, but she really didn't think so. He needed to talk to someone about it and, as much as she loved him, that person was not her. Not about this. She couldn't relate, and he would need that. He deserved that. She could sympathize, certainly, but empathy was a different animal. At least a counselor would have training to guide him through his recovery, which was too precious to entrust in her less than capable hands.

She knew he had skipped his appointments, that the idea of opening up to a complete stranger terrified him, that it was, in a way, another violation. It hurt her that she was asking him to relive the most traumatic event of his young life, even worse than the shooting, but he had to face it and she knew he wasn't doing that. She understood things had to be done on his schedule and not hers, but the more he avoided it, the more worried she became.

If only she knew someone...

Elizabeth.

Why the hell hadn't she thought of that sooner?!

She would have to swallow all of her pride and eat a lot of crow, but she would do it, and do so with relish if it would help her son. She'd stop by the hospital tomorrow. Maybe go with Kurt.

Kurt, who was sitting on the balcony in boxer briefs and an old football jersey, drinking coffee and waiting for her.

She couldn't even remember the last time anyone had waited for her, had wanted to spend time with her. Hell, her own children avoided her as much as possible lately. Sonny and Jax wanted nothing to do with her, and Jason was still in his coma. Her mother was...well, her mother loved her, sincerely loved her, but she doubted Bobbie liked her that much. She really couldn't blame the woman. After all, she'd completely torpedoed her mother's life, and on more than one occasion.

She didn't really know how she could ever adequately apologize for that, so she had never tried, which was probably the worst thing she could have done.

So many regrets. So many bad decisions.

She sighed.

"They'll keep for tonight."

She turned and found Kurt standing in the doorway of the French windows, looking at her.

"Whatever is bothering you will keep for one night, Carly," he said. "As cliché as it sounds, you can think about it tomorrow." He smiled. "After all, tomorrow is another day."
She smiled and joined him on the balcony, murmuring her thanks when he handed her an Irish coffee.

"Tell me about your children," he said.

She became very animated and did just that, detailing why each of her children was amazing and the world, especially her, was lucky to have them. Before she knew it, she was telling him about Michael.

He listened patiently, letting her speak until her voice was hoarse and there were no words left, and she felt unburdened in a way she never had before.

"It won't help just him to talk about it," Kurt said quietly. "You need to talk about it, too, Carly. Your son was violated in the most obscene way possible, and, in a way, so were you. You weren't able to protect him and you can't fix this for him."

She nodded, ignoring the tears slipping down her cheeks.

"But this wasn't your fault," he continued, "any more than it was Michael's. You can't be everything for him. He has to stand on his own two feet, and I believe you've given him the tools to do that."

She blew out a breath, having not realized until that moment just how badly she had needed to hear those words.

"Bad things happen in this world," he said, "and all too often they happen to good people."

He turned away and looked at the night skyline, appreciating its majesty and grandeur. Port Charles really was a beautiful city.

"Michael will be all right, Carly. Eventually. It will take time and you need to give him that. He instinctively knows what he needs to do, the work he'll have to complete to get himself through this, and he'll do it because he has no other choice. He will emerge a stronger person for it and come to understand that, though he may have been victimized, he's no one's victim."

She stared at him. "You must have had one hell of a psych rotation."

He smiled, but it was sad and lost in the haze of memory.

"I got through it," he said quietly. "Michael can, too."

And that made her want to kill, kill all of those who preyed on people like Michael and Kurt and even Elizabeth. Good people who had been made to suffer for no good reason. But she couldn't kill anyone right now and the words on her tongue died before she could give them voice, so she just held his hand and sipped her coffee and enjoyed the view with her new friend.

"So what about your family?" she asked as they were burrowed beneath the covers of his mammoth bed.

He was silent for a moment. "My mother died when I was four, and my father died at the start of my junior year of high school. I went to live with my grandmother in Paris and immersed myself in school. I took every class applicable to my major. I took courses during the summer breaks and winter intercessions. I felt like I was racing toward something I didn't understand, some finish line I
just couldn't see, but the truth was that I was running."

"Are you still running?" she whispered.

He closed his eyes. "In some ways. I've known for a while now that I will never get over my mother's death. I just won't. So I acknowledge the grief, recognize that it will always be with me, but refuse to be ruled by it. Still, that grief was and always will be a terrible, raw thing.

"I grieved for my father for almost ten years, but I finally learned to let that grief go. I had to, because it was interfering with the good memories, and there are a lot of them."

He opened his eyes and smiled. "I had the best father in the world. He loved me when I thought myself unlovable. He defended me to all those who sought to tear me down. He was...he was my knight in shining armor, and I think part of the reason I missed him so much was that I knew I'd never have anyone like that in my corner again."

He sighed. "It's hard to be an orphan, and that is what I consider myself to be. I had parents, wonderful parents, but I had them for so brief amount of time that I feel like an orphan." He fell silent for a moment. "There's no one to be proud of me anymore, you know? There's no one there when I rush home and want to tell someone about the great day I've had.

"I have friends, lovely friends who I think of as family, but it's not the same. They share my spirit, but not my blood, and despite sentiment and feeling, that makes a difference." He shifted restlessly and stared up at the ceiling. "I have a stepmother, Carole, and a stepbrother, Finn. I love them, but I don't really know them that well, not well enough to consider family. Carole and Dad were married on his deathbed. We never got the chance to be a real family, and I left for Paris soon after the funeral."

"Do you keep in touch with them?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes, but not as often or as well as I should. I think some of that has to do with the fact that they were there at the end, that they saw what I did, his death, and I can't help but associate them with that. They share my grief, but it's not the same, and frankly, I resent their pain."

"I think that's normal."

"You don't think it's selfish?" he asked.

"I think you do what you can, when you can," she replied, "and I don't think being selfish is always a bad thing." She chuckled darkly. "Granted, I'm probably the most selfish person I know, so you shouldn't go by me, but I don't see the appeal in being a martyr, either. I don't think it makes anyone feel any better. Your pain is your own. He was your father."

"Thank you," he said, voice warbling slightly.

She decided this was the perfect opening. "What are you really doing in Port Charles?"

His eyes widened.

She rolled hers. "Oh, please. You're rich, gorgeous, nobility, and have been educated at some of the best schools in the world. You pick some dinky mid-sized city in upstate New York in which to live? You just happen to own stock in the biggest corporation in town? You just happen to know the resident prince and his evil Disney queen of a grandmother? You just happened to know the slain daughter of your new boss?"
"I barely knew Emily!" he protested. "I never told Monica I knew her daughter."

She stuck her nose in the air. "Really? That's what you're leading with?"

His eyes narrowed. "Just what are you implying?"

"I'm not implying anything. I'm stating straight out that you have some agenda for being here."

He said nothing for several seconds before a smirk began slowly spreading across his face. "Well done. Kudos, you."

She rolled her eyes again and elbowed him. "Spill it, Ivory!"

"Ivory?" he demanded.

She shrugged. "Your skin."

He groaned and placed a hand over his eyes. "First Porcelain, then Alabaster, now Ivory? Someone call Susan Powter to stop the insanity."

Carly snickered.

He rolled on his side to face her. "There might be...something."

She gave him a sardonic look. "Uh huh."

He opened his mouth and then just as abruptly closed it.

"I'm not prying," she said. "You'll tell me what you want and I'll let it be enough. I just want to help if I can."

"Two months ago I learned I have a brother," he blurted out, looking honestly surprised he had done so.

"Whoa," she whispered. "Instant sibling." She exhaled. "I have a little bit of experience with that, but I knew Bobbie had Lucas before I came to town." She pursed her lips. "Lucas, on the other hand, was totally floored and not happy about me." She shrugged. "I suppose I can't blame him."

She bit her lip. She did wish she was closer to her brother, her only other family outside of Bobbie and whatever the hell Luke and his kids were. Her three kids barely even knew they had an Uncle Lucas. He and Michael probably met once or twice, and Josslyn was too young to the know the difference, but she wasn't even sure Morgan knew his mother had a brother.

Suddenly she felt ashamed and didn't understand why.

She didn't understand a lot of things lately, like why her attitude toward Elizabeth had softened, why she was missing Robin, and why Kurt had been so instantly important to her.

"What if he wants nothing to do with me?" Kurt murmured. "He probably doesn't even know I exist."

Carly scooted toward him and took his hand. "How did you find out about him?"

He grunted. "Through a letter, one which took a ridiculously insane amount of time to reach me. His grandmother had read about my father's death and decided to contact me almost ten years after the fact."
"Is she after money?" she asked baldly.

"I don't know," Kurt said. "Dad wasn't wealthy; the money was my mother's and grandmother's, but he was comfortable. He owned a chain of auto repair shops and our house had no mortgage." He shifted. "I wouldn't mind giving my brother his part of Dad's estate, but only after a DNA test."

Carly nodded. "Smart."

Kurt peeked at her "Not selfish?"

"Hell no! You don't know this woman from a hole in the wall! She writes to you years after your father died and announces her grandson is your brother?" She shook her head. "How convenient. You better believe she researched you prior to sending that letter. I'm sure she knows you have money.

"I'm not saying he's not your brother," she continued, "but I would certainly want more than some granny's word."

He nodded absently. "It's so strange, Carly. I want him to be my brother. I really would like a brother. Finn is my stepbrother, but we've never been that close. Still, I know I can count on him when it truly matters, and he knows the same. I guess I just thought it would be nice if I could start over with someone new. Wipe the slate clean, so to speak."

"I get that," she said. She paused for a moment. "Did your dad know?"

"No!" Kurt said vehemently. "I think if he'd even had an inkling, he would have told me before he died. He would've wanted me to have that connection. The woman said in her letter that her daughter never informed my father she was pregnant. They were together a year or so after my mother died, and apparently it was a very brief affair.

"My father was a good man, an honest one. If he had known he'd had another child somewhere out in the world, he would've moved heaven and earth to find him, that I promise you."

She laid her hand over his. "He sounds like he was amazing."

He closed his eyes. "He really was," he ground out, voice cracking.

She decided to change topics slightly. "So this guy lives here in Port Charles? That's why you applied at General Hospital?"

"Yes," Kurt admitted, embarrassment coloring his voice. "I really didn't think things through very well at all, which is so unlike me. I plan everything down to the last detail. I'm not really an impetuous person, but I threw caution to the wind and uprooted my entire life on the word of a woman I've never met, all on the chance I might have a brother."

"Is that really such a bad thing?" she asked. "Were you happy in Paris?"

He was silent for a long moment. "Not really," he finally confessed. "I had isolated myself. I have very dear friends I haven't seen in years. I immersed myself in my studies and then my work, to the point where everything else was excluded."

He blushed all the way to his hairline. "I don't even remember the last time I had sex."

"And that is entirely unacceptable," said a staunch Carly. "You're too hot to go without. You like making plans? Then let's make one. Tomorrow we go to General Hospital and you talk with
Monica. I have a...friend...who works there from whom I need to beg - and I mean that literally - a favor. Then we'll work on getting you a house and reuniting you with your brother. After that, we're getting you laid."

He groaned and covered his face with his hands. "My acceptance of this plan isn't necessary, is it?"

"Nope!" she said cheerfully.

He heaved a sigh, but she took note it wasn't one fueled by fear or anger, but perhaps exasperation. She was used to, and could work with, it.

"You said you know Nikolas," she said. She made a mental note to start addressing the man as Nikki just to see what he would do. "Do you know anyone else in town?"

"One or two people," he said. "Honestly, though, I'm not even sure they still live here."

He was tetchy about the subject and she knew it was best to let it go.

For now.

"Nikolas is single," she said in an offhand manner which fooled no one. He also basically owned the hospital. She wondered if Kurt knew that Nikolas was his boss in everything but name. She also wondered if he had an agenda where Nikolas was concerned.

She hoped that he did and that it required nudity.

Kurt soured. "He's also straight."

Like that was going to get in her way. No one was that straight.

"How long has it been since you've seen him?" she asked, ignoring his comment.

"Almost ten years," Kurt said, eyes lost in memory. "After he and Emily broke up the first time, but before he was with Courtney."

"Did you know Courtney?" she asked, a tremor in her voice.

"No," he said, "but I know Nikolas loved her. He called me after she died." He paused. "He really scared me, Carly. I think, if not for Spencer, he would have done something...unhealthy."

She felt sick to her stomach, remembering how she had conspired to pass off Spencer as Jax's son. She had known at the time that it was wrong, that she was a horrible person, and she truly hadn't given real consideration to Nikolas' pain. In that moment, more of her anger toward Robin slipped away and she rued that she had been unable to get past it while the woman was alive. It would have made Jason happy, if nothing else.

"He was worse after Emily died," Carly said softly. "Emily and I weren't friends, but everyone knew how much they loved each other. Whether you were their friend or family or just a stranger on the street, you couldn't help but be touched by it."

Kurt sighed. "I hope I find that kind of love one day."

I do, too, she thought silently. Sonny was her passion, but their love had caused more pain than joy. She and Jax started off as good friends before beginning something more. She knew their romantic relationship was over, but she really did miss their friendship. As for Lorenzo...she had loved him. If she hadn't been so obsessed with Sonny, maybe...
"You will," she vowed. "I can't manage my own love life worth a crap, but I'm awesome at telling other people what to do."

He rolled his eyes. "Bask in my joy."

"So what's your brother's name? Where does he live?"

Kurt frowned. "Harborview Towers, I believe it's called."

She nodded. "It's a huge apartment and condo complex about five miles from here. My best friend Jason lives in one of the penthouses."

He looked at her with hopeful eyes. "Do you think he might know my brother? Maybe he could introduce us. Just to calm the waters, so to speak."

"Sure, Jason's good at that kind of thing, but he's in a coma right now." She ignored his startled blink. "I might know your brother. I'm at the Towers all the time and I lived there for years. What's your brother's name?"

"Damien," Kurt said. "Damien Spinelli."

Carly shot straight up and stared down at him, her eyes like pinwheels. "You are shitting me!"
The Gang's All Here

Kurt's sleep was restless and fractured, and could only be partially dismissed by jetlag.

Carly had given him an earful about Damien and he was now more nervous than ever about meeting his potential brother. She hadn't said anything derogatory, nor was her tone laced with anything other than surprise at their possible relation, but he sensed she was either holding back so as not to color his judgment or to keep him from boarding a plane and getting the hell out of Dodge.

Apparently Damian was a genius - a literal genius - particularly with computers. Kurt himself was highly intelligent, but not technically a genius. This fact had never distressed him because he had seen the social troubles geniuses like Artie Abrams had experienced. There was constant frustration that others couldn't keep with you underlying the paranoia that you were constantly being ridiculed.

Most had believed Artie's simmering resentment was due to being confined in a wheelchair, but Kurt had known that it was because Artie felt he had to dumb himself down to fit in. He had never done so with Kurt, one of the few people easily able to match him, but had done so with Tina, which had been a contributing factor in their breakup. Tina was anything but stupid, but Artie had been hopelessly awkward and misogynistic without realizing it. His time dating Brittany had mostly cured him of that.

From what he had gleaned from Carly's anecdotes, Damien - who preferred to be called by his surname, which Kurt would not be doing - fancied himself the Ace of Cyberspace, nicknaming himself the Jackal. Kurt thought that was ridiculous, though he was slightly envious of his brother's much more interesting nickname than the ones which he had been made to endure.

Less thrilling was discovering Damien was mobbed-up insofar as his primary employer was Jason Morgan, enforcer for Sonny Corinthos. From everything he had heard about the latter, Kurt was surprised Damien was even tolerated by someone so volatile. Carly had detailed a few mafia escapades in which Damien had been involved, and Kurt had not been amused. He would make sure to express to Damien his displeasure.

Damien was also a private investigator, partnered with a woman named Samantha McCall, who was Jason Morgan's new wife and pregnant with his child. Carly had barely been able to disguise her hatred for this woman, which had given Kurt considerable pause.

He was a fairly good judge of character and deemed his earlier assessment of Carly to be quite right. She didn't like women and could be a real bitch, but his discussions with her about the denizens of Port Charles had been rather illuminating. She had briefly explained her problems with Elizabeth Webber and the late Robin Scorpio, but there was also an undercurrent of respect and even regret in her words.

Her words about Sam McCall, however, were just shy of absolutely scathing, and while Kurt knew she was trying to rein herself in for his benefit, he had the feeling he should pay heed to her assessment. Sam's history as related to him was shady, and he didn't like that she was in a position to influence his brother.

Of course, he really was putting the cart before the horse. He had no definitive proof that Damien was his brother. If he wasn't, the situation would be embarrassing for all involved. If he was, well, that opened a whole host of other problems.
He had told Carly last night that he wanted a brother, and that was true, but he was unsure how good a brother he himself would be. He had spent almost the past fifteen years in exile, isolating himself from almost everyone who meant anything to him. He had never been the warmest person and was an introvert by nature, though he could fake it with the best of them.

What if Damien was his brother and Kurt couldn't stand him? What if they ended up despising each other? Kurt didn't know if he could bear finding a connection only to lose it because of clashing personalities. The very thought depressed him. After all, he had uprooted himself and moved halfway across the world on the off-chance of sudden family. What if it turned out to be the worst mistake of his life? Even worse than that unfortunate haircut when he was twelve?

But he had Carly, and that was worth a lot in his estimation. It had been ages since he had clicked so immediately with someone and he knew he definitely wanted her in his life. He could tell this confused and somewhat worried her, so he would take his time to wear down her defenses and prove that he liked her for her. He'd been in her position; luckily, he'd had people like Santana, Brittany, Quinn, Mike, and even Rachel, who had forced their way past his shields and gotten him to lower his walls.

He gently extricated himself from the bed, pausing to smile at the gentle snore Carly released, and walked to the other room to consider what to wear that day. He wanted to make a good impression with his new colleagues, and while he had somewhat toned down his wardrobe over the years, it was still rather flamboyant. He wanted the people he worked with to admire his skill, not snicker about his fashion choices.

He settled on a Prada double-breasted navy suit with a crimson fitted Oxford shirt and red and black-striped tie. He chose Coach black wingtips so polished that they mirrored their surroundings. He selected a black Kenneth Cole messenger bag and deposited his keys, wallet, phone, and several folders within it.

He took a quick shower, moisturized obsessively, and placed an order with room service before dressing. He cooed at Carly to coax her out of bed, discovering very quickly that she was not a morning person despite having three children. When the cart arrived, he shoved a cup of coffee at her before dialing the boutique in the lobby. He interrogated the associate about their inventory, and then ordered an ensemble for Carly of his choosing.

She was a beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure who dressed expensively, but without taking into consideration the cut of her clothes and how best to flatter herself. He would do it for her and she would consent to him dressing her from now on. If she didn't, he would have to take steps.

True enough, she squawked and brayed when a bellhop delivered a garment bag and small collection of cosmetics. She growled and huffed as Kurt all but pushed her into the shower and demanded she wash herself, not at all amused when she prodded him to do so for her, since he was doing everything else.

After she emerged from behind a cloud of steam, Kurt immediately attacked her with haircare products. He straightened, smoother, spritzed, and cajoled her hair into a style worthy of her, though he refused to allow her to see it until everything else was complete. He then applied her makeup, using nudes and pastels to complement her complexion. Carly complained about the choices, but he countered that it was daytime and she was a co-owner of a four-star hotel. She was going to start dressing like one, instead of a cocktail waitress in an upscale supper club.

When he finally allowed her to look at herself in the mirror, she gasped in quiet wonder.

"Is that really me?" she whispered.
"Not at all," Kurt said. "Makeup and wardrobe are lovely accoutrements, but have nothing to do with who you are." He paused for a moment. "I once thought that if I just wore the right clothes and had the right haircut and the perfect skin, I could be something other than I was, that I could be who I wanted to be."

He shook his head. "I was wrong. Fashion became my armor, but I soon discovered that I was allowing that armor to eclipse what lied beneath. When I made that realization, I also realized I had no idea just what that was. I didn't know how to define myself, so I let my clothes do it for me. I tied my identity, in part, to my wardrobe. It wasn't easy to unlearn." He shrugged. "The clothes do not make the man or woman; the man or woman makes the clothes. That said, you better make damn sure that, whatever look you choose to don, you own it."

Carly's eyes gleamed with understanding and appreciation. She tilted her head and admired the elegant French twist into which Kurt had wrestled her unruly locks. Her hair looked brighter, healthier, and less brassy than she could ever remember it being. Her makeup enhanced her bone structure and overall look rather than drawing attention to one specific feature.

Her eyes traveled down and she shivered slightly in the bright white Donna Karan pantsuit which Kurt had selected. It was tailored to fit like a dream, as though it had been custom made just for her, emphasizing all of her good parts while diminishing the bad ones.

He allowed for her penchant for incredibly ridiculous shoes, selecting a white matte pair of Louboutins with a five-inch spiked heel. It was all topped off with a red leather clutch which matched the classic Louboutin sole.

Carly honestly couldn't remember looking better than she did at this moment. She looked classy and elegant, yet at the same time chic and stylish. She looked age-appropriate but not matronly. She looked like...the best she could be.

"Just remember," Kurt whispered in her ear, "you make the clothes. All of this is you."

She shook her head. "No, it's you." She grabbed his hand. "Thanks."

He sent a dismissive wave her way. "We're going shopping later."

Her eyes danced.

"For days."

She began bouncing.

"We will spend obscene amounts of money and be better dressed than anyone in this town." He tilted his head. "Although, from what I've seen, this will require very little effort on our part."

She threw back her head and cackled.

Until he could purchase a new car - which also meant applying for a new license and obtaining insurance - Kurt decided to avail himself of the Metro Court's town car service. It was a little more ostentatious than he preferred being, but he didn't see the point of depending on cabs when he could just as easily have a ride whenever and to wherever he wanted.

As he and Carly were chauffeured to General Hospital, she babbled about her anxiety regarding Elizabeth. Would she really help Michael?"
He placed a hand on her bouncing knee. "Carly, let me ask you a question about Elizabeth."

She nodded.

"Is she a good mother?"

Carly didn't even blink. "Absolutely."

He nodded.

"Well?" she demanded when he offered no further commentary.

He shrugged. "You answered your own question. This isn't about you, Elizabeth, or your antagonistic past. It's about Michael and what happened to him, something that also happened to Elizabeth. Talk to her as a mother and I guarantee she will listen to you as one. She's a survivor as well as a medical professional. She knows how necessary counseling is to recovery. She's not going to say no simply because you've never been friends."

Carly stared at him before giving a slow blink. "You're right."

He buffed his nails on his pants. "Get used to it."

She punched his shoulder and beamed when he winced and cursed at her. She was somewhat startled by his creative vocabulary and vowed at that moment to get him to swear as much and as often as possible.

They stood outside General Hospital and Kurt took a moment to scan the complex. It was of mammoth proportions, comprised of several wings and towers, parts of which looked futuristic and others which hallmarked much earlier eras. It was a veritable hodgepodge of architecture, but it somehow all worked together.

He felt dwarfed by the size of it. He knew that it was the regional hospital for the county, as well as a teaching hospital for physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and physician's assistants. Port Charles University had various programs for medical ancillary areas, including respiratory medicine, nuclear medicine, nursing assistants, and many others, and that General Hospital was where most of the students performed their externships.

He liked the size of it, its somewhat tacky grandeur, and decided he would not be averse to spending several years in practice here.

"I hope there are maps available," he muttered.

"Even better," Carly drawled. "Various colored lines on the floor."

He rolled his eyes and they stormed inside.

"Why are we going to this floor?"

"Because this is where Elizabeth works, I'll get to see and introduce you to my mom, and one of them can page Monica for you," Carly explained.

Kurt shrugged and nodded his assent, throwing a side eye at Carly who was nervously twisting her hands.
"Calm down," he said. "Just talk to her as we discussed and everything will be fine. From everything you've told me about Elizabeth, she's not going to turn you down."

"I wish I was as sure of this as you are," Carly muttered. "I've been pretty horrible to her over the years."

"Like I said, this isn't about you or her; it's about Michael. She's a mother. She'll help."

Carly sighed and dropped her hands to her sides before she picked her cuticles raw.

The truth of the matter was that, while she always knew she would have to face consequences for her own bad behavior, she had never really thought that her children would have to pay for her mistakes, of which there were many.

She hoped Kurt was right, that appealing to Elizabeth as one mother to another would work, but she had her doubts. Elizabeth certainly didn't owe her anything. Carly knew she had a lot of nerve asking the woman for a favor, and despite the fact that it was for Michael, she was pretty certain Elizabeth would think so as well.

The elevator dinged and, just as the doors were about to open, Carly took an involuntary step back.

"Do you want me to go first?" he asked kindly.

She was startled by his lack of mockery. She wasn't sure she'd be as gracious if the situation was reversed. She nodded weakly.

Kurt stuck his nose up in the air, jutted his chin forward, and began striding forward. Carly envied his confidence. Hers was often feigned, but Kurt's had been earned.

Elizabeth Webber, Bobbie Jones, and Epiphany Johnson, who were holding a brief conference about the status of the ward's patients, looked up when they heard the elevator doors open. They were expecting Patrick Drake to drop by and make arrangements for his sabbatical, but were instead surprised to see a very attractive and impeccably dressed young man saunter forward.

"Yowza," Epiphany muttered. "That's a damn shame."

"What is?" asked a puzzled Bobbie.

"That boy is as gay as a picnic basket," Epiphany said, "but he's a tasty morsel of white chocolate."

Elizabeth rolled her eyes.

They were surprised when the young man nodded a greeting in their direction. He then held out his hand behind him and they realized there was another in his party. They watched as a female hand grasped his and he all but pulled her from the elevator.


"Is that really my daughter?" Bobbie wondered.

"I've never seen her look that good." Epiphany drawled. Backhanded compliments were her forte.

Kurt strolled toward the charge desk, towing Carly with him. She looked nervous and unsure of herself, which very much surprised the other three women.
"Hi, Mom," she said. "Elizabeth, Epiphany," she said, nodding.

Elizabeth cautiously returned the nod while Epiphany grunted.

"Good morning, Carly," Bobbie said warmly. "You look lovely."

To the shock of all of them, save Kurt, Carly blushed.

Elizabeth hadn't known Carly was capable of this and was suitably stunned.

"Who's your adorable friend?" Epiphany demanded.

Kurt turned toward her and raised an imperious eyebrow.

Epiphany swooned. God, she loved a bitch, and she knew from bitches. Carly and her ilk were pretenders to the throne, but this little boy was the real deal.

Kurt ignored her and stuck out his hand toward Bobbie, who took it on reflex. He beamed his most winning smile at her. "Good morning, Nurse Jones," he said. "I'm so pleased to meet the mother of my best friend." He gave Carly an affectionate look, which she returned.

"Best friend?" Epiphany repeated.

"Did that confuse you?" Kurt asked with feigned concern. "Apologies. Is English not your first language?"

Carly barely managed not to snort. Elizabeth wasn't as lucky.

"I was just surprised," a defensive Epiphany shot back.

His brow arched even higher. "Surprised Carly has friends?"

She stared at him for a long moment. "Oh, you're good."

He nodded. "I'm the best."

"Mom, Elizabeth, Epiphany," Carly began, "this is my friend Kurt Hummel. He just arrived in town last evening and is staying at the Metro Court while he searches for a new house."

"Welcome to Port Charles," Elizabeth said kindly, shaking his hand.

He couldn't help but stare. Carly really hadn't prepared him well for this. As gay as he was, he was a sucker for feminine beauty, and this woman was in a league he hadn't encountered for some time.

"Forgive me," he said, blushing slightly. "I didn't mean to stare so blatantly, but you truly are exquisite."

The eyes of Bobbie and Epiphany immediately turned toward Carly, who showed no reaction at all to Kurt's words. This stunned both of them, who were well aware of how jealous Carly could be, particularly where Elizabeth was concerned.

For her part, Elizabeth's eyes widened as a blush appeared quickly across her cheeks.

Carly's gaze was calculating. Her thought from the other day reasserted itself; Elizabeth had no idea just how attractive other people found her. Carly had thought it was either naive or diabolical, but now she reconsidered her opinion.
She thought about what had happened to Michael and what had once happened to Elizabeth. She wondered how it must feel for a woman to be told she was beautiful by a man when her first real experience with the opposite sex was rape.

She inhaled sharply and forced the tears away. She thought of all the horrible things she had said to Elizabeth over the years, stopping only at that one line even she dared not cross. In her mind, however, she had silently accused Elizabeth of using her rape to garner sympathy and attention, even knowing all the while how cruel such a suggestion was, not to mention the fact that it was patently untrue.

All because she had been so desperate to hang on to Jason, to ensure her place in his life, no matter how many people she had run roughshod over in the process. No, it wasn't surprising she had no female friends, or any friends, really, other than Jason. But now she had Kurt. Kurt had his head on straight and would hopefully help her do the same.

"Thank you," Elizabeth said softly. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

He smiled and nodded.

Bobbie cleared her throat. "What brings you to Port Charles?" She definitely wanted to know better the young man who had clearly exerted such an influence on her daughter.

"Employment," he said briskly.

"That's why we came here," Carly said. "We were hoping you could page Monica."

Bobbie blinked. "Of course." She hesitated for a moment. "May I ask why?"

"Apologies," Kurt said. "My name is Kurt Hummel and I was recently contracted by Dr. Quartermaine to be the new staff forensic pathologist."

Epiphany's eyes widened to the size of saucers. "You're a doctor?"

"I am."

Elizabeth was enjoying this immensely. It was incredibly rare to see Epiphany so unsettled. She picked up the phone and all but chirped for Monica to come to the General Surgery floor.

They exchanged banal pleasantries while waiting for Monica to arrive, although Epiphany kept trying to interrogate Kurt and was being ridiculously unsubtle about it. He answered all of her questions politely, but with noticeable bite. Carly could only think that Epiphany reminded him of someone he had once known and that it hadn't been an amicable relationship.

When the subject segued to his prior residence and education, Kurt talked about Paris and the Sorbonne, causing all three nurses to dwell on Robin Scorpio.

Kurt nodded when Epiphany mentioned the late woman's name. "I'm aware of her, of course. Her reputation preceded itself, and though I was several years after her at the Sorbonne, she was somewhat of a legend."

He paused, a soft smile on his face. He was unaware that Monica, Patrick, and Nikolas were soon standing just behind him.

"Dr. Scorpio was even something of a role model for me. She was a brilliant physician and an incomparable researcher, a true leader in her field with an uncommon compassion which all
physicians should strive to emulate. From what Carly has told me, she sacrificed herself for the health of her patient, which in no way surprises me. It is one of my greatest regrets that I will never enjoy the opportunity to meet and work with her."

He blushed. "I realize that I will never know her as all of you did, but I feel as though I did and I do mourn her. She was a symbol for many of us of what intelligence, diligence, and a sincere belief in oneself could accomplish." He swallowed heavily. "She will be missed."

He heard a breath hitch from behind him and spun around on his heel in surprise. He looked up into the face of one of the most beautiful men he had ever seen, and he could tell from the utter devastation in that man's eyes that he was most likely Robin Scorpio's widower.

"My apologies, Dr. Drake," he said demurely, dropping his eyes. "I didn't mean to overstep my bounds or cause you any discomfort."

Patrick stared at the young man before him who was so obviously distressed. He took a moment to consider the words he had just heard. They meant more to him than most of the half-assed eulogies which had been thrown his way the past two days. To hear Robin spoken of with such reverence, to know that she had so inspired others, to realize that her life and work had touched more people than she would ever know...that was truly awesome.

Patrick laid a hand on the man's shoulder. "Thank you," he said sincerely. "That's...your words are what I think of when I think of her. I...I needed to hear them."

Kurt's blush was reaching epic proportions and he kept his eyes averted. Carly discreetly pulled him towards her and he drew strength from her.

"Elizabeth?" interjected a subdued Monica. "You paged me?"

Elizabeth blinked back tears and nodded. "Your new employee has arrived," she said absently, still thinking of Robin. How many more friends was she destined to lose?

Monica's eyes widened as she studied Kurt, who looked about twelve years old. In her mind, she recalled his resume. This child was already so accomplished? Good lord.

"The forensic pathologist position?" asked a surprised Patrick, turning toward Monica. "You were finally able to fill it?"

She blinked and nodded.

"This kid is a doctor?" demanded an irritated Nikolas.

Kurt cocked his head and glared. "I'm hardly a kid, as you so delightfully described me," he barked. "You know how old I am, Nikki. Have I really changed so much that you don't recognize me?"

Nikolas' mouth fell open. The only person other than Lulu ever to call him Nikki was..."Kurt?"


"Kurt!" Nikolas cried, rushing forward and picking Kurt up into his arms, hugging him to within an inch of his life. "What are you doing here? Why didn't you tell me you were coming? Where are you staying? You're going to be on staff at General Hospital?"

The others all stood and stared, completely unused to seeing Nikolas being so...effusive.
"Put me down, you great baboon!" Kurt squawked, ineffectually pounding on Nikolas' shoulders to force him to comply.

Nikolas eventually returned him to earth, took Kurt's face in his hands, and stared into his eyes. "I can't believe it's you. Look at you! You're all grown up."

Kurt gave him a wry smile. "That tends to happen in fifteen years, Nikki."

Nikolas winced. "There's no way I'm going to be able to convince you not to call me that, is there?"

Kurt beamed. "Not a chance in hell. You'll always be Nikki to me."

"I take it you two know each other," Monica drawled.

Kurt nodded. "Yes, Dr. Quartermaine, and please forgive me for what I'm about to do."

She frowned in confusion.

Kurt seized the opportunity to deliver a sucker punch to Nikolas' gut. "That's for not telling me about Emily!" he thundered.

Nikolas bent over and wheezed.

A startled Monica inhaled. "You knew Emily?"

Kurt gave her a sorrowful look. "Not well, but yes. We had only ever spoken on the phone, but I found her to be a warm, funny, and intelligent woman. The world is a much darker place for her absence."

"Why didn't you tell me you knew my daughter?" Monica asked, her tone curiously blank.

"Because I didn't truly know her, Dr. Quartermaine," he said. "As I explained, we had never met, just spoken over the telephone. I didn't want my relationship with her, as brief as it was, to color your decision to hire me."

She frowned. "Are you implying I'm unprofessional?"

"Not at all," Kurt said crisply, "merely that I want to be judged on my own merits."

Monica slowly began to nod. "I respect that."

"Thank you."

Nikolas tugged on Kurt's arm. "Where are you staying?"

"At the Metro Court," he replied.

Nikolas shook his head. "Absolutely not. You'll stay with me and Spencer at Wyndemere."

Kurt frowned. "No thank you, Nikki. I have little interest in staying at your gothic monstrosity of a castle, despite the quality of the company. I'm perfectly happy at the Metro Court. Besides, Carly and I have many plans and they don't suit me having to be shuttled back and forth from your island."

Nikolas' eyes narrowed. "Carly?" His eyes narrowed further as he spied their joined hands. "How do you know Carly?"
Kurt frowned. "I don't believe that's any of your business."

"Kurt, you don't know what she..."

"Nikki, we haven't seen each other in fifteen years and I would prefer that our reunion is not spoiled so quickly by an argument which you will lose. I'm no longer the child you knew and am perfectly capable of deciding for myself who my friends are. Carly is my friend. If you wish to continue to be my friend as well, you will respect that."

Nikolas stared.

"You will also respect Carly when in my presence," Kurt said coolly. "Is that perfectly clear?"

Nikolas stood rigid but finally managed to give a very gruff nod.

Carly stared.

Kurt smiled and leaned forward to hug him again, placing a gentle kiss on his cheek. "I've missed you so very much, Nikki," he whispered. "It's good to see you again."

Nikolas' arms automatically wound themselves around Kurt's slender frame. He was startled to note that Kurt was actually taller than him now, though very lanky. They had stayed in touch, but their communications had always been brief. He supposed that's why he had an image of a thirteen-year-old Kurt frozen in his mind, of seeing a beautiful boy nervously accompanying his renowned grandmother to his first ball.

"Why won't you stay with me?" he asked, pouting.

Kurt rubbed his back. "Because I'm aware that Helena is running amok. I'm not anxious to renew our acquaintance."

Nikolas pulled back, fear lighting his eyes as he nodded. He had lost so much: Courtney, Emily, his mother, and now Robin. He wouldn't lose Kurt, not now that he had him back, and certainly not to Helena.

"You know Helena?" Bobbie asked.

Kurt pulled away from Nikolas, turned to her, and nodded. "Yes, better than I'd like." He sighed. "Unfortunately I'm not in the same situation as you and the other Spencers. Helena quite likes me, you see. I don't believe she'd ever hurt me, but she would use me to manipulate Nikolas, which I simply won't allow."

A warm flush of pleasure infused Nikolas' face.

Carly and Elizabeth were watching this interaction with keen interest. If they didn't know better, if they didn't know Nikolas as the lothario that he was, they would think he was interested in more than friendship from Kurt. They inadvertently caught each other's eye. A raise of brows, a purse of lips, and mild shrugs later, they silently vowed to interrogate their respective friends.

The elevator doors opened again and a sobbing woman flew across the lobby and tackled Patrick Drake.

"Patrick," she screeched. "I got on a plane right after you called. I know you said it wasn't necessary for me to come, but Robin is my best friend." She froze in his arms. "Was. She was my best friend." She shook her head. "Oh, my god. This can't be happening."
Patrick closed his eyes and embraced her.

Kurt frowned and slowly circled them, eyes narrowed in thought. "Brenda?"

The petite brunette blinked and pulled away from Kurt to study the man who had addressed her. "I'm sorry," she said, voice thick with tears, "do we know each other"

He smiled gently. "Kurt, Kurt Hummel."

Her eyes widened as her mouth fell open. "No way! You can't be Tink!"

"Tink?" everyone else demanded, causing Kurt's blush to return full-force.

She shook her head. "Absolutely not! Tink is like sixteen or something! He's my adorable little moppet. You...you're hot."

Carly set her jaw and crossed her arms. This was most unwelcome. Why the hell hadn't Kurt told her he knew Brenda Barrett? She paused in thought. Well, he had indicated that he knew other people in Port Charles, though he wasn't sure they still lived here. She supposed Brenda qualified. Still, it was galling that one of the women she most despised was apparently friends with her new best friend.

Kurt put his hands on his hips. "I'm twenty-eight, thank you, and if you ever bothered to return a phone call or email, you might know that!"

She stubbornly shook her head. "You can't be that old, because I was twenty-three when I met you. If you're twenty-eight now, that means that I'm..." She shook her head even more furiously. "No!"

He shrugged mildly. "Sorry, but it's true."

She deflated. "It can't be," she insisted. "I don't want you to be grown up, because if you are, that means I'm getting old." She glared. "You're dragging me down with you and I don't like it!"

Kurt threw up his hands and stomped away, which led to Nikolas demanding from Brenda how she knew Kurt, which in turn made her question why he should care, which led to an argument which enthralled the others.

Kurt edged over to Carly. "Now's your chance to talk to Elizabeth."

She startled. Had he engineered this just to help her?

The smirk on his face suggested that he had.

She shook her head in incredulity or fear, she wasn't sure which, and slowly approached Elizabeth, who watched her with a wary eye. When she leaned over and whispered if she could talk to her about Michael, Elizabeth, eyes curious, nodded and led them over to one of the waiting room couches.

Patrick sidled up to Kurt. "You really do have a knack for making your presence known."

He nodded. "It's a little thing I do."

Patrick snickered. "How do you know them? Please don't take offense. Both of them were extremely close to Robin, and I'm just surprised if you know them, why didn't you know her?"
It was a fair question and Kurt decided to answer it. He waved over a flustered Monica as Bobbie leaned in to listen, as well. "I've known Nikolas since I was eight. You all know that he's Greek royalty, of course, and I'm French nobility. My grandmother held my title in trust until I reached majority, but I would spend summers with her so that she could groom me, so to speak. I met Nikolas during this time."

Monica raised a brow. "You're titled?"

He nodded absently. "My grandmother was Katrine Valois."

Monica's eyes widened. She had hired the Duke of Aquitaine? "I've heard about her from my father-in-law, Edward. She was a very successful philanthropist, yes?"

He nodded again. "She was. She, more than anyone else, encouraged my pursuit of medicine." He smiled wryly. "She was less than thrilled with my choice of specialty, but came to appreciate it."

"Why did you choose forensic pathology?" asked an interested Patrick.

Kurt was silent for a moment, mulling over his answer. "My mother died when I was four. Her car was run off the road by a drunk driver and we never recovered her body." He looked down at the floor. "It was horrible. There were no answers, so my father and I were never truly able to move on. Instead, we were stuck in this miasma of grief from which neither of us ever truly emerged."

He cleared his throat. "I decided that I wanted to do what I could to give other families the answers I never received. It's...the work is important. It's worthwhile. I give families closure. I give victims their voices back." He shrugged. "I can't even imagine doing anything else."

Monica nodded, completely understanding his point. She felt much the same about cardiology, though she doubted she would ever be able express her love for her discipline with such eloquence.

Patrick also understood at least the sentiment behind Kurt's words. Sure, he had chosen neurosurgery partly because it was risky and dangerous and girls loved it, but he had stuck with it because he was good at it, because he made a difference in people's lives.

"What do you think that's about?" Bobbie asked, inclining her head toward Carly and Elizabeth.

Kurt sucked in a breath. "One mother is asking another for help with her child."

Bobbie and Monica nodded. Nothing else need be said.

Patrick felt he also got the gist. "Still," he said, "the two of them together is somewhat frightening and probably indicative of an impending apocalypse."

Kurt and Monica snickered. Bobbie was much more interested in what could have compelled her daughter to hold a private, civil conversation with Elizabeth Webber. She suspected Dr. Hummel was involved.

"None of this matters!" Nikolas shouted at Brenda. "Did you know that Kurt's best friend is Carly?"

Brenda stared blankly at him. "Carly who?"

Elizabeth was only slightly worried that she was having a stroke. She couldn't imagine any other reason why Carly would ask to speak with her alone. She also couldn't imagine why the hell she
had agreed to the request.

But the Carly before her was not the Carly she knew. This woman was awkward and tripping over her words, eyes suspiciously bright. It was rather terrifying to see Carly so undone. Whatever this was about apparently concerned Michael, and that just made Elizabeth all the more worried.

Carly, for her part, couldn't string a sentence together to save her life. Not only did she feel guilty for violating Michael's privacy, though he had never asked her not to discuss his situation with other people, but she looked into Elizabeth's startlingly clear eyes and suddenly saw that which so many always had.

Elizabeth was a genuinely good person. She cared about people, even about those she probably shouldn't. She saw compassion on Elizabeth's face, not only for whatever had befallen Michael, but for Carly herself. She saw the empathy of a good mother who saw another in pain. Kurt's words echoed in her head and she realized just how right he had been.

She blindly reached out for Elizabeth's hands and seized them in her own. She swallowed painfully.

"Michael...prison...raped."

And then she watched as Elizabeth's eyes were filled with horror and rage and indignation and sadness and pain, such horrific pain, and Carly felt equally guilty for picking at a scab that most likely would never heal.

"I don't know what to do," she whispered, shaking her head. "I don't know how to help him."

Elizabeth surprised both of them by pulling Carly against her and holding her tightly. "It's not your fault," she whispered. "It's not your fault, it's not his fault."

"My baby," Carly brokenly said. "My baby."

"I can't even imagine," Elizabeth murmured. "I can't...I just can't go there." She pulled back and stared deeply into Carly's eyes. "What about the rapist?"

"Jason killed him," she admitted.

"Good," Elizabeth spat. "Good."

Carly realized she had just met Lizzie, and Lizzie was a force to be reckoned with.

"How did your parents get through this?" she asked.

The fire in Elizabeth's eyes dimmed. "They don't know. I never told them."

Carly couldn't even comprehend that statement.

"I haven't spoken to them since I was fifteen, Carly," she whispered. "They've never called me to check on me. They've never met their grandchildren. They've never even acknowledged them. I know for a fact that Gram...they know about Jake, but they never called."

And Carly knew a hatred she had never before experienced. What kind of parents were so self-involved that they sent their teenage daughter across the country to live with her grandmother and never once bothered to contact her again? That was...an obscenity. She thought about what she knew of Elizabeth, about the rape; her marriages to Lucky and Ric; her affairs with Jason and Zander; Cameron; her miscarriages; when Elizabeth had been hit by a car and rendered temporarily
blind; Jake's death.

How in the name of anything holy was Carly Corinthos closer to Elizabeth Webber than the girl's own parents?

"What complete assholes!" Carly bellowed.

Elizabeth giggled, looking surprised at herself. "Yeah, well...it is what it is, I guess."

Carly shook her head in disbelief. This woman had survived multiple traumas, but had still put herself through school with no help from anyone, often working two or three jobs to manage. She was a gifted artist, a great mother, and a good friend.

Elizabeth placed her hand on top of Carly's own. "Would you like me to talk to him?"

Carly blushed. "I would. I really would, but I know I have no right to ask, not after everything..."

"This has nothing to do with you or me or Jason," Elizabeth said. "This is about Michael. If I can help, I want to. If you think he'd let me, I want to try."

"Why?" Carly asked, choking on the question. Why the hell would Elizabeth want to help her?

"Because I know you would do the same for my child if the situations were reversed."

Carly stared at her, remembering when she had called Elizabeth's son a bastard. "I don't think that's true," she whispered.

"I do," Elizabeth countered. "Whatever else you are, Carly, you're a damned good mother."

Those words again. Those words which meant so much more to her when they came from this woman than they ever had from anyone else.

"He'll get through this, Carly," Elizabeth promised. "We'll get him through this."

Carly's tears spilled over and she wrapped her arms around Elizabeth once more.

"How in the hell is this even happening?" Brenda demanded as she stared down the hell at what was surely a sign of the End of Days.

"Ask him," Epiphany grunted, pointing at Kurt. "He set it up."

They all turned to face him and he stuck his nose up in the air.

"Carly needed help. Elizabeth was in a position to help her. Given what you know about Elizabeth, does it surprise you that she would?"

"No," Nikolas said, "but it surprises the hell out of me that Carly would ask."

Monica shook her head. "Not me. When your child needs help, there's nothing you won't do to see that they get it, even if that means swallowing every ounce of pride you have." She was done with this. She had little use for Carly, but the woman was obviously in distress and Monica felt like a voyeuristic vulture. "Your start date isn't for another month, Dr. Hummel. Did you wish to begin sooner?"

Kurt thought about it for a moment, but at last shook his head. "I'd like to become a little more
settled in Port Charles first. I still need to find a house, buy a car, get a new license, and a host of other things which require my attention before I can dedicate myself fully to my new position. Would that be inconvenient for you?"

"Not at all," Monica replied. "We've had trouble filling this position for a while. We've had a roster of physician substitutes filling in, but none of them are pathologists, and none of them enjoy your reputation. We're thrilled to have you here. Frankly, you're badly needed."

Kurt gave a cordial smile. "I very much look forward to working with your, Dr. Quartermaine. If possible, I would appreciate a tour of the hospital and its facilities when you have the time to arrange it."

"I can handle that," Patrick said, smiling. He liked this boy - man, he corrected himself - but more importantly, he sensed his daughter would, as well. Emma was desperately missing her mother and he knew he had, in the past two days, depended far too much on Elizabeth, who had her own child to raise.

Further, he had always liked Carly, despite the fact she and Robin had hated each other. If Kurt also saw the things in Carly he had seen, perhaps they could develop a friendship of their own. Most of his friends had been Robin's friends, and while he and Matt were growing closer, they were not at the point where they would yet consider each other friends, let alone brothers.

"Thank you, Dr. Drake," Kurt said happily.

Patrick smiled. "Call me Patrick."

Nikolas frowned. Brenda appeared intrigued.

Kurt watched as Elizabeth and Carly began walking toward them, whispering to each other. He turned on reflex when the elevator doors once again opened, only to drop the coffee had brought with him that morning.

Carly immediately was at his side, inadvertently dragging Elizabeth with her. "What's wrong? Honey, what is it?" She looked at the direction in which he was and frowned. "Do you know Anna, too?"

Kurt's pallor was waxy and he was trembling from head to toe. He look as though, at any moment, he would fall over into convulsions.

"Who?" he whispered as he began backing up, stopping only when he slammed into the charge desk.

Anna's attention was drawn toward the source of the kerfuffle, brow furrowed in confusion. She saw Carly Corinthos, Elizabeth Webber, Bobbie Jones, Monica Quartermaine, Nikolas Cassadine, Brenda Barrett, and...

Patrick watched in fascination as his mother-in-law's face fractured under the assault of emotions he couldn't even hope to name. He remembered when Robin had told him when she reunited with her mother, and he guessed that Anna was lost in memory, perhaps even having a flashback of those missing years she still couldn't recall.

Mac and Robert Scorpio stood at either side of her as she inched forward. "Kurt?" she whispered. "Oh, dear god. Kurt, baby?"
A strangled noise erupted from Kurt's throat, a cross between a sob and scream.

"Back off!" Carly bellowed at Anna. She maneuvered herself in front of Kurt, who looked back at her with eyes wild and terrified, his pupils blown.

"What is it?" she gently asked. "Do you know her?"

He grasped her forearms painfully, his gasps given way to hyperventilation.

"Kurt," she hissed through the pain, "who is she to you?"

His mouth opened and closed several times before he finally found his voice.

"My mother. That's my dead mother."

He then threw Carly off him and fled down the nearest hall, Anna's frantic screams echoing all around him.

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**End Notes:** I thought those unfamiliar with *General Hospital* might want to know what these characters look like. Ergo:
Elizabeth Webber

Prince Nikolas Cassadine
Sorry.

This Image is currently
Unavailable

Anna Devane
Carly stood staring at the space Kurt had just vacated, gaping, until her brain kicked into high gear. She took off after him without looking back. This signaled to a few, particularly Elizabeth and Bobbie, just what Kurt meant to her.

"My son," Anna whispered, tears streaking down her cheeks, feeling as though she was trapped in some horrible nightmare. "My son."

Robert meant to interrupt, but was cut off by Patrick.

"You really are his mother?" he demanded, raising an arm and pointing down the hall where Kurt had fled. "Is he Robin's brother, Anna? Is that my wife's brother?"

Their eyes locked momentarily and Patrick divined the truth. All he knew in that moment was to protect Kurt, as if it somehow might protect Robin herself. He could do nothing for his wife, but he could help her brother. He ran after Carly.

"I don't believe this," Brenda whispered, shaking her head dumbly before turning to stare at Anna. "You're Kurt's mother?"

Anna couldn't answer, too caught up in the memories which were now washing over her unbidden, memories she had been involuntarily suppressing for over twenty years and that had only been unlocked when she had laid eyes on Kurt again. Kurt...

Her son.

"Oh, dear god," she murmured. "Oh, my sweet baby boy."

"Anna, what the hell is going on here!" Robert bellowed. "What do you mean that young man is your son? You have no other children!"

"Shut up, Robert," she snapped, pressing a hand to her forehead. She was definitely not in the mood for this conversation, especially as she was unable to explain almost anything. How could she, when she didn't even know herself? How could she have forgotten her child? Again.

She couldn't handle this. She couldn't go through this again, the guilt and the pain. She still remembered with vivid clarity her reunion with Robin all those years ago. At least then she had been having flashbacks of her daughter, even though she hadn't known who Robin was to her.

But there had been nothing of Kurt, not a stray thought or misfired synapse, not even an inkling. Not in almost twenty-five years. Not when she had borne and lost Leora. Not when Robin had been pregnant with Emma. Nothing.

Her mind had thought her son was nothing.

How could she expect him to forgive her when she could never forgive herself?

Mac, for his part, just stood there staring off into space. It was all he could do to remember to breathe. Frankly, he wished he could forget, because every breath he drew was a painful reminder that Robin would never take another one.
"Anna," Nikolas said in a quiet but authoritative voice, "how is that you're Kurt's mother?"

Anna studied him for a moment, curiosity and years of training kicking in. "You know him."

He gave her a wary nod. "I've known him for twenty years."

Anna burned with anger and jealousy that her son was known to this man and not to her.

"Almost as long as I have," Brenda spat, not about to feel a scrap of pity for the woman before her. She, perhaps more than anyone else, understood how his mother's death - supposed death, she amended - had informed the person Kurt had become.

In many ways, his story was also hers. She too had grown up without a mother. Thankfully, Kurt had had his father. Her own had been more interested in his business than her, leaving her elder sister Julia to try and parent her wild sibling. Their relationship had never really recovered from that forced servitude.

"How do you know Kurt, Brenda?" Bobbie interjected.

Brenda shrugged. "I met him after Elizabeth took over for me as the Face of Deception. I went to Europe to continue modeling and met Kurt, who modeled in his early teens. We did a few photoshoots together in which he was usually cast as my brother." She swallowed. "He became that for me."

Nikolas shook his head, no longer interested in Brenda's relationship with Kurt. He was about to continue interrogating Anna, but she pushed past him and stalked toward Monica.

"What was my son doing here?" she demanded.

Monica raised an eyebrow. No one was giving her a second chance with her children, and she owed Anna nothing. Further, Kurt was now her employee and she had his privacy to consider.

"All I can tell you is that he is employed at General Hospital," she said coolly. "Anything else you wish to know, you will have to learn from him."

"Kurt's mother is dead!" Nikolas exploded, unable to stand it anymore. "I don't care if you gave birth to him. As far as he's concerned, you died over twenty years ago! I watched him mourn her for years."

"Me too," seethed a furious Brenda.

He nodded, for once glad of her presence.

"Watch your mouth, boy," Robert said sharply.

Nikolas narrowed his eyes. "I suggest you watch yours," he advised, steel in his voice. "Laura may be my mother, but I am a Cassadine. At the end of the day, we will always take care of our own."

Robert snorted like a bull and Mac had to hold him back. Laughter danced in Nikolas' eyes.

"Kurt is not yours!" Anna shouted.

Nikolas smirked. "Well, he's certainly not yours."

She reeled back as if struck.
"And he's definitely more mine than he'll ever be yours," he spitefully added.

Brenda laid a hand on his arm. "Pull it back a little, okay? Whatever's happened, she's still his mother."

Nikolas scoffed and Brenda moved from his side to directly in front of him, staring into his eyes.

"What would he want you to do?"

His jaws flexed before he stomped away. He knew she was right and he didn't want to try to justify his behavior to Kurt when cooler heads prevailed. Right now, he was much more concerned with finding him.

Besides, he well knew Kurt didn't need anyone to fight his battles.

He smiled.

Anna would come to realize that soon.

Kate Howard and Sonny Corinthos were engaged in yet another round of attempting to analyze their relationship and where it was going. Sonny wanted them to get married. Kate though getting shot twice for being his girlfriend was more than enough, thank you. Further, she was unconvinced he didn't harbor feelings for her cousin, Olivia, the mother of his eldest son Dante.

Honestly, Kate had no idea why she had even entertained a reconciliation with him. They may have come from the same world, but their paths had diverged decades ago. She loved him, yes, but she couldn't live with him. It wasn't even so much the mob as it was his frightening mood swings, especially as Sonny sometimes considered his lithium to be optional.

There were also his children to consider. Dante was her cousin and she loved him, but she had noticed the disapproval in his eyes whenever he saw her with his father. She didn't know if he was holding out hope for his parents to get back together - which Kate sincerely doubted; if anything, Dante wanted Olivia away from the insanity - or if he just thought she was being stupid, which was entirely within the realm of possibility.

Michael tolerated her, but perhaps only because he felt guilty for once accidentally shooting her. Michael was a curious mixture of his parents, but also wholly unlike them. It was disconcerting that she couldn't read him well. His brother Morgan was mostly indifferent. The only stepparent for whom he cared was Jax and she knew his divorce from Carly had devastated the boy, a fact which rankled Sonny to no end. She considered Alexis a good friend, but she barely knew Kristina, the daughter Alexis shared with Sonny. She had no idea what Kristina thought of her, if anything.

She took a hard look at the man in front of her as he babbled excuses and promises.

Yes, she supposed she loved him, but was unsure if she was in love with him or was merely ensnared by the nostalgia of their teenage relationship. If it was the latter, she was truly pathetic. The man had been divorced several times, had countless illegitimate children, was literally married to the mob, and had dallied with her cousin when she herself hadn't been available.

What the hell was she thinking?

She had worked her ass off to get out of Bensonhurst. She had changed her name and completely reinvented herself - thanks for the inspiration, Madonna! - and put herself through Princeton. She had been the editor-in-chief of the world's most influential fashion magazine before starting up her
Kate shrugged and then nodded. "Quite possibly. Kurt was a child model for a number of years,
and I know he was frequently paired with Brenda Barrett."

"Who is this kid?" Sonny wondered. "He's my ex-wife's best friend, friend to my ex-girlfriend, and friend to my current girlfriend?"

Carly smirked. "Well, he certainly knows you."

"How so?" asked a suspicious Sonny.

Carly's smirk turned into a wide, feline smile. "Does the name Santana Lopez mean anything to you? She's one of his best friends."

Kate raised a brow in interest.

Sonny stilled.

This...was not good.

The last thing he needed was La Lopez invading his territory, even if it was just to visit a friend. That psycho was seriously crazy. Definitely scary. Almost as terrifying was her enforcer, who could probably take Jason out with ease. Worse, said enforcer was some ditzy blond chick with a penchant for unicorns and sawed-off shotguns.

He'd have to get this Kurt kid alone and let him know that he wanted no trouble. They could coexist in Port Charles quite peacefully.

"Carly," Kate said, clearing her throat, "what was he running from?"

Carly's eyes became pained and filled with tears. "His mother."

Kate sharply drew back. "His mother's dead. She has been since he was a child."

Sonny's hands unconsciously curled into fists as he thought of his own lost mother.

Carly shook her head and wasn't terribly surprised when Patrick galloped up to her side.

"Not anymore she's not," he panted. "He just ran into her at GH."

Kate's eyes became the size of dinner plates. "What?" she whispered.

Carly turned to her possibly favorite ex. "Sonny, his mother is Anna Devane. He's Robin's brother."

Sonny's face lost all color and he shook his head dumbly. "You're telling me that kid just met his dead mother and it's Anna? That boy is R-Robin's..." He choked on the name.

Patrick nodded.

Sonny exhaled. "Jesus Christ, that poor kid." He shook his head again. "The only thing in that direction is the launch to Spoon Island."

Carly and Patrick exchanged a glance.

"He might go to Wyndemere," she said quietly.

Patrick nodded. "He and Nikolas are very close."
She snorted. "Yeah. Did you see how close Nikolas wanted to be with him? If that hug had lasted another five seconds, we would have to use a crowbar to pry him from Kurt."

"That's not exactly the hot issue here," he said.

"You're right," she said. She tilted her head and grinned. "But it was pretty hot."

He rolled his eyes.

"Is this actually happening?" Kate asked of no one in particular.

Sonny still couldn't move past the idea that Robin had a brother. If there was one thing he knew, it was to protect that brother. The way he couldn't protect Robin. The way he had promised Stone he would but had failed.

He fished in his pocket and pulled out a set of keys, handing them to Carly.

"The speedboat is docked near the launch. You know which one is mine. Use it and make sure he's okay."

She wanted to make a smart comment, but she could tell by the look in his eyes that he was thinking of Robin. She didn't have the heart to be that bitchy right now.

"Thanks," she said, before taking off at a run, Patrick hot on her heels.

"He idolized his mother," Kate whispered. "She was his entire world. He's mourned her for over twenty years." She shook her head. "Her death is what inspired him to pursue medicine."

"He's a doctor?" asked a startled Sonny. "That little boy?"

Kate scoffed. "That little boy is pushing thirty." She glared at nothing. "I sure wish I knew what his skin regimen was." She again shook her head to clear it and focus. "I can't believe this is happening to him."

"You really care about him."

She attempted to give a brusque shrug, but failed. "Kurt is...a very complex person. He's extremely intelligent and has a very strong character, but he's also...fragile. Maddeningly so." She sighed. "He's the first one to come running whenever a friend needs help. He doesn't hesitate to throw himself into the fray, and lord help you if you're the target of his wrath, but he never fights for himself."

She pursed her lips. "It's incredibly frustrating to watch, but he is a very good man. He lets few people get close to him. I knew he was close with Nikolas, but I think Brenda is probably more of a well-known acquaintance. I suppose I fall somewhere in between." She turned and stared out at the river. "He doesn't deserve this."

He could tell from those words just how much this kid meant to her. Kate wasn't one to offer praise - even reserved praise - unless it was sincere.

She exhaled and set her jaw. "If I ever find..." She trailed off, shaking her head in fury.

Sonny's antennae went on high alert. "Ever find who?" he asked, eyes narrowed.

"No one," she said flatly. "I have to get to work."
She spun on her heel and stomped up the steps toward Kelly's.

Sonny now very much wanted to know everything there was about this Kurt kid. Jason's coma was most inconvenient. Maybe he should call Diane?

He nodded to himself. He'd do everything he could to help this kid, for Robin's sake.

And also because he really didn't want Santana fucking Lopez paying a visit to Port Charles.

Kurt rushed across Spoon Island and toward Wyndemere with no real purpose in mind. All he knew was that he had to get as far away as possible from General Hospital and...her.

As he had no car and his phone was dead, he had taken a desperate chance that he would discover the right dock with a launch to Nikolas's island. Luckily, he had.

He didn't know why he was here, but he supposed he had no other place to go. He wouldn't have put it past...her to have tried to follow him or worm from one of the others that he was staying at the Metro Court. He didn't want to put Carly in an awkward position, so he fled to Nikolas's safe arms, or at least those of his castle. He knew Nikolas would protect him from...her.

How could this be happening?

How could he have run away? His days of running were long gone.

What didn't he cry or scream or demand or feel?

But there was nothing. Just emptiness.

Or perhaps a numbness. Yes, he believed that was more accurate.

He rolled his eyes. Here he was, running away from his very much alive mother and being picky about his word choices for the conversation he was having with himself inside of his own mind.

Still, he guessed it was better than breaking down and shoving his head in a corner, waiting for the Blair Witch to come and steal his soul.

Spoon Island really was beautiful. He could only imagine what it looked like in autumn and winter. He didn't blame Nikolas for wanting to live here, but it was incredibly isolated. Of course, that's what he was hoping for at the moment.

What he didn't need was to overhear a conversation.

Before he realized it, he was inside the castle and navigating his way toward the library. He wasn't even sure how he knew where it was; he was just following instinct. Maybe Emily had told him about the layout of the house. He remembered she had been enthralled to be the mistress of the manor, so to speak, a completely different experience from when she had been a mere visitor.

Of course his numbness had to be interrupted by the unwelcome sound of people. As curiosity was one of his more dangerous vices, he decided to eavesdrop to learn what was going on. After all, who was in Nikolas's house? There's no way Nikolas could have beaten him here, and there were too many voices - loud voices - to be dismissed as Spencer, the nanny, and/or the butler.

So he pressed his ear to the door and his problems were pushed to the back of his mind as he was mildly entertained. He heard arguing, pleading, begging, lying, scheming, bargaining, and swearing.
It was basically what he and Santana sounded like when shopping.

He thought he recognized some of the voices, one in particular, and decided he had had quite enough nonsense for one day. He couldn't deal with his own issues, but he could make sure Nikolas's ridiculous mansion would be safe until he returned.

Really, this place looked like *American Horror Story* had fornicated with *Dark Shadows* and then given birth to the asylum in which Freddy Krueger had been spawned.

Young and restless, and bored and reckless, Kurt pushed open the double doors and made his presence known. As the others in the room turned in surprise, his eyes lighted with rancor and amusement.

"Well, well, well."

Helena Cassadine slightly shifted the gun in her hand and bowed. "Your Grace."

Kurt bowed in reply, though his was deeper. "Your Highness."

Luke Spencer rolled his eyes. "Terrific. Who's this, Helena? Yet another Cassadine spawn dropping in from the ether?"

Kurt raised a brow. "I'm sorry, was that an insult? It's hard to take seriously the words of a man whose hair looks like it should be fed to one of Nikki's horses."

Helena snickered, the sound surprisingly light and girlish. "Oh, Kurt, darling, it's been far too long. Whatever are you doing here?"

"I've relocated to Port Charles," he replied, "and have accepted a position at General Hospital."

"Ah, yes," she said, nodding, "I heard about your pursuit of medicine. A most noble endeavor."

He smiled. "Thank you, Helena. It's good to see you, as well. I had the pleasure of reuniting with Nikolas earlier today."

"Oh, that's wonderful," she purred. "You know, dear Kurt, I've always had high hopes you and my grandson might become something more than very good friends."

Luke's mouth fell open. His stepson was gay? Really? Then why didn't he dress better? He looked around. Why wasn't Nikolas a better decorator?

Kurt blushed. "Helena, please. We're not here to discuss my friendship with Nikolas, but rather why these people are lying to you."

Luke, Holly, and Ethan squawked as Helena narrowed her eyes.

"Whatever do you mean, Kurt?" she asked. "How do you know they're lying?"

He breezed into the room, gracefully plopped in an armchair, and crossed his legs. "I was listening at the door, of course." He shrugged unapologetically. "It's a little thing I do." He gathered a breath. "Anyway, I arrived just in time to overhear these two," he said, pointing at Luke and Holly, "attempt to convince you that he," he pointed to Ethan, "is the son of Robert Scorpio, which is absurd."

Helena smiled poisonously as she turned to Luke. "I knew he was the rotten fruit of your loins."
Luke began to panic. He couldn't deal with his greatest enemy killing the child he'd never known he'd had.

"Not exactly," Kurt gently corrected. "For all I know, the truth of the matter is that he might possibly be the son of Mr. Spencer - or Mr. Scorpio, for that matter - but he is certainly not the son of Holly Sutton. In fact, she's not Holly Sutton at all."

Ethan stared at him as Luke's mouth dropped open.

Intrigued, Helena urged Kurt to continue.

Before he could, however, Holly cut him off. "Who are you to claim such things?"

He gave her a brittle smile. "The fact that you don't know is my proof. I've known Holly for almost ten years. In fact, after I left Paris - but before I arrived in Port Charles - I spent two weeks with her at her country home in Bedfordshire."

Her eyes bulged.

He smirked. "So unless you cut off all your hair, changed your makeup, and somehow managed to teleport yourself here in eighteen hours, there's no possible way you could be Holly Sutton." He leaned forward, his smirk turning into a wolfish grin. "Which means you could only be Paloma."


"You're insane," she spat at Kurt. "It's obvious you've been paid or compelled by this harridan," she said, pointing to Helena, "to spew these lies."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Please, honey, I have more money than you could ever count and no one makes me do anything I don't want to do."

"He is my son!" she insisted, moving toward Ethan.

Kurt shrugged. "I never said he wasn't, only that he is not the son of Holly Sutton."

"The DNA test proved I was the father," Luke said stupidly, before glaring at a smug Helena.

Kurt's eyes pinned him in place. "Really? And DNA tests can't be faked?" He shook his head. "How in the world has anyone ever thought of you as clever?"

Helena was somewhat bothered by that remark, wondering what it said about her that she continued to antagonize Luke as much as possible.

He looked again at Paloma and smiled. "If this is your son, congratulations. Now, as Maury Povich is otherwise engaged, why not tell us who's the daddy? For my money, I'm betting on Bill Eckert."


Kurt nodded. "That's the one! Of course, we can settle this definitively and quite easily."

"How?" Ethan croaked.

"First, the real Holly would not be here playing paternity games. She'd be at Patrick's house with Robin's daughter."

"I've known of Robin for some time," Kurt said, "both from the Sorbonne and from Holly. After Robin's parents were presumed dead, it was Holly who helped raise Robin with Mac Scorpio." He glared at the imposter. "There is no way that, were you Holly, you would not be at his side now."

Paloma's eyes darted in the other direction.

"I heard of Dr. Scorpio's tragic death," Helena demurred. "She always appeared to be an incomparably clever girl."

"Thank you, Helena," Kurt said quietly. "I'm pleased to know you held my sister in such high regard."


"Young man, how is this possible?" Helena demanded. "You are the only child of only children, and both your parents have passed."

He snorted. "Well, I can say for certain that my father is indeed deceased, but my mother is not." His eyes turned icy. "Less than an hour ago, I ran into her at General Hospital. I knew her as Suzanne Hummel; everyone here knows her as Anna Devane."

"Dear god," she whispered before her face clouded with anger. "And she abandoned you for over twenty years? How dare she? I will have vengeance!"

"You won't," Kurt said softly but with force. "This vengeance is not yours to take."

She stared at him for a long time before at last nodding her head.

"But I thank you for the sentiment."

"You were always my favorite, Kurt," she said fondly. "That hasn't changed."

He nodded sharply, stood, and crossed to Nikolas's desk. "And second." He placed the phone on speaker before dialing a string of numbers. It was answered on the third ring.

"Hello!"

Kurt reflexively smiled. "Hello, Holly. I hope I didn't catch you at a bad time."

Luke took a step back, shaking his head.

"Oh, Kurt, I'm so glad to hear from you! Now, tell me, have you arrived in Port Charles? Where are you staying?"

"I have, and I'm currently residing at the Metro Court. It is most hospitable."

Helena snorted. "I suppose it is serviceable, at least for this provincial nightmare."

"Kurt, who was that?" Holly asked.

"Helena Cassadine," he replied, ignoring her choked gasp. "At the moment, however, I'm sure you'd be much more interested in who else is here with me."

"Oh?" she drawled.

His eyes lighted with menace. "Oh, yes! You see, your delightful half-sister is here pretending to be
you and trying to pass off her son as that of you and Luke Spencer.”

An enraged scream filled the air.

"Well," Helena offered, "that was rather impressive."

As Holly continued spewing obscenities, Luke and Ethan stared at each other with a curious mixture of disappointment and relief. Paloma seized the opportunity to sneak away, though both Kurt and Helena noticed her departure.

He cleared his throat. "Holly," he said gravely, "I have worse news."

"Dear God, what now?"

"Robin Scorpio was killed yesterday in an accident at the hospital."

There was a slight pause before Holly screamed. It was agonizing and seemed to go on forever.

Kurt snatched up the phone, tersely explained what little he knew, and promised to send his jet for her immediately. Before he could even posit saying a goodbye, Holly had rung off, presumably to pack her bags.

He gently laid the phone in its cradle and stared down at the desk for a number of moments.

"Helena," he finally said, "Nikolas will most likely be here at any moment in search of me, along with Mr. Spencer's niece."

"Caroline?" asked a surprised Luke.

Kurt smirked. "My new best friend."

Helena rolled her eyes. "Honestly, young man, you could certainly find far better company to keep than a white trash gun moll."

"I find Carly highly entertaining," he volleyed.

She sighed with annoyed acceptance. "Very well. I suppose I should be on my way before my grandson decides to release the hounds." She smiled. "It was lovely to see you, my dear. I'm sure we'll speak again soon."

He smiled and bowed, and then Helena slipped back into the secret passage, shutting the door behind her. He had a feeling Paloma wasn't going to get very far, especially after he informed Santana that one of her enemies was in his newly-adopted town.

He turned to Luke and Ethan. "For the record, I am sorry that I had to destroy your illusions so thoroughly. It was not my intention to cause either one of you any pain, but I know Helena well. If I hadn't interfered, she would've killed you."

Luke nodded dumbly. "You got that right, Dollface."

Kurt raised a brow.

Luke chuckled. "You've got a pair, Dollface, and now I see the family resemblance. Your sister was the cream of the crop. She'd be damned proud of how you played this."

Suddenly Patrick and Carly's voices were racing down the hallway.
"Some advice, Dollface," said a surprisingly serious Luke. "Talk to your mother. I've known the woman for a very long time and, if you are her son, there's no way she abandoned you. Something or someone made that happen."

Kurt considered his words and finally nodded. "You should go before they get here."

Luke grabbed Ethan and exited into the formal dining room, which had French windows leading to the terrace from which they could make their escape.

In an instant, an hysterical Carly was hugging him to within an inch of his life, while a stoic Patrick was asking if there was any help he could provide.

Patrick had come to his aid because of Robin, Kurt knew, but he appreciated the sentiment.

Carly, meanwhile, was on his side simply because she was; no reason was necessary.

He kind of loved her for that.
There's a lot of exposition in this chapter, but it's necessary. Past and current residents of Port Charles are discussed and it's for a reason. Those unfamiliar with General Hospital might have difficulty keeping up, but I've tried to make it as accessible as possible. Additionally, plot points from All My Children are included from the time that Robin and Anna were on that show.

One reviewer of the last chapter rightfully pointed out that Kurt seems to know everyone in Port Charles. To a certain extent, that's true. He knows many people, but those he does know are not original residents. They settled in Port Charles, but are not originally from there. Also, said people are from circles in which it has been previously established that Kurt traveled.

Finally, don't assume anything about these characters, or about Kurt in particular. Nothing has been said anywhere that Kurt in this story is a good guy. Do with that what you will.

And, now, on with the chapter! I hope you enjoy it and, as always, I thank you and look forward to your reviews!

Once again, for Laynie.

Kurt listened with half an ear as Carly and Patrick babbled at him. Verbal responses weren't really required, so he only needed to nod or shake his head to indicate agreement or refusal. He had far more important things to consider.

First, as much as he would have preferred to disregard Luke's advice, it was easier said than done. If someone or something had forced his mother from him, he wanted to know what that was. He knew he would have to speak with Anna eventually, but he was going to put it off for as long as possible, not the least of which was because he knew his mother was planning his sister's funeral.

His sister.

Robin.

Robin Scorpio had been his sister, a woman and professional he had idolized, and he hadn't and would never know her.

That made him very, very angry, which, in turn, made him incredibly focused.

Second, he needed to find out everything he could about Anna prior to their impending conversation. He wanted to know if she left out key facts about herself and her story. He had an idea who could help him with that. For the first time in over ten years, he was glad his father was dead. He couldn't even imagine how his dad would have reacted to this.
Third, if his mother was Anna Devane, if Suzanne Valois had been an assumed name, how did that explain Katrine? She had been his grandmother, his mother's mother, and she and Suzanne/Anna had enjoyed a close, loving relationship. How was that possible if she and Anna had only known each other so short a time? Why had Katrine taken on the onus of educating him about society and his role in it? Why had she moved him to Paris and finished raising him after his father's death?

Why had she left him her fortune, more money than he could ever spend in several lifetimes, let alone the family title? He felt like he was an imposter, and Katrine, who had passed away almost seven years ago, was maddeningly out of his reach.

But he would find out. He would find out everything.

He nodded to himself, not realizing he had just acquiesced to some demand Patrick had made, one which had thoroughly pissed off Carly. Suppressing a sigh, Kurt turned toward them.

"What?" he asked.

"You're moving in with Patrick," she said flatly.

Kurt blinked. "I'm not."

"You are," Patrick insisted. "You're Robin's brother and my responsibility."

Kurt gave him an incredulous look. "I'm going to ignore how completely offensive that statement was and write it off as your grief talking," he said sharply, giving Patrick his best stink-eye.

Carly beamed.

He shook his head. "First of all, I am no one's responsibility but my own. Second, I am not moving into the home you shared with your wife, Patrick, regardless of whether or not that woman was my sister. I don't know you. I didn't know Robin." His eyes bored into Patrick's own. "I'm not Robin."

Patrick flinched and turned away.

Despite her anger, Carly felt a pang of sadness for the man. He was obviously so desperate to hang on to Robin, he had fixated on her newly-discovered brother.

"But don't you want to know her?" Patrick asked softly. "I want to tell you about her. I want...I want to talk with someone about her."

Kurt empathized. He had wanted to talk to someone when his mother had died - rather, when he had thought she'd died - but his father hadn't been able to bring himself to listen. He had wanted to talk to someone when his father had died, but there had been no one who could really understand their relationship and what he had lost.

"And I want to talk about Robin with you," Kurt said kindly, "but I don't need to live with you to do that. I appreciate the offer, Patrick - sincerely, I do - but you're being irrational. We don't know each other. I don't belong in your house. You and Emma are going through enough; I won't add more to it. That's not healthy for either one of you."

"She's your niece."
Kurt's mouth fell open before slowly closing. It was apparent he hadn't realized this until just that moment. He understood, at least intellectually, that Robin had been his sister, but now he recognized that Robin's child was related to him. He had a niece, a blood connection for which he had been longing for so very long, one which he had believed would always be denied to him.

He blinked back the tears threatening to rush to the fore.

"I'd like to meet her," he said softly, almost bashfully, "but now isn't the time. She needs you. She needs...her grandmother."

Patrick exhaled. "There are things you should know about Anna."

"Now's not the time," a cross Carly interjected.

"Yes, it is," Patrick barked back. "Do you really think the woman is resting on her laurels while we sit here yammering at each other? You know Anna, Carly. You know what she's capable of. Ten to one she's already tried interrogating Nikolas..."

"And she failed," Kurt flatly interrupted. "Nikolas will shield me."

"Of course I will."

They stared at each other for a long moment before Kurt stood and rushed into his arms. Carly thought it was hot; Patrick was uncomfortable.

"Thank you," Kurt said quietly, his face buried in Nikolas' neck.

Nikolas nodded, gently rubbing Kurt's back. "I figured you might end up here."

Kurt leaned back, gave a wry smile, patted Nikolas' cheek, and resumed his seat next to Carly. "You were right, and I was welcomed by none other than your grandmother."

"What!" the others bellowed.

He rolled his eyes. "Honestly, I've already explained that Helena would never hurt me." He blushed slightly. "Admittedly, I was rather embarrassed when she insinuated things about my relationship with Nikki..."

Carly put her chin in her hands, eyes sparkling. "Which is what exactly?"

Kurt's blush turned more fierce. "Helena believes that Nikki and I should begin, er, seeing each other, uh, romantically. I, of course, told her that we would be doing no such thing."

Patrick narrowed his eyes at Nikolas' slight flinch.

"Well," Carly began, "maybe..."

Kurt cleared his throat. Loudly. "Carly, enough. Your fanatical adoration of boys kissing is inappropriate at the moment. Be grateful I managed to keep her from killing your uncle."

Her eyes widened.
"Luke was here?" asked a confused Nikolas.

Kurt nodded. "Along with a boy named Ethan and someone impersonating Holly Sutton."

Patrick stared. "That's not Holly?"

Kurt glanced at him and scoffed. "Of course not." He shook his head. "Patrick, did Robin never explain to you her relationship with Holly?"

Patrick frowned. "I know that Holly was once married to Robert, and she helped Mac raise Robin after Robert and Anna were presumed dead."

Kurt didn't comment on that bit of information about his mother, but filed it away. Another presumed death? It appeared as though Anna had come back as many times as Shirley MacLaine.

He nodded. "Holly considered Robin to be the child she never had. If that creature passing itself off as her had done their homework, they would have been helping you with Emma, not parading around fictitious children."

"You know her," Carly guessed.

Kurt became guarded, though it was apparent only to Nikolas, who made a mental note to question Kurt about it at a later time. "I do. I've known Holly for several years and I knew about her relationship with Robin."

Patrick shook his head again. "I'm sorry, but I find this all so unbelievable. You arrive in Port Charles the day after Robin's death and, though you never met her, you know of her, are friends with her best friend, her good friend, and her surrogate mother. To top it off, you're revealed as her brother." He raised a brow. "Is all of that really a coincidence?"

Kurt's lips thinned. "I understand your point and will concede that, in that context, it's all rather fantastical, but you're reading too much into the situation, Patrick. I knew of Robin through her work at the Sorbonne and her reputation in the medical field, as well as through Holly. I've known Nikolas for many years, but most European nobility is at least aware of each other."

Patrick's eyes darted toward Nikolas, who nodded.

"And Kate told me that she knew you because you modeled when you were a kid, and that's also how you know Brenda," Carly added.

Kurt blinked. "Kate?"

"Kate Howard."

His brows raised. "Kate lives here, too?"

His honest surprise and confusion was obvious to the others.

Carly nodded. "You ran past her and Sonny on the docks."

"I didn't even notice," he murmured. "I hope she wasn't offended that I didn't acknowledge her."
Patrick let loose a low whistle. "I think you should more worried about what Kate is going to do to Anna. She was...not happy."

Kurt sighed. "Oh, dear. A grouchy Kate Howard is good for no one."

"She has other moods?" Carly asked.

His lips twitched and he shook his head. "At any rate, I knew of Robin, Patrick, but she had no reason to know of me. She wasn't a pathologist and all of my published work is directly related to my field. She and Holly were close, but Holly told me they didn't keep in active contact. Nikolas would have no reason to mention me to Robin, especially since I haven't seen him in years, and the same holds true for Brenda."

His eyes turned icy. "As for Anna, well..."

Patrick nodded and looked away.

Carly took Kurt's hand in her own. "What do you want to do?"

He grasped her hand tightly, so grateful that someone had asked him that question. "I can't deal with Anna right now. I'll perform my own investigation and then speak with her, but not until after Robin is laid to rest. She needs to focus on her daughter."

"You're her son," Patrick said.

Kurt shook his head. "I'm not. I'm the son of Suzanne Hummel, a woman who died over twenty years ago. She was my mother; Anna Devane is not. They might be the same person biologically, but not emotionally."

He paused. "She didn't raise me, Patrick. She wasn't there for the majority of my life. She wasn't there for my first date or my first dance. She wasn't there when my father died, when I had to bury him. She wasn't there when I left my entire life behind in Ohio and started over in Paris. She wasn't there when I finished secondary school. She wasn't there when I graduated university and medical school.

"She wasn't there for my first broken heart. She never met my first boyfriend. She never attended one of my recitals." His eyes filled and his voice broke. "She wasn't there when...when...I was all alone..."

"You're not now," Carly whispered into his ear, pulling him toward her. "You don't have to talk about it anymore."

"Kurt?" prompted an anxious Nikolas.

"It's none of your business!" Carly spat.

He was infuriated that Kurt appeared to be closer to this virtual stranger than to him, that she knew things about Kurt that he didn't. It was like a fist in his gut and, suddenly, he could imagine with painful and vivid clarity some of what Anna must have been going through.

"It's all right, Carly," Kurt said, patting her back. "It's a matter of public record. If Anna goes looking, and I'm fairly certain she will, she'll discover it. She will ask me about it. I won't have her
blindsiding my friends."

"What the hell happened?" Nikolas demanded.

"Sit down, Nikki."

"Kurt! Tell me..."

"I said sit!"

Nikolas immediately complied and Carly gave Kurt a look of respect.

Kurt cleared his throat but kept his eyes averted. "When I was at St. George's, I was raped."

An uncomprehending Nikolas just stared at him.

"Jesus Christ," Patrick muttered, fisting his hair in his hands before dragging them down the sides of his face. He couldn't even posit it, but he could definitely imagine how Robin would have reacted to this assault on her brother. She would have started an apocalypse in her quest for revenge. "Holy shit."

Nikolas stood. "Who."

"Sit down, Nikki."

"Fuck no!" Nikolas roared. "Who did it!"

Carly and Patrick were noticeably startled to see Nikolas, normally so placid and distant, this enraged.

"He's dead," Kurt said calmly.

Nikolas sat back down, head in his hands.

"Did you kill him?" Carly asked.

Kurt shook his head. "Holly did."

Nikolas sharply raised his head as Patrick's turned so fast, it was in danger of snapping right off his neck.

"Damn," Carly whispered.

"And that's another thing I have to consider," Kurt said, sighing. "I sent my plane back to Heathrow to pick up Holly for Robin's funeral." He bit his lip. "I haven't told her about Anna. I...I'm worried about what she'll do."

"I can see why!" she exclaimed.

"How did she..." Nikolas croaked.

Kurt furiously shook his head. "I don't know. I've never asked and never will. She's never admitted
it to me, but when I saw articles about the murder, I knew it was her."

"I don't want her around my daughter," said an anxious Patrick.

"Don't be absurd," Kurt snapped. "Holly would never hurt a child, especially Robin's child. You
couldn't ask for a better and more loyal protector. She would die before she allowed anything to
happen to Emma."

Patrick understood the point, but would have to wrestle with it later.

"You said Holly considered Robin to be the child she never had," Carly said. "Does she feel the
same about you?"

Kurt looked down at his hands, nervously wringing themselves in his lap. "If Anna forces me to
choose, I will choose Holly," he said softly. "Not because I owe her, but because I love her.
That...when that happened...I never thought I would get through it, but I did, and a lot of that is
down to her."

He wrapped his arms around himself. "But she would never ask me to choose. Holly is one of the
only people for whom I would not only gladly die to save, but kill without question to protect."

There was power in his words, despite how quietly they were voiced. The others present had
absolutely no doubt in their minds that he meant them to the depths of his person.

Helena, hidden in the secret passage of Nikolas' study, gave a brief nod in accord. After
dispatching a few operatives to chase down Paloma, she had returned to Wyndemere to unearth
possible developments between her grandson and Kurt. Kurt was such a fine young man and it
wasn't as though Nikolas hadn't had dalliances when he was younger. Of course, he was most likely
unaware she knew of them.

Looking at him now, however, it was apparent he was interested in Kurt as more than just a friend.
The truth be told, it had always been such, but the age difference had been so great at the time, it
would have been entirely improper for Nikolas to pursue anything. Thus, he had accepted the role
of big brother and tried to fulfill it as best he could, though it had been obvious his heart hadn't
truly been in it. And that age difference was no longer prohibitive.

Kurt had lost much; far too much, in her opinion. His parents, his family, his innocence, and now
his sister. She was a good judge of people, which was why she didn't like any of them. She had
killed without compunction and with impunity and had never regretted it. She had killed family,
friends, allies, enemies, and some just for the thrill of it. She wasn't a good person, or a kind one,
but Kurt had somehow endeared himself to her.

Perhaps part of it had been her respect for his grandmother, Katrine, a woman as ruthless as herself
but with admittedly more scruples. Katrine had been a genuinely decent person, but anyone who
crossed her quickly learned never to displease her again.

Like his grandmother, Kurt had always been respectful, even cordial, and not because it was simply
good breeding. He was a very formidable young man and could only be pushed so far. He
understood the old ways, that an eye for an eye was sometimes the only solution. He had even
employed it on a few occasions. He understood the art of vendetta.

Apparently, so did Holly Sutton, who would now perhaps be one of the safest people to walk the
Mac had led an eerily quiet Anna back to his house, an irascible Robert in tow. His brother was working his last raw nerve and, before he knew it, he had handcuffed Robert to the chair and threatened to gag him if he didn't shut up.

He was in no mood for this. He had taken one look at the boy, at Kurt, and had known he was Anna's son. He had her hair, her cheekbones, her coloring, and her lithe figure. If they were standing side by side before him now, he was positive he would be able to catalogue even more similarities.

He felt bad for the kid, no question. From Kurt's reaction, it was apparent how much he had loved his mother, how painfully he had mourned her, and how shocked and hurt and horrified he was to be confronted with her now.

As many times as Mac Scorpio had seen people in Port Charles return from the dead, it never ceased to amaze him.

Further, Kurt's reaction had been decidedly different from that of his sister. Robin had been overjoyed to have her parents returned to her. She had never held any true resentment toward them for not having raised her, merely happy to have them back. Her life hadn't been easy, but from what he'd learned about Kurt's, he'd had it far worse.

He would try to find Kurt later and talk to him, explain about what had happened to Anna. If the boy wanted to speak with her, he would; if he didn't, Mac would support him in that, as well.

"How could you not have told me you had a son?" Robert seethed at Anna.

"It's bloody obvious, Robert!" Mac thundered, his Australian accent returning full-force, as it always did when he was highly emotional. "Did you see her face? She had no idea! Whatever the hell Faison did to her, its ramifications are still expanding." He threw up his hands. "Why do you even care? The boy isn't yours and you haven't been married to Anna for years!"

Robert had no good answer to the question, so, after several moments of sputtering, eventually fell quiet.

"Mac," Anna whispered. "what do I do? How do I explain...how can I help him?" She shook her head, tears spilling over. "I've lost my daughter. Am I to lose him, too?"

"Why are you asking him?" Robert hatefully asked.
Anna turned furious flashing eyes on him. "In case it escaped your memory, you great bloody prat, your brother is the man who raised our daughter when we weren't there for her. He's the one who put her to bed every night. He's the one who saw her off to school every morning. He saw her through university and medical school. He was there when she was diagnosed, when she lost Stone, and when she found Patrick.

"We may have been her mother and father, Robert, but Mac was her parent."

Robert sneered. "Did he tell you that?"

"No," she snapped, "Robin did."

His mouth closed with an audible clack of teeth and, for the first time since learning of his daughter's death, he took a good, long look at his brother, and he felt shame. His brother, the man he had once dismissed as the black sheep, the inferior, had spent almost half of his life keeping this city safe and raising the daughters of other people. He had done so unselfishly and had sacrificed much of his own path to happiness to do it.

But he had never complained. He had never espoused regret. He had raised Robin and Georgie and Maxie the best he could and with no help from anyone - and he had done a damn good job.

Then Georgie had been murdered, and now Robin...

Mac looked like he had aged twenty years in the past two. It was unfair, unjust, and just plain sad that Mac gave everything and continued to have even more taken from him.

Robert knew people would look at him and Anna and feel pity and sadness, for they had lost their daughter. Anna - Robin - had been right, however; Mac was Robin's parent.

"I'm sorry, Mac," he choked out. "I'm so damn sorry."

Mac sighed. "It's fine."

It was clear he didn't wish to discuss it and Robert was gracious enough to let it go.

Mac turned to Anna. "You have to let Kurt set the pace. You can't force him to feel things he doesn't want or isn't ready to feel." He gave her a sad but understanding look. "This isn't about you, Anna, no matter how you might believe otherwise. He's your son, yes, but he's also his own person and he hasn't had a mother for a very long time. He might feel he doesn't need one now."

Anna tearfully nodded.

"Felicia tried to force Maxie into a reunion after Georgie was killed, and it was the worst thing she could have done. She completely underestimated how bitter -and rightfully so - Maxie was toward her and Frisco, and to do it right after losing Georgie was foolish and unintentionally cruel." He sighed. "My advice is to do nothing until he takes the first step, no matter how much it will hurt or frustrate you. You have to give him space."

Anna closed her eyes. "At least he isn't alone. He has Nikolas and Brenda, for whatever that's worth."
Mac shrugged. "They should be able to help him somewhat. Nikolas didn't know his mother until he was almost an adult. Brenda lost her mother when she was toddler and her father had never taken an interest in her. It's not the same situation as what Kurt is experiencing, but they'll be able to sympathize."

She nodded absently. "I have so many questions."

Mac bobbed his head. "I figured you would, which is why I made a few calls while Robert was escorting you from the hospital."

Her eyes widened. "What do you know?"

Mac took a breath. "I need you to listen to me and hear what I'm about to tell you. You can't run off and try to smother him with mothering."

"It's bad, isn't it?" she whispered.

He licked his lips. "How much do you remember about your time with him?"

"Flashes, really," she murmured. "His father, his birth, the few years we shared. Bits of feeling here and there, powerful feelings, but nothing solid. But he's mine; I can feel that."

"Okay, then let's just start at the beginning."

She nodded and braced herself.

Mac pulled out his phone and began scrolling. "Kurt Elijah Hummel, twenty-eight years old, originally from Lima, Ohio."

She nodded.

"He's gay."

She cocked her head at his tone of voice. "So?" she demanded.

"Good. I was afraid of how you would react."

"Oh, please! I have no prejudices when it comes to sexuality, Mac."

He was unrepentant. "A lot of people say that until they're directly confronted with it. I remember the trouble Lucas Jones went through when he came out to Bobbie. She eventually accepted it, but it did lasting damage to their relationship. He hasn't been back to Port Charles in years."


Mac winced. "Do you remember Lima?"

"Some," she admitted. She dwelled on his question for a long moment. "What did they do to him?"

Mac exhaled. "It wasn't pretty. There were several police reports of vandalism and harassment, as well as arrest records for assault."
"Assault!" she screeched. "He was assaulted?"

"I can't even imagine how difficult it was for him, living in that town," Mac said, "but he survived. He got through it, Anna."

She grimaced. "With no help for me."

Mac knew it would only get worse from here on out. "His father, Burt Hummel, died when Kurt was a junior in high school."

She gasped and covered her mouth with her hands, tears streaking down her cheeks as fractured memories of Burt assailed her. "How?" she whispered.

"A heart attack," he said quietly. "Just before he died, he married his girlfriend of a year, Carole Hudson."

"So Kurt has a stepmother?" Anna said through clenched teeth.

Mac nodded. "And a stepbrother, Finn, who also lives in New York; Long Island, to be exact. He's married with two children."

"Kurt doesn't appear to be particularly close to either of them. After Burt's death, he left Lima and went to live in Paris with his grandmother." He blinked. "I'm sure he's now wondering who this woman really was, and, frankly, so am I."

"Grandmother?" she blankly repeated. "Who is this woman?"

He looked down at his phone. "Her name was Katrine Valois."

Robert's mouth fell open in an almost comical manner.

Mac noted this and smiled wryly, nodding. "So you've heard of her. She was an incredibly wealthy philanthropist who passed away almost seven years ago, leaving Kurt all of her money and the title of Duke of Aquitaine."

Anna stared at him for a long moment before giving a slow blink. "Duke?"

"Most likely, this is how he knows Nikolas," Mac continued. "European nobility tend to be aware of those who run within similar circles."

"How much money are we talking about here?" Robert asked, honestly curious.


Robert's eyes widened to the size of saucers.

Anna shook her head. "I don't know this Valois woman. Why was she passing herself as Kurt's grandmother?"

Mac raised a brow. "A better question might be why did she pass herself off as your mother? Because that's what she did. As far as Kurt knew until this afternoon, you were Suzanne Valois, the only child of Katrine Valois. After his father died, Kurt went to Paris to live with Katrine. He
finished his secondary education in Paris and then attended the Sorbonne for university."


He nodded. "An eerie parallel. He then attended St. George's University for medical school."

"He's a doctor," Anna murmured, "just like his sister was. Just like my sister is."

"What sister!" Robert exclaimed. "What the hell is this?! You've got more family coming out of the woodwork than a redneck who's just won the lottery!"

Anna blushed lightly, surprised she hadn't remembered she had never told the Scorpio boys about her sister. "Alexandra, or Alex, as I call her. She's my twin sister. She's also a physician and is married to Dimitri Marick."

"Twin?" Robert trilled.

Mac raised a brow. "Isn't Marick Hungarian nobility?"

She nodded and then understood the implication. "Oh! You think Alex knew this Valois woman?" Her brow furrowed and she scowled. "Are you suggesting that my own twin knew I had another child and purposefully didn't tell me?"

Mac shrugged. "I don't know. I don't know your sister." He paused. "Did she know about your difficulties with remembering Robin?"

Anna offered a hesitant nod.

"Then perhaps she was merely trying to spare you further emotional and psychological pain."

She growled. "She told me several times that I had to remember Robin myself, not be told about her." She blew out a breath. "If she knew about Kurt and kept him from me, I'll kill her."

Robert had no doubt she would do exactly that and thought it best to get things back on track. "So the boy's a doctor."

"A forensic pathologist, to be exact," Mac said. He paused for a moment. "I knew he was arriving soon, so I'm aware of his professional background. Monica forwarded me his resume, which is impressive and extensive, as he and I will be working closely together."

Before Anna could interrupt, he cut her off.

"No. I will not be your spy or champion. He's a medical professional and, frankly, we're lucky to have him. We haven't had a competent forensic pathologist in this town for a number of years, and I won't jeopardize that. I understand he's your son, Anna, and I respect that, but he's also my colleague. I need for him to be able to trust me."

It hurt, that was obvious from the look on her face, but she understood his point. "Will you at least look out for him, try and help him adjust to Port Charles?"

He pursed his lips and eventually nodded. "I can do that, but I don't think he'll have as much difficulty as you think. He already has friends here, Anna. He has Nikolas and Brenda, and, from
the way Carly and Patrick went after him, I'm assuming they're on his side as well."

"Patrick I understand, but why Carly?" she wondered.

Mac sighed. "Bobbie told me that he's staying at the Metro Court. Apparently he and Carly just hit it off and consider each other their new best friends."

Her eyes bulged.

"Why is he here?" Robert asked. "I'm not insinuating anything, Anna," he said, rolling his eyes at the expression on her face. "It's a logical question."

Mac nodded. "It is. Frankly, Monica was surprised he not only accepted the position, but that he applied for it at all. With his education and training, which includes stints at the Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins, not to mention his money and reputation, he could find work anywhere in the world. So why Port Charles?"

Anna soured. "You think he has an agenda?"

"Yes," Mac said honestly, "but I don't think you're part of it. I caught the look on his face when he saw you. He was completely gob-smacked." He shook his head. "There's no way he could have faked that."

Robert grudgingly agreed. "But something is at play here. He knew of Robin, Anna. He has powerful contacts in this town, despite the fact that he's never before set foot here. Then it's revealed he's your son?" He shook his head. "I agree with Mac, the boy had no idea you were alive, but perhaps someone else did and encouraged him to move here."

"Perhaps," she said slowly, "but it's worth pointing out that Nikolas, Brenda, and Carly are not originally from Port Charles. Nikolas grew up in Europe, as did Brenda. He knows them through that, not because of this town."

And Carly only came to town to track down her mother, Mac silently thought. Another parallel?

Robert nodded. "That's fair."

Her gaze again found Mac. "I know you. What is it you so desperately don't want to tell me?"

Mac stood, crossed the room to the bar, and poured all of them three whiskeys neat. He handed Anna hers, uncuffed Robert and delivered his drink, and then gulped down his own.

"When he was at St. George's University, he was raped."

All the color bled from Anna's face as the glass slipped from her hand and shattered on the floor. "What?" she whispered.

"Dear god," Robert muttered before slamming down his drink and rubbing his face with a hand.

Mac poured her another drink, placed it in her trembling hand, and remained silent until she finished it.

"He did everything right," Mac said. "He had himself examined, filed a police report, and pressed
charges. He did everything we ask victims..."

She flinched harshly.

"...to do. He understood what was involved, what was needed, and no matter how it might have
made him feel, he did it."

"Kid's got a pair," Robert murmured, respect in his tone. "What about the piece of shit rapist?"

Mac turned toward his brother. "Dead. Murdered. No one knows by whom. Admittedly, no one
really made much effort to discover his killer. He was a fellow student of Kurt's and had a lot of
money, but the case was strong. He would have been convicted, the police were sure of that. His
money bought him some time before the trial was to commence, but he was killed before he could
be found guilty."

Anna raised haunted eyes to him. "You think Kurt killed him."

"I don't know," Mac said, "but if he did, more power to him."

Robert raised a brow. "That's a rather cavalier statement from the chief of police."

"I remember the hell Elizabeth Webber was put through," Mac hissed. "It was horrific. It was...it
was despicable. I remember how Emily Quartermaine changed after she was attacked by that
imposter. I remember how haunted Felicia was after Ryan Chamberlain tried to rape her."

He eyed his brother. "I've seen what rape does to people. It completely changes them on a
fundamental level. They can get through it, but they will never truly heal from that violation. I
have no sympathy for rapists, and the recidivism rate is so high as to be ridiculous."

He turned to Anna. "I followed one of your cases when you were chief in Pine Valley. Bianca
Montgomery?"

Anna's frown was furious. "Yes, Erica Kane's daughter. The nightmare he made of that young girl's
life..." she shook her head. "He also tried to rape Erica and her other daughter, Kendall. When
Michael Cambius was murdered, I performed my duty, but I have to confess it was only a
perfunctory effort. I was glad someone had put that animal down."

"And it was Bianca herself who had killed him, yes?"

She nodded. "She had repressed the memory. Michael tried to rape Bianca again, but she shot him.
Her sister discovered her just after and confessed to the murder herself. It was only after Kendall
was convicted and about to be sentenced that Bianca remembered what she had done. She was
horrified by her action, but I wouldn't say she felt especially guilty. She regretted taking life, but not
his life specifically."

Mac nodded. "At any rate, Kurt was never charged. He wasn't even investigated. If anyone thought
he was guilty, they were content to let him get away with it."

"My son was raped," Anna whispered, closing her eyes, "and I wasn't there. I didn't help him." She
opened her eyes and looked up at Mac. "Did anyone?"

He winced. Hard.
She knew that whatever was coming might rival the horror he had just delivered.

"There was someone..."

He was interrupted by the trilling of his phone.

He grunted. "Sorry, but I've got to take this."

Anna and Robert, each of whom well understood the demands of being chief of police, merely nodded.

"Scorpio," he tersely greeted the caller. He flinched and pulled the phone from his ear. Anna and Robert raised brows at the screaming erupting from the receiver.

Mac frowned. "Holly?"

Anna rolled her eyes. She had no use for that woman and never would. She didn't wish Holly dead, but she probably wouldn't go out of her way to save her, either.

Robert, however, looked very interested in why his ex-wife was calling his brother.

"Holly, what the hell is wrong?" Mac demanded. He listened for several moments. "What are you talking about?" he shouted back. "I told you about Robin myself!"

Anna and Robert exchanged a curious glance.

"What!" Mac roared, before collapsing on the sofa. Again, he listened for many long moments, the look of incredulity on his face almost comical, despite how serious it was. His mouth opened and closed several times, though he never said anything.

"Yes," he said, "I know him." After another long silence, he jumped to his feet. "What the hell is going on in this town! I'm the fucking chief of police and I'm always the last to know everything!"

Anna was stunned at his use of invective. Robert, conversely, appeared rather proud.

"All right," he said wearily. "Do you want me to meet you...stop screaming at me, Holly! How was I to know?" He rolled his eyes. "Fine, do what you want. You always did." He glowered. "Don't you dare speak to me of her! You know how much I adored that girl!"

He flinched. "Don't cry, Holly," he said softly. "Please don't cry."

Robert stared. "Holly doesn't cry."

Anna rolled her eyes again.

"I'll see you soon," Mac said. "Yes, I promise. Not until you get here. I know you loved her, Holly. I know that better than anyone."

Anna curled a lip in disgust and was shocked when Mac flipped her off.

"Call me when you arrive," he finished, before disconnecting.
Before Anna could even open her mouth, Mac was pointing a finger in her face.

"Not a word. Not one single word, Anna. I know how you feel about Holly and you have cause, but everything you said to Robert about how I was there for Robin when you couldn't be also applies to Holly. She helped me raise her, Anna. There was nothing in it for her. Robin was no relation to her. She didn't owe anyone anything.

"But she helped. She was there. There were moments with Robin when only Holly could get through to her. You have no idea how many nights I stood outside that girl's bedroom door while Holly told your daughter how brave you were, how much you loved her, how you would never have left her by choice, and how much she was sure you missed Robin."

Anna bit her lip and looked away.

"Holly did that," Mac said. "Not for you, not for Robert, but for Robin. So you go ahead and hate Holly all you want for as long as you want. You can die cursing her name for all I care, but you will respect that woman as long as you are in my home. Do I make myself clear?"

"Crystal," Anna whispered. She was embarrassed and ashamed. She couldn't stand Holly Sutton, but she knew how much Robin had loved her, had considered her her stepmother, even though Holly and Robert had long been divorced.

"What was all the screaming about?" Robert asked.

Mac ran a hand through his hair, causing his curls to stand on end, and sat down. "Holly was furious because I hadn't called to tell her about Robin. I told her that of course I had spoken with her. In person, as a matter of fact."

"She's a little young for senility," Robert joked.

Mac glared at him and he shrank back.

"What happened?" Anna asked, honestly interested, though she had no idea why.

Mac ground his teeth. "I didn't tell Holly. I haven't even spoken to Holly in over five years."

Anna and Robert stared.

Mac's hands curled into fists. "The woman in Port Charles now is not Holly Sutton, but her half-sister Paloma, who's been impersonating her for god knows how long. Holly hasn't returned to Port Charles in over ten years."

"What the fuck?" Robert barked. "I've seen her! Talked to her!"

Anna nodded. She too had regretfully spoken with Holly.

"It wasn't her," Mac said flatly. He turned toward Anna. "She only found out today because your son was the one to tell her."

"I'm sorry?" she said.
"You wanted to know if anyone helped Kurt through his rape. Someone did, and it was her."

Anna shook her head in furious denial.

"Oh, yes, Anna," Mac said. "It was Holly who saw him through the worst of it. It was Holly who took him to the hospital. It was Holly who went with him to the police. It was Holly who went with him to court. It. Was. Holly."

Anna couldn't breathe. She couldn't stomach the idea that a woman she had despised for half her life was so important to both of her children.

"How do they know each other?" Robert asked.

"I have no idea," Mac said. "What I do know is what Holly just told me. Kurt called her this afternoon from Wyndemere to tell her that Paloma was here in Port Charles passing herself off as Holly and attempting to pass off her son as Luke Spencer's."

"Ridiculous," Robert said. "Luke and Holly haven't been together for decades and there is no way he would have committed adultery while married to Laura."

Mac nodded. "Which is exactly what Kurt told Helena Cassadine, who was at Wyndemere and ready to shoot Luke, the boy Ethan, and Paloma. Kurt revealed what he knew and backed off Helena, who he has apparently known for years. The woman is quite fond of him."

Anna choked down bile, but only barely.

"He finally called Holly for confirmation and then told her about Robin. He then sent his plane to Heathrow to bring her back to Port Charles." He shook his head. "Needless to say, Holly is...not well, at the moment. She's angry, hurt, confused, and feeling betrayed. She's heartbroken over Robin and terrified that Kurt has run across Helena."

He looked to Anna. "She also has no idea Kurt is your son and he didn't tell her. I can only assume there is a reason he did not." He looked thoughtful. "He put all of this together very quickly, our relationships with each other."

Robert nodded. "He knew of Robin. He's friends with Nikolas Cassidine and his vampire of a grandmother. He knows Brenda Barrett and god knows who else in this town. He's close with Holly. Yet he never knew he was Anna's son?"

"He didn't," Anna insisted. "I thought we already established this."

"We did," Robert agreed, "but now I think it's more obvious than ever that if he isn't here for some other reason, someone or something directed him here. Someone wants him here."

"To what end?" she insisted.

Mac shrugged. "To hurt him. To hurt you."

"Faison," she hissed.

He nodded. "That's what I'm thinking."
"But he's dead!" Robert exclaimed.

Mac rolled his eyes. "Be serious, Robert. How many people in this town have died and returned? Two of them are in my house right now."

Robert and Anna blushed.

"What do we do?" she wondered. "How do we help him?"

"We have to get someone on our side to establish ties with him," said a decisive Robert. "The friends he already has here are loyal only to him. They won't tell us anything, not even if he's in danger. We need a mole."

Mac sighed, but agreed it was probably the best they could manage. "Options?"

"What about Maxie?" Anna suggested.

He shook his head. "My daughter can be conniving, but she has no talent for subterfuge. As it is, she's so raw over Robin's death that she would cling to Robin's brother with everything she had."

She grimaced and nodded.

"Who else do we know who is the boy's age? Someone he might interact with on a regular basis."

Mac frowned in thought. "Lucky Spencer, maybe. They'll be working together on cases and Lucky would probably feel grateful to Kurt for saving his father."

"Do you really think Lucky would inform on one of his brother's best friends?" Anna asked.

He nodded. "True."

"What about the Webber girl?" Robert asked.

"There's no way one rape victim would spy and inform on another," Mac said flatly. "Elizabeth has more integrity than anyone I know. If she even got wind we were trying to do this, she'd run right to Kurt." He paused. "Or possibly to Carly." He shivered. "The very idea of the two of them on the same side for anything is frightening."

"What about Luke's daughter?" Anna asked. "Lulu?"

Mac hemmed and hawed for a bit. "She might be a possibility. Anyone else?"

"How about Maxie's friend, the Jackal, as I believe he calls himself?"

"Spinelli," he said slowly. "He is a genius with computers. He's able to access all of the video cameras in town. He's protected by Jason and, somehow, attained a PI license." He exhaled. "It might work."

After once again refusing invitations from both Nikolas and Patrick to stay with them, Kurt returned to the Metro Court with Carly.
While she was in the living room ordering dinner, he stole into the bedroom and placed a call.


He rolled his eyes but smiled. Their inappropriate sexual banter was hysterical, especially because it so titillated and repelled their audience. Then his mouth settled into a grim line.

"I need your help."

She went silent as he counted down the day's greatest hits. She was shocked, horrified, and saddened, but most of all, she was pissed off.

"What do you need?"

"Everything you can find out on Anna Devane; Robin, Mac, and Robert Scorpio; Patrick Drake; and the woman who called herself my grandmother. The real information, not the sanitized or redacted records I could obtain."

"Done. What else?"

He had no words.

"Do you want me and Brit to come, Rainbow? Because I can have us on a plane in fifteen minutes."

He slowly exhaled. "No. No, not just yet. I have Nikolas and Brenda. I have Carly, who I think you'll really like. Holly's on her way."

She huffed. "I am not happy that you moved into Sonny Corinthos' territory without telling me beforehand."

He smirked. "By now, I'm sure Carly has informed him of our connection. He won't trouble me."

She blew a raspberry and then laughed hysterically. "You totally did that on purpose!"

"Are you new?"

She laughed harder.
"You know Nikolas totally wants to jump your bones, right?"

Carly smirked in satisfaction, pleased her non sequitur had startled Kurt from his maudlin thoughts. Ever since they had returned to the hotel, he had been eerily silent. It was almost creepy how little noise he made. More than once she had found it necessary to focus on his chest to see its rise and fall, just to ensure he was still breathing.

Not that his chest wasn't worthy of notice all on its own.

She didn't blame him, of course; a whole hell of a lot of curveballs had been thrown at him tonight and she was sure he needed to get his head together. The problem was that she didn't much care for silence. It unnerved her, so she always sought to fill it whenever possible.

That had been one of the worst parts about Ferncliff. After her breakdown and commitment, it was the consumptive silence of the sanitarium which had almost driven her completely around the bend. The silence was so seductive and yet so menacing. It had rendered her speechless for months, terrified to break the monotony of its power.

Kurt slowly turned toward her and pursed his lips. "That had occurred to me, yes."

She blinked. "Really?"

He rolled his eyes. "Honestly, Carly, it wasn't terribly difficult to discern." His eyes narrowed. "I don't know what you're thinking, but I hope it's not that I'm some prude or innocent. Yes, bad things have happened to me, but they've happened to everyone. Regardless, I've been in relationships before. I do know when I've garnered the interest of someone."

"How?" she demanded.

He smirked. "Nikolas and I are both men, Carly. The hug at Wyndemere made things quite clear."

She frowned. "I don't get it."

His brow furrowed and her confusion before he threw up his hands. "He was hard, Carly! He was hard, okay? I gave Prince Cassadine a raging boner."

"Wow," she murmured. Her gaze turned thoughtful. "Were you hard?"

He found her bluntness mortifying and the look on his face suggested as much. "I will not discuss that!"

"Which means you definitely were!" she grinned. She yanked on his arm. "Come on, Kurt! What's the point of having a gay best friend if you can't talk about this stuff with them? Dicks should always feature in our conversations!"

His mouth fell open.

"I bet Nikolas would love to see that particular look from you," she snarked, making her eyes very large and brimming with innocence.

He was totally aghast. "You are unbelievable!"
She shrugged and nodded. "So has said every ex-husband of mine. Your point?"

He glared.

"Nikolas is gorgeous," Carly murmured, nudging him with her elbow.

Amusement danced in Kurt's eyes. "Yes, he is. He always has been, but the years have been...quite kind to him."

"He has an amazing body," she added.

"I did notice that, Carly."

"Well?" she demanded.

"Well, what?"

She jumped to her feet. "Are you and the prince going to hit the sheets or not?!" she bellowed.

A giggle erupted from his throat, which soon segued into vaguely hysterical laughter. After he managed to get himself somewhat under control, he looked up at her. "Why are you so interested in this?"

"Because guys making out is hot! You and Nikolas would be hot!"

"I'd be hot with anyone."

She sat down, frowning. "That's true," she grudgingly admitted.

He reached over and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, drawing her flush against him. He laid his cheek upon the top of her head. "Thanks," he said softly.

She grunted.

"I mean it, Carly. I know what you were trying to do, and it even worked." He withdrew his arm and shifted to face her. "You don't have to worry so much about me. I'm a lot stronger than I look; I've had to be. I can deal with this."

"I don't know how," she said honestly. "I don't think I could."

"I didn't say it would be easy," he said. His eyes slipped past her and dimmed. "You can't even conceive of the number of times I imagined she was alive, that it was all some big mistake and she was fighting to get back to me. I've thought, more times than I could care to count, what it would be like, what it would feel like, of how I would react." He shook his head. "Nothing prepared me."

"You don't really know what happened," she said softly. "No one does."

"That's true," he agreed, "but I saw her when she saw me, Carly. The recognition on both our parts was almost immediate, but I could tell from the expression on her face that she hadn't thought of me for over twenty years."

"You don't know what happened to her!" Carly exclaimed, herself unsure why she was leaping to Anna's defense. "She..."

"I know enough," he interrupted, "or I can at least make a few hypotheses. This afternoon at Wyndemere, I did make note when Patrick said that Anna and Robert had been presumed dead
before. From the obituary I read in the paper this morning and knowing Robin's age, Anna had been missing for slightly more than two years when I was conceived. Then I was born, I had her for four years, and she was gone."

He dropped his eyes. "I'm so jealous."

"Why?" asked a baffled Carly.

"Because Robin got her back. Robin's mother was returned to her, but mine never was."

She reached over and took his hand. "She could be, if you wanted."

He gave her a sad smile and shook his head. "It's not the same. I'm an adult, Carly. I don't need a mother."

She scoffed. "Then you're an idiot. I didn't find Bobbie until I was an adult, and though I was hell on wheels, I needed her. I needed her so badly and I resented that and took it out on her. It's taken years for us to get where we are and I'm not even sure where that is. All I know is that it's better than where we started."

Her eyes locked with his. "You will *always* need your mother. You will *always* want your mother with you. That will never change, Kurt."

He drew in a ragged breath as his eyes filled with tears. "I didn't know it was possible to hurt this much without dying."

He fought her as she tried to embrace him, but eventually capitulated and let her hold him. She wondered when the last time was he had been held and it devastated her that it was most likely by one of his parents.

"Let me tell you what I know," she whispered. "I know that Anna Devane loved her daughter with everything inside her. I know that Robin felt that love even when Anna and Robert were gone. I can't imagine Anna doesn't feel it for you, too, even if she doesn't remember why."

"Luke said that Anna would never abandon me," he murmured as she rocked him, "that someone or something took her from me."

"I think he's right," she said, "and that's not something I'd say lightly where Luke's concerned." She paused. "I know you're not ready to listen to me about this, but Anna's life wasn't her own for a very long time. Things happened to her, bad things, and you're going to find them out. It's going to hurt you. You're going to hate people, perhaps even your mother, despite the fact that she's blameless in all of this."

"But, at the end of the day, she's your mother. Talk to her, Kurt. Listen to what she has to say. Do that for her. Do it for yourself. Do it for all the children, like your niece, who wish they had the chance."

Elizabeth hadn't planned on entertaining her former brother-in-law and his son that evening, but she was glad for Nikolas and Spencer's presence.

She had always found her cottage to be charming if slightly small, but since Jake's death, she and Cameron stumbled about like it was a cavernous space waiting to be filled, both knowing it never would be.
Elizabeth had offered to keep Spencer for the night, to which Nikolas had agreed. She had put the children to bed about half an hour ago and she had Nikolas had settled on the sofa, sipping coffee and talking.

It was strange. She considered Nikolas to be her best male friend, but they didn't often converse. Nikolas wasn't a chatty person, and neither was she, really. They had always been content with the silences their respective spouses had felt the need to fill. Without Emily and Lucky, the Four Musketeers had fallen apart and they were unsure if their friendship had been a casualty.

"I've missed you," he said quietly. "I don't think I realized until today how much."

She patted his knee. "I've missed you, too. I'm sorry if I've been distant, but I never wanted to put you in the position of feeling you had to choose between me and your brother."

Nikolas waved her words away. "Lucky and Emily were still close before she died." He gave her a soft, sad smile. "We were always the outsiders, weren't we?"

She nodded, eyes shining. "If they hadn't grown up together but had met later as teenagers or adults, they'd probably be married."

He nodded and took another sip of his coffee. "So much has happened today and, after it did, I realized how much I wanted to talk to someone, and that someone was you. Not because there wasn't anyone else, but because you're my best friend, Liz. I need...I need help."

"With Kurt?" she asked softly.

He turned startled and pained eyes on her, slowly nodding. "I guess I was fairly obvious."

She shook her head. "No. You were exuberant, which was startling to those who don't know you well, but you weren't obvious to anyone who doesn't truly know you." She waited a moment. "Do you have feelings for him? Romantic ones, I mean?"

He dropped his head in his hands and exhaled. "Yes. I have for years."

She was somewhat shocked by the admission. "Years?"

"I couldn't - wouldn't - do anything about it then. He was so young, Liz. Hell, so was I, but I was certainly more of an adult than he was."

"But he's not young anymore," she said, smiling.

He looked askance at her. "You're taking this very well. I'm having a crisis of sexual identity and you're making pithy observations?"

She rolled her eyes. "Nikolas, you're not having any such thing. You know who you are and you know what you want. If you want Kurt, that's your business. I'm not labeling it, so why do you feel the need?" She tilted her head. "I'm not sure what you want from me. Do you want me to judge you or try to talk you out of pursuing him? Because I'm not going to do that."

He sighed. "I think that is what I wanted."

"Why?" she asked. "I know you're not homophobic. You wouldn't even be friends with Kurt were that the case. Have you had relationships with other men?"

He fidgeted. "I wouldn't call them relationships..."
She nodded sagely. "Booty calls, then."

He gaped at her and she smirked in reply.

"Well, yes," he said reluctantly.

"But that's not what you want from Kurt?"

"No," he whispered. "Not at all."

She waited for a long minute. "Is this about Emily, about what she would think of this?"

He considered her question. "I don't think so. At least, not about Kurt being a man. She had no prejudices."

"And she'd also want you to be happy, no matter with whom that was," she said. She decided to shift focus. "Well," she continued, "it can't be about Lulu or Laura, because they could care less who you're with, as long as that person makes you happy."

She paused. "For that matter, the same holds true for Luke, at least as far as absence of judgment is concerned. Luke rallied to his nephew's side when Lucas came out. In fact, I think he was the one who screwed Bobbie's on straight about the whole thing. Whatever problems you two have, Luke wouldn't ridicule you for being with a man."


"Are you afraid of what Lucky would think?"

She knew she had hit the nail on the head when he flinched.

"Lucky's always been macho," Nikolas said. "He's often made fun of me for being so reserved, for being cultured and refined. He thinks I put on airs, that I can be...effeminate."

"He's jealous, Nikolas."

"What?"

"He's jealous. He always has been." She sighed. "You have to understand, Lucky was an only child for a very long time. He was almost a teenager when Lulu was born, and, by then, he was ready and thrilled to have a baby sister to spoil."

She paused and chose her words carefully. "Your existence blindsided him. There's a very special bond between a mother and her son, particularly her first-born son."

"Do you have that with Cameron?"

She nodded, smiling. "I do, and, for a number of years, Lucky had that with Laura. And then he no longer did." She placed a hand on his arm. "You're not to blame, of course, and I think part of Lucky always knew that. He was more upset by the fact that Laura never told him."

"He's jealous that I'm her firstborn?"

"That's one of many reasons. You both had very...unusual childhoods. Lucky always had his parents, but they lived their lives on the run with danger lurking around every corner. Part of him loved that sense of thrill and adventure, the same part that led him to becoming a cop, but another part of him longed for the structure you had."
"Lucky is very smart, but he's not an intellectual, and he feels out of his depth when confronted with one. He considers himself more cunning than intelligent, and while he prizes his common sense and street smarts, he resents that opportunities you enjoyed."

Nikolas frowned. "He could have gone to college."

She nodded. "He could've, but he's always been torn between trying to be his own man and trying to live up to the man he believes Luke Spencer's Son should be. You've never had that onus."

He snorted. "No. I have Helena."

She laughed. "Point. Lucky's always been insecure, Nikolas, but that's not your fault. It was never so much that you acted superior than it was that he felt you were superior. He wasn't thrilled when Emily and I went to college, either, and it was an issue of contention in our marriage. He believed I thought I was better than him because I was more educated."

She shook her head. "That was never true, but I couldn't convince him otherwise. He can be very obstinate. That said, I don't believe he would judge or condemn you for being with Kurt. He wants you to be happy just as much as I do."

"I'm scared," Nikolas whispered.

"Of what, honey? Of Kurt? Of your feelings for him?"

He turned haunted eyes upon her and she reeled back slightly. "He told me something today, something I never knew, and I felt...Elizabeth, I've never been so angry. I've never felt like such a Cassadine."

Her eyes searched his. "What did he tell you?"

His tears spilled over. "He was raped, Liz. He was raped when he was in college."

She automatically recoiled, thoughts drifting to Michael. She now better understood Carly's close connection with Kurt. In fact, she now believed it was most likely Kurt who had encouraged Carly to reach out to her.

That Carly had done so still amazed her, but when she thought about their meeting this afternoon, a Carly she had never before encountered, she couldn't help but think that Kurt was good for Carly. He encouraged her to be more thoughtful and deliberate, more calm.

Nikolas shook his head. "He never told me. I don't think he told anyone. Not Brenda. Not Kate."

"Kate?" she blankly repeated. "Kate Howard? He knows her, too?"

He nodded and then launched into an explanation of what had earlier happened at Wyndemere.

"And now Holly's coming here?" she asked, eyes wide. "Where Anna is?"

"How do I help him?" he asked.

"You can't," she said bluntly. "These aren't problems you can fix, Nikolas. Kurt will have to do that work alone. All you can do is support him and his decisions."

He nodded absently. "That's what Carly's doing." He colored. "I thought she was being a sycophant, but now I realize she's just being a good friend. While Patrick and I were fighting over where he'd live and how to take care of him, she was the only one to ask Kurt what he wanted."
He sighed. "I could tell how much that meant to him and I felt like such a failure. I've known him half my life, Elizabeth. Why don't I know how to be a better friend?"

"You're being much too hard on yourself," she insisted. "Think about today. You were reunited with a friend you haven't see in over a decade. He discovers his dead mother is not dead at all, that a woman he idolized was actually his sister, and that a woman for whom he cares greatly was being impersonating by someone else. He then has a confrontation with Helena.

He nodded absently, acknowledging her point. Kurt had been put through a lot today, and he was actually handling it better than anyone else!

"He confided in you about something that's horrible," she continued, "but he told you. You don't truly understand what that means, that he felt comfortable enough to discuss it with you. No survivor talks about their attack unless it's necessary or to help another survivor."

He nodded again. Elizabeth didn't talk about her own rape with anyone who hadn't been in her circle at the time it had occurred, and even amongst them, she was reticent to discuss it. Emily hadn't talked about her rape by Connor with anyone other than himself, Lucky, Elizabeth, Sonny, and Jason.

"The rape must have been, what, eight to ten years ago?" she asked.

He nodded bleakly. "About that, yes."

She sighed. "You never get over something like that, but I'm sure that Kurt received counseling. He's a doctor; he knows the steps." She raised a brow. "Does knowing he was raped change the way you see him?"

His eyes darted away.

She nodded. "I see," she said lowly, her fury starting to simmer. "Now he's a victim in your eyes."

"No!" he protested. "No, it's not that at all. I'm...mad. And I'm anxious and concerned and...and..."

"You want to help him but don't know how," she surmised, "and a part of you understands there's nothing you can do because you weren't there when it happened."

"Yeah."

"You want to take vengeance on his behalf and are furious because his attacker is dead."

"Yes," he seethed.

"You're resentful of Holly because she did what you feel should have been your responsibility."

He closed his eyes. "Yes," he whispered.

"But it wasn't your job, Nikolas. It wasn't Holly's, either. It was no one's, but it happened and it's over. You wallowing in Kurt's past trauma and theorizing how you could have helped him helps no one, least of all Kurt." She raised a brow. "I think there's some sublimation going on here. Rather than telling Kurt you're interested, you instead want to put him on a pedestal and prove yourself worthy of him."

She shook her head. "You might be a prince, but this isn't a fairy tale, Nikolas."

He blushed from his neck to his hairline.
"Are you anxious about how he might react if you expressed your interest?"

He nodded. "I haven't seen Kurt in years, but we've kept in contact. I don't think he's had a steady boyfriend in a very long time." He frowned. "At least, not that he's told me about." He exhaled. "I'm being ridiculous, aren't I, putting the cart before the horse? I haven't even asked him out yet. I don't even know if he's interested in me that way."

"You won't know until you ask," she affirmed. "The worst thing that could happen would be that he said no, and if he did, it would probably be because he wouldn't want to risk losing you as a friend if a romantic relationship didn't work out."

Nikolas shook his head. "That would never happen; losing me as a friend, I mean. I'll always be his friend."

"So tell him that. Let him know that the two of you dating won't change your relationship, but perhaps make it deeper. Give him the choice, Nikolas. Give him a chance. Your fear is making you irrational and you're dreaming up worst-case scenarios that will never happen. He's an adult now, not the little boy you knew, so treat him like one."

He turned to face her. "Damn, you're smart."

She sighed. "I know. My greatest curse is that I'm surrounded by stupid boys who didn't realize this fact years ago."

His eyes widened and then he leaned over and began tickling her, smiling when shrieks of hysterical laughter erupted.
I'm freely altering General Hospital canon to suit my whims, particularly with Holly and Luke, whose characters have been slowly assassinated over the past fifteen years. Longtime fans know what I'm talking about.

He had finally convinced Carly to return to her own home and her children for the night, and Kurt was very much regretting it. He had craved the isolation her absence would allow, but now that he was alone, he found he didn't much care to think about the events of the past two days, no matter how much it was necessary.

He had come to Port Charles in search of the brother he had never known, and instead had found his lost mother. That, in turn, had led to the realization of his newly discovered and newly dead sister, Robin Scorpio. Now, he had somehow acquired a new best friend, reconnected with two dear friends from his childhood, renewed his bizarre mutual admiration society with Helena Cassadine, and Holly Sutton was speeding toward town on his jet.

He had yet to meet Damien, was now being cajoled by his sister's widower to be part of a family he didn't even know, and he knew he had better contact Kate Howard before waiting to let her contact him. The last thing he needed was another demanding woman encroaching on his space. He loved Kate, of course, but he was frankly concerned with some of the things Carly had told him about the woman.

First was her relationship with Sonny Corinthos. It bothered him that the mobster now appeared to be becoming an integral part of his life. Sonny was Carly's ex-husband, Brenda's ex-fiancé, Kate's current beau, Damien's de facto employer, and had been close with Robin once upon a time. He did not want to be drawn into Sonny's world, not the least of which was because of how Santana would react.

He had an assignment to complete in Port Charles and the last thing he needed was Sonny's interference.

Second was that Kate had headquartered her new magazine in Port Charles; in fact, within the very hotel in which he now resided. He was of the opinion that Kate should have left Couture much sooner than she had and was more than qualified to head her own magazine, but why run it from a provincial town in upstate New York? Granted, it was probably much cheaper to do it here than in New York or Los Angeles, and Kate had undoubtedly received a tax break for creating new revenue, but it was still surprising.

Third was that Carly hated Kate, which was not surprising, given that Carly hated most women. Still, part of the reason for her rancor was that Kate had apparently conducted an affair - or, more accurately, a one-night stand, with another of Carly's ex-husbands. Even though Carly and her husband were separated at the time, it wasn't like the Kate he knew to involve herself in such a circumstance. After all, it certainly wasn't as though Kate couldn't attract an available man on her own.

He'd call her in the morning. Better yet, he'd just take the elevator down a few floors and surprise
her in her office. He'd give her the illusion of the home-court advantage as he subtly interrogated her about what the hell was going on.

He also knew he'd have to deal with Brenda eventually. She was giving him his space now, which he appreciated, but he knew he didn't have much time before she stormed the Metro Court in search of him, most likely instigating a catfight with Carly in the process.

Then there was Anna. And Holly.

And, finally, he would have to come to a decision about what he wanted to do about Damien. Frankly, he was currently of the opinion that he should do nothing for a while, at least until some things had been resolved with Anna. It wasn't fair to drag his presumed brother into his now-crazy life until there was a legitimate reason to do so.

Which meant he would have to scheme, get a sample of Damien's DNA, and run his own tests.

Sometimes it paid to be a doctor, he thought, smirking.

And then there was Nikolas, his Prince Charming.

Nikolas was, well, Nikolas was the man who had unwittingly helped him realize that he was indeed gay. He had been a young boy on the cusp of adolescence when he had met Nikolas, an honest-to-goodness prince who was intelligent and witty and honorable and genuinely kind...and so fucking hot that he had given Kurt night sweats.

Nikolas had been his first crush, his first wet-dream, his first illicit masturbatory fantasy. Kurt had unknowingly compared all boys he had met later against the figure Nikolas had cut in his life, especially with Finn and then Sam. Admittedly, Sam had been much closer to the ideal Nikolas had established than Finn ever had.

But it was best not to think of Finn, and especially not of Sam.

He had the sneaking suspicion, however, that his relationship to Anna would soon be regional tabloid fodder. It was now common knowledge, and presumably a subject of gossip, and Anna was apparently something of a local celebrity. The rags would get a hold of the story of her long-lost son just after the death of her daughter, and then Finn would be on the horn sooner rather than later, demanding to know what was going on.

He didn't want to be dragged back into Finn's orbit, for that also meant Rachel would be along for the ride.

Brr.

Nikolas wanted him, he understood. That had been obvious when they had embraced at Wyndemere. Kurt was of two minds on the subject. On the one hand, he loved Nikolas and had considered him something of an elder brother for half of his life; if they attempted a relationship which ultimately didn't work out, he didn't want to lose his friend.

On the other, Nikolas was an incredible specimen of manhood. He had aged beautifully. That hug, almost a full-body assault, had left nothing to the imagination, either. Nikolas had muscles for days and an impressive cock. In fact, the real thing had turned out to be even better than his many, many fantasies.

Of course he wanted to sleep with Nikolas. He'd wanted to sleep with Nikolas for fifteen years. The sex would probably be amazing, if not downright apocalyptic. However, he also suspected that
now that Nikolas knew about the rape, he thought of him as vulnerable, or even as damaged goods, and there was no way he would allow the man to view him as some wounded bird in need of the healing cock of a prince.

This meant he would have to make the first move, and a bold one, but until he was ready to do so, he had to avoid Nikolas as much as possible. It wouldn't be easy; he well knew how dogged and determined Nikolas could be when he wanted something.

He sighed and poured himself a fat bourbon, downing it in one gulp and staring through the bottom of the glass, willing his erection away. He failed, plopped down on the sofa, unzipped his pants and began palming himself, eyes closed as he imagined Nikolas on his knees before him.

Oh, Jesus. This was dangerous. Nikolas could prove to be a distraction, albeit a very pleasant one. It might not be feasible to put off Nikolas for very long. In fact, it was all he could do not to head over to Spoon Island immediately and fuck Nikolas into unconsciousness.

He groaned and licked his lips.

What the hell had he gotten himself into, coming to this town? When had his life become a soap opera?

Carly stared at the phone in her hand with incredulity. This day of surprises just kept on delivering.

She still couldn't quite understand why Elizabeth had called her. Further, she had no idea how the woman knew her cell phone number. It wasn't like they were in each other's Top Five.

But, lo and behold, she had answered the phone and a chatty Elizabeth began regaling her with the story of the not-so-secret lust Prince Cassadine had for Kurt Hummel. Apparently Nikolas had just left his son with Elizabeth and, after one of their heart-to-heart conversations, admitted that he was crushing on Kurt, and crushing badly.

Carly was further stunned when Elizabeth gaily told her that she had encouraged Nikolas to man up and pursue Kurt, because he needed to move on from Emily and Kurt was a good prospect. He had money, a career, was obviously intelligent, and had a damn fine ass.

Damn fine ass?

When did Elizabeth start noticing guys' asses, and why hadn't Carly been aware of this?

So now Elizabeth wanted Carly to chat up Kurt about a possible hookup with Nikolas. Carly informed her that she had already approached Kurt with that idea, and while Kurt didn't veto the possibility, he was reticent until he had resolved some issues with his newly-discovered family.

That caused the conversation to segue into how cute - and hot - a hookup between the Prince and the Duke would be.

Carly would never have suspected that Elizabeth Webber was a fruit fly of the first order, but, there it was.

Elizabeth then suggested it was absolutely necessary that they do everything in their power to push Kurt and Nikolas together without making it look like they were interfering. Carly was all over that like white on rice, and they spent the next hour organizing the love lives of their two best friends, because Kurt and Nikolas obviously couldn't be trusted to make their own choices.
Just as their conversation appeared to be drawing to a close, Elizabeth shocked her further by telling her that, per information gleaned from one of her nursing colleagues, Jason was showing signs of waking from his coma.

Carly couldn’t believe Elizabeth was confessing this to her. She thought about all of the times she had tried to keep Jason and Elizabeth apart, and now she truly had no explanation for her behavior other than jealousy.

She felt ashamed when, after questioning Elizabeth about why she was relating this information, the woman simply stated that Jason was Carly's best friend. If the situations had been reversed and her best friend Nikolas had been in Jason's position, she would hope that someone would tell her the way she was now telling Carly.

Elizabeth was also of the firm opinion that, upon waking, Jason should immediately be told of Robin's death. She absolutely believed that Carly had the right idea about this and that Sam, Jason's wife, had no clue as to who her husband was if she thought Jason would tolerate her keeping secrets from him. Especially about Robin.

Carly smirked as Elizabeth explained that the only reason she hadn't told Sam to shove it was because Sam would have had her banned from Jason's room as she had Carly. As long as Elizabeth maintained access to Jason, she could get Carly in to see him.

Carly was beginning to realize that she had vastly underestimated Elizabeth Webber, to both their detriments.

She then spent the next fifteen minutes disparaging Sam McCall, and while Elizabeth had patiently listened, she had refrained from adding any commentary. When pressed as to why, Elizabeth casually explained that she didn't have the burning hatred for Sam that Carly did.

Carly rightly inferred that it wasn't that Elizabeth liked Sam, but considered her to be a complete nonentity. Elizabeth barely acknowledged that Sam was an actual human being.

It was vicious and delicious and so incredibly subversive that Carly almost had an orgasm.

Carly, Elizabeth had explained, _Sam stood by and watched as my baby was kidnapped and did nothing to stop it. She lied about the fact that she had witnessed it and then had the audacity to work with Jason as he was searching for our son, all the while insinuating that, had I been a better mother, Jake wouldn't have been kidnapped in the first place._

Carly sat there listening, jaws agape, at this essential information to which she had not been privy. Jason hadn't told her, obviously in a bid to protect Sam, who needed to be disemboweled at the first opportunity.

_Then, Elizabeth continued, after Jake was returned and I was getting closer to Jason, Sam hired some Russian thugs to harass and threaten me and my children in the park so that she could pretend to come along and save us, as if she were some great hero. Cameron still has nightmares about it._

Carly Corinthos was of the firm opinion that Sam McCall was a fucking bitch.

She had always believed this to be true, but now she had concrete evidence to back it up. The miserable whore had arranged for a toddler, an infant, and their mother to be ambushed at the local playground by gun-toting criminals. Not only had Cameron been terrified about what might happen to him, but even more frightened about what might happen to his baby brother and their mother.
And then, mere months ago, Cameron had lost his brother. Elizabeth had lost her son. Carly's own
dughter was alive only because Elizabeth had made the most unselfish decision anyone could ever
make: she donated her son's organs so that other children could benefit from her loss, that other
parents might be spared from the suffering she was experiencing.

Elizabeth might be a Pollyanna, but she was undoubtedly the most decent person Carly had ever
known.

Carly blinked when she realized Elizabeth was still talking. As the woman detailed the end of her
marriage to Lucky Spencer, Carly's own cousin, Carly realized there had been a lot she hadn't
known.

She knew that Lucky had cheated on Elizabeth with Maxie Jones, but she hadn't known that it had
been Maxie who had initially hooked Lucky on drugs, acted as his dealer, stolen hospital
pharmaceuticals to feed his habit, faked a pregnancy and then miscarriage to trap Lucky, and
continued to taunt Elizabeth to this day about how she had stolen Elizabeth's husband.

Well, the fact that Maxie's best friend was Sam McCall now made a lot more sense. That Maxie
was the object of obsession for Kurt's possible brother, Damien Spinelli, did not bode well.

But it didn't end there. She was horrified and appalled as Elizabeth explained that Lucky had not
only cheated on her with Maxie, but had left his gun laying about the house, where it had been
discovered by and then discharged very near to Cameron. Lucky had also physically assaulted
Elizabeth while she was pregnant with Jake, throwing her to the floor and almost inducing a
miscarriage.

The final straw was that Lucky had pretended he had dispatched local thug Manny Ruiz when the
truth of the matter was that it had been Jason. Manny had been psychotically obsessed with Sam
McCall. In order to hurt her, he had caused a train to derail, which had led to Alexis Davis going
into premature labor and the death of Reese Marshall.

Manny had terrorized Carly herself, killed her father, and had kidnapped Elizabeth, knowing how
important she was to Jason. He had known Elizabeth had been raped as a teenager and had
threatened to rape her again. Elizabeth had shot him and, during their struggle, Jason found them
and threw Manny from the roof of the hospital, killing him. Lucky had arrived soon after, taken the
credit, and received a promotion to detective.

Sam had made the entire ordeal about her and her suffering while Elizabeth was left alone to try
and put herself back together and care for her children. She filed for divorce and then Lucky had
started screwing Sam, the woman who had allowed his wife's son to be kidnapped. Oh, and did
Carly know that Lucky had also once screwed Sarah, Elizabeth's own sister? Yet he fiercely
resented her friendship with his brother, Nikolas.

Frankly, Carly didn't understand why Elizabeth hadn't become a mass murderer and killed all of
the fuckwits who seemed determined to make her life as miserable as possible. She put that very
question to Elizabeth, who had replied that, in the end, by doing nothing, those who hurt her had
eventually hung themselves without her having to lift a finger.

Elizabeth thought herself cowardly and somewhat cruel. She also despaired that the entire town
saw her as either a victim or a martyr.

Carly thought the woman was diabolical. There should be classes.

She looked down at the clock beside her bed and was startled to realize she and Elizabeth had been
talking - really talking about deep stuff, stuff that mattered, stuff that haunted them - for over five hours. No insults, no sneers, no eye-rolling. Instead, there was understanding and commiserating and catharsis.

Carly took pride in the fact that she had been right: Elizabeth would become her new best friend. Well, new best girlfriend. Kurt was her best friend, despite the suddenness of their relationship.

Elizabeth would run interference for her with Sam with regard to Jason, while she would run interference for Nikolas with Lucky. Carly agreed with Nikolas' assessment that Lucky would give him grief for pursuing Kurt.

Lucky was her cousin and Carly loved him, but she was also more than willing to kick his ass, both figuratively and literally, because it was obvious he needed it. She didn't know Laura Spencer well, and Laura probably thought little of her, but the woman would have been appalled with how Lucky had been conducting himself these past few years.

She disconnected with Elizabeth, who wanted to check on Cameron and Spencer, promising to call tomorrow. Carly, who herself wanted to check in on Morgan and Josslyn, smiled, already looking forward to their next conversation.

She couldn't even remember a time when she had a best friend. Now she had two, and she would make damn sure they were well protected.

Anna paced around Mac's living room, wringing her hands and silently cursing almost everything about her life.

She felt guilty for staying at Mac's home. She normally would have checked in at the Metro Court, as she did whenever she was in town, but she knew that Kurt was staying there and she was following Mac's advice, allowing her son his space. There was also the fact that she had called the hotel and tried to make a reservation but was told she wasn't welcome.

The clerk who delivered this information had sounded nervous and truly sorry, and Anna realized Carly had instructed her staff that Anna Devane was to be considered persona non grata.

She had never liked Carly Corinthos, but had to give the woman credit for looking out for her friends.

She wandered over to the wall and flipped off the light. It was hard enough being in this house, the house in which Mac had raised her daughter, without the physical reminders of Robin's former presence and now her absence. She stood against the wall, closed her eyes, and could almost hear Robin's girlhood giggle. Her eyes shot open and she bit her lip forcefully to restrain the scream.

She hadn't truly understood what it had been like for Mac to lose Georgie, especially in a such a violent manner. Nothing about Robin's death was fair, but at least it was accidental, quick, and, hopefully, relatively painless. Anna realized that her daughter must have known she was going to die and was determined to save the life of her friend before it happened. That's why Robin was a hero, and everyone else in their family, save Mac, was an asshole.

Mac, whose daughter had been murdered, strangled in the park by a former friend and then left in the snow on the steps, like so much litter.

As hypocritical as she knew it was, Anna had little sympathy for Felicia. Anna hadn't been a part of Robin's life because she had been kidnapped, brainwashed, and her memories and identity erased. Felicia had abandoned her children with her ex-husband while she took off in search of their father,
then stayed with him while Mac raised their children. She completely understood why Maxie had all but thrown her mother out of the house when the woman returned for Georgie's funeral.

Georgie, who, by all accounts, couldn't have been more like Robin than if they had been sisters. Incredibly kind, genuinely decent, frighteningly intelligent girls who always put the needs of others above their own and never expected or desired anything in return.

She had lost her daughter. Mac had lost another daughter.

She heard him pacing his bedroom floor above her.

He would never get over this, she knew. He had been barely surviving since Georgie's death, putting on a brave front for Maxie and Robin. She couldn't ask him to run interference for her with Kurt, even though Mac and Kurt would be working closely together in the space of a month. She couldn't do that to him. She had no right to ask even more of him.

As for Kurt, she knew she had to leave him alone. Even though it had been indirect, it was the only thing he had ever asked of her and she respected that. She knew she needed to focus on planning Robin's funeral, trying to comfort Robert and Patrick, and wondering how they would tell Emma that her mother was gone.

The more she tried to distance herself from the idea of Kurt, the more her memories of him assailed her. His birth, his first steps, his first word. She remembered teaching him the piano.

Kurt could sing.

She wondered if he still did. She wondered if the fact that he now knew her to be alive had ruined the good memories he'd had of her.

And Burt...she couldn't even bear to think of him. Now that she was remembering Kurt, she was also remembering his father. The memories were so close, so potent, she felt as though she were still married to him. She had loved that man with everything inside of her, but she had forgotten him as easily as she had their son. What kind of wife, what kind of mother, could do that? Brainwashing and traumatic injuries aside, they had been her entire world for almost six years.

She would have to grieve for her husband, but after she had grieved for her daughter. Then she could only hope and pray that her surviving child would, if not forgive her, at least speak to her.

Truthfully, however, as much as she was curious about Kurt and his life, there were also things she didn't want to discuss. She couldn't bear to think about the fact that her son, her baby, had been raped while in college. She herself felt violated, though she knew it was absolutely nothing compared to what Kurt had endured. The worst part was that there was nothing she could do, nothing she could say, that would help him.

She hadn't been there for him. Instead, it had been Holly Sutton.

She burned with rage and shame at her dislike for this woman, while, at the same time, experienced a gratitude so profound that it stole her breath. Perhaps it didn't truly matter that it had been Holly who had been there for Kurt, but the fact that someone had been. Wasn't that really all that mattered?

Of course she was jealous. Mac had made it clear that, while he had raised Robin mostly on his own, Holly had been an invaluable help and resource in those early years. Holly had been the one to hold Robin as the girl cried for her mother. Holly had been there for Robin's first crush, her first date, her first dance. Holly had been the one to explain to Robin what a period was and how that...
meant she was becoming a woman.

And Mac had been right: there had been no reason for Holly to do these things other than the simple fact that she loved Robin. Perhaps she had only done so because she had initially seen Robin as an extension of her father, but, in the end, it was irrelevant. Robin had been an amazing person, had meant so much to so many, and a part of the woman that Robin had become had been informed by Holly Sutton.

She knew Holly had always wanted children, that she had never truly gotten over her miscarriage, the child she had created with Luke Spencer. The miscarriage had left Holly unable to have other children.

Anna also knew that Holly had been shafted, not once, but twice, with regard to the men she had loved. First Luke, who had been presumed dead in an avalanche, only to show up very much alive a year later.

By that time, Holly had married Robert in order to avoid being deported. Torn between the two, Holly had never been allowed to make a decision, because, before she could, Luke's wife, Laura, who had also been presumed dead, turned up very much alive. Thus had Holly lost Luke. She and Robert had truly fallen in love with one another, but then a presumed-dead Anna, Robert's first wife, hit town with Robert's unknown child in tow.

But Holly had never held any resentment for Robin, obviously. If she had, she never would have become such an important part of Robin's life.

Anna tried to place herself in Holly's shoes, to try and determine what the woman must have been feeling. Holly was most likely devastated that the girl she considered to be the closest thing to a daughter was dead. To compound the matter, her own sister had been impersonating her, grifting people for money, and trying to pass off her son as Holly's own, knowing full while that Holly could never have children of her own and destroying her friendship with Luke in the process.

Anna slowly released a breath and, with it, some of her misplaced anger. The bottom line was that when her children were at their most vulnerable, Holly had been there for them.

And that was when she realized that it must have been Holly who had killed Kurt's rapist. For that, and for so many other things, Anna discovered a newfound respect for Holly Sutton.
Kurt was correct in his belief that his relationship to Anna would soon become common knowledge, but perhaps even he would have been surprised at the speed with which it did. Merely hours after his brief reunion with his presumed-dead mother, the name Kurt Hummel was quickly making the rounds amongst the echelons of Port Charles society.

Mac Scorpio wanted to alert his daughter Maxie of Kurt's existence before anyone else could. The girl had never forgiven herself for how she had treated her sister, and Georgie's murder continued to haunt her years after the fact. Maxie, who had been attacked before Georgie, often wondered had she been killed when planned, if her sister would ever have been targeted.

She also held herself accountable for Robin's demise. Mac wasn't quite sure how she had arrived at that conclusion, some half-baked idea about her purse hitting a laboratory gas nozzle, but the guilt Maxie was experiencing was keen and heartfelt. He knew when his daughter was acting, usually because she did it so poorly, and thus recognized when her remorse was genuine. Maxie was devastated over the loss of her cousin.

With trepidation, Mac knocked on the door to his daughter's apartment, unsurprised when Damien Spinelli answered. Mac didn't like Spinelli, thought he was weird, but there was no denying the kid's sincere love for Maxie, which Mac could respect even though he found it somewhat abhorrent. From the look on Spinelli's face, it was obvious the kid had had no more luck talking sense into Maxie than he had.

He sighed.

All he wanted to do was grieve for Robin, but Anna needed him. Robert needed him, though he would deny it. Holly might need his help, but would never ask. Maxie needed more help than perhaps anyone could give.

He was so very tired.

Robin and Georgie had been so easy. Self-sufficient, frighteningly intelligent, and mature far beyond their years, they hadn't needed the constant supervision the rest of his family demanded. He had always been able to trust them, knew they would do the right thing, and knew they would come to him when they truly needed his help. Neither had ever cried wolf nor had they been so wrapped up in appearances that they wouldn't ask for assistance when required.

They had quite literally been his eye in the hurricane.
And now they were both dead.

He wearily trudged into the apartment, greeted his daughter, who didn't respond, and told Spinelli he was welcome to stay during the visit. He well knew Maxie would spill her guts as soon as he left. The fact that he was willing to let Spinelli hang around should have clued Maxie in to the fact that a bombshell was about to be delivered.

Indeed, it did, for she was now regarding her father with suspicious eyes.

"What?" she whispered, a tremor of fear in her voice.

He perched upon the coffee table before her and stared. "Something has happened, and I wanted you to hear it from me before you did anyone else."

She said nothing, a truly rare occurrence.

He took a deep breath. "Do you remember I told you a few weeks ago that a new forensic pathologist had been hired? He would be working at General Hospital but under the umbrella of the police and the District Attorney?"

She raised a brow and nodded.

"He arrived in town today," Mac continued. "While at General Hospital, he was confronted with his mother, whom he had believed dead for over twenty years."

"Whoa," Spinelli muttered.

Maxie blinked. Okay, yeah, she loved gossip and this was definitely juicy stuff, but why the hell had her father trekked across town to tell her this bit of news? It had nothing to do with her and was interrupting her wallowing!

"His mother is Anna Devane."

Maxie ceased breathing.

Mac closed his eyes and released a breath. "He's Robin's brother."

She immediately leapt to her feet. "I want to meet him."

As Mac tried to explain why this wasn't an appropriate time, she screamed and shrieked and carried on about her newfound cousin, who was actually of no relation to her, and how she needed to meet him and explain how sorry she was and how amazing Robin had been and a host of any number of things.

He fell silent and appeared disinterested until she had worn herself out. He then proceeded to explain all he knew about Kurt: how he had been orphaned in high school; how he had moved to Europe, where he had been educated; his relationships to Nikolas, Brenda, and Holly; and that his best friend was Carly Corinthos, who Maxie staunchly declared an evil succubus until Mac explained that Kurt was gay, which made her think of her other cousin, Lucas Jones.

Mac wasn't prone to gossip, but he knew that if he didn't nip this in the bud, Maxie would have Spinelli on his laptop in a matter of seconds to track down Kurt so that she could bombard him at the soonest opportunity. Therefore, and with great reluctance, Mac explained about how Kurt had reacted to Anna; of the pain and confusion from which he was sure to be suffering; that he had been devastated by Robin's death even prior to discovering she had been his sister; his
confrontation with Helena Cassadine; and, finally, and only because it would convince Maxie to leave him alone for the time being, his rape in college.

For one of the few times in her life, Maxie Jones decided to put someone before herself. Robin's brother - and that was how she referred to him in her thoughts, not even by his name - obviously needed time to come to grips with the day's events. She couldn't run and dump her guilt all over him in the vain hope of absolution. He hadn't known Robin, wouldn't understand her relationship with Robin, and owed her nothing. He'd probably kick her ass right out of the door, and who knows what the hell Carly had told him about her.

"Will he be at the funeral?" she asked softly.

"I honestly don't know," Mac replied. "I spoke with Patrick on my way here, and he told me that he had asked Kurt to come and stay with him and Emma while he looked for his own home."

"He said no, right?"

He nodded. "Kurt was gentle, but firm. He didn't know Robin and will not be in any way construed as a substitute for her. He likes Patrick and wants to develop a relationship with Emma, but this isn't the time."

"Is he staying at Wyndemere?"

Mac hesitated. Revealing Kurt's present location was a risk, but one he should probably take. If he didn't, then Maxie would simply knock on every door until she found him.

"He's at the Metro Court," he said, "but fair warning: Carly has already barred Anna from the hotel, and I don't think she'd offer you a much warmer reception."

Maxie glared.

He shrugged. "I don't know. They've only just met, but I can tell you what I observed. First, Carly is very serious about this friendship. She went to the trouble of introducing him as her best friend to her mother, only hours after making his acquaintance. From what Bobbie told me, Kurt supported the best-friend angle and couldn't have been more complimentary of Carly."

Maxie rolled her eyes.

He rolled his in reply. "Second, she was the only one he responded to when he was confronted with Anna. She was the first to run after him. She was the one who figured out he would most likely have gone to Wyndemere. Patrick told me that while he and Nikolas were fighting over with whom Kurt would stay, it was Carly who was the only one to ask Kurt what he wanted. And what he wanted was to stay at Carly's hotel."

She cocked her head, considering his words.

"But the coup-de-grâce? He somehow forged an alliance between Carly and Elizabeth Webber."

Maxie's mouth fell open and she stared at her father in abject horror.

"Inconceivable!" Spinelli whispered. "The Maternal One and the Valkyrie united on any front is most heinously apocalyptic!"

Mac just shook his head.
Maxie, however, heeded her friend's words. Elizabeth absolutely despised her and, though loath to admit it, for good reason. Carly only actively disliked her, and that was more about her former rivalry with Carly's cousin Lulu Spencer. Even though the girls now considered each other frenemies rather than outright nemeses, that meant little to Carly.

She was sure her perceived deficiencies had been thoroughly catalogued by Carly. Elizabeth would have been more diplomatic in her assessment, which, counter-intuitively, would have spurned more dislike than any poisonous Carly diatribe.

Terrific. She had a new family member who was most likely already lost to her.

District Attorney Alexis Davis and her good friend Diane Miller, also a legal eagle, were having a Girls Night In at the mansion of another good friend, fashionista Kate Howard. Alexis had left her young daughters Kristina and Molly with her eldest daughter Sam McCall and was looking forward to an evening filled with wine, laughter, and no dire emergencies.

When her phone rang, she realized she should have known better. She was only mildly surprised when Diane's phone also trilled. She sighed. Most likely this was some Sonny Corinthos-related catastrophe. Kate had told them that she had washed her hands of Sonny earlier that day, about which both women were happy, so it made sense that Kate's phone remained blissfully silent.

Alexis was startled when the caller was revealed to be her nephew, Nikolas. She grew more and more concerned the more Nikolas babbled, in itself troubling, as he wasn't prone to idle chatter. She had heard of Kurt Hummel before, though his name hadn't been mentioned by Nikolas in years, but she knew her nephew had once been enamored of the boy and she was very curious as to what might result now. If Nikolas's effusive praise and shy tone indicated anything, it was that her nephew was quite interested in Kurt Hummel.

She couldn't have been happier for him. Other than her children, Nikolas had always been closest to her heart. Her eldest brother Stavros had always despised her, thanks to Helena's interference, and her relationship with elder brother Stefan had always been very...contentious. Nikolas was the only Cassadine to whom she laid vociferous claim. After watching him mourn Emily for almost three years - and that horrible debacle with that Rebecca person - all she wanted for Nikolas was his happiness, and if that was with Kurt Hummel, so be it.

But then Nikolas launched into the day's events, sparing nothing: Kurt's appointment as the city's new forensic pathologist; his relationships to Brenda, Carly - which, the hell?- and Kate, also WTF; his aborted reunion with his dead mother Anna Devane; his meeting with Helena; and his rape and that Holly Sutton, who apparently had been being impersonated by her lookalike half-sister, had most likely murdered the assailant.

Like Maxie Jones, it wasn't often that Alexis Davis found herself speechless, and she wasn't too happy about it.

Diane Miller was engaged in a similar conversation with one of her clients, Sonny Corinthos. He related much of the same information as Nikolas was imparting to Alexis, save the more personal details of Kurt Hummel's life, with the additional caveat that Kurt was affiliated with, and most likely under the protection of, a woman mobster so fierce that she made Sonny himself look like fluffy kitten. He wanted all the dirt she could find on one Dr. Kurt Hummel.

Diane's first thought was that she definitely wanted to meet the woman Sonny called La Loca Lopez. She also wondered as to the quality of shoes such a person would wear.
Her second thought was, after inferring Kurt was most likely gay, how soon could she set up a shopping spree with him, not caring how stereotypical or offensive that thought was.

Her third thought was that she had no interest in poking about the tragic life of this young man to pacify Sonny's paranoia. He was more than welcome to have Spinelli or some other goon run a background check. She told him just that and hung up on him.

As Alexis was still occupied with her nephew, Diane took the opportunity to study Kate, who was looking back at her with eyes that were a curious and compelling mixture of artic and aloofness.

"My relationship with Kurt is an unacceptable discussion topic," she said flatly. "You can inform your client that I would sooner outfit myself in the Jaclyn Smith Collection before I would betray a friendship."

Diane shuddered and nodded. Sonny threw a lot of business, and thus cash, her way, but she valued her friendship with Kate more than she did Sonny's laundered money. She could have her choice of high-profile clients in this town, and the fact that she was Sonny's lawyer hindered that recruitment. No one, not even other criminals, wanted to be construed as in any way associated with Sonny Corinthos.

Neither noticed that, by this time, Alexis had hung up and joined their conversation.

"I think my nephew is in love with your friend, Kate."

Kate arched a brow. "Then Nikolas has truly exquisite taste, despite what the decor of Wyndemere would suggest." Her gaze cooled. "However, I would strongly suggest, Alexis, you inform Prince Cassadine that, should he do anything to hurt Kurt, he will be dealing with me in ways he couldn't even conceive. Trust me when I tell you he will not enjoy it."

Diane almost climaxed.

Alexis wondered why everyone she knew scared the shit out of her.

Dr. Matt Hunter had left the hospital and stopped to check on his brother, Dr. Patrick Drake, and his niece, Emma Scorpio-Drake.

Emma was sadly asleep and would thus be deprived of her Uncle Matt's unparalleled ability to read a bedtime story. Instead, he was confronted with an almost manic half-brother who was going on and on about the sudden appearance of his heretofore unknown brother-in-law.

Matt was certainly intrigued, not the least of which was because he had actually read Kurt Hummel's resume when it was posted on the employee listserv in preparation of the new doctor's arrival. He was somewhat annoyed that General Hospital had procured yet another superstar physician after Patrick and himself, particularly one who was younger than both of them. He was only partially relieved when he learned Dr. Kurt was gay.

He was also disconcerted, and frankly amused, by his brother's obvious infatuation with Dr. Kurt. Patrick, for whatever strange and hilarious reason, had decided he was in competition with Nikolas Cassadine for Dr. Kurt's affections. Matt well knew his brother was straight, but Patrick was a peacock who strutted about and very much enjoyed the effect he had on members of both sexes. It thrilled him to no end that even other dudes wanted him.

Matt could understand; he was, after all, the same way. Therefore, he was quite looking forward to meeting Dr. Kurt and seeing how far he could outflirt his brother. Of course he knew that Patrick's
infatuation was fueled by his terrible desperation at holding on to any piece of Robin he could find, but his own interest was decidedly more...carnal.

His flirtations with Maxie Jones and Elizabeth Webber had gone nowhere and he was unbelievably horny. If Dr. Kurt was half as cute as he was smart, perhaps it was time to switch back to guys for a while.
A reader asked who I envision as portraying Maxie in this story. Truthfully, my favorite Maxie was Robyn Richards and I think GH should have stuck with her. Kirsten Storms is a good actress, but I preferred her as Belle over on DAYS than as Maxie. Jen Lilley is also a good actress, but she wasn't right for Maxie, particularly when Maxie lost Robin. She did the scenes well, but it wasn't the same. I believe Storms is most identified with Maxie now, and it's her I see as Maxie here.

Also, say hello to Backbone!Elizabeth. She's going to become a permanent fixture. To reiterate, I am NOT a fan of Sam McCall. If you are and you continue to read this story, know what to expect.

Monica entered the dining room of the Quartermaine mansion - her mansion; thank you, Alan - and heaved a sigh of relief that she was the first one down. If her luck could only hold for just a few precious moments longer, she could grab a coffee, a croissant, and put off dealing with Edward and Tracy for yet another day.

"Monica!"

Hope.

Dashed.

Monica rolled her eyes and released another sigh, this one more gentle and filled with resignation. She turned toward the voice and gave its bearer a withering glare. "What is it, Tracy? Something?"

Tracy paused. Her sister-in-law wasn't normally this irascible so early in the morning. Perhaps Father had been giving her lessons. Or maybe it was because Monica's sole remaining child was lying in a coma. Tracy was grateful she'd had the foresight to have a spare son just in case. Not that she knew where Dillon was or what he was doing, but she knew he was out there somewhere in the world, most likely bringing shame upon the Quartermaine name.

Tracy barreled forward. "Monica, what is this nonsense about Anna Devane having another child she can't remember? I mean, I know she's British and they're all fairly hands-off with childrearing, but you'd think she'd recall the labor pains, if nothing else."

Monica, though she had been curt with Anna the day previous, felt badly for the woman, especially as Anna had just lost Robin. She found Tracy's idle gossip and pathetic attempt at wit to be noxious.

"Oh, Tracy, do shut up. You speak in stupidities and it's far too early in the morning for me to entertain your nonsense." She grinned. "By the way, if you can tell me your sons' birthdays, I'll consider your criticism of Anna's mothering abilities to be valid."

Tracy glared but said nothing.

Monica smirked and returned to her orange juice before swiping a croissant, wrapping it in a cloth
napkin, and shoving it in her pocket. Next was coffee, something which she desperately thought should be available as an IV infusion. Luckily, Alice had placed a stainless steel mug beside the pot and Monica poured herself enough to get her to the hospital.

Tracy plopped down in a chair and began picking at a fruit plate. "Word has it that your son-in-law has the hots for the newest Scorpio," she said loftily.

Monica narrowed her eyes, slowly set down the mug, and turned toward her most hated relation. And damn Luke and his big mouth, she thought, knowing her brother-in-law must have spilled the beans. She suppressed a sigh. It had been obvious yesterday to anyone that knew Nikolas that he had been a little too excited to see Kurt.

"First of all, Kurt is Anna's son, not Robert's. Second, Kurt and Nikolas have known each other since they were children. What those feelings might now entail is not my business, and it certainly isn't yours."

"Emily..."

"Is dead, Tracy!" Monica roared. "I don't need you to tell me about my daughter, her husband, or their marriage. Nikolas has mourned her for three years. He needs to move on with his life. His desperation at holding on to her memory isn't healthy and was literally killing him!"

Honestly, she had no problem with Nikolas finding love again, regardless of whether it was with a man or woman. She knew how much he had sincerely loved her daughter, and though his marriages to Emily had often been more fraught with anguish than not, she would never say that they hadn't been soul mates.

"Maybe you should take your own advice," Tracy said quietly.

Monica frowned. "What?"

"Alan wouldn't want to see you like this, either," Tracy said, her voice remaining soft. "He's been gone for years, Monica, and all you do is work. You get up, go to work, come home with work, and then start all over again the next day."

Monica faltered, blindsided, as she always was whenever Tracy exhibited any true sense of caring for anyone but herself. "Being chief of staff..." she began, before trailing off and shaking her head in frustration. "I'm not ready," she said frankly. She sighed. "I don't know if I ever will be."

"I hate Anna Devane," Tracy announced, apropos of nothing.

Monica blinked owlishly. "Well, hate does seem to be your default state of mind."

Tracy ignored her. "She gets to do it over again. No matter how it happened or what will come of it, she gets another chance to be a mother, to do things right this time."

Monica hesitated. Part of her wanted to say that it was probably too late for Anna to repair the damage to the relationship with her son, but another part, that which was the mother, understood Tracy's point.

She sat down. "I understand. I've lost three of my four children, Tracy. Dawn, A.J., and Emily died by violence, and Jason..."

Tracy winced. It wasn't too often she considered the fact three of this woman's children had been murdered and that her fourth was a murderer. Christ, how the hell did Monica get out of bed every
"Has a baby on the way," Tracy finished.

Monica nodded and looked out the window.

"What do you really think about his marriage to Sam?" Tracy suddenly demanded.

Monica exhaled. "That it was too quick. That it probably won't last." She diffidently shrugged a shoulder. "That he'll never love any woman the way he loved Robin or the way he continues to love Elizabeth."

"Are you thinking about Jake?" Tracy asked gently.

Monica flinched. "I want to hate Elizabeth for that," she said honestly, "but I can't. She did what she thought was best to keep her children safe. She placed their needs above her love for Jason, and though I despair the outcome, I admire her self-sacrifice."

"She still should have told you Jake was your grandson."

Monica shrugged. "That's what I thought, too, at first, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that, regardless of the circumstances, it should have come from Jason. Elizabeth doesn't owe me anything, and after watching how this family used Michael as a yo-yo I can't blame her for not wanting to put her son through the same thing."

Tracy grimaced but let it go. She knew when not to press a point. Besides, blaming Elizabeth solved nothing and the woman had lost her child. "Any progress on the driver?"

Monica shook her head. "I know that Mac has put pressure on the mayor to keep Jake's case active and that he's run down every possible lead, but outside of a confession, a witness coming forward, or some unlikely surveillance tape, there's nothing."

"Perhaps we should offer a reward."

Monica cocked her head. "That's ... an intriguing idea. I'll run it by Jason when he wakes up and see what he thinks."

Just as she was about to get up and head to the hospital, Edward, the Quartermaine patriarch, charged into the room, sat down, and grunted.

"Monica," he barked, "why didn't you alert me to the fact that you hired an ELQ stockholder?"

"Because I had no idea I had. Who is this person?"

Edward soured. "A Dr. Kurt Hummel. He owns, or rather inherited, a two percent share in the company from his grandmother."

Monica nodded. "Katrine Valois. I had no idea they owned stock."

Tracy's eyes bugged out. "He's a Valois?"

Monica decided to lay aside the puzzling relationship between Kurt and the Valois woman, who might very well turn out to be unrelated to him. "Dr. Hummel is the Duke of Aquitaine."

Tracy stared.
Monica turned to Edward. "He's also Anna Devane's son."

Edward's mouth fell open.

Monica then told both of them what she knew about Kurt, including how some of his life had followed a course parallel to that of his recently departed sister. Edward, who had always been extremely fond of Robin, turned somewhat misty.

Monica stood and grabbed her mug. "I'd watch your step, Edward. If you irritate Dr. Hummel, he might just sell his stock to one of his two best friends."

"And who would they be?" Edward demanded.

She smiled. "Well, the first is Nikolas. Given that he controls Emily's shares, I doubt you'd want him getting his hands on even more. Oh, and a word to the wise: Helena Cassadine is apparently a fan of Dr. Hummel."

He shuddered. "And the other?"

Her smile turned fierce. "Carly," she drawled as she sailed out of the room, cackling.

She smirked when she heard Tracy swear under her breath while Edward mumbled about needing his pills.

Carly was approaching one of the back entrances to the hospital according to the directions Elizabeth had texted her that morning. She raised a brow when she found one of the plastic bags the hospital used to stow patients' belongings, exactly where Elizabeth said it would be. Bending down and picking it up, Carly smiled when she saw a pair of scrubs just her size.

She headed to the nearest doctors' lounge, grinning all the while. Elizabeth was turning out to be pretty awesome. She regretted it had taken her so long to get her head out of her ass where the other woman was concerned. Seriously, she had wasted so much time! When she thought about her schemes the past few years, she realized it would have really helped had she a reliable partner. Elizabeth was nothing if not reliable.

And sneaky.

*Sneaky* was a trait Carly never before would have associated with Elizabeth, but, there it was. Elizabeth had texted her this morning with the news that Jason was due to wake any moment. He had woken from the coma sometime in the middle of the night and had settled into normal sleep. After checking his chart when she first started her shift, Elizabeth had immediately contacted Carly with a plan.

Carly quickly changed into the scrubs, ducked into an elevator, and made her way to Jason's floor. Upon arrival, she carefully crept out and looked toward the nurses' station where she saw Elizabeth arguing with Sam.

Carly rolled her eyes at Sam's predictable and lame attacks upon Elizabeth's person. Elizabeth looked equally bored.

Elizabeth stared at Sam as the woman heaped her usual scorn upon her. Her only concession to Carly's presence was an arched brow and a slight tilt of the head.

Carly was just about to head down the hall to Jason's room when Elizabeth decided she'd finally
had enough of Samantha McCall.

"Sam, I don't know how much clearer I can be. Your opinion of me, and of everything else, is completely irrelevant. Trust me when I tell you that when I leave this hospital, I don't give you a second thought. You're simply not important enough for me to consider."

Sam smirked. "You can deny it all you want, Elizabeth, but we both know how much you hate me for marrying Jason."

Carly leaned forward. This should prove interesting.

Elizabeth scoffed. "Oh, please, Sam, I don't hate you. Hate requires a certain level of commitment and interest which I would never expend on someone like you. At most, I'm indifferent to the fact that you draw breath. I could also care less about your relationship with Jason. You're the only one who's bothered by my past with him and we both know the reason you are is because I had him first and he will always feel more for me than he does for you."

Carly's eyes widened and it was all she could do not to pump her fist in victory.

Yes! Elizabeth Webber had just sunk that bitch's battleship!

"That's not true!" Sam screeched.

Elizabeth shrugged. "Sure it is. Everyone knows that Jason will always love me. He will always love Robin. He may even love you," she said, pursing her lips and using air quotes, "but we both know he'll never put you first. In fact, I'd wager that Spinelli has a stronger hold on Jason's heart than you ever will. You're just an incubator with a truly awesome boob job."

Carly had to bite her lips to keep from roaring with laughter. Elizabeth was being so nonchalant about all of this, as if she really could've cared less about Sam creating a scene. The fact that Elizabeth was right about everything she had just said was beside the point.

"When I have our baby..." Sam began.

"He'll put the baby first," Elizabeth interrupting, nodding, "as he should, but the same doesn't hold true for you. Face it, Sam: he settled. You act like you're the first person to give Jason a child. Carly gave him Michael and I gave him Jake. You're nothing special."

"Michael isn't his son," Sam growled.

"Jason raised Michael from when he was a newborn through the first year of his life," Elizabeth countered. "They might not be biologically father and son, but they still possess a biological connection." She leaned forward and smiled. "If it came down to a decision between you and Michael, who do you think Jason would choose?"

Backed into a corner and not wanting to admit what both she and Elizabeth knew to be true, Sam opted for prevarication. "At least I'll be a good mother. Michael barely tolerates Carly and it won't be long before Morgan and Josslyn try to escape her clutches, as well." She snorted. "As for you, you're such a great mother that you let your kid get run down right in front of your house."

Carly's mouth fell open in outrage. "You fucking bitch," she hissed.

Elizabeth stiffened. "A truly pathetic retort from a former carnival ride who came to town to scam money from men, got knocked up, didn't know who the father was, and threatened an abortion
until she was paid off."

She shook her head. "I'm no saint and I'm the first to admit it, but at least I'm not a hypocritical liar who's so terrified her husband will leave her that I have to micromanage everything about his life, particularly who his friends can be. You positively reek of insecurity. It's nauseating."

Sam rolled her eyes. "Lucky did leave you."

"Incorrect," Elizabeth shot back, "as you very well know." She grinned. "Tell me, Sam, when you were with Lucky, with whom was he more concerned: you or me? We both know the answer, just as we both know my connection with Jason will never be dimmed, regardless of to whom he's married. How does it feel to come in second to me every single time? Like I said, you'll never be first. You're not even the first runner-up."

"Jason doesn't want you!" Sam spat.

Elizabeth rolled her eyes. "I couldn't care less. I haven't been interested in Jason romantically for years, Sam. The reason he and I aren't together is because I didn't want it."

"Who do you're thinking you're fooling, Elizabeth? Everyone knows ..." Sam began ranting and raving about Jason's fidelity and loyalty, which was now solely focused on her.

Elizabeth stared into space and paid no attention, finally holding out her hand, cupped toward the ceiling.

"What are you doing?" Sam demanded.

"I was waiting to see if a fuck might descend from the heavens and fall into my hand so that I could give it to you." She looked around quizzically and finally shrugged. "Too bad. No fucks to give."

With that, Elizabeth turned her back on Sam and began paging through her paperwork, thinking that Carly might be a bad influence on her. She was kind of digging it.

Sam's mouth fell open in fury.

Carly had to sprint down the hall before she began screaming with glee and gave herself away.

Anna knew she was pushing her luck, following Kurt to the airport as he went to meet Holly's plane.

Technically, it was Kurt's plane.

She still hadn't managed to wrap her head around how much money Kurt possessed. She had tried and tried, combing through her mind for any reference made to Katrine Valois, but had come up empty. Who was this woman? Why had she taken Kurt in and left him all of that money?

She couldn't help but think that Mac was right and her sister Alex had something to do with this. Alex had been part of Europe's glitterati even before marrying Count Dimitri Marick, and Katrine Valois was just the type of person with whom Alex would have associated. It was more than possible that Alex had learned her sister had another child and sought to make provisions for him until Anna remembered he existed.

But why would the Valois woman have gone along with it? Had she been blackmailed? Coerced? Or had she merely been the philanthropist her reputation suggested?
Still, there was a huge gulf between taking in an orphaned child on the cusp of his majority and leaving him billions of dollars. Further, by all accounts, Katrine had been a vital presence in Kurt's life long before Burt died.

She shook her head in frustration. She would have to puzzle over it later and interrogate her sister at the earliest opportunity. She found it quite telling, however, that Alex was dodging her calls.

She also had the sense - though she could never prove it - that her son knew she was tailing him. Kurt didn't even bother to have his driver attempt to lose her, so he most likely didn't care that she was surveilling him. Obviously he had expected her to learn of his relationship to Holly and that she was on her way to Port Charles.

Mac and Robert's words from the previous night began echoing in her mind. Perhaps Kurt truly did have an agenda in Port Charles, and while she would never believe that he had suspected his mother was alive and it was highly probable he was directed here, he had business in this town outside of his job at General Hospital.

She wondered what it was. She was even more nervous about finding out.

Half an hour later, Anna stood three terminals down from where Kurt was waiting for Holly. The airport was sufficiently populated that she didn't look too conspicuous by hanging around.

She still didn't like that Holly was coming to Port Charles, and she absolutely despised that the woman was so close to her son, but had learned a while ago to pick and choose her battles. The bottom line was that Holly was important to Kurt, and if she wanted to reestablish a relationship with her son, she was going to have to accept the fact that he was an adult who made his own choices and had his own relationships.

She watched with interest as the arrival doors opened and Holly burst forward through them. To put it kindly, the woman looked like hell. She looked wrecked with grief and anger and pain.

Admittedly, this was a surprise. Anna could say a lot about Holly, and certainly had over the years, but never could she deny that Holly was an incomparably beautiful woman. She was the living embodiment of the English Rose paradigm and Anna had never seen Holly look so...unlike herself.

Anna knew that she herself was considered beautiful, but hers was a more earthy, more sensual, beauty. Holly was classically beautiful.

Holly also looked much softer and more gentle than she could remember, and she felt rather stupid for not realizing that, for their last few encounters, Holly was being impersonated. They had never been friends, but Anna was arguably one of the few people who knew Holly well. Even from this distance, it was obvious that while their appearances were eerily similar, Holly and Paloma were in no way identical.

She watched with envy as Holly flung out her arms and Kurt dove into them. Her lip trembled as she watched Holly soothe him, smoothing his hair and whispering words into his ear. She felt tears gather in her eyes as Kurt buried his face in the woman's neck and appeared to collapse with the weight of what had been piled on him the past two days.

Holly just held him and Anna could see the strength he drew from her. She knew he would never welcome that from her, not yet, and perhaps not for a long while.

But she would fight for him. She wouldn't fight Holly, but she would fight for her son. She could only hope Holly wouldn't interfere.
For the purposes of this story, the children of Carly and Alexis will not be SORASed as they were on the show; they will remain children. There's no particular reason for this other than I'm simply uninterested in writing them. Morgan, Josslyn, Kristina, and Molly might make appearances, but won't impact the plot.

Carly sat back in her chair and waited patiently as Jason absorbed and processed what she had just imparted. She knew many people considered Jason's brain damage to be intellectually impairing, but that couldn't have been farther from the truth. His accident might have caused radical personality changes, but the intelligence that had belonged to Jason Quartermaine, the intelligence which had once zealously pursued medicine, now belonged to Jason Morgan.

Jason was very intelligent, but he was also rational, logical, and extremely focused. He might not have always understood the punch line of a joke or the more subtle cues of human behavior, but once given a task, Jason would complete it quickly, efficiently, and ruthlessly. That's what made him so skilled an enforcer. It's why Spinelli called him Stone Cold.

She had known Jason for almost twenty years, and where he was logical, she was intuitive. Thus she was able to read the play of emotions now shifting across his face. He was devastated by Robin's death, she realized. Her loss had resulted in an almost ruination of who he was as a person.

When Carly thought about it, what she had witnessed and had been told, it was Robin who had been his anchor after the accident.


In Jason's singularly complex simplistic mind, Robin was the ideal of everything good and true. She had been the pinnacle of humanity in his eyes. Their relationship hadn't worked not because they hadn't desperately loved each other, but because Jason never believed himself good enough for her.

In some ways, that was true. Robin had been had been extremely moral and very self-righteous. She'd always had a clear sense of her own morality. For Robin, there had been Good and there had been Evil; there was black and there was white, and nothing and no one could make her see the shades of gray in which most other people resided.

Jason had done things, mostly to help Sonny and Carly, that Robin simply couldn't accept, and while she maintained a tentative relationship with Sonny due to Stone, she had never wanted Carly in her life.

Robin had been very compassionate and forgiving, but she had also been vindictive. Carly knew there was no way she could have had the fledgling friendship with Robin that she was beginning to enjoy with Elizabeth. Elizabeth was also moral, but she was more flexible. She wanted people to act humanely and with kindness. She expected perfection of no one but herself and, when she couldn't meet it, she punished herself more harshly than anyone else ever could.
In Carly's opinion, Elizabeth would do better to adopt some of Robin's more negative attributes, mainly the one which refused to allow anyone to walk all over her. Robin might have appeared a milquetoast, but the woman had had a backbone of steel. Highly intelligent and very shrewd, it had been all but impossible to pull the wool over Robin's eyes. If anyone ever managed to do so, it never lasted long. Once burned, Robin would cut you from her life like a balloon.

Her death would change Jason on a fundamental level. For so long, he had used Robin as his moral compass. Though his morality was obscenely flexible given his profession, there were lines even Jason would not cross. Those lines existed in part due to his own internal sense of right and wrong, but were mainly the legacy of Robin.

Carly also saw the tremendous guilt Jason was experiencing. She had debated telling him why Robin had run back into that laboratory, but in the end she knew she couldn't hide the fact Robin had done so to save his life. If she hadn't, he would've learned it from someone else, probably a spiteful Patrick, and then she would have been just one person lying to him. Jason was almost as intransigent as Robin when it came to lying.

She saw the anger in his eyes after she had told him - in explicit detail - that Sam had barred her from his room so that she couldn't tell him these things. She told him exactly what she had witnessed between Elizabeth and Sam before entering his room.

At that point, Carly underwent a heretofore unknown experience: a need to defend Elizabeth Webber. So she did just that.

She lambasted Jason for marrying Sam after everything that bitch had put Elizabeth through, particularly Jake's kidnapping and that appalling scene in the park. What had he been thinking by marrying her, she demanded. How could he put aside everything that woman had done to the mother of his child, she wanted to know. Did he really expect her to believe that he was truly in love with Sam McCall, because, sorry, Brain Damage Boy, no dice.

Jason stared at her in befuddlement. "When have you ever been on Elizabeth's side?"

"Since she became my best friend."

His bewildered stare intensified. "Hell froze over? How long was I in that coma?"

This was the perfect segue to introduce the concept of Kurt Hummel. She watched something light his eyes. She wasn't sure what it was; perhaps hope, or longing, or a second chance. Whatever it was, Jason now understood that a part of Robin continued in her brother, a brother he very much wanted to meet.

Well, Carly wasn't that interested in sharing her new best friend, so she explained what she knew about Kurt and his life, including his education, occupation, and his friendship with Nikolas and Brenda. The idea behind this was to cause Jason to question Kurt's sanity. He had never cared that much for Nikolas, only putting up with him for the sake of his sister Emily. Brenda had always been a thorn in his side, placed there by Sonny, and while he would probably die to protect her, he wasn't that fond of her.

She also wondered what Jason thought of gay people, especially the fact that Robin's brother was gay. Jason wasn't a prejudiced person; he didn't even understand the concept. He had no hangups about race or gender or religion. He truly believed all people were equal and should be judged on their actions. That said, she didn't think he actually knew a gay person. He knew of her brother Lucas, but had never known him.
"Why would you ask me that, Carly?" he questioned. "It's none of my business who someone sleeps with."

She shook her head and sighed. Sexuality was simply too complex a notion for Jason to understand if he thought being gay was limited to sleeping with those of the same sex.

"Kurt's a doctor," Jason said. "He's Robin's brother and Anna's son. He's friends with you and Nikolas and Brenda. He has a lot of money. He went to some great schools. He's also gay. It's only one part of who he is. It doesn't define him. Why are you defining him according the fact that he likes guys?"

She cocked her head and stared.

Maybe she was wrong. Maybe Jason understood a lot more than that for which she gave him credit. Maybe he understood things better than she did.

Maybe being simple was better, and a lot easier, than so-called non-brain damaged people would ever know.

Holly collapsed on the lounge in Kurt's penthouse hotel room, waiting until the porters deposited her luggage and departed before delving into real conversation. As Kurt called down to Room Service and asked for a proper English tea, Holly looked at her surroundings and admired how well appointed the Metro Court was.

Kurt had initially offered to reserve the other penthouse suite in her name and pay for her stay, but she had balked at the gesture. She had money, enough to keep her comfortable for the foreseeable future, and she wasn't about to take advantage of him. She knew that he had more money than he could possibly spend in several lifetimes, but he would not be spending it on her. She also knew that money was one of the few things he felt he could provide after their years of friendship, never realizing how much she loved him, and that she did because of the person he was, not what was in his wallet.

They settled on her staying in the third bedroom of his suite. He wanted her close and she wasn't going to quibble about money. She'd stay in the room but pay for her own meals and other expenses. The fact that the second bedroom housed his wardrobe was of no surprise to her.

She loved Kurt beyond reason, considered him all but her own son, but he was one of the most frustrating people she had ever known. He was confident in all areas of his life except when it came to how people he loved could love him in return. She didn't understand that behavior and wondered what was responsible for it. From everything he had told her about his parents, he hadn't just been loved, but adored.

No, this upsetting peccadillo had sprung from something else. She didn't believe it was the rape, because Kurt had admitted he had trust and insecurity issues long before it occurred. She was of the opinion that his hometown in Ohio - more specifically, the way he had been almost universally shunned there - was behind this.

Names he had most likely forgotten he had ever mentioned flitted through her brain: Finn; Mercedes; Sam.

She didn't know these people, knew nothing of consequence about them, not even their last names, but she would've liked to have met them. If only for a few minutes.

She wondered when or if Kurt would ever confront her about the murder of Garrett Rothschild. If
he did, she would be honest. Yes, she had killed his rapist. She didn't regret it, never would, and would do it again without question.

She smirked with cold satisfaction as she remember a blubbering Rothschild pleading for his pathetic life. Watching said life dim from his eyes had been a singular pleasure.

Once they were finally alone, Holly took the initiative.

"What is that you so desperately don't want to tell me?" she asked with a casual tone.

He hesitated before sitting down primly beside her. He gathered a breath and stared at the coffee table before them. "There is...information I have discovered since arriving in Port Charles that pertains to me personally."

She arched a brow. "Well, I assume that you've been reunited with Brenda and Nikolas, so it can't be that." She paused. "I'm sure your encounter with Helena was unsettling, but you know how to deal with her and you're one of the few who are unafraid of her."

She grimaced. "I doubt it's about Paloma."

He grinned darkly and turned to face her. "It may please you to know that your sister is now enjoying Santana's hospitality."

Holly blinked. She had met Santana Lopez only a few times but found her to be a fearsome woman - and Holly Sutton was not one who scared easily. She knew that her sister had somehow offended Santana in a grievous manner, but she had never discovered said offense. Of course, neither had she probed too closely.

She shook her head. How Paloma had turned from being a heroic revolutionary to a grifting, manipulative bitch was beyond her, and, frankly, she didn't care to know the reasons.

She shrugged. "Paloma made her own bed."

Kurt nodded absently.

Holly cleared her throat. "Your diversionary tactics have been noted and disregarded. Please don't act as if I don't know you, Kurt. What is going on?"

"I'm glad you're here," he whispered, hands trembling as they reached out for her own. "I need you so badly right now, Holly."

"Sweetheart, tell me what's happened!" she pleaded.

He bit his lip and gave her the saddest smile she had ever seen. "I guess we're more family than we ever realized."

"What does that mean?"

"You told me that I was the son you never had."

She nodded, impatient for him to get to the point.

"And that Robin was the daughter you never had."

She nodded, this time more carefully. She had no idea what he was about to say, but she could sense its already tremendous impact. She held her breath.
"Robin was my sister, Holly."

Her eyes searched his for an indeterminable amount of time. He was *serious*. His words were not euphemistic. This was not information in his possession prior to arriving in Port Charles, else he would have told her.

Dear god.

Robin Scorpio, the girl she had helped raise, whom she had loved as though she had birthed her, had been the sister of the boy before her, her son in everything but name.

"Robert?" she whispered.

He closed his eyes and shook his head as his tears spilled over. "Anna."

A thousand ideas passed through her thoughts, but she could grasp none of them. This was...this was absolutely surreal. What were the odds that she would have been so close to Anna's children, regarding them as her own?

Kurt drew in a deep, shuddering breath and, with his eyes still closed, explained. "I went to the hospital with Carly so that she could speak with Elizabeth Webber and I could discuss my new position with Monica Quartermaine."

Holly waited for him to continue, saying nothing, just holding his hands. She knew Monica, of course, and while she had heard of Elizabeth Webber and Carly Corinthos, she had never met them. From what Robin had told her, Elizabeth had been one of her best friends while Carly was something akin to an arch rival.

"I t-t-turned around and there she was," he gasped, eyes flying open as he pried his hands from hers. "My mother. My dead mother. She was standing right before me and looking at me as though she had no idea who I was."

He turned back toward her. "She didn't." He shook his head. "Not at first."

Holly knew better than to interrupt, but pieces were starting to fit together and she didn't care for the overall picture. She did not like Anna Devane. She had never liked Anna Devane. They would likely never be friends.


The one good thing Holly could say about Anna with absolutely no qualms was that the woman was a damned good mother. She had loved Robin with her entire heart and soul. If she was truly Kurt's mother, there was no possible way Anna would have been separated from him by choice, let alone allow any child of hers to believe she was dead, not after seeing what that had done to Robin.

No. This reeked of Faison, which meant that bastard was still alive and still a threat.

That was something to be unpacked later, however. Right now, Kurt needed her.

After several cups of tea and long minutes of angry crying, Kurt leaned back against the sofa and sighed. He felt better, lighter, as he always did when he spoke with Holly, who always was able to put things in perspective for him.

"There are good things, too," he said. "Nikolas, Kate, and Brenda are here, and Carly...I've only
ever experienced such an immediate connection once before, but this is nothing like it was with Mercedes. I trust Carly completely, and I know that sounds ridiculous, given how I trust almost no one."

He shifted and turned toward Holly. "But I do her. I trust her with my life, Holly." He shrugged. "I can't explain it."

"You don't have to," she replied. "I've had those connections before. My relationships with Robert and Luke are certainly not what they once were, but I know without a doubt that should I ever truly need the assistance of one or both, they would be at my side without question."

He nodded.

She hesitated and then decided to move in for the kill. "What do you know about Anna? I don't mean what other people have told you. I mean what have you discovered? I'm sure by now you've launched your own investigation."

He grinded his teeth but nodded. "Carly told me what she knew. Patrick tried, but I distracted him. Santana compiled a complete dossier for me which I've perused with great zeal."

"Those are just words," Holly said. "I know her, Kurt. I've known her for the majority of my life."

He nodded. "I know."

"Then do me the courtesy of listening to what I have to say. I'm sure you know that Anna and I are not friends. You can trust that I'll be honest in my assessment."

He nodded again, this time with more caution.

"Summarize what you know."

"Anna Devane is a former secret agent of the World Security Bureau who is now an independent contractor. She was partnered with Robert Scorpio, who she secretly married. She was presumed dead but later surfaced while you were married to Robert, bringing her daughter Robin with her, a child Robert never knew existed."

Holly nodded.

"Anna relocated to Port Charles, eventually becoming the chief of police after Robert's tenure. She and Robert were abducted by a man called Cesar Faison, who held them captive and brainwashed Anna. He rigged a boat explosion and Anna and Robert were presumed dead. Robin was raised by Robert's brother, Mac Scorpio, the current chief of police, and you."

"Anna was discovered alive in Pine Valley, Pennsylvania, where she had been brought by her twin sister, Alexandra, a physician who later married Hungarian count Dimitri Marrick..."

Holly startled. This was the first she had ever heard about a twin sister. Good lord, how many of them were there?

"Robin went to Pine Valley and met with Anna, who was struggling with her memories, most of which had been erased by Faison's efforts and the explosion. Anna finally did remember her life with Robin and they renewed their relationship. Anna remained in Pine Valley for several years, eventually becoming their chief of police, and marrying Dr. David Hayward. They had a child, a daughter Leora, who died in infancy."
Holly's eyes became the size of saucers. Anna had lost another child?

"Anna divorced Hayward and left Pine Valley, becoming a freelance operative. She has often returned to Port Charles to visit with Robin. Those visits had become more frequent since Robin gave birth to Emma."

Emma. Robin had become a mother. Holly wanted nothing more at this point than to disappear into her bedroom and sob for a good number of hours, but she had to make her case now, while Kurt was still vulnerable and open to her words.

"Those are the highlights," she said. "Let me tell you the story."

The jetlag had finally caught up with Holly and, after several hours of conversation - well, Kurt had mostly just listened - she had retired to bed.

And he had listened.

He knew Holly had told him the truth as she believed it. He knew she was no great fan of Anna and had no need to whitewash their relationship. She had presented a fair and balanced picture of the woman she knew.

Kurt now truly believed that someone had taken his mother from him. That person would pay, and pay dearly, but he was not yet ready for his own reunion with Anna. He needed to process these feelings, these emotions that were surfacing which he had believed had been dealt with long ago.

He also wanted to talk to other people about Anna. The first on his list was Mac Scorpio, but that would keep until after Robin's funeral.

However, there was one other person he knew personally who could give him some insight into his mother, a person he hadn't even been aware knew Anna until he'd read Santana's dossier. He trusted her and, though she could be quite like Carly when it came to other women, he believed she would be honest with him once she heard his story.

He checked his watch. Knowing her, she'd still be at work.

He reached for his phone, dialed the number from memory, and waited for the call to go through.

"Good evening," he said. "Kurt Hummel for Erica Kane."

Despite her claims to the contrary, Holly wasn't sleepy.

Instead, she found herself lying in bed, wondering how Anna would react when she discovered who her son really was and why he was in Port Charles.

She had the sense that someone had directed Kurt here, wanted him here for some reason, and the only reason she could suss out was Anna.

Someone was after Anna and was using Kurt to get to her.

Faison? Possibly, though other enemies couldn't be discounted.

It could have been one of Anna's former colleagues, perhaps someone in the WSB. Someone who knew that Kurt, in addition to being a forensic pathologist, was also a GNET agent.
She didn't know what Kurt's assignment in Port Charles was and she would never ask, but she suspected he was here to assassinate someone.
Brotherly Love

Robert entered the kitchen that evening, amused to see Anna attempting to prepare dinner for themselves and Mac. In over thirty years, the woman had never learned to cook. Of course, neither had he, and both of them had passed that trait on to their daughter; though Robin, admittedly, had been able to make some edible foods, mainly things that simply required being heated.

"Shit," Anna muttered, burning her finger on the lip of the frying pan.

Robert snickered.

"Oh, shut up," she halfheartedly snapped. "I know I was better at this when Kurt was a child. He would watch me in the kitchen all the time! I taught him how to cook."

Robert didn't believe that was something about which she should brag.

Anna sighed, shut off the burner, and all but threw the pan toward the back of the range.

He grew concerned by how depressed and unhappy she appeared. "Have you remembered more of your life with him?"

Her back straightened and she was silent for several moments, at last giving a sharp nod. "Yes," she said quietly. "I remember my wedding and Kurt's birth. I remember teaching him to cook. I remember he was playing the piano at three years old and had an incredible singing voice. I remember he was so intelligent and mature for his age, far ahead of his peers. He was precocious to the point of being an adult."

Robert walked in and sat at the table. "Sounds like someone else we know." He grimaced. "Knew."

She turned and regarded him. "Yes," she said. "He was much like Robin then." She paused. "He's much like her now." She shook her head. "Robin would have adored him. She had always wanted a sibling."

Robert knew just how true that was, that Robin had always felt alone and had wanted to give Emma a little brother or sister so that her daughter wouldn't know her mother's loneliness.

"I, uh, followed him today," she admitted. "When he went to the airport to pick up Holly."

He raised a brow. "Did you discover anything?"

She set her jaw. "That she loves him as only a mother can and that he is just as fiercely devoted to her. I know that I will have to be careful of my interactions with her. I know I will have to be cautious of my words about her when in Kurt's presence."

She crossed to the table and sat down. "I'm fairly certain she killed his rapist."

Robert was absolutely floored by that remark and the casualness with which it was delivered. "Holly isn't a killer, Anna. I'm sure she loves Kurt, but to go that far?" He shook his head. "None of you have ever really understood Holly. She may be a schemer, but she's soft-hearted."

Anna scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous, Robert. If anyone misunderstands that woman, it's you. I know you feel guilty for the demise of your relationship with her, but Holly Sutton is not and never has been a milquetoast. She can be absolutely vicious with her words. What makes you think she's any
less qualified with a knife or a gun?

"She may have the face of an angel, but her father was a scam artist. She was involved with Luke and then you. She went off to help her sister fight a war. I don't know how the hell they went from sisters-in-arms to Paloma being a con artist and all-around bitch, but I think it's safe to say that if Holly ever meets her sister again, only one will be walking away under her own power." She shrugged. "My money's on Holly."

He regarded her with suspicion and didn't believe her theories regarding Holly. "Since when are you on her side?"

"It isn't a question of sides, but of character. Holly and I have never been, and most likely never will be, friends, but my daughter loved her. My son loves her. She was there for him when I wasn't. She was Kurt's Mac. That means something to me."

He dropped his head. "I think I hurt his feelings last night."

"You did," she said baldly. "He will forgive you because that's what he does. He has far more important things on his mind, anyway."

"I should have come when Georgie died," he whispered. "I didn't think...I didn't understand...until now what he was going through." He shook his head and looked away, ashamed. "I'm a shit brother."

She shrugged. "So stop being one."

He gave her a sour look. "Any word from your twin?"

She scowled. "Alex is dodging my calls and so is her husband, which makes me think Mac was right: Alex is somehow involved in this Valois scenario."

Robert said nothing because he couldn't imagine what Alexandra Marick's motivations were for keeping her sister and nephew apart. All he knew was that if Alex didn't get in contact soon, Anna would go looking for her. The results would not be pretty.

Lulu Spencer was doing her best to man both assistant desks at Crimson magazine. She completely understood Maxie taking bereavement leave, but it had come at the worst possible time. Spring Fashion Week was barreling toward them at an astonishing rate and she simply wasn't able to keep up with all of her own work, let alone trying to cover Maxie's assignments.

Until today, she hadn't realized how much work Maxie actually did. How the hell did the girl cope when Lulu called out as often as she did?

She winced. Yeah, that was kind of obnoxious. She definitely owed Maxie a muffin basket.

She exhaled. Okay, time to suck it up and deal. She could do this. She would do this. Otherwise Kate would can her ass.

She groaned and dropped her head on her desk when the elevator doors dinged.

As the sound of footsteps approached, Lulu raised her head, plastered a condescending smile on her face, and turned around. "Can I help you?" she droned, in what was perhaps the most unhelpful voice ever.
The man before her arched a brow.

*Man* somehow seemed an inefficient adjective for the person at whom she was now looking. This guy, whoever he was, was *gorgeous*. He must have been a model, if the cheekbones and fabulous outfit were anything to go by.

"Good afternoon," he said, voice high and musical. "I would like to speak with Kate Howard, please."

Lulu immediately went on autopilot, her mind accessing the files Kate had drilled into her head when people without appointments came calling.

"I'm very sorry," she said, her tone verging on a sneer, "but Ms. Howard has neither the time nor inclination to accommodate those without an appointment, especially egotistical models who have an exaggerated idea of their own importance."

Kurt surprised her by bursting out in laughter. "No doubt a direct quote from the estimable Ms. Howard herself." He shook his head in apparent fondness. "Please let her know Kurt Hummel would like to speak with her."

Lulu looked askance at him. "Am I supposed to recognize your name? Is Kate?" She shook her head. "I don't think so."

She winced when his eyes darkened.

"Listen up and listen well, princess, because I don't repeat myself. It's quite obvious from your tragic outfit and ridiculous hair that the only one who doesn't belong here is you. I can't possibly fathom what Kate was thinking of when she hired you, but either she undoubtedly owed someone a favor or had been sentenced to community service."

Lulu's mouth fell open. "You can't talk to me that way!" she screeched.

He shrugged. "I just did." He moved closer and studied her with a relentless scrutiny. "You certainly are your father's daughter, but you have infinite miles to go before you're in your cousin's league. It's a very good thing Carly is related to you, otherwise she would eat you alive."

Her brow furrowed. "You know Carly?"

"She's my best friend."

Lulu stared. *What?* Since when did Carly have *any* friends?

"And I have many reservations about that."

Kurt and Lulu turned toward Kate Howard, the former beaming and the latter almost screaming.

"Lulu, I suggest you answer the many phone lines that are currently ringing and worry less about my personal friends." She scowled. "Even if they're also friends with Carly." She turned back to Kurt. "In my office, young man. Now."

Kurt merely smiled in reply and bounced on the balls of his feet before crossing the threshold. He turned and called out over his shoulder. "Tell Nikki I'll call him later. Thanks, Lulu!"

Kate rolled her eyes, stomped in after him, and slammed her door shut.

Lulu stared. *Nikki?*
Who the hell was...

*Nikolas?*

Her *brother* Nikolas?

She dimly recalled addressing him in the same manner when she was very young, but as she had grown up, as she had watched Nikolas interact with their family and his friends and his business partners, she had stopped seeing him as *Nikki* and he had instead become *Nikolas*.

She frowned. Now that she thought about it, she missed *Nikki*. When she was a child she had arguably been closer to Nikolas than to Lucky. Once she had become a teenager, however, she had become obsessed with all things Spencer. Admittedly, she'd let her relationship with her elder brother suffer. Well, until she needed something and would run to him crying and he would try to solve all her problems because he loved her.

So who was this guy? How did he know her brother and her cousin? Apparently her father, too. Further, and most incredibly, he was *personal friends* with Kate Howard.

*Kurt Hummel.*

Lulu ignored the ringing phones, the chirping faxes, and her cooling latte, and navigated toward Google. It would save her, as it had so many times before.

Meanwhile, her brothers were having yet another of their awkward conversations.

Neither was exactly sure when their relationship had become so awkward, but it had and it upset them both. Being who they were, however, they usually avoided the topic rather than addressing it. That was perhaps one of the greatest things they missed about having their mother with them. Laura was all but a paragon of virtue, but she could also be a hardass. She believed in addressing things directly, conversing openly, and being honest about her feelings.

Apparently it was a lesson they both still needed to learn.

"When did this happen to us?" Lucky wondered, before cringing after realizing he had posed the question aloud.

Nikolas sighed. "I don't know," he said, not needing clarification, "but I hate it."

"Me too," Lucky softly agreed. "This isn't us."

"Not for a long time. I miss how we used to be. I...I miss you."

Lucky blushed lightly. "I miss you, too. I don't know when it was that we began depending on Lulu to hold us together."

Nikolas shrugged. "Because she helped bring us together. After Laura..."

Lucky grimaced. "Please call her Mom."

Nikolas startled. "What?"

"You called her Laura. I like it better when you call her Mom."

Nikolas blinked. "I didn't even realize...when did that happen?" He shook his head. "In my mind, I
always think of her as Mom. I don't know why I called her Laura." He screwed up his face in confusion. "Didn't I used to call her Mom?"

Lucky shrugged. "Infrequently, but not so much after she got sick."

Nikolas flushed. "I'm sorry. It's not a Cassadine versus Spencer thing, I promise."

Lucky waved it away. "I know that. It's just...sometimes I think that you wish you hadn't come to Port Charles, that you had never met us."

Nikolas's eyes widened and he moved closer to his brother. "Don't ever think that, Lucky. Other than my son, you and Lulu and M-Mom, you're the best things in my life."

Lucky's eyes searched his for a very long time.

Nikolas's heart broke at his brother's disbelief. "I mean it," he said softly. "I'd have nothing, be nothing, without you."

Lucky blinked away unbidden tears and loudly cleared his throat. "You've lost so much since you came here. I wouldn't blame you for regretting it."

"My family could never be a cause for regret," Nikolas said staunchly. He hesitated. "I know...I know we don't say it often, if at all, but...I l-love you, Lucky. You're my brother, and I'm so damned glad that you are."

Lucky dropped his head and said nothing for a very long time, but he did place a trembling hand on his brother's knee, gasping softly when Nikolas laid his own atop it.

"Wow," he croaked. "We're really turning into girls."

Nikolas laughed. "Yeah, well, we've always been surrounded by some pretty amazing women."


Nikolas gave him the side-eye. Lucky had always been suspicious of his friendship with Elizabeth, so he wondered as to this sudden line of questioning. Still, in the spirit of their fraternal reaffirmation, he decided to play along.

"I visited her last night and she kept Spencer for me." He smiled. "I like the idea of Cameron and Spencer becoming closer."

Lucky winced. He knew he had been pulling away from Cameron since Jake died, and he knew it wasn't fair. He'd have to do something about it. "Me too."

"How are you dealing with Robin's death?"

Lucky exhaled. "Not well. I mean, she wasn't a Musketeer, but..." he trailed off, shaking his head in uncertainty.

"It felt like she was always there," Nikolas finished, causing his brother to nod. "I know what you mean. I feel as though I lost something I never really knew I had."

"I feel so bad for Elizabeth," Lucky whispered. "First Emily, and now Robin?" His eyes widened. "Not that we all didn't lose Emily! Not that you..."
"Lucky, stop," Nikolas interrupted. "You knew Emily longer than any of us. You and she were best friends almost your entire lives. It's okay that you miss her. Your pain isn't secondary to mine."

Lucky drew in several sharp breaths, his tears reasserting themselves. "It feels like one of my limbs has been torn away," he whispered, "but I still feel it. I still feel her here, all around me."

"Does it hurt?" Nikolas quietly asked. 

Lucky shrugged with diffidence. "Sometimes. Not all the time. But it's always...sad. Even when I remember the good things, and there were a lot of them, it's still sad. No one will ever mean to me what Emily did, and I know that she was your wife and Liz's best friend..."

"And that's irrelevant," Nikolas said. "You don't need to be the strong one for us, Lucky. You need to grieve for Emily, too. Like I said, she was in your life longer than Elizabeth and I have been." He paused. "I remember when we thought the cancer would kill her. I remember the look on your face when you went to visit her for the last time. I was...I was really scared you'd do something stupid and I'd lose both of you."

"I felt the same about you," Lucky shot back. 

They both looked away.

"We need dates," Lucky finally said. He raised a brow when Nikolas shrank away from him and he suspected he was about to enjoy a bit of brother torturing, which was exactly what he needed after this unscheduled bout of sentimentality. "Are you seeing someone, Nikolas?" he asked, grinning.

Nikolas flushed. Deeply.

Lucky stared. He'd never seen his brother so...embarrassed? No, that wasn't right. Anxious? Well, Nikolas was usually anxious about a lot of things, but this was more than just nerves. Fear? Was Nikolas scared of something?

"There's someone in whom I'm romantically interested," Nikolas admitted, his back straight as he stared off at nothing in particular.

At this, Lucky raised both brows. He knew when his brother slipped into Prince Mode that something was indeed afoot, something he was reticent to discuss.

"Nikolas," he said sharply, "I hope you're not worried about what I, or anyone else, thinks of you dating. It's been years since Emily...was taken from us. You deserve some happiness. I was disappointed when things between you and Nadine didn't work out, but if you've found a chance with someone else, you should take it! Fuck what anyone else thinks!"

"Even you?" Nikolas whispered.

"What does that mean?" demanded a baffled Lucky. "I just told you I want you to be happy. If there's a woman who's managed to turn your stubborn head..."

His words died as Nikolas became, impossibly, even more distant.

What was the cause of that distance?

"It's a guy," Lucky realized. "Wow."

Nikolas soured.
"I mean, wow. Wow. Wow."

Nikolas set his jaw and scowled, but didn't deny his brother's charge.

"Do I know him?"

Nikolas was silent for a long moment. "No," he finally grunted.

Lucky grinned. "Can I meet him?"

"No!" Nikolas thundered.

"Why not?" his brother whined. Again, realization dawned. "Oh. He doesn't know you like him?"

Nikolas shifted uncomfortably. "I'm not sure."

He was pretty sure Kurt had felt his dick poking into him, and he was fairly certain Kurt had been doing some poking of his own, but there was nothing definitive happening between them. Yet.

"Well," Lucky began, "how long have you known him?"

Nikolas sighed. "About twenty years."

"Damn! And it's taken you this long to make a move?"

Nikolas stared. "You're being very blasé about all of this."

Lucky gave him a sidelong glance. "What I'm about to say never leaves this room. No betrayals. Immunity from prosecution."

Wary but intrigued, Nikolas agreed.

Lucky, forearms on his knees, laced his fingers together and stared down at the floor for several moments. "I had a crush on a guy once," he said quietly. "For a really long time."

To say that Nikolas was absolutely stunned was beyond understatement.

"I'm not gay," Lucky said, "I'm not bisexual. This only happened once and only with one particular person." He finally shook his head. "I get the feeling I'm not the first person you've mentioned this guy to. I'm guessing Elizabeth."

Nikolas nodded. "She pretty much gave me the same speech you did, about how I need to get out there and find some happiness of my own."

"Elizabeth is usually always right about stuff like this. And about everything else."

"Are you mad I spoke with her first?"

"That depends," Lucky said, tilting his head. "Was it because she's your best friend or was it because you were afraid of how I'd react?"

"A little of both," Nikolas admitted.

Lucky sighed. "It hurts that you think so little of me. I'm not that angry teenager anymore. I don't resent you. You told me you love me, Nik. Don't you know how much I love you, too?"

Nikolas turned away.
"Well, I do. I don't say often; not to you, not to anyone. But I love you."

"Why don't you say it?" Nikolas softly asked.

Lucky scoffed. "Okay, first of all, let's not pretend that you're a very verbose person. Second, you like talking about your feelings even less than I do." He paused. "And third, because I've lost almost every person to whom I've said those words. Mom. Emily. Mary Mae. Lila Quartermaine." His cheeks reddened. "Foster." He shook his head. "Damn, I miss that dog."

He stood and crossed to the bar, pouring himself a shot. "I was a shit husband, Nikolas. We all know it. I treated Elizabeth as though I were doing her some big favor by marrying her, when the truth of the matter is that I'm only alive because of her."

"Lucky..."

"It's true. When she was the one needing rescuing, I had no problem being the hero, swooping in to save her, but the day-to-day stuff? The things that really matter?" He shook his head. "I wasn't good at it. Most of the time, she was the one rescuing me, and I resented her for it.

He glared at nothing in particular. "I whored myself out to an underage girl for drugs. To this day, I think Mac hates me, and I can't blame him."

Nikolas held up a hand. "Maxie Jones was no innocent little girl, Lucky. She looked at you, saw a handsome man with integrity, and decided she wanted him for herself, damn his wife. I know she was hurt when she lost her boyfriend, that cop, but that she gave no regard to your marriage as she pursued you was disgusting. Not to mention the grief she still gives Elizabeth. Where that girl gets off, I have no idea. Elizabeth never did anything to her."

Lucky hung his head. He had never held Maxie to be as responsible as he was. In the end, she had been young and vulnerable. It could be argued, quite convincingly, that he had used her just as equally. He'd used her to escape the pain from his surgery, from a marriage he didn't know how to save, and from being Luke and Laura's son to Nikolas Cassadine's brother to Elizabeth Webber's husband, but never simply Lucky Spencer.

"I was always so angry, and too often I took it out on Elizabeth."

"So why did you?"

Lucky appeared startled by the question. "Because I knew she'd let me," he said frankly. "I knew she felt - wrongly - that she owed me for seeing her through the rape. The fact that I took advantage of those feelings is something I will regret for the rest of my life. For more than fifteen years, Elizabeth has held me together. These past few years without her...well, you've seen the mess I've made of my life."

"But it's not just her, is it?"

"No," Lucky said, "but she's most of it. When I came back after Helena brainwashed me, Elizabeth separated from Jason and returned to me. Even though I was pretty much out of my mind at the time, I knew that her feelings had changed, that she was thinking of me more as a perceived duty than a lover. She loved Jason."

"So did you," Nikolas said impulsively, blinking. "Oh, my god."

Lucky drew in a sharp breath.
"Your crush was...Jason?"

Lucky slowly nodded. "Jason - both of them, Morgan and Quartermaine - has always been very charismatic. For some reason, you just want to be around him, even when you know he's doing bad things. I knew what Jason did for Sonny and I knew it was wrong. I knew I was falling into the same trap that Dad once did with Frank Smith, but I didn't care because I was too...enthralled by Jason's company. I wanted to be with him all the time, to do whatever he did."

"That sounds more like hero worship than a crush," Nikolas observed.

Lucky's chuckle was dark and bitter. "Yeah, well, that might have been the case if I hadn't been jacking off to thoughts of him without a shirt on." He spun on his heel to face his brother and began laughing uproariously. "You know what the sickest thing of all is? I still miss him. After everything - after Elizabeth and Jake and Sam, and all the rest of it - it's Jason I miss the most. I miss his friendship. I miss when he trusted me, relied on me, patted me on the head like you would a dog."

He shook his head. "How pathetic is that? I've spent half of my life and ruined most of Elizabeth's by trying to garner Jason's attention." He appeared incredulous at his own words. "I was so jealous when I came back and found them together, and to this day, I don't know of whom I was more jealous: Jason, for taking my place, or Elizabeth, for getting him."

"But you weren't in love with him," Nikolas said.

Lucky shrugged. "I don't know. I honestly don't. What I do know is that the most intense relationship of my life was with Jason Morgan, and it appalls me as much as it thrills me."

He wandered back over to the couch and sat down next to his brother. "The fact that you're into another dude doesn't rattle my cage, Nikolas. I'm sad that you felt you couldn't talk to me about it without Elizabeth's prompting, but I'm glad you told me. For what it's worth, I'm happy for you. I really hope things work out with this guy."

Nikolas began flushing. "He told me something the other night, something I never knew, and now I don't know what to say to him. I don't know how...I don't know how I'm supposed to relate to him now that I know."

Lucky's brow furrowed. "Know what?"

Nikolas turned pained, blazing eyes upon him. "He was raped, Lucky."

Lucky paled and swallowed heavily. "Jesus," he whispered.

"How did you...with Elizabeth, I mean...I don't know..."

Lucky shook his head. "The situations are in no way comparable. They never could be, regardless of the circumstances. When something that...violent and...and sadistic happens, it's incredibly personal. It's a violation of the soul as well as the body."

Nikolas had never before heard his brother express himself so...eloquently. He also experienced a new respect for Lucky. He couldn't imagine how Lucky and Elizabeth had dealt with this when they were only fifteen.

"I found her right after it happened. I've never been able, not in fifteen years, to put the Sight of that out of my mind." Lucky's hands shook. "When I saw her crawling out of those bushes, her skinned knees dragging through the snow, her hair a mess and mascara running down her cheeks...I knew
what had happened. I knew, and I still asked because I didn't want it to be true."

"It wasn't your fault," Nikolas whispered.

Lucky laughed, a horrible sound like glass shattering upon the floor. "You telling me that, Elizabeth telling me that, doesn't make me feel it any less. I stood her up, Nikolas. I dumped her for Sarah again, so Elizabeth went out that night to go to the movies to try and not feel as though she were the second choice again. She was in that park because of me, because of how much I hurt and disappointed her."

He shook his head. "She changed so much after that. I mean, that's natural, of course. When something like that happens, you change. She used to be a lot like Lulu, but where Lulu has bravado, Elizabeth had real confidence. She was even bitchy. She knew who she was, didn't apologize for it, and didn't care whether or not you liked her. Being so young and so sure of yourself...it was the most beautiful and most awful thing I've ever seen. I still don't know who the hell I am."

Nikolas merely sat and listened, knowing there was nothing he could say to make his brother feel any better, but feeling as though he'd obtained more insight into Lucky this evening than he had throughout their entire relationship.

"After the rape, that's when Lizzie became Elizabeth. You've never really met Lizzie, but she was something, let me tell you. Lizzie knew she was beautiful. Lizzie knew she was sexy." He shook his head. "Elizabeth has forgotten just how breathtaking she is. It doesn't even occur to her. Sure, she puts on makeup and does her hair, but that's all image to hide her complete exhaustion. It's not organic like it used to be.

"Lizzie was mouthy and brave and always honest. She had no problem telling you what she thought about any number of subjects. Elizabeth's goal is tact, always. She plays the peacemaker, the negotiator. She doesn't want to argue. She doesn't want a fuss, particularly one made over her. She keeps her real feelings to herself, and while she will share them if prompted, she apologizes if she causes even mild offense."

He sighed. "I miss Lizzie. I was so stupid, chasing after Sarah, who really turned out to be a very pale imitation of her younger sister. Sarah reminded me a lot of Mom: blond and blue-eyed, and quiet and thoughtful, but wasn't as smart, wasn't as kind, and wasn't as decent as Mom; or as Elizabeth was, even then.

"Sarah was so jealous of Elizabeth, always striving to outshine her, that she never bothered to develop any kind of relationship with her sister. When I think of Mom and Aunt Amy..." he trailed off, shaking his head. "I'm glad that didn't happen to us. I'm glad I pulled my head from my ass and realized you being my brother was so much more important than your family name or who your father was."

Nikolas blinked furiously.

"Elizabeth has so much potential. She has a spark. There's no limit to what she can do," Lucky said, voice bordering on reverence. "Sarah, on the other hand, well, I'm still surprised she managed to become a doctor, but I'll always believe she did so more to get her parents' attention than out of any real calling. Don't get me wrong, Sarah's by no means stupid, but she's...simple.

"Sometimes I don't know for whom I feel more sorry: Elizabeth, for never really having a sister she could count on, or Sarah, for missing out on such an incredible person."
He cleared his throat and turned back toward his brother. "There is nothing you can say, nothing you do, that will ever make right what happened to him. It happened to him, not you, and you have no say in how he deals with it or how much he allows it to affect his life. So my advice is to stay out of it. Trust him to ask for help when or if he needs it. Be his friend, be his lover, but don't be his priest or his avenger. You'll lose."

Nikolas stared. "That's what Elizabeth told me, almost word for word."

Lucky snickered. "Yeah, well, for whatever else we are, Elizabeth and I will always be in agreement on some things." His eyes darkened. "You can't do anything for him, but I have to admit that one of the biggest regrets of my life is that I didn't kill Tom Baker."

"Kurt's rapist is already dead," Nikolas said. "Murdered." He sighed. "I wish I had been the one to do it."

"Was he?" Lucky prompted.

"No. It was Holly Sutton."

"I'm sorry, what?"

Lucky sat enraptured as Nikolas proceeded to detail his past relationship with Kurt and what it was now.

"Robin's brother," Lucky whispered, shaking his head. "It's so wrong he'll never know her."

Nikolas agreed. "It's also wrong that she'll never know him."

"I've never heard you talk this way about anyone before," Lucky said. "You're usually so calm and collected, but you're kind of turning into a fanboy here."

Nikolas glowered. "I am not."

Lucky rolled his eyes. "By your own admission, when you met him at the hospital, you rushed him, picked him up off the floor, and held him until he demanded - both verbally and physically - that you release him."

Nikolas pouted. "I was excited."

Lucky laughed. "Yeah. In your pants."

Nikolas scowled.

Lucky shook his head. "The intersections are amazing. You, Brenda, Holly, and Kate. Now Anna, Robin, and...Carly?" He cocked an eyebrow. "Really?"

Nikolas nodded begrudgingly. "I've never seen her like this before, but Kurt tends to inspire the best in people. I've known Carly for a long time, Lucky. She tried to pass off my son as another man's and I doubt I'll ever be able to forgive her for that. I can say this, however; her feelings for Kurt are genuine. Even I can see that. I think she'd seriously hurt anyone who tried to harm him."

He shrugged. "I can't hate her for it."

Lucky shrugged as well. "Whatever. Carly and I have never been close. Lulu has always looked up to her, and, admittedly, Carly has given her some pretty great advice so that Lulu won't make the same mistakes she did, but I can't say we're friends. We barely acknowledge each other as cousins."
He tilted his head in thought. "I wonder how much her friendship with Kurt is about trying to make
amends with Lucas."

"Her brother?" Nikolas asked.

Lucky nodded. "And my cousin. I haven't seen him in years, not since he came out. Aunt Bobbie
was...I love her, but, well, she really disappointed me by how she reacted. Uncle Tony and Dad
were pretty great about it, and I think they helped Lucas accept himself and realize that being gay
was nothing of which he should be ashamed."

"Carly wasn't involved in that at all?" Nikolas asked.

Lucky shook his head. "I can't remember if Aunt Bobbie and Carly were even speaking then. Dad
and Carly have never really gotten along, probably because they're too much alike. I know Carly
regrets how she came to town and destroyed Aunt Bobbie and Uncle Tony's marriage, and
everything that happened after with Michael, but I think it's Lucas she feels she most wronged. But
he's gone. He hasn't come back to Port Charles in years, and I don't think he and Carly are in
contact."

He shrugged. "Maybe Kurt is a substitute." He held up his hands in surrender when Nikolas's eyes
began shooting sparks. "I'm not saying Kurt isn't awesome in his own right, but Carly might be
seeing her brother in him." He pursed his lips. "Is that even a bad thing? It's not like the idiots we
became with Rebecca."

Nikolas ground his teeth. "I'm trying to forget she exists. Please don't remind me."

Lucky snorted. "Why should I be the only one in pain? You don't have Ethan hanging around and
insisting he's your brother."

"He's not your brother," Nikolas said, "and you know that thanks to Kurt."

Lucky brightened. "Hey, that's right! Okay, now I really want to meet him, even if only to thank
him."

"I think Carly is about all the Spencerness Kurt needs to endure at this point," Nikolas drawled. He
paused. "Lucky? Thanks. Thanks for being there for me."

"Thanks for letting me," his brother replied. "And thanks for not asking about the Jason thing."

Nikolas shrugged. "I understand what you mean about his charisma. I don't even necessarily think
it's sexual. It's just part of who he is. All the women in his life feel the need to take care of him,
even though he's more than capable of taking care of himself; in fact, it's one of the things he does
best. As for the men, I've always thought he and Sonny were more than a little in love with each
other."

Lucky wrinkled his nose. "That's just gross."

"Doesn't Spinelli still live in Jason's penthouse?"

"Kill you."

"And let's not forget Franco's obsession with him."

"Feed your body to dogs."
Behind the Curtain

The next day dawned much sooner than Kurt would have liked.

As the obnoxious sunbeam snuck in between his curtains and hit his face, he groused and huffed, pulling the comforter up over his head. Try as he might, however, he was unable to get back to sleep. Today was the day they were putting his big sister in the ground.

He had never known Robin, but he still considered her his big sister. He didn't know why and didn't care to examine it too closely. He had learned a while ago that when he dwelled on his feelings, they tended to rule him. Nothing good had ever come of that.

He was angry, absolutely. He was angry that he was expected to attend yet another family funeral, as if burying his parents, and later his grandmother, wasn't enough. It didn't matter that his mother had never died or that Katrine had most likely been no relation to him. He had still buried them. He had still grieved for them. His life had changed in drastic ways in response to the losses.

After Katrine had died some seven years ago, he had accepted that he was without a family. Finn and Carole, not to be too harsh, didn't really count. He kept in intermittent contact with his stepmother, who, admittedly tried constantly to instigate some kind of relationship with him. He hadn't seen Finn since the day he left Lima and didn't miss him, though he still harbored some form of love for the man.

He hadn't gone to Finn's wedding to Rachel, nor had he attended the births of their two children, Cosette and Caleb. He faithfully sent gifts and notes to his niece and nephew, for he did regard them as such, but they had never met Uncle Kurt. He'd never had an interest in maintaining an even rudimentary acquaintance with their parents.

Finn had been horrible in the wake of Burt's death and had reacted poorly to Kurt's lack of reaction. The heart attack had been one thing, and Kurt had cried and cried, which had brought out the Brother Bear in Finn. However, once Kurt understood and accepted his father was going to die, he had shut down. He had become aloof and disinterested in the world around him, and Finn had been furious.

Finn had screamed and carried on, alternately cajoling and insulting Kurt for his lack of emotion. What Finn had never understood was that it was never that Kurt didn't feel the loss of his father, but couldn't express it. He had never recovered from his mother's presumed death and, the truth of the matter, is that once you lose one parent, you become very aware that you will lose the other. You don't know the circumstances, but you already begin to anticipate the loss.

Carole and Rachel had begged and pleaded with Finn to stop his treatment of Kurt, but he had never been able to bring himself to believe that Kurt had loved his father as much as he had always claimed. Kurt didn't cry enough, wasn't upset enough, wasn't miserable enough. No matter what he did or didn't do, or what he did or did not say, it was never good enough for Finn.

Kurt, long before that, had stopped worrying about what Finn thought of him and chose instead to ignore him, which just inspired all the more rage in Finn.

After the funeral, at which Finn had made a complete spectacle of himself, Quinn, Tina, Artie, and Sam had all stopped speaking to him. Santana and Brittany insulted him as often as possible. Mike and Puck had stayed out of it, but Santana had told him they too had written Finn off.
Only Mercedes had sided - loosely - with Finn in that she too thought Kurt wasn't feeling everything he should in the wake of his father's death. Of course, she had always believed she knew what was best for everyone, despite the fact she couldn't have managed her own life if it had depended on it.

He left Lima directly after the funeral and never looked back. He remained in contact with Quinn and Tina, and spoke with Santana and Brittany often. His relationship with Sam had tanked, until one day he had just stopped writing the letters that were never answered. Truthfully, he hadn't been too surprised when Sam cut him loose. He had never been quite able to believe that Sam loved him, despite Sam's vociferous claims to the contrary.

Remembering Sam hurt.

Nikolas had been his first crush, but Sam had been his first boyfriend, his first date, his first kiss. There had even been a few other firsts with Sam. Once Kurt had left town, however, they had just fallen apart. Kurt wrote letters that, while never returned, were also never answered. Facebook messages and tweets also went unacknowledged.

His friends had stayed out of it, adopting a hands-off approach where his relationship with Sam was concerned. On the one hand, he had wanted and appreciated that. On the other, when the inevitable end had arrived, he'd had no one to support him.

He'd seen Santana and Brittany often, once they'd graduated McKinley and Santana had taken over her grandfather's business. Her parents had strongly objected to that, but she had made the argument that better her than someone over whom they had no control; someone who might have viewed what remained of the Lopez family a threat.

Santana and Brittany had gone to university in Spain, as they were both fluent in the language, and they often met up with Kurt in Paris and, later, London. After they graduated and relocated to Buenos Aires, the visits became less frequent, but they managed whenever possible.

He honestly didn't know how he would've gotten through those years without them. Thanks to Brittany, Santana, and Holly, he had survived his rape and graduated with honors from medical school.

He'd met up with Quinn and Tina a few times after he'd returned to the States for his residency and fellowship. There was no sense of awkwardness, but there was one of formality. They all continued to stay in contact, and said contact was warm, if distant.

After he completed his postgraduate work and moved back to Paris, his accidental, fledgling friendship with Bianca Montgomery had taken off and he was proud to be an honorary uncle to her daughters, Miranda and Gabrielle. Through Bianca, he had also become good friends with her mother, Erica Kane.

He, Bianca, and Erica had all survived what no one should ever be made to endure.

He had thought a lot about what Erica had told him of his mother. Erica wasn't one to offer praise - she was much like Kate Howard that way - but she'd had nothing but good things to say about Anna. Her opinion mattered to him and he knew she wouldn't whitewash it to appease anyone.

She had told him about her often antagonistic relationship with her late mother, Mona. Despite their many fights, when push came to shove, they were always there for one another. Erica continued to mourn her mother years after the woman's passing. She said she would always miss Mona, would always want Mona with her, and Kurt was a damn fool if he didn't work past his anger and give
Anna an honest chance.

It was no longer a question of giving her a chance, however. Kurt had pieced enough of the story together to understand the overall picture. He knew what Faison had done to Anna, and to Robert, and how his selfish machinations had devastated Robin. He didn't blame Anna for her lack of memories. That she had managed to recover as much as she had, that after only a moment of confusion she had managed to recognize him after more than twenty years, spoke to him.

His mother loved him. Of that, he had no doubt.

It wasn't that he didn't want to get to know Anna, but he wasn't sure whether he was emotionally capable of lowering his walls to let her in. He honestly didn't know if he'd be able, but he wanted to try.

They'd have to go slow, of course, and he wanted the right to set the pace. He hoped she would understand that.

That was why he had agreed to attend Robin's funeral. He not only wanted to say goodbye to the sister he never knew, but he wanted to be there for the mother he had just found. He also wanted to be there for Patrick and Emma. He wanted to know his niece. She was all he had left of Robin.

He knew Nikolas, Brenda, and Elizabeth would be there, possibly Kate, and most likely Luke and his children, as well. Lulu hadn't made much of a first impression and he was hoping Lucky would fare better. Kurt was of the opinion that no one not wearing a dog collar should be named Lucky, but as the man was a detective, he knew he'd eventually be working closely with him. He wanted them to get along.

He was content with his decision to push the idea of Damien to the background. He had come here preparing to meet a new sibling, not two, and since Robin's death had been the more immediate circumstance, determining whether or not Damien was his brother would have to wait. He needed time to process losing his sister before he embraced his brother.

He sighed and threw the covers off, wondering if Holly was awake. He had heard her roaming about the suite last night, thrown by the jetlag and her grief. The only reason he hadn't gone out to comfort her when he heard her sobbing was that she would have tried to comfort him. She needed to feel the loss as badly as he and Anna and everyone else did. She couldn't do that if she was too busy trying to take care of him.

Yawning, he stood and stretched his arms over his head before stepping into his slippers and donning his bathrobe. He heard a knock on the door and presumed it was his standard breakfast order, which had been amended to include Holly. He padded into the other room.

When he opened the door, however, he was met with a mouthful of blond ex-cheerleader.

"Brittany?" was his unintelligent response once she had relinquished him. "What are you doing here?"

She gave him a look filled with sadness and incredulity. "Kurty, you're burying your sister today," she said gently, taking his hands in hers. "Where else would we be?"

He blinked. "We?"

Santana barreled into the room and slammed the door shut behind her. "Alright, Rainbow, let's talk. There's a lot more going on in this town than I realized, and you're smack in the middle of it. The discovery of your mother and sister aside, you're here for more than some new hospital job.
What's your assignment?" 

"What makes you think I have one?" he casually asked. "I'm no longer an active agent."

She snorted. "Yeah, like that means anything. Look, I know we've never really discussed what it was you did for GNET - or how the hell you got them to let you go - but once an agent, always an agent. The agency itself is irrelevant. It's who you are, Kurt. You may no longer be aligned with the company, but that only means you've become an independent contractor."

He raised a brow. Damn, she was good.

"There's no one in Port Charles," she continued, "other than Sonny Corinthos..."

"Sure there is!" interrupted a sunny Brittany. "You know for whom he's gunning, San, and you know why. Kurt assigned himself to this. It's very personal."

Santana stared at her wife before realization flashed in her eyes. She turned toward Kurt. "Then it's a good goddamn thing we're here," she said. "We can take some of the heat off you."

"Absolutely not!" he said sharply. "I'm not going to draw you into this, Santana, and I don't want Brittany being put in the crosshairs of Jason Morgan."

"I have no fear of him," Brittany said, voice placid. "We will eventually meet, Kurt. You know it. That's just how it goes."

"And I fully expect you'll walk away the winner, Sweetness," he said. "That's not what concerns me. I'm not yet established here. I'm too new. The fact that you two just happened to roll into town?" He shook his head. "It would be far too obvious. I'm in no hurry. As you said, I assigned myself this case. I have all the time in the world."

Santana eventually nodded. "I see your point. Still, you must have considered the ramifications of this. I know you, Kurt, and you're nothing if not methodical and efficient. This town and its citizens, including your friends and family, could be caught up in the ensuing aftermath."

He shrugged, unconcerned. "That depends on how I approach this, and I plan to be quite ingenious." His eyes flashed dangerously. "He killed my partner. He doesn't just get to walk away from that."

"He didn't," she said softly.

"He may as well have," he growled. "He was drugging her, Santana." He nodded at her look of shock. "That's why she became so unstable, so erratic. He was drugging her to force her compliance. That she managed to resist as much as she did, for as long she did, is a testament to her strength. She won't be avenged." He shook his head furiously. "I won't let her be."

"And the police?" Brittany asked. "You're one of them now, kind of."

He smirked. "I'm a forensic pathologist, darling. I know what to do with a body."
"I'm still not convinced this is a good idea," said a nervous Carly, wringing her hands. "A lot of people will want to know why I'm there and I don't have a good excuse to give them."

Kurt raised a brow and looked at her. Carly looked quite beautiful in a conservative black dress with a hem that ended just below the knee; her shoes, for once, were modest. Her hair was pulled into a severe chignon and her minimal makeup made her look both mature and, strangely, chaste.

"Do you want to go?" he asked.

She blinked. "Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I want to pay my respects. Robin was a part of my life for a very long time, and though most of that part was bad, she didn't deserve what happened to her. She saved my friend at the expense of herself. I respect that. I want to honor that." She shrugged anxiously. "And I want to be there to support you."

He gave her a small smile. "Those are your reasons. If someone feels a need to question them further, please direct them toward me."

Amused, she shook her head. "I'm not going to draw you into one of my many tangled webs. Not today, at least." She sighed. "Still, don't be surprised by the whispering and perhaps even heckling that will erupt at my presence."

"Carly, I'm going to this funeral for Patrick and Emma, and because it's all I can do for my sister. What anyone else thinks about anything - about Robin, her death, you, or anything else - can kiss my ass. I'm not in the mood to placate anyone today, and if people want to take up arms against you, they'll be dealing with me. Trust me, I'm used to torches and pitchforks."

Holly sailed into the room and patted his shoulder. "Try not to ruin too many people, darling. You've only just arrived in town."

Kurt nodded. "You might have to remind me later. You know how difficult it can be for me to pace myself."

Holly snickered, kissed his cheek, and went off in search of her purse.

Carly watched them, a soft smile on her face. This was the most relaxed she had seen Kurt since he had arrived in Port Charles. Despite the many laughs and tears they had already shared, he had always appeared to be on guard. Not necessarily because of her, but just in general. Ever since Holly's arrival, however, she had seen him lower his automatic defenses. He smiled more, brooded less, and was never without a clever quip for any given situation.

She was somewhat fascinated by their relationship. Kurt and Holly were not biologically related, but the more time she spent in their company, they more similarities she noticed. Perhaps the old adage was true and the more time you spent with someone, the more you began to look like them.

If that was true, she could certainly understand why Kurt and Holly were so close. Both of them were truly stunning people.
They didn't argue, but they sometimes quarreled. They discussed their differences of opinion and then agreed to disagree. It was a rather eye-opening experience and she felt kind of dumb that she needed to be shown this avenue of debate. Her way was always outshouting another or crying or scheming behind someone's back. Disagreeing and then walking away had never occurred to her.

Kurt and Holly had so many inside jokes, but Carly never once felt left out. It was a nice feeling, being included, and Holly did include her. She had met the woman before but they had never really spoken. However, when she had arrived at Kurt's room that night, Holly had been very solicitous, asking about her children, about Jason, how she enjoyed running the hotel. At first, Carly thought she was merely being polite, but Holly had appeared truly interested in her answers.

She then gleaned that the woman was assessing her, judging her worth to be included in Kurt's circle. She didn't mind; in fact, she totally understood. She did the same with her children and probably always would. Whatever the case, she had apparently passed. She was surprised by how much this pleased her. It had been a long time she had ever garnered someone's approval, especially that of another woman.

Holly and Kurt were like mother and son, sister and brother, and high school best friends. Carly could tell that they knew everything about each other, accepted that knowledge - even if it wasn't tacitly addressed - and loved one another deeply.

Then there were Brittany and Santana.

Santana Lopez legitimately scared her. She had looked into those dark eyes, like snapping Dobermans, and had no problem imagining why Sonny did not want to antagonize this woman. Surprisingly, they had gotten along very well, though Kurt had later told her he had expected no less.

It had been very difficult, however, to imagine Brittany Pierce as an enforcer, particularly a feared one. She wore her long blond hair in pigtails and pulled on them when anxious. She cooed over Kurt and soothed Santana's almost constantly-ruffled feathers. Carly could see plainly the effect this woman had on the other two. But, after a while, Brittany's mask had slipped and Carly had glimpsed the woman who could kill without compunction. She would never cross her.

She couldn't even imagine what it was like for them - Kurt, Santana, and Brittany; as well as Kurt and Holly - to trust someone so much, to have someone believe in you to that extent. It was both awesome and humbling. She wanted that for herself one day, but she knew that day was not today. She'd get there, however. She had a lot of work to do, a lot to make up for, and a lot of cleaning house, but she'd do it.

She had to.

She'd been mortified when, the other night at home, Morgan had come to her with a sheaf of papers, articles he'd printed from the internet about her many escapades, asking if they were true. When she had looked at the articles and then back at her innocent, trusting son, she hadn't been able to lie, though she had certainly wanted to do just that.

She told him the truth. She had watched, saddened, as he struggled to reconcile the woman in those articles with the person he believed his mother to be. She wanted to be that woman. She had always tried to so hard to protect her children from everything, never realizing she might one day have to protect them from herself, from her reputation and burned bridges.

She needed to grow up, finally. She wanted her children to be proud of her.
And while Robin's death and Elizabeth's life and Morgan's questions had spurred all of this introspection, it was Kurt's quiet acceptance which had deepened her resolve. For this, she was grateful.

She wasn't out to kiss anyone's ass or make a lot of phony friends. She wasn't going to apologize for things for which she was not truly sorry just to make someone else feel better. She was, however, determined to be more thoughtful and perhaps more compassionate. She entertained no scenarios that she would make herself over into a clone of Robin or Elizabeth or Emily. That wasn't her, and she still firmly believed they needed, or had needed, to be a little more like her and fight for what they wanted.

But she didn't have a bitch for the sake of it.

Kurt had said that she could be honest and have integrity and still be a bitch. He was living proof.

Carly thought she could work with that. She didn't have to put on airs or pretend to care. She just had to think before opening her mouth. She had to make sure the emergency brake was on before she flew off the handle. She had to think of her children more and herself less.

"Are you all right?" Kurt gently asked, startling her from her thoughts when he placed a hand on her shoulder.

She turned and smiled. "You know, I think I am? For the first time in a long time, I think I'm going to be just fine."

He returned the smile, which slipped from his face when someone knocked on the door. He wasn't expecting anyone.

Holly closed the door to the hall closet and turned around. "Do you want me to get it?"

He shook his head and crossed the room, opening the door. His face softened into a warm smile. "You didn't have to come."

She scoffed. "As if I'd be anywhere else! I'm offended you weren't expecting me."

"I didn't want to presume," Kurt said, almost bashfully, "and I certainly had no desire to make you feel guilty..."

"Guilty?" she interrupted, snorting delicately. She pushed her way into the room, raising an imperious brow at the other woman before turning back to Kurt. "Excuse me, have we met? I'm Erica Kane. I don't do guilt."

Holly was finding all of this a bit too surreal. She was in a stretch limousine which was gliding towards Queen of Angels, the church hosting the funeral of her daughter in everything but name. Accompanying her was the man she considered her son; his new best friend, who was also Luke Spencer's niece; his other two best friends, a mafia princess and her wife; and Erica Kane.

Holly knew that Kurt was close with Bianca Montgomery, but had been unaware the friendship had expanded to include the young woman's mother.

As if reading her mind, Kurt and Erica's conversation turned toward her daughter.

"Bianca so wanted to be here," she said, patting Kurt's knee. "She had only met Robin once or twice, but thought her to be lovely." She paused. "When I told her that Robin was your sister..."
He gave a small smile. "If anyone understands sudden siblings, it's Bianca. How is Kendall, by the way?"

Erica recognized his desire to change the subject and accepted it gracefully. "She's well. She, Zach, and the boys are all doing just fine," she said, beaming.

He didn't ask for details about Bianca. The last time he had spoken with her, she confided that she was considering filing for divorce from her wife, Reese Williams. He desperately wanted to know if she had pursued that course, but this wasn't the appropriate time. Besides, he knew Bianca would prefer he put his questions to her, not her mother.

"You understand this is going to cause a scene, don't you?" Holly said to Kurt.

He merely shrugged.

She arched a brow. "Really? You're escorting me, Carly, Erica Kane, and two very powerful young women. There will be talk; perhaps even a backlash."

He sighed. "Holly, I'm unconcerned about how Anna or anyone else will react to this. She wanted me there and I agreed to attend, but on my terms. She already knows how close I am with you and Carly. She has no quarrel with Santana or Brittany, and she knows Erica."

Erica smiled. "Don't worry, Holly. If necessary, I will intercede with Anna." Her eyes dimmed and the smile became forced. "Besides, I'm sure she's far more concerned with other matters. I've been where she is; I don't envy her."

Holly accepted that and let it go.

"Give us a rundown of the major players, Rainbow," Santana asked, knowing that forcing Kurt to channel his energies in another direction would be a good thing."

He nodded. "There's Anna, of course, and her ex-husband Robert Scorpio; they're Robin's parents."

No one noticed that he omitted the fact Anna was his mother.

"Mac Scorpio," he continued, "is Robert's brother and the chief of police. He, with Holly's help, raised Robin after Anna and Robert were presumed dead. Dr. Patrick Drake is Robin's husband and Emma is their daughter."

"How old is she?" Brittany quietly asked.

"Four," Kurt murmured.

"Like you were when you lost Anna?"

He nodded and turned away, clearing his throat and not wishing to consider that strange symmetry. "Elizabeth Webber is a surgical nurse at General Hospital and was one of Robin's best friends. Nikolas told me that she's been spending as much time as she can trying to help Patrick with Emma, but it's difficult because she has a young child of her own."

"Cameron's a really sweet boy," Carly said, almost wistfully, remembering when Michael had been so young and innocent. Perhaps she should suggest to Elizabeth that they get Cameron and Morgan together for a play date. She wanted her son to have friends. "The few times I've seen him since Jake died...he's so sad now."
"Who's Jake?" Erica asked.

Carly blinked back tears. "Jake was Elizabeth's other son, and the son of one of my best friends, Jason Morgan."

She didn't notice Santana stiffen.

"He was mowed down outside his house," Carly spat, suddenly furious. "They still haven't caught the bastard who did it."

"Oh, my goodness!" Erica exclaimed, eyes wide with horror. "Who could hit a child and drive away as though nothing happened? It's unconscionable!"

The tension left Santana's shoulders. She'd had no idea Morgan had even had a son, let alone that the son had died. La Kane was right. Who the fuck could run down a kid and drive away? She looked toward Kurt, who was obviously considering the situation.

She smirked. She had no doubt that Jake Webber's case would be one of the first he tackled as the city's new pathologist. If there was any forensic evidence to be found, Kurt would find it, and the guilty party should only hope he turned it over to the cops rather than meting out justice himself.

"That poor woman," Holly sighed. It always devastated her when she heard about a mother losing her child, which was why she empathized so much with Anna's situation regarding Kurt. Once again, she feared she would never get over her miscarriage, that it would haunt her well into her dotage.

"Elizabeth is amazing," Carly whispered. "My daughter, Josslyn, was in the hospital when Jake was killed. She had just been diagnosed with kidney cancer." She swallowed and trained her eyes on the floor. "Elizabeth donated Jake's organs, and he was a match for Josslyn. My daughter lived because of Elizabeth and her son."

"What an extraordinarily unselfish woman," Erica remarked. She didn't know if she could make the same decision. Kurt had informed her of Elizabeth and Carly's tempestuous past, and she doubted she could do the same for a woman she disliked, such as Barbara. She tilted her head. Though she probably would have done it for Brooke English. She shrugged. Their relationship had always been bizarre.

"Erica," Kurt gently interrupted, "when are you returning to Pine Valley?"

She looked toward him. "I booked a suite for two days. Why?"

"I was hoping you would consider speaking with Carly after the service and burial, once things have calmed down."

Erica was baffled, but agreed. "Of course." She frowned. "Is something wrong?"

Kurt and Carly exchanged a glance.

"Carly needs guidance regarding a situation with her son, Michael. I...am unequipped to help as much as I would like."

"You've been more help than you will ever know," Carly said hotly. "You listened to me. You shared with me. You were there for me in a way that no one else ever has been. You even managed to convince me to speak with Elizabeth. That's no small feat."
She sighed as she noted Erica and Holly's curious eyes upon her. "My son was raped."

Holly drew in a sharp breath as Erica's eyes bulged.

Brittany stared at Kurt, who gave a tight nod. Too bad. She wouldn't have minded killing a rapist before dinner.

Anna, Mac, and Patrick stood outside the church doors to welcome the mourners, having sent Emma inside to sit with Elizabeth and Cameron.

Patrick was still unconvinced it was wise to allow Emma to attend the service. Robert and Maxie had argued that she was too young, while Elizabeth and Anna cautioned that not allowing the girl to say goodbye to her mother would only cause her to resent her father. Mac had simplified everything, as he usually did, by suggesting that they ask Emma what she wanted to do.

Emma wanted to be there. She wanted to be with her daddy and her grandparents and thought her mommy would be sad if she looked down at the church from heaven and didn't see her.

That statement effectively quashed any contrary opinions.

Robert was pacing around the courtyard, very obviously uninterested in interacting with anyone else. Those present respected this.

Lucky arrived with Luke and Lulu in tow, each of whom expressed their sincerest condolences. Lucky had somberly shook Mac's hand before hugging Patrick, while Luke embraced Anna and muttered in her ear words lost to everyone else. Lulu quickly hugged Mac, who was confused, but assumed that it was in lieu of hugging Maxie.

Nikolas was the next to arrive, holding the hand of his son, who was pale and appeared frightened, no doubt remembering the last funeral he had attended was for the woman who had been the only mother he had ever known. Spencer had been very young at the time, but he remembered Emily. He missed her. He felt bad that Emma now had to miss her mommy, too.

"There's my favorite nephew," Lucky chirped, scooping Spencer up in his arms.

The little boy rolled his eyes. "I'm your only nephew, Uncle Lucky, and your behavior is improper."

Lucky raised a brow. "Excuse me, my prince."

Spencer waved his tiny hand. "All is forgiven, peasant," he said airily, before lapsing into giggles and all but strangling his uncle with a hug. "I miss Emmie, too," he whispered.

Nikolas watched as his brother's eyes turned suspiciously bright and wondered what his son had said. He crossed to them and wrapped his arms around them.

"All right?" he quietly asked his brother.

Lucky just nodded and rested his head on Nikolas' shoulder.

Luke and Lulu watched this with bewilderment, wondering when Nikolas and Lucky had become so close. Lulu felt left out, and Luke, while concerned, wished Laura were here to see just how tight her sons had become. It had once been her greatest wish.

"There's something I never believed I would ever see," said a soft voice.
They turned, stunned to see Laura Spencer standing before them.

"Mom!" Lulu cried, throwing herself at her mother.

"Hello, my baby," Laura whispered, smoothing her daughter's hair. As she wrapped her arms around Lulu, her eyes found another mother. "Anna, I am so sorry," she said. "Robin was one of the best people I have ever met in my life. It was my privilege to know her."

Tears appeared in Anna's eyes. "Thank you, Laura, and thank you for coming. I'm very pleased to see you are well, and I know Robin would have been, too."

Laura smiled sadly and released her daughter, who scooted off to greet a newly arrived Maxie and Spinelli. Maxie looked awful, as though she hadn't slept or eaten in days, and Mac knew his little girl was remembering not only her cousin, but her sister. His ache for Georgie, while always present, sharpened intensely.

He blinked back tears and scowled. "Criminals approaching."

They all turned as one and said nothing as Sonny, Jason, and Sam walked toward the doors.

Sonny felt as though he were a complete failure. His relationship with Robin hadn't been as strong as it once was, but he still remembered when she had been an integral part of his world; when, after Stone had died, just seeing her face could get him through the day. He had promised Stone, his brother in everything but blood - and what was blood, really, when he shared it with Ric? - that he would look after Robin. He hadn't.

Sam looked miserable because she was. Her husband, after angrily confronting her about trying to keep Robin's death a secret, was not talking to her. He had only relented in his silence to order her to stay away from both Elizabeth and Carly. Of course this led her to feeling very insecure, and though Jason had assured her that he loved her and their baby, he would not tolerate secrets and lies between them.

Further, she had had no right to antagonize Elizabeth in her workplace, nor in barring Carly from his room. They were his friends, that's all they were, and if she couldn't accept that, it was on her, not him or the other women.

And she had listened. She had understood that she was walking a very fine line and had no desire to step over it. It had taken a long time for her and Jason to find their way back to each other, but they had. They were married and expecting a child. Why was she tempting fate by attacking Elizabeth and Carly when she knew it was a surefire method of enraging her husband? She knew she had a lot to think about and planned on doing just that.

Jason knew he shouldn't be here, but he hadn't been able to stay away. He knew how the people in this town viewed his past relationship with Robin, that he had broken her heart so badly all those years ago that she had run off to Paris to escape him. He knew they were judging him for living at Robin's expense, when everyone, himself included, would agree the world would have been a much better place had he died rather than her.

He nodded tightly at Anna, Mac, and Patrick, and followed his wife and Sonny into the church.
Then the hospital personnel began arriving *en masse*. Doctors, nurses, residents, interns, physician's assistants, nursing assistants, x-ray technicians, respiratory technicians, nuclear medicine technicians, pharmacists, and everyone else who had a more than passing acquaintance with Robin had turned out to honor her, leaving a skeleton crew to monitor General Hospital for a few hours.

Several staff members of Mercy and County, those with whom Robin had consulted on a regular basis, also showed up.

Felicia Jones appeared and a furious Maxie ran to her father's side and refused to leave him. She knew that Robin and Felicia had once been very close, so she could appreciate her mother's presence, but didn't wish to interact with her.

Brenda Barrett then arrived, shockingly with her sister, Julia, whom Ned greeted warmly, much to the consternation of Lois.

Anna couldn't believe the numbers, that her daughter had touched so very many lives. It filled her with joy and wonder and acute agony that she would most likely feel for the rest of her life. Still, there was one person she was desperately hoping would still come.

And then he appeared, encircled by women. Carly and Holly were givens, but she didn't know the other two. She blinked harshly.

"Erica?"

Erica hugged Anna tenderly. "I am so sorry about Robin, Anna."

Anna stared. "I wasn't aware you even knew her."

Erica averted her eyes. "Truthfully, I didn't, though I knew of her from Dimitri and Edmund. I'm actually here for your son."

The stare became blatant. "You know Kurt."

"He's very close with Bianca," she said softly. "I believe you would understand why."

Anna's eyes filled with tears and she nodded. "Thank you for coming. Thank you for being here for him."

"Of course," Erica said quietly, before standing aside.

Carly gave her respects to the others, though only Patrick voiced his appreciation. She ignored Maxie's scowl.

As one, Nikolas and Patrick made their way to Kurt. Patrick shook his hand while Nikolas wrapped an arm around Kurt's shoulders.

"Thank you for being here," Patrick said. "I appreciate it, and I know Robin would've wanted you here."

Kurt nodded but didn't feel much like speaking. This entire experience was anathema to him. He
kept his thoughts focused on Robin and let everything else go.

"So that's him," Lucky murmured, staring at Kurt with fascination. Finally, he shrugged. "He's cute."

"Dollface has a pair, too," Luke chimed in. "You should have seen him face off with the Queen of the Damned. Smooth, man. Smooth."

"Excuse me?" asked a baffled Laura.

"That young man, Angel," Luke said, "is Anna's long-lost son and, if your eldest gets his way, he'll be your son-in-law."

Lucky snorted.

Laura stared. "I'm sorry?"

"He's Anna's son?" Lulu trilled.

"You know him?" demanded an irritated Maxie.

Lulu eyed her. "He's in tight, and I mean tight, with Kate."

Maxie's eyes bulged. She shook her head. "He's friends with Kate and Erica Kane?" She released her father. "I need to go sit down." She then wandered into the church to do just that.

At the same moment, Elizabeth emerged from the doors, crossed the courtyard, and held out her hand.

To Carly.

Who took it.

Luke, Lucky, Laura, Lulu, and practically everyone else stopped and stared at the gesture, as though this were a spaghetti western and the clock was about to strike noon.

Elizabeth and Carly, hand-in-hand, went inside the church. The stares followed them, as did Santana and Brittany, arms linked. Erica was next.

Kurt stood off to the side, distancing himself from both Nikolas and Patrick while remaining close to Holly, who met Anna's stare unflinchingly.

Then accented voices erupted.

"Anna!" called one. "I got here as quickly as I could."

"Mac!" the other said. "My god, I am so sorry."

The two men then halted in their tracks and stared. "Kurt?" they asked in unison.

Kurt felt his heart sink. He couldn't deal with this. Not now, and not ever. He had lived so much of life isolating himself from others, only allowing a few in and only one at a time.

And, now, they were all here converging upon him, making him feel things. Making him hurt.

Because this was his life. He really should have been used to it by now.
"Jax," he said with a pleasantness he didn't feel as he struggled for some modicum of normalcy, nodding at the man. He turned and nodded at the other. "Aidan," he said, his tone slightly warmer. "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" they both demanded before turning on each other. "Who are you?"

"Oh, no," Kurt whispered.

And then a most unwelcome thought wormed its way into his mind, a horrible one that he had absolutely no wish to consider yet knowing that he had no choice.

"I live here in Port Charles," Jax said blankly. "You didn't know? You're not here...to see me?" he softly asked.

"Why would he be here for you?" Nikolas barked.

Jax narrowed his eyes at the very small distance separating Nikolas and Kurt.

Oh, hell no. Not again. Not after Courtney. He was not losing anyone else to Nikolas Cassadine.

"I'm here for Anna," Aidan answered Kurt, who blanched. "Why are you here?" he asked with heartfelt concern before his eyes widened. "Kurt, are you all right?"

"How do you know Anna?" Kurt whispered, voice tremulous.

Aidan's brow furrowed. "She's my aunt."

And it was all Kurt could do not to vomit, because if Aidan was Anna's nephew, that meant he and Aidan were first cousins.

Which meant they had spent two years, off and on, committing incest.

As if sensing one of the herd was about to be felled, Santana, Brittany, Carly, Elizabeth, and Erica flew out of the church and joined Holly in surrounding Kurt before shepherding him inside, leaving a very confused populace in their wake.
It was all Kurt could do to remain in the pew for the service. He felt horribly guilty, knowing he should have been listening to the heartfelt eulogies for his sister, but instead his mind was racing.

Why was all of this happening? Further, how could it be happening?

He had come to Port Charles for a job and his brother. Instead, he had found a mother, his dead sister, her husband, a niece, a new best friend, and had been reunited with some of the most important people from his childhood.

Damien still didn't know about him; he was fairly sure Nikolas was interested in him romantically; he had discovered he had committed incest; and then there was Jax.

His heart thudded painfully. In truth, he had never expected to see Jax again. Theirs had been only a brief, chaste romance, but it had nevertheless left an indelible impression. They had met in Brisbane not long after he had broken up with Aidan - his cousin - and while Jax was between marriages. It had been whirlwind and surprising and utterly romantic.

Jax had reminded him of the best parts of Sam. Tall, blond, gorgeous, with an amazing body and a terrific sense of humor, Jax was a genuinely decent person. Jax had been one of the best things to happen to him in quite a long time. They had parted easily and with every intention of reuniting once they had sorted out their tangled love lives, but it had never happened. He often thought of Jax with fondness, but had accepted their chance had come and gone.

But now he was here and Jax was here, and Jax had asked if he was here to see him, which meant Jax had actually taken up at least semi-permanent residence in Port Charles. Kurt didn't know if he could handle running into Jax on a regular basis, not with all of these unresolved feelings he had for the man.

And there was Aidan to consider. He was thoroughly revolted that they were cousins, but biology took nothing away from the fact that he had loved Aidan desperately at one time. Aidan had been his first lover after the rape, had made him feel safe and cherished and wanted again; wanted for the right reasons. Their occupations had kept them apart geographically and emotionally.

Aidan had been an agent for a competing organization at the time, but had since left the WSB. They had been introduced on a lark by a mutual friend - Bianca Montgomery. She hadn't expected anything other than a possible friendship between two intelligent men. After all, Aidan had romanced Bianca's sister, Kendall, and any number of other women in Pine Valley. No one had been more surprised than her when Kurt and Aidan had begun dating.

Kurt suppressed a snort. Well, it hadn't been so much dating as it had been mindblowing sex on any available surface at the drop of a hat for over two years. No one had ever made him feel as desired as Aidan had. The acts they had performed together were the very definition of carnal. They had all but been addicted to each other. There were mornings both had actually woken up dehydrated.

Even now, across the church, Kurt could feel that magnetic pull, could feel Aidan's eyes on him, and his body responded accordingly. They had never really broken up, per se, but had more or less agreed their relationship had run its course. Perhaps each had believed they would one day find
their way back together.

Kurt supposed, in a way, they had, but in a most perverse manner.

He was inexplicably angry with Anna. He knew it made no logical sense, but he blamed her for these feelings of anger and disgust. If only she had remembered him sooner, if only he had known her real name, there was every real chance he never would've been involved with Aidan as anything but a distant family member.

But no. Now there was remorse and regret and fury and desire and passion and longing. The moment he had seen Aidan's beautiful face...

He bit his lip and shifted restlessly.

He folded his fingers and drove his nails into the palms of his hands, forcing himself under control. These thoughts were entirely inappropriate given the present setting. He shook his head to clear it and concentrated on listening to the grieving mourners. He noticed Carly send him a look of concern from where she was seated at the end of the pew. Next to her were Santana and Brittany, and on his other side sat Holly and Erica. Elizabeth was seated next to Emma in the first pew, Cameron on her other side.

Kurt listened attentively as Patrick and Robert spoke of Robin, of their memories of her, of what she meant to them and their family. Before he was even conscious of them, tears began rolling down his cheeks. He suddenly felt the loss of his sister more keenly than he had expected or anticipated. He drew in a sharp breath when Anna walked toward the lectern.

More than her words, it was her manner that was so devastating, ripping through him like shrapnel. Whatever his pain, his disappointment, his regrets and concerns for the future, this woman had just lost her child. He could only imagine how Anna must have felt, especially after being forcibly separated from Robin against her will for years, arguably the most formative ones of Robin's life.

He pressed his lips together very tightly when an upset Holly gently laid her head on his shoulder and entwined their fingers. She had told him earlier that she would not speak, that she didn't want to upset Anna even further. He had argued that she deserved her chance to remember Robin, but she had remained steadfast. This was not about her and, at the end of the day, Anna had been Robin's mother.

This had served as a reminder to him that this was not the time for his hurt feelings. He needed to be strong for the people in his life, for the women in his life whom he loved, including Anna.

He did love her. He remembered when she had been Suzanne and they had been each other's entire world, sometimes even to the exclusion of his father. Anna had been a good mother, a terrific mother. That was evidenced by how long and how keenly he had mourned her. He told himself to remember those times, not to allow them to get lost in his haze of anger.

The priest then opened up the floor to others who wished to speak, and many wanted that privilege. Monica, Bobbie, and Epiphany each spoke of Robin's absolute dedication to her patients and her incomparable skills as a physician. Monica and Bobbie also shared tales of Robin's youth, of her precocity and desire for public service, to be useful.

Sean and Tiffany Donely, as well as Brenda Barrett, shared similar stories, speaking eloquently of Robin's path to adulthood and how she inspired everyone around her simply by being herself.

Elizabeth was the last of Robin's colleagues and friends to speak, noting that she was speaking also
for Nikolas and Lucky. She detailed her early history with Robin, when they had been more
acquaintances than friends, and how their relationship had deepened due to shared passions, shared
love for the same people, and the loss of those who had meant so much to them.

She had been on the verge of tears from the moment she opened her mouth, yet she never cried,
most likely in a bid not to upset her son. However, she quickly reduced almost everyone else to
tears. Her gentle, dulcet tones carried throughout the church; no one had to struggle to hear her,
though she did little more than whisper.

As she spoke of Robin's death as part of a streak of loss which appeared never-ending, making
mention of her son, Jacob, and Emily Quartermaine, she wondered aloud how she would muddle
through Robin's passing.

She then answered her own question: by doing what Robin would do. Namely, getting on her with
life, helping her friends and family, and honoring her calling.

"That's Robin's legacy," Elizabeth concluded. "Strength. For so long, so many of us drew upon her
relentless well of strength. I don't know how she replenished it for so long, and so often, but she
did. Now, that's what we must do. For her, for Patrick and Emma, for the Scorpios, and for
ourselves."

She chuckled darkly. "If Robin were here, she'd tell us just to get on with it, and perhaps she would
be right. It isn't that life must go on but that it does go on, and that's the end of it."

She paused. "One of Robin's secret pleasures was poetry. She didn't share her love of it with many
people. As she once said, enough people already thought her pretentious."

Gentle laughter circled the space.

"I searched and searched for a passage I thought would be relevant, would speak for Robin, as so
many of us are attempting to do here today. This is what I found."

She gently cleared her throat and looked down at a piece of paper in her hand.

"Do not stand here at my grave and weep.

I am not there; I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow,

I am the diamond glints on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain.

I am the gentle Autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush,

I am the swift, uplifting rush

of quiet birds in circled flight.

I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stare at my grave and cry."
Elizabeth smiled beatifically. "And, in a way, she didn't. She lives in our hearts. She lives in Emma. Robin lives as long as she is remembered. We'll always miss her, of course - that's what grief is - but rather than seeking to fill the emptiness of her loss with longing and pain, I choose to fill it with memories of love and happiness. Every day I will give thanks that I was fortunate enough to call such an amazing person one of my best friends."

She shrugged awkwardly, blushing. "Of all the lessons Robin taught me, the most important was to live in the present. You can't predict the future, and the past, although perhaps not at rest, is literally history. Learn from it, but don't wallow in it. You have to live every moment you have to the fullest. Otherwise, what's the point? That's what Robin did, and that's what I will do to honor her."

"Now that was a eulogy," Erica said softly, and somewhat in awe, as Elizabeth reclaimed her seat.


She turned over her shoulder and smiled sadly at him as she wrapped an arm around Cameron.

Maxie, not to be outdone, shook off Spinelli's restraining hands and made her way to the podium. In under a minute, she had made Robin's death about herself and how sorry she was for having caused it. She ranted and raved in between hysterical sobs, and Spinelli finally went up and collected her, Mac too shocked to do it himself. There were mutterings from the audience, but they ceased when Mac approached the dais.

He took a deep breath and slowly released it, staring sightlessly out into the audience.

"Parents should never outlive their children," he said, voice shaking with the effort to keep himself under control. "I thought I had learned and understood that proverb three years ago when Georgie was taken from me." He shook his head and stared down at the lectern. "Obviously, I was wrong."

He gathered another breath and raised his eyes. "I'm angry. I'm angry that the life of one of the most brilliant and beautiful women I've ever known has been snuffed out. I'm angry because Robin is gone and I will never be able to say to her everything I wanted, things she deserved to know, but probably knew already.

"I'm angry that Emma will have to grow up without her fearless and loving mother at her side. I'm angry that Robert and Anna have lost their child, that I've lost my niece, that Maxie has lost her cousin, and that Patrick has lost his wife."

His eyes shined. "But I'm also grateful, so absurdly grateful, that it's all I can do to stand here and say these words. I had the privilege - the honor - of witnessing this amazing woman grow up into an upstanding member of society. Every day, I watched her, cognizant and fearful that, at any moment, I could lose her. And I'm grateful for that, because I never let a day pass that I didn't tell her how much I loved her."

He sighed gently. "Robin...changed my life. She changed me. She made me better. She made me more patient and more thoughtful and more aware of how precious each and every moment can be. She never took anything, even the most innocuous things, for granted."

He paused. "Before her, I lived...a half-life. I was a man, but not a particularly good one. She taught me what it was to be an uncle, to be a father, to be a part of a family."

He smiled. "From the first moment I met her, she embraced me as belonging to her. Suddenly, I
had no baggage. I was no longer the younger Scorpio, desperately trying and failing to live up to my brother's name. I wasn't a schemer or a reprobate or the charming rogue. I was just Uncle Mac. She unwittingly gave me the freedom I had once so desperately sought.

Tears once again gathered in his eyes. "That was the most important role I have ever played in my life. When Robert and Anna were presumed dead, I suddenly had on my hands this amazing child on the cusp of womanhood, and I was supposed to guide her."

He shook his head. "It was she who guided me. She taught me how to cook, how to keep house, how to balance a checkbook. Things I should have learned years ago, but had fought against, because I thought it made me boring.

"I'm happy to be boring. I'm happy to be stolid and a stick in the mud, because that means I didn't fail her. That means she could count on me and she knew it. There are worse things in the world than being dependable and responsible, though, while growing up, such qualities are anathema to us.

"Because of Robin, I was able to be a good father to Georgie and Maxie. Because of her, I was able to appreciate the community of which we all are a part. Because of her, I grew up.

"I've sat here today, listening to all of you, so appreciative that Robin touched so many of your lives, and so grateful that I was a part of hers. That's the takeaway lesson Robin gave to me: live your life and do it honorably. That's what she did for as long as I've known her. Elizabeth was right - of course, she usually is - Robin was strong. There were moments, days, a lifetime, where I would stare at her and wonder, enviously, how one person could be so strong.

"She was strong because she had to be, because she didn't know any other way. She made mistakes, certainly, but she acknowledged them, learned from them, and moved on. That's a lesson many people twice her age, including me, have yet to learn.

"I'm learning it today because I have no other choice. I don't know how I will make it in this world without her, but I know that I will try because she would expect nothing less from me. If I've learned anything these past twenty years, it's that I was meant to learn from her."

Mac calmly returned to his seat, unaware of the impact his words had had on those present.

That's a real man, thought Diane Miller. A good man.

Alexis Davis was the first to admit she had the world's worst taste in men. She certainly could, and should, have chosen better fathers for her daughters. But never before had she been so regretful that she had let a relationship pass through her fingers. She and Mac had dated for a while, but he hadn't brought that level of lunacy she had come to require from her paramours. Unlike Mac, she hadn't grown up, not really. Perhaps she should start now.

All Maxie could think of was the numerous times she had failed Mac, had treated him like dirt, had denounced him as only her stepfather when, the truth of the matter was that he had spent more consecutive years being her parent than either Felicia and Frisco ever had. She stole a glance at her mother and knew Felicia was having similar thoughts.

Maxie shook her head. Yeah, you really screwed the pooch, Mom. You had it all and threw it away to chase danger and near-death experiences. And where's Dad - no, Frisco - now? If I'm not careful, I'm going to end up just like you, alone and filled with regret.

She turned toward Spinelli. He wasn't the most exciting man or the most handsome, but he loved
her. He loved her in spite of the fact that she was seemingly unable to love herself. Still, she could never shake the notion that she had him only because they had lost Georgie. Had Georgie lived, Spinelli would be at her side, probably still referring to Maxie as the Bad Blond One. Whenever she allowed herself a moment to acknowledge how much he loved and was devoted to her, she couldn't help but think that a small part of him wished she were Georgie.

Kurt was just glad Robin had had Mac, that she had been loved so purely and unselfishly, just as his father had loved him.

Patrick was relieved that Jason hadn't dared approach the podium, but his brow furrowed furiously when Sonny shuffled toward it.

Sonny didn't look at anyone as he opened his mouth to speak. After opening and closing his mouth several times, obviously struggling to control his emotions, he finally cleared his throat.

"Other than my children, Robin Scorpio was the only person who made me even remotely human." He paused. "I made a promise to Stone that I would look out for her, protect her, and I failed. We hadn't been close these past years, and that was my fault. She was a mirror I couldn't afford to have in my presence, because she was a constant reminder of just how far I've fallen."

He shook his head. "But she loved me anyway. That was Robin's gift: she continued to love you even when you believed yourself unlovable. A world without her is cold. And dark. And horrible. Yet we go on, because, as Elizabeth said, there's no other choice. The only choice I can make is to listen to all the things Robin tried to tell me over the years that I ignored, because I was either ignorant or arrogant.

"So, Robin, if you can hear me, and I really hope that you can, I'm listening now. Thank you for never giving up on me, even after I gave up on myself. You truly were the best of all of us."

His tears spilled over and he ambled back to his seat, Carly watching him with sad eyes. Before she even knew what she was doing, she rose to her feet and walked over toward the podium, refusing to meet the angry eyes she knew were staring back at her.

"I know most of you are wondering why I'm standing here today," she began. "Believe me, it's a shock to me, too." She exhaled. "All of you know that my relationship with Robin was, on its best day, contentious."

She gave a sardonic chuckle. "But we did have a relationship. As I sat here today thinking about it, I realized that Robin Scorpio was perhaps one of the most constant presences in my life. Our relationship, however you want to qualify it, has lasted longer than all of my marriages combined, and including Robin's marriage to Patrick and her relationship with Jason. I've had no life in Port Charles that didn't include her.

"I'm not going to stand here and proclaim any secret love for Robin. I'm not going to gush about how wonderful she was. She and I couldn't stand one another. We fought for almost two decades about some of the most important, and some of the most stupid, subjects.

"But here's what you probably don't know: Robin Scorpio always had my respect. She was, as Lizzie..."

Several eyebrows rose at the shortening of Elizabeth's name. Elizabeth, for her part, merely smirked.

"...said, strong. Perhaps one of the strongest people I've ever known, and certainly one of the
strongest women. I'm not going to apologize for how I treated Robin because she gave as good she got, if not better. She fought with words and fists, and she kicked a whole lot of ass. She loved fiercely and without restraint. She had morals and beliefs which ruled her life and she didn't let anyone convince her there were shades of gray to which she must adhere. If you didn't agree with her, if you didn't like her, she couldn't have cared less. And that was awesome to behold.

"Robin Scorpio, was, without a doubt, the most self-aware person I've ever known, and, through that self-awareness, she was aware of everything and everyone around her. You couldn't fool her, because she could always see through bullsh...nonsense. You couldn't lie to her, because she always saw the truth. In fact, she saw your truth. She knew you better than you knew yourself.

"Yes, she was an amazing doctor and a terrific mother and loving daughter and a phenomenal friend and all of those other good things, but what I will remember most about Robin - and this is something that I will always cherish - is that she was unafraid. I don't know if that was because of the constant uncertainty she had experienced in her youth or the knowledge that her diagnosis could change at a moment's notice, but she lived her life according to her own rules and on her own terms, and she didn't give a shit what you thought about it."

Carly looked up and smirked. "For all intents and purposes, Robin was who I tried to be for more years than I care to admit. I never had her grace or poise or intellect, but I'd like to think that I was a good foil, that I made her think about things in different ways, that I challenged her. Because that's what she did for me.

"Like Mac, I'm angry. Robin didn't deserve this. She had long fought for and earned more than this. I'm angry that Patrick has lost his wife and Emma has lost her mother. I'm angry that Mac, a man I'm sure almost every woman in this building wishes was either her father or lover, has lost another daughter. I'm angry that I lost someone who was more important to me than I ever realized. And, selfishly, I'm angry that I'll never be able to tell her that."

Her eyes turned toward Kurt. "I'm angry that Robin will never have the opportunity to know this amazing man, her fellow doctor and her brother." She shook her head ruefully. "I've never had a girlfriend. I've never enjoyed the bonds of sisterhood that people like Alexis and Diane, or Maxie and Lulu, share. And, admittedly, that's my fault. When I was younger, I was always one of the guys and I learned to relate better to men than women. I'm easily jealous and quick to anger.

"Then, just a few nights ago, Kurt Hummel walked into my life and caused my world to shift fundamentally on its axis. He took one look at me, and, like his sister, saw me for exactly who I am." She smiled. "And he liked that person. He didn't ask me for apologies for my inappropriate words, he didn't expect me to act better or any differently than I how I normally act. He just accepted me for who and what I am, and, for the first time in my life, I understood the value of friendship."

Aidan Devane stared at this unknown woman. What the hell was she babbling about? Kurt was Robin's brother? He desperately hoped that meant Kurt was Robert's son, because otherwise...oh, Jesus.

"I know Robin would have adored him," Carly continued. "After all," she snickered, "she and I always shared the same taste in men." Her face became stern. "I know she would have moved heaven and earth to bring him whatever he needed or desired. I know there's not a dragon she would not have slain for him. Because, as much as Robin and I despised each other, I knew her. I knew and understood her better than many of you. And while I can't do anything to help her, what I can do is love her brother the way I know Robin would've loved him. He's her gift to me, and I want to thank her for him.
Jax was dumbfounded. Carly knew Kurt? Carly was friends with Kurt? Carly was friends with anyone?

"I want to thank her for never letting me get away with anything. I want to thank her for that little voice in the back of my head that asks me before I do something stupid and impetuous, what would Robin say? Because, whether I like it or not - and, in fact, lately I'm kind of digging it - somewhere along the way, Robin Scorpio became my own personal Jiminy Cricket. And that's how I'll always remember her. Robin somehow became my conscience, and I'm damn lucky for that."

She swallowed heavily. "And for her."

Again, she cleared her throat. "Robin Scorpio was a force of nature, and nothing so banal as death can ever dim her flame. I searched for a long time to find words I believe Robin would say to all of us today, and I think I finally found them.

"Death is nothing at all.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

I am I and you are you.

Whatever we were to each other, that we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name.

Speak to me in the easy way

which you always used.

Put no difference into your tone,

wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed

at the little jokes we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word

that it always was.

Let it be spoken without effect,

without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.

It is the same as it ever was.

There is absolute unbroken continuity.

Why should I be out of mind

because I am out of sight?"
I am but waiting for you,

for an interval.

Somewhere, very near,

just around the corner."

Carly looked up from her notes and smiled, eyes shining brightly. "All is well."

Jaws scraped the floor as she strode back to her seat, especially as she stopped along the way to grip Patrick's shoulder, gently kiss Emma's cheek, ruffle Cameron's hair, and embrace Elizabeth, who stood and hugged her back just as fiercely.

Jason shook his head in disbelief. He remembered Carly telling him in the hospital that she and Elizabeth were now friends, but he had dismissed it as a hallucination, probably a side effect of the anesthesia. He couldn't believe that Carly had just stood at the front of a church and all but sang Robin's praises. Hers wasn't the only world to shift on it axis.

Sonny Corinthos and Samantha McCall were of a similar mind.

Lulu and Maxie were horrified. One of the tenets of their young lives had been that Carly Corinthos hated Elizabeth Webber and Robin Scorpio with her entire being, yet here she was, letting everyone know, through both word and action, that that was far from the truth.

Nikolas Cassadine thought the woman was diabolical, though he appreciated her words regarding Kurt, knowing that she would do what she promised, to watch over him as Robin would. He had many reservations about Carly. He would most likely never like her. Still, he didn't doubt that, in the past minutes, she had been absolutely genuine with her words. Not to mention, Elizabeth wasn't easily fooled, nor would she play such games at Robin's funeral. So if Elizabeth saw something in Carly, then there was truly something there.

Luke gaped at his niece while Laura's eyebrows hovered near her hairline. Bobbie couldn't ever remember being more proud of her daughter than she was today.

Carly's children, Michael and Morgan, stared at their mother as though they had no idea who she was. And perhaps that had been Carly's point. Maybe no one knew who she really was. Michael surreptitiously stole a glance at the young man who had somehow bewitched his mother. Who was Kurt Hummel? How could one person have such an effect on a person in so short a time?

"I totally get it now," Brittany whispered to Kurt. "She's pretty awesome."

"Agreed," Santana said in a clipped voice. "I like that she'll be hanging all over you for the foreseeable future. She'll protect you."

She ignored Kurt's eyeroll and made a mental note to give Carly her number before returning to Argentina. She hoped to impress upon the other woman that, should Kurt need help, to call her. Too often Kurt tried to handle things on his own. He was more than capable, but if he ran into trouble, she knew he wouldn't call on her until the situation was dire. Hopefully Carly would be more sensible. She rather thought that the case.

Carly gracefully plopped back into her seat and sent a shy smile Kurt's way.

"Thank you," he whispered.
The poem which Elizabeth quoted is entitled "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" and is attributed to Mary Frye. Carly quoted "Death is Nothing at All," by Canon Henry Scott-Holland.

I hope you enjoyed the chapter. It was difficult for me to write, and I can only hope I captured the emotions adequately. I know that some are not fans of Robin, but I literally grew up watching her. I adore the character, even if she is self-righteous. I'm also glad people are enjoying the friendship I'm developing between Carly and Elizabeth. I think they could both benefit from acting a little like the other.

Again, yes, Kurt knows a lot of people in Port Charles, but most of them are not originally from Port Charles. He knows them from growing up in Europe and through his travels as an agent. If you have an opinion on with whom you would like to see Kurt paired, feel free to suggest it in a review. Right now, there are potential suitors in Jax and Nikolas. Aidan may or may not stick around. If you have other suitors in mind, let me know. I know with whom Kurt will eventually end up, but I'm interested in your thoughts.

After all, there's no reason Kurt can't have wild monkey sex with outrageously hot guys until he settles down with Mr. Right.
A Battery of Barracudas

Kurt was absurdly grateful he was surrounded by a pack of fearsome women who tolerated no bullshit, because trying to escape the church was a nightmare.

He saw a very determined Anna and Nikolas separately heading toward him with Aidan lurking in the nave, ready to ambush.

"Are you going to the cemetery?" Brittany whispered.

He shook his head.

"Reception?"

"I have to get out of here," he murmured. The before I kill someone was implied.

She nodded, looped her arm through his and held him tightly. Santana did likewise on his opposite side. He supposed some secret female communication passed amongst them, because suddenly Holly and Erica were in front of him, with Carly and Brenda bringing up the rear.

He closed his eyes and allowed them to usher him from the church, ignoring the voices of those calling after him: Anna, Nikolas, Jax, and Aidan. He dimly registered a confused Patrick asking him what was going on and breathed a sigh of relief when Elizabeth corralled him.

He only opened his eyes when he felt himself being gently pushed into the limousine.

"What is it, honey?" asked a concerned Holly.

His response was wholly inappropriate and hysterical laughter.

He continued laughing as tears began rolling down his cheeks.

"Oh, not much," he warbled. "Let's see: my mother is alive, my sister is dead, I just discovered I committed incest, and I think it won't be too long before Nikolas and Jax start fighting over me, even though it has actually very little to do with me." He giggled. "I hope they wait until after the reception."

Erica blinked. "You've had quite a day."

"Incest?" demanded a confused Santana.

He turned toward her. "Aidan Devane."

Her eyes widened. "Holy shit."

"Well, I don't think there's anything I can add to that!" he exclaimed, before laping into another round of laughter.

Erica shook her head. "You and Aidan were involved."

Kurt nodded miserably, shifting again to tears. "For over two years." He chortled. "Bianca introduced us."

"Oh, dear lord," she sighed, covering her eyes with a hand.
"Who's Aidan?" Carly asked. "What do you mean incest?" Horror crossed her face. "Oh, Jesus, is he your brother?" She blinked. "Wait! Does this mean Anna has another kid?"

"No," Kurt said, forcefully exhaling. "Aidan said Anna is his aunt, which means one of her siblings is his parent."

"One of?" Carly barked. "I didn't know she had any."

"It can't be Alex," mused a thoughtful Erica. "She hasn't any children. Neither can it be Gabriel, as he's younger than Aidan."

"Then it must be Lindsay," Kurt concluded.

"None of this turned up in my research!" Santana exploded. "Who is this family?"

"What do you want to do?" Brittany whispered to Kurt, who shook his head.

"I can't go back to the Metro Court," he said. "That's the first place they'll look for me."

"What's with you and Jax, Tink?" Brenda asked. Most of them startled and turned toward her, unaware that she had even joined their party.

"When did you get here?" Carly demanded.

Brenda rolled her eyes. "I was standing right next to you as we left the church." She glared. "Besides, it's about time I was brought into all of this. I've known Kurt longer than any of you. He's like a brother to me."

"Check yourself, you discount Cindy Crawford," Santana snapped. "Brittany and I were here long before you."

Brenda's eyes shifted toward the blond. "Wow, so you're the Brittany," she said nodding. "I guess that means you're Santana."

They stared at her.

"Kurt has told me all about you, of course."

That mollified them. Somewhat.

"So where do we go?" Holly asked.

The ringing of Carly's cell startled them all.

"Yeah?" she asked crossly upon answering. She frowned. "How did you even get my number?" She listened for a long while, rolling her eyes and sneering, before finally shrugging. "It's as good an idea as any other." She hung up.

"That was Kate," she announced. "She said we can regroup at her place."

Kurt sagged with relief.

Carly looked at him with concern before turning and lowering the partition, giving the chauffeur the address of Kate Howard.
Kurt settled down and laid his head on her shoulder.

Yes, she had a lot of questions, particularly regarding Jax. She assumed she wouldn't like the answers, but recognized this would be her first test as a true friend.

She was determined not to fail.

"Aidan!" Anna hissed. "What is going on?"

He glared at her. "You might have told me you had a son, Anna," he spat.

Suddenly Robert was there, pushing them apart.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded of the younger man.

"Aidan Devane," he growled. "Anna's my aunt."

Robert gave an exaggerated blink before turning toward his ex-wife. "How many more are there? A twin sister, another child, and now a nephew?"

Anna waved him away. "Aidan, I didn't even remember Kurt until a few days ago." She clenched her hands. "We suspect Faison."

Her nephew's anger deflated in the wake of her admission. He was all too aware of what had been done to Anna, how she had fought to regain her memories of Robin, and how there were several years for which no one had ever been able to account. Apparently, Kurt had featured heavily during that time.

"Do you know Kurt?" Anna asked, both annoyed and confused.

Aidan snorted. "Why, yes, I do!" he cheerfully exclaimed. His eyes then hooded. "Biblically."

A stricken Anna brought a shaky hand to cover her mouth.

"Jesus," Robert muttered, shaking his head. He couldn't help but feel for Anna's son. The kid had already been put through so damn much, and now, on the day he buries his sister, he discovers he's committed incest.

"We were introduced by Bianca," Aidan added. He shook his head, staring down at the floor. "What the hell do I say to him?" he asked roughly.

Anna shook her head dumbly, silently asking herself the same question.

"We need to get to the cemetery," Robert gently prompted his ex-wife.

Anna blinked harshly and nodded before looking back at her nephew. "We'll talk later?"

"I don't see how we can avoid it," Aidan replied, "no matter how much any of us might wish we could."

Somehow, Kate managed to beat them to her house and opened the door with a raised eyebrow.

"I want to know right now what the hell is going on," she demanded of her young friend.
Kurt looked at her and sighed. "This requires alcohol."

"What doesn't?" Brenda asked, shouldering past Kurt and wandering into the house, navigating it with ease. Its layout was a mirror image of Sonny's, which wasn't surprising, considering his was the estate next door.

Santana and Brittany entered next, following in Brenda's footsteps. Erica, who followed no one, demurely slipped inside, nodding at Kate, whom she had met on a few occasions, notably when Enchantment had purchased advertising space in *Couture* when Kate was editor. Carly stood with Kurt, glaring at Kate, who was truly unimpressed. Holly stood at his other side, patiently waiting to do whatever it was he wanted.

"Thank you for allowing me this respite," he said quietly.

Kate softened. "You're always welcome, Kurt. Please, come inside and sit down."

He nodded and wearily trudged toward the lounge, shoulders hunched and head bowed.

"He will get through this," Holly murmured to Carly. "He's gotten through worse."

Carly nodded to herself, knowing it was true, and sad for it.

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The graveside service passed in a blur for the rest of Robin's family. Anna wouldn't have been able to tell anyone who was there or what was said. She felt horribly guilty for her lapses in concentration, knowing she should give her daughter's funeral the respect and gravitas it was owed, but she also welcomed the distraction that focusing on her other child provided.

She couldn't help but feel responsible for the situation in which her son and her nephew now found themselves. She understood that, rationally, she was not to blame, but that realization did little to diminish her regret.

If only she had remembered Kurt sooner.

If only she wasn't such a complete and utter *failure* as a mother.

She knew the true culpability laid with Faison and not her, but she had never been one for passing the buck. She blamed herself for Kurt's suffering, even though, logically, she knew she had been as much a victim as her son. Still, her son had been a victim because of her. If Faison hadn't been so obsessed with her, she might still be in Lima, married to Burt and having raised her son herself.

At least then, perhaps, she would have managed to raise at least one of her children rather than fobbing them off on the next closest relation.

Her eyes drifted toward Mac, who stood staring as Robin's casket was lowered into the ground. He was completely lost, she knew, oblivious to everything around him. She noted Maxie's histrionics, as well as the attempts of Spinelli and Lulu to silence her. She could feel Laura's sad eyes upon her, but she refused to make eye contact, knowing she would burst into tears. She stole a glance a Robert and realized that their daughter's death was now hitting him full-force.

She knew that she should keep an eye on him, as he would most likely and predictably begin acting out, but she was too tired. She was so very tired. All she wanted was her dead daughter and the son who ran every time she approached.
"How could I have slept with my cousin?" Kurt hissed at himself, helping himself to one of the mimosas Kate produced from who knew where.

Erica took a sparkling water. "Kurt, there is no possible way you could have known," she said calmly. "I can only imagine how upsetting this must be, but you're being far too hard on yourself!"

Holly nodded. "Absolutely. Kurt, sweetheart, as far as you knew, your mother was Suzanne Hummel, not Anna Devane. Even if you had been aware of her real name, Devane is a rather common surname, particularly in England."

Carly blinked. "Did she have an accent when she was your mom?"

Kurt frowned. "No. Her accent was American, and rather generic."

"What exactly was your mother like, Kurt?" asked a curious Brenda.

"Kind," he said softly, "quiet, patient. She stayed home to raise me, even though she had a business degree. She taught me all kinds of things: how to cook, play the piano, and sing."

"Anna does none of those," Holly said, her brow furrowed. "She can't cook to save her life and she is definitely not musical." She paused. "I suppose a business background wouldn't be too much trouble for her to manage."

"You suspect someone gave Anna the identity of Suzanne Hummel?" Kate asked.

"Well, that's the only thing that makes sense, isn't it?" Brittany asked. "You don't disappear from the middle of the south Atlantic Ocean after a ship explosion and turn up in dinky little Lima, Ohio with a new name, voice, and occupation by happenstance. Someone put her there, and it's most likely the same person who took her from Kurt."

"Faison," Holly whispered.

Erica's eyes widened. "Cesar Faison?"

Holly nodded, face grave.

"I'd never heard of this person before Kurt asked me to look into Anna's background," Santana complained, "and I've found no real information. Who the hell is this asshole?"

"I've only heard of him in passing," Carly said, "mostly from Mom and Luke. Years ago, he kidnapped my cousin, Lucky, under the orders of Helena Cassadine. He basically brainwashed Lucky into being Helena's slave."

"He also tried to kidnap Robin," she continued, turning toward Holly, "but you stopped him, right?"

"That one time, yes," Holly murmured, "but he had kidnapped her several times, beginning when Robin was just a very young girl." She inhaled sharply and straightened her shoulders. "What I know of Faison is, in reality, only small pieces of information. I know that he was the one who recruited Anna into the DVX."

"My mother was DVX?" Kurt asked, his voice oddly toneless.

"Before she was WSB, yes," Holly whispered.

Kurt looked around the room, studying the others. "I know that many of you either don't know
each other or like each other, but I know and love all of you. I trust you completely."

"Kurt's, what is this about?" Kate demanded.

"Nothing I say here ever leaves this room."

Kate and Erica stared at him while the others immediately nodded their assent.

Erica blinked and shook her head. "Of course, Kurt. I hope you know that trust runs both ways. You can always count on me."

He smiled at her.

Kate prevaricated. "Is this information really going to change anything?" she asked. "I can't imagine anything you could say that would cause my feelings for you to alter."

"I hope not," Kurt said honestly.

She nodded after a moment. "You have my word."

Carly was reluctantly impressed. She didn't like Kate and probably never would, but she knew the woman could be a good friend. God knew she was thick as thieves with Alexis and Diane, and while Kate often argued with her cousin Olivia, she defended the woman to any who would sully her name. Kate was also a good friend to Jax, despite how that nauseated Carly.

And, she supposed, Kate had been good to her kids. Certainly a lot more than any of Sonny's other girlfriends. Hell, Michael had shot her and she had forgiven him.

Kurt nodded, throwing Kate a grateful look. "To catch everyone up, then, let me make the introductions. This is Santana Lopez and Brittany Pierce, my best friends from high school in Ohio. We've all known each other since we were small children, but it was being cheerleaders together than cemented our friendship."

"You were a cheerleader?" asked an amused Carly.

"He was the best," Santana snapped. "He led us to a national championship and we would've added another, but Uncle Burt died and Kurt moved to Paris."

"Which is where I met Brenda," Kurt added. "After modeling for Dominique Baldwin at Deception, Brenda went to Europe to further her career. We met when I was thirteen. By this time, I was already good friends with Nikolas through our grandmothers.

"After Dad died and I moved to Paris to be with Katrine, she pushed me into modeling to get my nose out of my books and to dwell on something other than being an orphan. Brenda and I did several campaigns together in which we were usually paired as siblings."

"I remember those," Erica said. "They were very well done. The camera captured the genuine affection you had for each other. Those campaigns, if I recall, were wildly successful."

He smiled at Brenda. "You were the best thing to have happened to me, then. You made me laugh. You actually listened when I talked, and you cared about what I said and how I felt. I don't think I ever thanked you for that. If I did, it wasn't nearly enough."

She blushed lightly. "You did those same things for me, Tink. Lord knows my father was never interested in anything I had to say, and my relationship with Julia then was pretty much
nonexistent."

He sent a fond look at her. "Brenda then moved to Italy and I did a few more campaigns - on a much smaller scale - by myself. It was on the first of these where I met Kate, who was then the editor of French Couture."

Kate nodded. "Regardless of your age then, you were one of the most interesting people I had ever met. You've always looked so much younger than your true age, but were precocious, ridiculously intelligent, and far too serious for your years." She raised a brow. "You still are."

He smirked. "I stopped modeling shortly before I entered the Sorbonne." He paused, running his tongue over his bottom lip. "While studying there, I was recruited."

Carly narrowed her eyes. "By what?"

He sighed. "GNET."

Erica blinked. "Excuse me?"

"What the hell is GNET?" Carly demanded.

"GNET, or the Global Network Intelligence Initiative, is a multinational covert agency dedicated to the pursuit, apprehension, and conviction of international fugitives, predominantly those involved in organized crime. As its name implies, it is indeed global, with agents from almost every country."

Brenda stared.

Carly balked.

Kate pursed her lips. "Continue, please."

His lips quirked at her nonchalance. "GNET recruited me when I was eighteen, during my second year at the Sorbonne." He shrugged. "In many ways, I was the ideal candidate. I was barely an adult with almost no family. I am highly intelligent, well-read, and speak several languages. I'm attractive, but not so much so that it's offensive or off-putting; memorable, but not too distinctive. I'm quite wealthy and have several highly-placed contacts. They thought I would be a good fit and I was."

"Are you still an agent?" Erica asked.

"You're always an agent," he replied, "but, no, I'm not active."

Carly raised a brow. "Oh, so you're, what? A retired secret agent at the ripe old age of twenty-eight?"

He bobbed his head. "Something like that." He cleared his throat. "At any rate, after the Sorbonne, I attended St. George's to obtain my medical degree. By then, I had worked for GNET for three years, mostly in the capacity of a courier or translator.

"Once it was understood that I was seriously pursuing medicine as profession and not just as a cover, GNET started involving me in more serious missions, often as a medic during extractions or exchanges."

Okay, he was leaving some important stuff out, but he wasn't going to tell these women he was a
trained assassin who had sometimes enjoyed his job a little too much.

"I was also assigned a handler, someone who facilitated my missions and worked on my behalf with the company." He paused. "That person was Holly."

Brenda stared. "You're an agent, too?" she asked the woman.

"No," Holly replied. "As Kurt said, I was his handler, a combination administrator and immediate supervisor. I was responsible for the day-to-day minutiae: providing Kurt with his assignments, creating his aliases and cover stories, submitting his reports, and making sure he would be retrieved should a mission go south."

Her lips quirked into a wry smile. "Essentially, I was middle management."

"Are you still with GNET?" asked Carly.

Holly exchanged a glance with Kurt. "No," she finally answered. "Kurt and I left the agency together."

He nodded and swallowed. "What I'm about to tell you is only known to Erica and Carly."

Both women stared at him and then each other.

Santana and Brittany were quite obviously pissed off that he had shared whatever the hell this was with these two newcomers rather than them.

As if reading their minds, he turned toward them. "I couldn't tell you. I was scared of what you would do, of the risks you might take." He exhaled. "I'm only telling you this now because it will soon become common knowledge." He grimaced. "Although I really wish it wouldn't."

He sighed, shook his head, and looked away.

"I've told this to Nikolas and Patrick, though inadvertently. I assume that, by now, Anna has either had me investigated or asked Robert or Mac to do it for her. I don't know who, if anyone, they have told."

Carly gave him a gentle look. "Nikolas most likely would have told Elizabeth, and perhaps Lucky. He probably wanted their advice on how to handle...the situation."

Brenda stared. "Why would Elizabeth..." Her eyes widened in horror. "No!" She shook her head frantically as tears started streaming down her face. "Please, no!"

Kurt closed his eyes. "I was raped."

Santana pressed her lips together so tightly they all but disappeared. She was blinking rapidly to force the tears away, but it was in vain. She should have known. She could all but pinpoint when it had happened, when Kurt had changed, pushing everyone away, even her and Brittany.

Brittany, for her part, leapt to her feat and began pacing, mumbling under her breath, her fingers pulling imaginary triggers.

"How could you not tell us this?" she seethed. "You're our best friend, Kurt. There's nothing we haven't told you! Why are we only learning about this now? Were you afraid of us, of how we would react?"

Though she used plural pronouns, Kurt knew Brittany only cared about the fact he hadn't told her.
Santana, in this instance, was incidental.

"I was afraid you would do something stupid and I would lose one of the only people in my entire life I have ever been able to count on," he said with some force.

She abruptly sat down.

"Who did it?" Santana demanded. "Who did this, and where are they now?"

"They're dead."

"Did you kill them?"

"I did," Holly interrupted.

The others, save Kurt and Carly, turned toward her.

"I've never admitted it," she elaborated, "but I suspect Kurt has known for some time that it was me. I do not regret it, I would do it again in an instant, and I would have happily gone to jail or to my death if it meant that piece of shit would no longer walk this earth."

Santana's eyes all but shot sparks. Now this was a woman she could respect.

"How was it done?" asked a breathless Brittany. "What did you use?"

"A very sharp knife," Holly said.

"Good," Kate spat. "Good."

Carly glanced at her, surprised that Kate had used the same word, the same intonation, that Elizabeth had when told of Michael's rape.

"This isn't over," Brittany hissed at Kurt. "Not by a long shot."

He knew she was furious with him and was okay with it. He knew she wanted to avenge him and was touched. He knew she was frustrated by her inability to punish the one who had so hurt him, but that wasn't his problem.

The rape had haunted him for years and he regarded it even now as an intensely personal event in his life. Holly had known because she had been there, because the attack had impacted his work; otherwise, he would've kept it to himself. In the end, it had happened to him, not anyone else. He wasn't required to open a vein for anyone.

The only reason he had told Erica was because she understood, as did Bianca. He had only needed to acknowledge it had happened, not explain the details. He imagined Elizabeth and Michael would share a similar experience if and when they spoke.

"After that," Kurt quietly said, ignoring Brittany's comment, "Holly took me to Paris to regroup. It was there that I later met Bianca Montgomery, through whom I met Erica."

Erica was too busy scrutinizing Holly to pay Kurt notice. "What did it feel like? To kill him, I mean."

"It felt wonderful," Holly admitted. "I've never regretted it. Perhaps others would claim that they could never do it, that all life is precious, that there are other punishments and possibilities for rehabilitation and redemption."
She shook her head. "Not for me. Not for him. Not for what he did. That man, and I use the term very loosely, violated the boy I consider my own in the most heinous manner possible. If anything, death was too good for him, but I relished delivering it."

Erica nodded absently. "I often wish I could have done the same for my daughter." She sighed. "For both my daughters."

"I understand," Carly murmured.

Erica nodded again, time in sorrowful acknowledgment.

Kate narrowed her eyes. "How could you understand?"

Carly and Kurt looked at each other.

"It's up to you," he said quietly. "For what it's worth, I trust both Kate and Brenda with my life. I know you've had...interactions...with them that have not been ideal, but I trust them."

She hesitated for a long moment, finally sighed. "Michael was raped in prison," she whispered.

Brenda shot to her feet and took off into the hallway, holding a hand over her mouth.

"Does Sonny know?" asked a shaken Kate.

Carly shook her head. "Michael only told Jason, who convinced him to tell me. Then Jason got sick and Robin died and..." she trailed off.

Kate nodded in understanding. "Are you going to tell him?"

"No," a staunch Carly said. "Michael should be the one to tell him."

Kurt and Kate both nodded with approval.

Brenda reappeared a moment later, pale and shaky, her face and hair slightly sweaty.

She found herself unable to meet Kurt's eyes, her mind recalling every unanswered email, every missed phone call, and wondered if he had wanted to tell her, if he had tried reaching out to her. In the end, she supposed it didn't matter; she had abandoned him regardless.

She could blame it on her youth, on her inexperience and lack of sophistication, but she had been thoughtless and too wrapped up in her own drama to pay attention to the boy she had once thought of as her brother.

She had failed him.

She had failed Robin. Julia. Jagger. Jax. The list was endless.

"Oh, my god," she murmured. "Oh, my god. Not Michael."

Focusing on Michael, a boy she knew but not well, allowed her to sublimate the fact that Kurt had been...she couldn't even bear to think the word.

Carly forced herself to hold her tongue. Despite what she thought of the women in Sonny's life, she had to admit that a few of them - namely Brenda, Robin, and Kate - honestly cared for her children in their own right, not just as extension of their father.
Brenda turned haunted eyes on Carly. "Does Jax know?"

Carly winced and shook her head. "If Michael wants him to know, Michael will be the one to tell him. Michael and Jax are not close, but Morgan is old enough to understand somewhat what has happened to his brother. Morgan will need Jax then. I think he'll always need Jax."

Desperate to avoid further discussion on this particular topic, she turned to Kurt. "How do you know Jax?"

He sighed and rolled his eyes. "I've been waiting for this. I met Jax in Brisbane several years ago after one of his divorces." He turned toward Brenda. "How many times did you two get married again? Have any of them been legal?"

She shot him an evil glare.

Kurt snickered. "Whatever. He was raiding some corporation and I was attending a medical conference as a cover for an assignment. We met, we flirted, we had a lot in common."

He shrugged, trying to distance himself emotionally from the topic. "We both felt there could have been more, we both wanted it to be more, but he had just divorced Brenda while I had only recently separated from Aidan. We didn't want to be each other's rebound. We promised we'd stay in contact, but outside of a few texts, it just sort of...fell away."

He shook his head to clear it. "I'm very fond of Jax and suppose I always will be, but I don't see a future for us. If we still feel anything for each other, it's only the mourning of missed opportunity."

Carly harrumphed. "Considering Jax's other romantic entanglements, I can say with no hesitation you're the best suited to him, boy parts notwithstanding." Her eyes sparkled. "Although the boy parts would be..."

Brenda cut her off with a snarl, but just as quickly turned thoughtful. "Actually, that's probably true."

"Too bad, Kurt," Kate snarked. "You could have had membership in the not-so-exclusive I Slept with Jax Club."

He raised a brow.

She nodded.

"I see," he said slowly, turning toward Carly, who smirked.

"I married him. Twice."

He gave an exaggerated blink and held up a hand. "Wait. You and Brenda married Jax multiple times. You married Sonny multiple times while Brenda was engaged to him multiple times." His eyes bugged. "Kate, Carly told me you slept with her husband. That husband was Jax?"

"Not one of my finer moments," admitted a spuriously haughty Kate, "and in my defense, they were legally separated. Jax and I had been friends for years and our one night together was more about solace than passion."

"And now she's dating Sonny," Carly complained.

"I'm not," Kate countered. "I told him today that we could no longer see each other."
Carly wasn't sure how she felt about that. Why was she so confused? Brenda's feelings were similarly mixed.

"So all of you have either dated or married Jax and Sonny?" Kurt asked the three women.

"It's like I never left Pine Valley," Erica murmured.

"Jax was also once married to my dear friend Alexis Davis," Kate added.

Kurt tilted his head. "Nikki's aunt?"

She nodded. "Nikolas called Alexis the other night to wax poetic about you."

He ducked his head and blushed.

Her scrutiny increased. "My other friend, Diane Miller, who is also an attorney, received a call from her primary client - Sonny Corinthos, coincidentally - who wanted her to compile a dossier on you. She declined."

He frowned. "Carly told him of my close relationship with Santana." He paused. "I assume he wants to use me to negotiate some kind of peace."

"I'll take care of him," Santana purred.

"Let us know when that goes down," Carly said. "You could charge ticket prices."

"Not that we want Sonny hurt permanently, of course," Brenda added, "but he's long overdue for a comeuppance."

"Even I must agree," Kate said. "Alexis and Diane would, as well. Sonny has the potential to be a good man, but he's inherently misogynistic and condescending."

"And I thought my love life was messy," Holly said.

"Are all women in this town so fucking dickmatized?" Santana demanded.

Carly laughed, though she didn't know why. "I also had a relationship with Sonny's best friend and enforcer, Jason, while Brenda was once married to him."

Kate rolled her eyes. "Boring. Let's talk about the slut he's married to now."

Brenda snorted with amusement.

Carly snickered and then recited verbatim Elizabeth's showdown with Sam.

Brenda whistled. "Wow. I didn't know Little Lizzie had it in her."

"It's always the quiet ones," Kate said. "Good for her. I love Alexis like a sister, but her daughter Samantha McCall is nothing but trash who has been allowed to fester for far too long. She needs to be put out on the curb so that someone will remove her from our presence."

"Maybe we'll get lucky and she'll take Maxie with her," suggested a hopeful Carly.

Kate pursed her lips. "The girl might one day become a competent assistant, but her unparalleled ability to make absolutely everything about herself is offensive. The scene she created at the service was appalling."
Everyone could agree on that.

"Her father seems like a lovely man," Erica noted.

"Mac is a very good man," said a surprisingly serious Carly.

Brenda nodded, as did Kate.

"You're going to be working with him, right?" Santana asked Kurt.

He nodded. "He's the chief of police, so we'll be frequently thrown together."

"Probably Lucky, too," Carly noted. "You can be sure he'll push you at Nikolas."

"Oh, goody."

Brenda's eyes widened. "So I wasn't imagining it at the hospital. You and Nikolas, Tink? Really?"

"No, not really," he snapped. He blinked and softened his face. "Perhaps something might happen, but not any time soon. I have more important things to consider."

"Like your new job?" Kate smoothly asked.

He nodded. "Yes."

No one believed him.
The day following Robin's funeral was overcast, the sky the color of burned-out light bulbs.

Many felt it was appropriate. Port Charles was dimmer, colder, for Robin's absence.

It was a unrealized foreshadowing of what was to come.

Jax had barely slept for thinking about Kurt.

Kurt was here, but not for him.

Of course, he didn't know where Kurt was precisely. He knew Kurt was checked into the Metro Court, but when he questioned the staff, his staff, they knew nothing. He wasn't sure if that was the truth or if Carly had laid down the law. He suspected the former only because the staff generally preferred him to Carly and were thus more likely to be honest with him.

And, okay, maybe it wasn't the brightest idea to sneak up to Penthouse A via the service elevator and use his master key card to enter Kurt's room. Sure, it was a total invasion of privacy and he would usually have more respect for his guests, but...he wanted to see Kurt, to talk to him.

He knew he was being pathetic. Kurt obviously had more important things on his mind than their dalliance a few years ago, like the fact that he had just buried his sister or that his dead mother was very much alive.

That was about all he had managed to unearth from shamelessly eavesdropping after the church service. He hadn't gone to the cemetery because he knew it wasn't his place. He had loved Robin and considered her a dear friend, but he wasn't family.

The strange thing was that, as incendiary as the gossip should have been, it was for some reason being kept quiet. He had tried to cozy up to Bobbie, knowing she had a soft spot for him as he was her favorite amongst Carly's ex-husbands, not that that was saying much, but she had dummied up quickly. So had Monica.

He had witnessed Lucky and Nikolas with their heads together, whispering furiously. It was strange to see. As far as he was aware, the brothers were not especially close, at least no more so than other siblings, but the two of them had been hanging all over each other like twins. He had noticed in particular Lulu's consternation at this and Laura's hopeful countenance. Regardless, he knew better than try digging for information about Kurt from Nikolas. Their body language in the courtyard had made it clear that Nikolas was quite interested in Kurt.

And that really rankled.

He didn't like Nikolas Cassadine and the feeling was entirely mutual. Granted, Nikolas perhaps had more cause; Jax and Carly had tried to pass off Spencer as Jax's son with Courtney. Still, Nikolas had started the whole thing by pursuing a woman married to someone else, all the while he was married to the supposed love of his life.

Jax scowled. Emily had really been shafted in every aspect of her life.
He certainly didn't trust Nikolas where Kurt was concerned but also recognized he had to play this carefully. There was nothing Kurt liked less than being considered a damsel in distress, especially since he was anything but. Jax winced as he recalled their singular sparring session. He may have a black belt in karate, but Kurt had kicked his ass despite his smaller height and slighter build.

Although Jax hadn't particularly minded a sweaty Kurt sitting astride him, pushing him down, pinning his arms above his head. That was a kink Jax wasn't even aware he'd had until that moment.

He unconsciously licked his lips and halfheartedly willed away his erection.

Well, it appeared his body still responded to Kurt in the same manner.

Finally he had approached Elizabeth but, despite their deep friendship, she too had held her silence. He didn't know whether it was out of respect for Kurt, her friendship with Nikolas, or, god forbid, her friendship with Carly. That scene during the service had been like a slap across the face. The idea of Carly and Elizabeth being friends would have been laughable if it wasn't so horrifying. He suspected Carly must have had some angle.

He was therefore surprised when Patrick fobbed off Emma on Elizabeth, who walked outside with the girl and Cameron. Jax couldn't help but smile when he noticed Cameron and Emma's joined hands. Patrick then proceeded to whisper to him some things he would have preferred he'd never known.

For one, the fact that Nikolas and Kurt had been friends since childhood was off-putting. He couldn't help but imagine a young Kurt and Nikolas holding hands as he had just witnessed Cameron and Emma doing. He tasted bile.

That Kurt was Anna's long-lost son had been made clear during Carly's frankly touching eulogy, but it was still somewhat unbelievable. He knew how long and how badly Kurt had mourned his mother. That was one of the few subjects Kurt had refused to discuss. He had been more than happy to wax poetic about his father, but his mother was off-limits. Jax couldn't even imagine what his ... friend ... was experiencing.

That Helena Cassadine was enamored of Kurt was terrifying. Jax would never forgive her for kidnapping Courtney and holding her hostage those years ago. Still, Patrick had made it clear that, for whatever reason, Helena held respect for Kurt and it would be unwise to anger the woman. Apparently upsetting Kurt was enough to accomplish this. If Patrick could be believed, it was only due to Kurt's interference that Luke, Ethan Lovett, and Paloma No-Surname-Provided were still alive.

He had no idea what to make about Holly's sister impersonating her. He knew Holly in name only through Mac and Robin. Patrick had explained, though, that Holly was extremely close to Kurt, all but considered him her son. Jax couldn't imagine what Anna must have thought of that.

Not that he was all Team Anna. He barely knew her, after all, and while he was sure it wasn't her fault she had forgotten Kurt, it still bothered him. He knew better to shoot his mouth off about it, however.

Kurt was apparently the new chief forensic pathologist for the city of Port Charles. That Kurt was so young and held such a title didn't surprise Jax, but the idea that Kurt had chosen Port Charles in which to settle sure did. According to Patrick, Kurt had known of Robin through reputation, but had never met her and never knew of his connection to her. He hadn't known of Anna. He knew Nikolas was based out of Port Charles, but hadn't known that Kate Howard lived here or that
Brenda returned with regularity.

In the space of three days, Kurt had unwittingly inserted himself into the middle of several lives. His friendships with Carly, Brenda, and Kate all but ensured they would gossip to him about Jax for all they might say, this could be a good thing. He just had to consider which one would speak the most highly of him. Probably Kate.

As chief pathologist, Kurt would work closely with Mac Scorpio and Lucky Spencer. Jax and Mac weren't terribly close friends, but they got along better than they had in the past.

Lucky, however, was sure to use his close proximity to Kurt to chat up Nikolas. Jax knew that while Lucky and Nikolas had their disagreements - many of them - they always went to bat for each other and presented a united front to those outside their family. Another problem was sure to be Alexis. Jax loved her dearly and she was his best friend in the whole world, but he well knew that she absolutely adored her only nephew. She would put Nikolas ahead of him in the race for Kurt's heart.

Jax had been able to tell from Patrick's brittle chatter that the man had fixated on Kurt; whether it was because of a sexual attraction or the fact that Kurt was Robin's brother was unknown. Still, Patrick would have more access to Kurt than Jax himself. So would Nikolas, for that matter, as he all but owned the hospital. Jax had a seat on the board, but how could he use it to maneuver himself closer to Kurt? If Kurt wanted something the hospital denied him, Kurt was likely to go off and buy it himself.

He blinked. If Kurt was Anna's son, how did that explain Katrine? Had she been Anna's mother?

Jax shook his head to clear it. He had far more questions that he did answers and he expected that would be the case for some time. He inhaled sharply and, checking either side of himself, pulled the master key card from his pocket and ran it through the lock on the penthouse, smiling when it opened. He quickly stepped inside.

"And who are you?" a sharp voice demanded.

Jax startled and looked down to see... "Erica Kane?"

He thought he had seen her with Kurt yesterday at the funeral, but how in the world did Kurt know Erica Kane?

Erica placed her hands on her hips and threw him a dismissive look. "Well, now that we've established that I am indeed Erica Kane, because of course I could be no one else, who are you?"

Jax offered his most charming smile. "Jasper Jacks, Ms. Kane, co-owner of the Metro Court. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Erica wrinkled her nose. "Congratulations on being genetically gifted, Mr. Jacks, but excuse me for being unimpressed. I'm quite familiar with some of the most handsome men walking the planet; I've married most of them. Some of them twice. Explain to me why you're in my good friend Kurt's hotel room despite knowing, I'm sure, that he is not here." She arched a brow. "Tell me, can all of your guests expect such invasions of privacy?"

And that's when Jax knew he was fucked.

Erica knew too, so she offered a smile of her own, one which bared all of her teeth.
Carly and Elizabeth were at Kelly's diner enjoying an impromptu gossip session and drawing bewildered stares from most of the clientele.

Carly had already cleared it with Kurt to catch Elizabeth up on everything that had been discussed at Kate's house the previous day. Normally, Carly would have been peeved that Kurt so clearly approved of Elizabeth, but now that Elizabeth was her new best girlfriend, she was unbothered. She knew Elizabeth was trustworthy and, apparently, so did Kurt.

Plus, it was fun to have someone with whom to share gossip!

Elizabeth was currently regarding her with wide eyes. "Kurt and Jax?"

Carly nodded. "Can you believe it?"

Elizabeth offered a slow blink. "Not really, no. Until just now, I never would have even conceived of Jax being involved with another man." She blew out a breath. "Of course, I also believed the same of Nikolas."

Carly grinned. "How cute is it that Kurt calls him Nikki?"

Elizabeth's eyes sparkled. "It's adorable, especially because, as much as he denies it, Nikolas loves it."

Carly rolled her eyes. "Boys."

Elizabeth nodded. "They're hopeless, which is why it's up to us to do the heavy lifting."

Carly arched a brow. "Suggestions?"

Elizabeth bit her lip. "Well, that depends. How upset are you about the idea of Kurt and Jax as a couple?"

Carly thought about it for several long moments. "Actually, I'm pretty okay with it." She held up a hand. "Don't get me wrong; I'm not thrilled." She shrugged. "Still, I do want Jax to be happy and I really like Kurt. If Kurt can make him happy, if they can make each other happy, then good for them." She snickered. "Besides, at least no other woman will have Jax. Well, not for the foreseeable future."

Elizabeth likewise snickered. "So let's make it interesting and play a little game."

A wolfish smile graced Carly's face. "What do you have in mind?"

Elizabeth smirked. "As much I loved Emily, as much as I will always miss her, I'm tired of Nikolas stomping around his empty mausoleum of a mansion trying to find things with which to distract himself. He might have asked for my advice, but I still don't think he has the balls to pursue Kurt, so I'm going to give him a push. A big one."

Carly's eyes lighted with glee. "I see. Am I to assume I'm to do the same with Jax?"

Elizabeth nodded. "We both know how competitive they are. Jax will probably make the first move and if Nikolas is made aware of that fact, he'll race to catch up."

Carly thought it was a good plan with the potential for a lot of fun and boys kissing, but she had some concerns. "I don't want it to be Courtney all over again."

Elizabeth sighed. "True." Another smirk. "Do you really see Kurt as a Courtney figure, playing
them against each other?" She snorted. "If anything, he'll put leashes on them both and walk them around town."

"We're going to need cameras," Carly said.

"And pompoms."

As they threw back their heads and cackled, the other patrons shivered in fear.

Kurt was beginning to rethink his plans with Brenda and Kate.

He might have had a black belt in shopping, but he had never before shopped with the likes of them. Brenda insisted on trying on absolutely everything in her size, as well as a size below and one above, and then parading out of the fitting room as if on a runway and asking for Kurt's opinion. Conversely, all Kate did was bemoan the provincial fashion offerings of Port Charles.

After his twenty-third You look amazing, Brenda! he decided it was time to cash out.

"We're gorgeous and rich. Why are we shopping at a Lacey's department store when we could just go down to the City and really do this?"

Kate and Brenda slowly turned toward him. They squealed, though Kate would later insist she had done no such thing.

Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled. "Let me call the other girls. We'll leave first thing in the morning."

Brenda balked. "You want me to go shopping with Carly?"

Kate looked similarly ill.

This time Kurt rolled his eyes and scowled. "You don't even have to speak with Carly if you're so bothered, but if you want to object to her coming with us, you both can just stay here."

They accepted his rebuke with feigned meekness but were annoyed. The truth of the matter was they had seen yesterday how much Carly truly liked Kurt. More than that, she respected, well, no one. Also, Kurt appeared able to handle Carly and her moods with ease, so, really, what was the issue? Besides, they could always just leave. They looked at each other and nodded.

Kurt rolled his eyes again and called Erica.

A terrified Max led Santana and Brittany into Sonny's living room.

"Mr. C will be right with you," he said, struggling to conceal the tremor in his voice.

Santana stared at him.

And stared.

And then she stared some more.

Max fidgeted, pulled at his collar, and finally fled the room.

Santana smirked. She was used to guys like Sonny pulling their little power trips. Having an
underling meet her at the door, escort her inside, and then stand guard over her until he deigned to make an appearance really was poor form.

Seven minutes later, and Santana had counted, Sonny walked in.

"Please excuse me for..."

Santana cut him off at the pass. "Listen up, half pint, because I don't repeat myself. You are to leave Kurt Hummel alone. You don't look at him. You don't talk to him. You don't talk about him. Observe these simple rules and you're golden. Ignore them and I'll string fishhooks through your nipples and fly you from the roof of your ex-wife's hotel. Are we clear?"

Sonny frowned. "I don't take orders or threats."

"That wasn't a threat. It was a promise." She arched a brow. "You've grown soft, Corinthos. You may be a big cheese in this podunk town of nothing, so you might have forgotten that you're on the low rung in the real world. I can eliminate you with ease and don't think I won't. I have no interest in what goes on in Port Charles beyond Kurt. Leave him alone and all will be well. Questions? Comments? Concerns?"

The only reason Sonny didn't open fire immediately was because of his policy not to hurt women. Granted he often hurt them emotionally and perhaps spiritually, but never physically. Also, despite his machismo, he knew her promise was valid. Oh, sure, he might be able to catch her by surprise and take her out, but despite her relatively young age, the woman was the head of a network vastly superior to his own. He might have ruled the Port Charles mob scene, but she ruled Argentina and had interests in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela.

She had friends, a lot of them, all of whom, from the intelligence he'd been able to gather, were quite satisfied with how she ran her empire.

And then there was her wife to consider. Brittany Pierce's reputation far preceded her.

He was a lot of things, but he wasn't stupid.

"How does a doctor from an old ennobled European family become so close to a mafia princess from South America?" Sonny demanded. Admittedly, he was curious. He had no intention of hurting the kid. If anything, he'd make sure Robin's brother was untouchable in this town.

"Cheerleading."

He stared at her in confusion.

Santana then pointed to her wife.

Brittany growled. "Hurt my Kurty and I'll strangle you until your eyeballs swell to the size of banjos before popping like ripe cherries." She paused. "Then I'll eat them."

He believed her.

There were no more questions.

Laura realized she had been away far too long. Leaving her children to their own devices was never a good idea.

She had extended her stay in town by an extra day to allow her more time with her children, but
after breakfast with her daughter, she was seriously considering another extension.

Lulu had been dating a mobster, and now she was with a cop - Lucky's partner, no less - who was also the long-lost son of Sonny Corinthos? Why the hell was her daughter working for Kate Howard, anyway? Lulu had never been interested in fashion.

Lunch had been spent with both Nikolas and Lucky, and she was pleased but disconcerted by how close they had become. She had always wanted them to be such, of course, but this new connection between them, forged by who knew what, was frankly a little creepy. It was bordering on incestuous.

They simply couldn't keep their hands off each other. If Lucky's hand wasn't laid atop Nikolas' own, then Nikolas' arm was slung across Lucky's shoulders. When Nikolas spoke, Lucky laid his head on his brother's shoulder, and when Lucky took over the conversation, Nikolas pressed himself so tightly against Lucky's side, they looked like conjoined twins. That didn't take into account how they often finished each other's sentences or held entire conversations just by staring into one another's eyes.

"What is going on?" she finally demanded.

"What do you mean?" asked a bewildered Lucky.

Nikolas frowned and pulled his brother toward him as if to shield him from their mother's anger.

Laura's eyes widened at the defensive position. Since when was she the enemy?

"I just don't understand," she said more softly. "I've never before seen you like this with each other."

"You mean acting like brothers?" Nikolas drawled.

"That not what I mean," Laura said impatiently.

"Like brothers who love each other?" Lucky then qualified.

Laura flushed and looked down at her Cobb salad. That one struck a little closer to home than she would have liked.

"A lot's happened, Mom," Nikolas said, voice more gentle. "The night before Robin's funeral, Lucky and I had a long talk, probably the longest and the best we've ever had, and we realized several things."

Lucky nodded. "Like how much we really do love each other. Like how grateful we are to have one another."

"Our family," Nikolas continued, "both Spencer and Cassadine, spends too much time holding on to the past, to who said what to whom, to who did what to whom." He shook his head. "At the end of the day, it's irrelevant, at least to us. Lucky is my brother. I love him."

Lucky sighed. "We had been holding back a lot of things from each other because we'd grown to used to conforming to the patterns which, sorry to be blunt, were never ours. I look at Nikki and see my brother, not a Cassadine."

Nikolas flushed and ducked his head at the diminutive.
Laura raised a brow. "Nikki?"

Lucky grinned. "That's what Kurt calls him."

Nikolas punched his brother's thigh.

"Robin's brother," Laura murmured, looking at her eldest from the corner of her eye. "Luke made mention..."

Nikolas snorted. "Oh, I'm sure he did." He smirked. "Did he happen to mention that Kurt is the only reason he's still alive? Helena had ambushed Luke at Wyndemere with every intention of killing him. Kurt stopped it." He held up a hand. "How? Helena likes him."

Laura's mouth fell open.

She blinked and shook her head to clear it. "Why would Luke even be at Wyndemere?"

With great reluctance, Lucky informed his mother about Ethan Lovett and his questionable paternity.

"That's ridiculous," Laura insisted, quickly doing some mental math. "At the time this boy would have been conceived, Luke and I were together, happily. Holly wasn't in the picture and hadn't been for years."

Nikolas then filled her in on Paloma impersonating Holly.

She sighed. "Poor Holly," she whispered, shaking her head. "I don't think anyone's really even stopped to think how many disappointments she's been made to endure." She blinked. "So who are Ethan's parents?"

Nikolas shrugged. "According to Kurt, Paloma and Bill Eckert."

She raised a brow. "Luke's cousin?"

"And mine too," Lucky said. "So I guess that means Ethan is related to me and Lulu."

"Well, you always did want more family," Laura said.

"That's because the only cousin we had was Carly."

She nodded. "Well, and Lucas, but point taken." She paused. "Carly is...different."

"Kurt's influence," Nikolas said.

"He must be quite a man."

"He is."

Mother and son stared at each other for several long moments. Lucky tried not snicker.

"Ask your question," Nikolas said.

Laura smiled. "Why would I, when I already know the answer?" She shook her head. "I'm not judging you, Nikolas, and I'm bothered that you seem to expect me to do just that. Your life is your own. Who you love is your business." She arched a brow. "Believe me, I've had enough people comment on and judge me for my choices. I won't do that to my children."
She paused. "Do I worry? Yes, of course. I always will, just like I'll always listen to whatever you want to tell me, but I won't judge you. If you want to be with Kurt, be with Kurt."

Nikolas stared at her in confusion. "You don't care?"

She frowned. "Of course I care, but about you. Whether you're with a man or woman makes no difference to me, as long as you're happy and treated well."

"And is Scotty treating you well, Mom?" Lucky asked.

Laura took a moment before answering. "Scotty is ... in a very bad place, Lucky. There are things I won't tell you but, suffice it to say, he's lost two of his children; Serena isn't speaking to him; and no matter what he believes, it's Lucy he loves, not me."

Nikolas scoffed. "I can understand missing Karen, but no one misses Logan."

"That was uncalled for," Laura murmured. "No matter what else Logan was, he was still someone's son, Nikolas."

He blinked harshly and turned away. She was right and he knew it.

"Sometimes I forget Karen is gone," Lucky said sadly. "I never knew her that well; she was more a part of Jason and Robin's group than she was ours, but we always were aware of her." He sighed. "She was a nice person."

Nikolas nodded. "She really was, and she was an excellent doctor."

Laura cleared her throat. "I understand Kurt is a doctor."

Nikolas rolled his eyes as Lucky smirked.

The interrogation was about to commence.

"Mommy, look! It's Unca Kurt!"

Rachel Hudson immediately stopped preparing breakfast and ran to the nearest window, desperate eyes searching for any sign of her ... brother-in-law.

Kurt had always been very firm that while they were colleagues, occasional allies, and heaven forbid, some measure of family, but never friends. It had hurt.

It still did.

So many years had passed in silence, save the occasional postcard or text message. Kurt had never been faithful about keeping in touch, about even acknowledging that she and Finn existed.

She soured and then softened.

Well, that had been true, but it had all changed after Cosette was born.

She could say a lot about Kurt Hummel, and she had certainly said her share, but he was a damn good uncle. He had showered Cosette with gifts over the years - nothing ostentatious or over the top. Expensive, yes, and definitely well-chosen, but nothing obnoxious. It was obvious from the tone and quality of the gifts that Kurt cared about Cosette, saw her as family, and loved her deeply. The same was true of Caleb. He sent the cards and notes for no reason at all. He sent them flowers
and Parisian chocolates and exquisite books they would one day come to appreciate. He loved them completely.

But not their parents.

Still, Kurt had mellowed over the years. She needn't have been in personal contact with him to recognize it. He was no longer so melodramatic and histrionic ...

Okay, he had never really been those things. Sure, Kurt had always had a lot of drama, but most of his negative behavior had been directly proportional to how people had treated him. Viewed from that angle, she supposed she hadn't really been the friend she had believed herself to be.

She'd tried, she truly had, the best way she had known how, but being a friend, a true friend, had always eluded her. She knew she had been selfish and self-absorbed, had tended to force circumstances to fit her wants and needs, but that had been years ago.

She had changed, too. She was a wife now, and a mother, and she was good in those roles of a lifetime. She thought even Kurt would agree.

She didn't know why it bothered her so much that Kurt had kept himself removed from their family. Yes, they'd had their problems, but that was ten years ago! Everyone had moved on and grown up, but Kurt stubbornly refused to acknowledge that she and Finn had changed.

She knew she wasn't the only one who felt that way. Finn keenly mourned the loss of his brother, of the friendship and kinship he and Kurt might have enjoyed, had he not been so stubborn. That was always the rub for Finn; as much as he loved and missed Kurt, for the longest time Finn had blamed his brother for their lack of relationship.

The truth of the matter was that Finn had treated Kurt very badly. He had known it at the time and believed they would have eventually reconciled, but then Burt died and Kurt was gone.

Honestly, Rachel never blamed him for leaving; Lima had been suffocating him for years.

Despite knowing how slow Kurt was to trust, despite knowing that Kurt was even slower to forgive, Finn had remained obstinate. When he finally reached out, Kurt hadn't been interested. Rachel had never blamed him for that, either. Still, it always amused her just how alike Finn and Kurt really were.

She blinked and shook her head before scowling. Kurt wasn't there. She didn't know why she ever thought he would be.

Cosette ran into the kitchen brandishing a newspaper, her younger brother toddling after her as fast as he could.

"Look, Mommy!"

Rachel arched a brow and relieved her daughter of her burden. She gasped when she looked down.

It was Kurt, splashed across the front page of the Port Charles Herald.

Though the paper was only regional, it was nevertheless well done. It served mainly Northern and Upstate New York, as well as parts of Canada, but Long Islander Rachel Berry-Hudson had taken a subscription because the Herald paid close attention to theater, particularly local and regional theater.
A lot of patrons had taken a chance on her various very off off-Broadway shows because of her reviews in the Herald. She'd always be grateful for that and to the critics on staff.

Still, she had never been front page material.

She stamped down her surge of jealousy and tore her eyes from Kurt's picture, though it was difficult.

He hadn't aged a fucking day! That was just not right.

Then she began reading the copy and paled.

"Oh, my god," she whispered.

It couldn't be right, could it?

This made no sense!

She glanced back up at the picture and frowned, not terribly surprised to see Brittany and Santana standing beside him.

But what in the hell was Kurt doing with Erica Kane? How did he even know her?

She read the caption.

Dr. Kurt Hummel, the new Chief Medical Examiner of Port Charles, mourns the loss of his sister and fellow physician, longtime Port Charles resident Dr. Robin Scorpio-Drake, who is survived by husband Dr. Patrick Drake and daughter Emma. Also pictured: his companion, the internationally renowned Erica Kane; close friend and Argentinian oil and gas mogul Santana Lopez and her wife Brittany Pierce; former Port Charles resident and ex-stepmother of Dr. Scorpio, Holly Sutton; Carly Corinthos, the proprietor of the Metro Court Hotel; and Prince Nikolas Cassadine, international Greek shipping magnate and the major shareholder of General Hospital.

She recognized the Four Horseman minus Quinn Fabray, of course. She briefly wondered if Prince Nikolas was the same Nikki of whom Kurt had made mention all those years ago; at the time, she had believed Nikki to be a figment of Kurt's lonely imagination.

She had no idea who Holly Sutton and Carly Corinthos were, but judging their protective stance around Kurt, they were close to him.

But wait.

Sister?

What?

She quickly scanned the rest of the article and almost collapsed from shock at the picture just below the one featuring Kurt.

Dr. Robin Scorpio-Drake was the only child of Anna Devane and Robert Scorpio, both former Port Charles chiefs-of-police and who were presumed dead for several years. Dr. Scorpio-Drake was raised by her uncle, Malcolm "Mac" Scorpio, the current Chief of Police, and Holly Sutton.

This Anna woman ... Rachel recognized her from the photo, because she was the woman from the one photo she had ever seen of Kurt's mother.
Anna Devane was Suzanne Hummel.

And she was alive.

Tears gathered in Rachel's eyes. Kurt's mother was alive. Surely if he had known this, mention would have been made. He would have told someone and eventually it would have come down the grapevine to her or Finn. Further, she knew for a fact that if Kurt had accepted a job in Port Charles, it could only have been recently. He had still been living in Paris less than a month ago, because Caleb's birthday presents had been shipped from Kurt's Paris address.

Kurt had found his dead mother but had lost a sister, one he probably never even knew he'd had.

She could see the resemblances between Kurt and Anna, Robin and Anna, and Robin and Kurt. She could see that little Emma looked just like her mother and also like her uncle.

Her heart lurched at the thought of a young mother taken from her child. She couldn't even imagine.

But Kurt could, and that just broke her heart. After all those years of mourning his mother, to be confronted with her now?

But what could she do?

How could she help him?

"Finn!"
Laura delicately nursed her coffee, satisfied with herself and her sons. She'd managed to get them to talk to her about what was really going on in their lives without having to cajole or browbeat. Sometimes all that was required was a patient ear and a gentle smile.

Not always, of course. There were moments which demanded threats and intimidation. Those moments could be rewarding, as well.

She was startled from her thoughts by the chirp of Nikolas' phone.

He pulled it from his pocket and grinned.

Lucky smirked. "Well, I guess we know who's calling."

His brother gave him a dirty look and rolled his eyes. "Good morning," he purred into the receiver.

Laura raised her brows. She had to admit, she liked seeing Nikolas' playful and flirtatious side. She so often worried about him now that Emily was gone. If nothing more was to develop between her son and Kurt Hummel, she was grateful Nikolas had the other man's friendship.

"I'm just fine, thank you," Nikolas said, ignoring his family. "And how are you?" he asked huskily. He smiled when he detected the blush in Kurt's voice. "I'm so glad you called."

He elbowed Lucky in the ribs when his brother began making kissy noises.

Laura chuckled.


Lucky perked up. Jealousy!

"Yes," Nikolas said carefully, "he has the day off." He frowned thunderously. "Why would you care if Lucky has plans today?"

Lucky raised a brow, wondering as to the purpose of Kurt's call and debating the possibility of flirting heavily with him the next time they crossed paths. That would definitely spark a pursuit by Nikolas and get him out of his creepy castle.

And Kurt was extremely hot.

He shook his head to clear it.

What the hell was he thinking?

Nikolas' face cleared. "Oh. Well, I don't think that would be a problem. Would you like me to ask him?"

"Sure I'll go on a date with you, Dr. Kurt!" Lucky loudly exclaimed. "What should I wear, Nikki?"

Nikolas turned furious eyes on his brother, who was almost choking with laughter. Their mother was snickering into her coffee mug. Lucky beamed and tickled his brother's ribs.

Nikolas huffed and rolled his eyes before scowling. "No, he was just kidding," he said to Kurt.
"That's my brother: notorious comedian. Ha ha." His eyes widened. "No, you can't talk to him!"

"Aw, come on!" Lucky whined. "Let me talk to the hot doctor!"

"Lucky is not devastatingly beautiful!" Nikolas insisted.

"I am, too," Lucky pouted, jutting out his lower lip and fighting the light blush on his cheeks.

Devastatingly beautiful? Really? That was ... wow. Definitely wow. Lucky didn't think anyone had ever called him beautiful before. Okay, so, yeah, maybe he could understand why Nikolas was so enamored.

"Am I not beautiful?" Nikolas complained.

Slowly Nikolas turned into a tomato with hair. Lucky and Laura exchanged an interested glance, wondering just what Kurt had said to Nikolas to elicit that reaction.

"Oh," Nikolas whispered. "Thank you. When are you coming back?" He nodded. "Would you like to have dinner?" He beamed and then frowned. "Yes, in public." He tilted his head. "Why would I care who sees us? Kurt, you're one of my oldest friends, probably my happiest memory from childhood. I don't give a fuck what people would say."

He sighed. "Kurt, you don't need to protect me. Further, what, exactly, do you think I need to be protected from? That people might think we're on a date? That I might be perceived as gay? Why should that be considered a bad thing?"

Lucky's respect for Kurt grew. The man was obviously concerned about Nikolas' reputation and didn't want anyone to call his character into question. That Nikolas obviously didn't care was a point in his brother's favor.

"If anyone becomes obnoxious, we'll just call Lucky and he can arrest them."

Lucky sniggered and nodded.

"No, Lucky won't use his handcuffs on you!" Nikolas barked.

"Oh, yes, I will!" Lucky called out. "Call me, Dr. Kurt!"

Laura rolled her eyes at their antics.

"Be careful, okay?" Nikolas said into the phone. He blinked. "Yes, I know you can take care of yourself." He frowned. "No, I wasn't insinuating anything about your age or capability. Of course I trust you!" He glared. "What do you mean, keeping me on my toes?"

Laura burst out laughing, resolving to meet Kurt before she left Port Charles.

Lucky was holding his sides, all but howling. He loved seeing Nikolas like this, so flustered and unseated. It made him so much more fun.

"Okay," Nikolas said, "I'll see you then." He blinked owlishly. "I ... I love you, too, Kurt," he said quietly before disconnecting and staring down at his phone.

"We always used to tell each other that," he said. "He was often the only person who ever told me they loved me."

Laura's eyes filled as she reached across the table and put her hand on his. Lucky wrapped an arm
around his brother's shoulders and buried his face in Nikolas' neck.

"You know that's not true anymore, right?" he whispered.

Nikolas reached up and patted Lucky's face. "I know." He then patted him a little harder. "Don't flirt with Kurt."

Lucky laughed. "It was fun! I think I actually had forgotten how fun it could be."

Nikolas sighed. "Lucky, I really wish you would get yourself out there again. You spend far too much time at home sulking."

Lucky pulled back and stared. "Really? Hi, Nikolas. You just received a collect call from Pot to Kettle. The message reads: you're black."

Nikolas had the grace to flush.

Laura cleared her throat. "So what's going on?"

"Kurt wanted to ask Lucky if he could watch Cameron for the weekend. He and Carly are going down to the city, and since Elizabeth has the weekend off for the first time since ... Jake ... they want to take her with them."

Laura blinked rapidly. "Elizabeth and ... Carly?"

Nikolas huffed. "The new Thelma and Louise of Port Charles, apparently."

"I don't even want to know," Lucky said, holding up his hands. "For whatever reason, it's working, and I much prefer when Carly isn't attacking Elizabeth."

Nikolas inclined his head. "Kurt's friends, Santana and Brittany, are also going, along with Brenda Barrett, Kate Howard, and Erica Kane."

"It's like The Untouchables," Laura remarked.

Lucky nodded. "That works. Sure, I'll watch Cameron, but why didn't Elizabeth just ask me herself?"

"It's a surprise," Nikolas said. "They had asked her, but she said she had to watch Cameron and declined. They're not giving her a choice."

"Good," said a serious Lucky. "She needs to get out of the house and spend some time with adults ... and Carly."

Nikolas snickered. "So how about it, Mom? Want to spend the day with your sons and grandsons?"

Laura smiled. "I'd like nothing more."

Patrick watched listlessly as Anna bustled around his kitchen, trying her best to prepare breakfast for Emma. He was both saddened and amused; Robin had apparently inherited her lack of culinary skills from her mother. It was just one more thing that made his heart heavier.

Emma was quieter than usual but still cheerful, which Patrick took a good sign. He was quite in awe of his daughter. She understood that her mother was gone, that Robin was dead, but the funeral had actually provided some measure of closure for her. She was certain her mother was now in
heaven watching over her. He greatly envied her faith and innocence.

"You have to eat something, Patrick," Anna gently coaxed, "even if it's not something I made. In fact, it probably shouldn't be something I made."

He forced a smile. "Thanks, Anna, but I'm really not hungry."

She sighed and nodded, resisting the urge to mother him in place of her daughter, and sipped her tea.

"Have you heard from Kurt?" Patrick asked thoughtlessly.

Anna raised her head and blinked owlishly.

"Who's Kurt?" Emma chirped, holding her spoon in midair as she awaited the answer.

Patrick and Anna exchanged a panicked glance.

"Oh," Emma said, as though just remembering something, "he's the boy Morgan's mommy was talking about at the church, right? Mommy's brother?" She wrinkled her nose. "Does that mean he's my uncle?"

Patrick stared at her. "Yes, sweetheart, Kurt is Mommy's brother and your uncle."

She nodded. "So why haven't I met him before?" She frowned. "Does he not like me?" she whispered. "Did I do something wrong?"

"Absolutely not, darling," Anna said soothingly. She blew out a breath, wondering how to explain this to a child.

Patrick knew that complete honesty was the only way to go. Anything less and Emma would see right through it. She was just like her mother in that way.

"Honey," he began, "do you remember when Mommy and Mimi told you about when Mimi was hurt before you were born?"

Emma pursed her lips. "You mean when Mimi forgot who Mommy was?"

Anna closed her eyes and fought for breath.

"Exactly," Patrick continued. "Well, it was the same thing with your Uncle Kurt. Mimi forgot she had another baby. She only remembered Mommy when Mommy went to Pine Valley to find her, and she only remembered Uncle Kurt when he went to General Hospital and she saw him."

"Oh," Emma said, nodding. "I understand." She turned to Anna. "But you remember him now, Mimi, right?"

"I do, sweetheart, but not everything," Anna admitted. "I can't remember when Kurt and I were separated, but he thought I had died. He believed that from the time he was your age."

Emma's eyes filled with tears. "That's so sad. He must have been so lonely."

Patrick swallowed heavily. Compassion was another of Robin's traits which Emma had inherited in spades. "He was, baby, he was very sad for a very long time. He never thought he'd see Mimi again and he never knew Mommy was his sister."
Emma stared at him for a very long time. "He must be angry," she finally declared.

"He is very angry," Anna said softly, "and he has every right to be."

"But he's not angry at you, Emma," Patrick said. "He very much wants to meet you."

She beamed at him. "Yay!"

Patrick smiled and then startled when his phone rang. He glanced down at it and frowned before answering. "Hello, Nikolas."

Anna raised a brow.

Patrick listened for a very long time and at last nodded. "Hold for a second and let me check." He covered the receiver with his hand. "Emma, would you like to go to the park today with Cameron and Spencer?"

She cheered.

He nodded, not exactly thrilled to spend the day with Nikolas, but wanting to make his daughter happy. "We'll meet you at eleven in the park," he said into the phone. "Thanks for thinking of us, Nikolas."

He hung up and frowned.

"Is everything all right?" Anna asked.

He finally shrugged. "I guess. Lucky and Nikolas are spending the day together with their sons and thought Emma might like to join them."

"Cam and Spencer are my boyfriends!" the little girl exclaimed.

"They are not your boyfriends," Patrick said.

She pouted. "They're my friends and they're boys. How are they not my boyfriends?"

Patrick closed his eyes and groaned. He could feel Anna smirking at him.

"Emma," he said, sighing, "put your dishes in the sink and go upstairs and get dressed, okay? In play clothes this time, not your ballerina costume."

Emma glared at him, put her dishes in the sink, and stalked from the room with all the wounded dignity a five-year-old could muster. Which was actually quite a lot.

"You appear displeased," Anna noted.

"Spending the day with Nikolas really wasn't high on my list of priorities," he drawled.

"Because of Kurt?"

He flushed and looked away.

"It's fairly obvious that Nikolas is interested in him, and if I didn't know you better, Patrick, I would think you are as well." She frowned. "He is not Robin."

She startled when he noticeably flinched.
"That's not the first time you've been told that, is it?" she asked softly.

"I don't know what's wrong with me," Patrick muttered. "It's not normal, my reaction to him. It's embarrassing and mortifying and it's hurting me and him."

"You miss your wife. You're desperate to cling to any part of her." She sighed. "He's my son, Patrick. Do you think I don't see the similarities? His demeanor, his intelligence, his profession, his wit. I see her too, but she's not all I see. You have to see him."

Patrick scowled. "I know that. I do."

"All right," she said slowly, "then answer me this: are you attracted to him? Not emotionally or intellectually, but sexually?"

He shifted uncomfortably.

Her eyes narrowed. "You're not sure, are you?"

He set his jaw and looked away.

She had no idea what to say. She had certainly never seen this coming.

Patrick cleared his throat. "Kurt is going down to the city for the weekend. Brittany and Santana, as well as Carly, Elizabeth, Brenda, Kate Howard, and Erica Kane, are going with him."

She blinked. That was quite a cast of characters. She wasn't sure New York would survive it.

"And Holly?" she asked hesitantly.

"Holly is staying in Port Charles."

She nodded.

"Permanently," he amended. "According to Nikolas, Holly will spend the weekend looking for a house for Kurt and herself."

He didn't know why he said it, why he used that tone, but he knew it stung her and he was glad. It was petty and spiteful, but her remarks about Kurt had hurt him and he was in the mood to spread the pain around.

Robin would've killed him for it. Hell, he wanted to kill himself for it. Strangely, however, he knew that Anna wouldn't take offense.

She didn't. He knew he was lashing out and she didn't blame him. She had lashed out at Robert and Luke after the funeral. She wasn't in the mood to handhold Robert and Luke's pursuit of her was now just annoying. He was still married to Tracy and in love with Laura. She wasn't about to be added to his harem.

She finished her tea and began doing the dishes. She would let Patrick have the day with Emma so that he would hopefully get himself somewhat under control.

And then she was going to find Holly and have a long overdue chat.

Kurt stared at Erica as though he couldn't have possibly understood her correctly. "Jax actually used his key to come into the room?"
Carly scowled. "That is so over the line and not even like him."

Brenda nodded. "He must be very lonely," she said quietly. She turned toward Kurt. "Or he's just that into you."

Kurt rolled his eyes as Carly smirked. "He and I will have a discussion, but later." He looked back to Erica and pouted. "Are you sure I can't convince you stay in Port Charles? I love having you here."

She smiled and took his hands in hers. "And I love being with you, but I have to get back to Pine Valley next week. Enchantment won't run itself and I'm due to begin taping the new season of *New Beginnings*.

Kurt hummed and nodded his head. "Would you be open to a possible show topic?"

She blinked. "Of course!"

"Crimson," he said. "Kate's magazine has been in operation not even a year and is breaking sales records in every market. An endorsement from Erica Kane would only see circulation skyrocket."

His eyes sparkled. "Perhaps Kate could guarantee a massive reduction in ad space for Enchantment?"

Erica and Kate stared at him and then at each other before shaking hands.

"This is wonderful!" Erica exclaimed. She shook her head. "Honestly, Kurt, I know you're a gifted doctor, but you definitely have a head for business."

He blushed. "Well, then here's another freebie for you. The anniversary issue is approaching. Brenda Barrett gracing the cover would surely send circulation soaring and her appearance on *New Directions* would win your time slot hands down."

Kate smirked and inclined her head as Brenda squealed with joy and tackled him with a hug.

"What say we share the cover?" she asked. "It would be just like old times."

"I'm all for that," Kate said.

"I'm not a model," Kurt said, "and it would be unprofessional of me to draw that kind of publicity to General Hospital."

"Perhaps," Erica drawled, "but I should think a segment on the new Port Charles chief pathologist would make an excellent segment on *New Beginnings*."

She held up a hand to stave off his protests. "Just think about it, Kurt. Not only would the hospital and Port Charles itself get great press, but I know how passionate you are about your field. Imagine what this forum could do for it. You could explain exactly what forensic pathology is and how it's an integral component of criminal justice."

He opened his mouth and just as quickly closed it, considering her valid points. It would be nice to dispel the myth that forensics was as neat and tidy as every episode of *CSI*. DNA analysis and toxicology results were not available overnight, but the success of that show and those it spawned brought all the wrong attention to the practice. The general public had no idea what was entailed.

"I'll think about it," was all he would agree to do, "and I would have to get Monica's permission."
Carly snorted. "Get serious. She was desperate to hire you. Plus free publicity for the hospital when we're about to kick off charity season? She'll do it." She turned to Kate. "I'll talk to Jax about purchasing double the space for the hotel in the magazine."

Kate gave her a cool smile, but was pleased.

"And I'm happy to do a feature on the Metro Court for New Beginnings," Erica said. "I truly have enjoyed your hotel, Carly. You should be proud of it."

"Thank you," Carly said sincerely, "and I'd like to speak with you later about featuring Enchantment cosmetics exclusively in our boutiques and salons."

Erica beamed.

"Well, now that you've all had a chance to play Alexis Colby," Santana barked, "can we get this show on the road? I promised Brittany tickets to The Lion King."

"Hello."

A miserable Aidan looked up from his shot glass, in which he had been contemplating why his life sucked so much, to see a mature, beautiful woman smiling at him.

"Kurt and Erica suggested I would be likely to find you in a bar and this is only the second one I've tried!" She nodded at the bartender. "One of those," she said, pointing at Aidan's glass, "and another for him."

"It's early in the morning for a lady to be drinking," he griped, not wanting anything she might be selling.

"Then it's a good thing I'm not a lady," Holly said grandly, knocking one back.

"I saw you yesterday at the funeral."

She nodded. "Kurt wanted to talk to you himself but he wasn't sure you'd welcome his company."

Aidan said nothing, staring at the fresh drink now before him.

"You're Anna's nephew?" she asked. As his nod, she sighed. "I've been where you are, Aidan, and I don't envy you. If you need to be drunk to get through the worst of it, do so, but don't make it a habit, all right? It won't help."

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Holly Sutton."

He blinked owlishly at his glass and slowly turned to face her.

She grinned. "Heard of me, then? I'm not surprised. I've been a thorn in your aunt's side for most of our adult lives."

He sighed. "How is he?"

"Managing," she said, "but it's not any easier for him than it is for you."

"He must be furious with me."
Her brows gathered. "Why would he be? You're just as much a victim of this circumstance as he. He doesn't blame you at all, Aidan. If truth be told, he was frightened to approach you himself, so I offered."

"He's scared of me?" Aidan whispered, devastation marring his features.

She was silent for a long moment, obviously choosing her words with care. "He loved you very much, Aidan, and he still does. Everything you felt for each other doesn't simply go away because you now find yourselves related to Anna."

"I feel dirty," he admitted, shaking his head, "and that angers me because I shouldn't feel that way, have never felt that way, not where he's concerned."

"Kurt is feeling much the same," she confessed. "The fact of the matter is that neither one of you knew. There was no reason for you to know." She paused. "In the grand scheme of things, it matters little. I know that's easy to say, but it is the truth. Your love hurt no one. It didn't even hurt the two of you, not really. No damage has been done that is irreparable."

He scoffed. "Yes, of course. I only spent two years having intercourse with a first-degree relation. No worries, then."

"You didn't know you were related," she repeated with some force. "You're both men. No genetic aberrations resulted from your time together." She raised a brow. "If you could go back and not love him, knowing what you now know, would you?"

He didn't answer, which was an answer in and of itself.

She nodded with satisfaction. "Yes, it's sad, but it's not shameful. Neither one of you did anything wrong."

"Intellectually I understand that," he said, "but emotionally, it's going to take a while to reconcile it."

"Then take that time," she advised. "Objectivity will come. Are you still in love with him?"

"That's what I've been trying to figure out," he said mournfully, "and I don't think I am. I don't believe we would ever have gotten back together. We were terrific at the time, and I don't regret my love for him, but, no, I'm not in love with him."

"That's half the battle fought, then," she said. "Aidan, I've known Kurt for a very long time and can say with confidence that he was happiest when he was with you. Don't let this baggage take away from that. You helped him so much, brought him back from the brink even, so don't ever forget that he loved you fiercely and with great pride."

His hands tightened around the glass. "You mean after the rape."

She turned and stared ahead, her reflection from the mirror on the bar staring back at her. "Then you know about that."

He nodded, his fingers now carefully shredding the cheap paper napkin beneath the glass. "I wish I could have done more. I wish I could have stopped it. I wish I could have killed that bastard."

"It wouldn't help. His death didn't mitigate his actions. Kurt still has to live with the consequences. He always will. You wishing things had been different changes nothing."
"You killed him," he marveled.

"I did and I relished it, but did it help Kurt? No, not really."

"Who are you?"

"Hasn't Anna told you?"

He waved a dismissive hand. "Please. I always knew her condemnations of you were to be taken with a grain of salt. I've never known anyone to get under her skin the way that you do. That tells me that she has regrets where you're concerned, that she knows she made poor choices."

Holly had nothing to say to that. Her past with Anna was just that; hers.

"How is Kurt doing really?"

She exhaled. "He's angry. He's hurt. He's sad because he believes he's hurt you."

His eyes widened as he opened his mouth in protest.

"I know," she interrupted, "but we understand how he thinks, Aidan. If it is at all possible for Kurt to blame himself for something, he will." She motioned for another drink. "He's devastated over Robin," she said quietly.

"He won't admit it, won't even talk about her, really, except in the abstract. With Anna, there's just shock and confusion; he hasn't allowed himself to move beyond that. However ... though he always mourned for her, he had accepted she was dead. Now that he knows she isn't, there's anger and fear and sadness, all the usual suspects, but with Robin ..."

"There's a hollowness," he guessed. "He never even had the chance to know her, though he knew of her." He ducked his head. "That must make it even worse for him."

"It does. He respected her tremendously and she was something of a mentor to him, albeit an unwitting one. She sighed. "He'd always longed for a sibling, he probably told you that."

He nodded.

"His stepbrother Finn ... they're not close, haven't really spoken in years. Now Kurt finds out that all this time he had a sister, who was even a doctor like he is. Yes, he's hollow for her loss, absolutely gutted. It will take him a long time to move past it, especially as he doesn't believe himself worthy of mourning her. He's much more concerned for Patrick and Emma, even for Anna and Robert."

Aidan sighed. "Selfless to the point of stupidity, that one."

She snorted. "Too right." She shook her head. "He'll come through it. He always does. But we both know he has to do it on his own. That's just who he is."

"Where is he now?" Aidan whispered.

"He's taking his friends down to the city for the weekend. Brittany and Santana have to get back to Argentina and Erica needs to return to Pine Valley." She tilted her head. "I really think he just needs to get away from it for a little while. He never expected all of this when he came to Port Charles."

"Why did he come here?"
She smirked. "Oh, many reasons." She looked to her right out of the corner of her eye, spying Damian Spinelli nursing an orange soda. She'd be sure to get the glass before the bartender could. "But that's a story for another time."
Man About Town

Patrick was relieved to see Laura standing with Lucky and Nikolas. Perhaps the day wouldn't be sotrying for her presence. She had a remarkable ability to soothe everyone around her. It wasn't hard to see why her long absence had been so difficult for her family to bear.

Laura was the first to see him and Emma cresting the ridge and regarded him with warm eyes. He wondered how different her children would be had she been able to raise them as she had so desperately wanted.

He supposed he liked Nikolas enough, but really only knew the man through Robin; the two had been extremely close, though never lovers. Patrick had known and loved Emily as Robin had, so it wasn't hard to empathize with Nikolas when he had lost her. Especially now. Nikolas had firsthand experience in being a young widower with a child to raise.

Patrick had never cared for Lucky. Elizabeth had been one of his first friends in Port Charles. After she had repeatedly turned down his charms, his respect for her, for her character, had blossomed. Elizabeth Webber was the epitome of a good woman who had been done wrong by almost every man who had crossed her path, particularly Lucky.

It had been harder for Robin. She and Lucky had known each other since they were children. Still, Elizabeth had been Robin's best friend and, regardless of a shared childhood experience, you didn't screw over one of Robin's friends. She might have loved Lucky, but she hadn't liked him in the end.

As for Lulu … well. He put up with Maxie because she was Robin's cousin. Lulu was basically Maxie without the ditzy charm and familial obligation.

"Hello, Patrick," Laura said softly with a smile. "I'm so glad you could join us." She bent down and smiled at Emma. "Hello, there. I'm sure you don't remember me …"

"Sure I do!" Emma chirped. "Hi, Mrs. Laura!"

A wave of sadness appeared in Laura's eyes and Patrick knew how much she too was missing Robin.

"Where are the boys?" he asked, nodding at Lucky and Nikolas and looking around for Spencer and Cameron.

"On the jungle gym," Lucky grinned. He cupped his hands around his mouth. "Cam! Spence! Emma's here!"

Seconds later, the boys scrambled over and greeted Emma with enthusiasm. Patrick smiled, happy his daughter had good friends and that the boys weren't put off by Emma's femaleness. It had been his experience that the boys who hated girls when they were young grew up to be the biggest douchebags. It was certainly true of him until Robin had gotten ahold of him.

He was also glad that the boys weren't possessive of Emma, of the time they spent with her. They didn't compete with each other for her attention and neither did they exclude her. They were just simply a trio, one which fit together naturally and without pretense.

"Hi!" Emma said cheerfully.

Cameron and Spencer grinned at her and returned the greeting.
Spencer became very serious very suddenly. "How are you?"

Emma ducked her head and shrugged. "It hurts a lot."

Patrick pursed his lips, struggling not to cry.

Spencer nodded. "I know. I still miss Emmie."

Nikolas wrapped his arm around Lucky's shoulders when the man sharply inhaled.

"I miss Jakey all the time," said a sad Cameron, "but Mommy said he's in heaven and watching over me, so I have to make him proud."

Lucky hung his head as Emma and Spencer nodded.

"Let's go on the swings!" Emma said.

Just like that, a flip switched and they ran off together, hands linked.

Nikolas blew out a breath. "I envy their resiliency."

Lucky and Patrick nodded.

"How are you really doing, Patrick?" Lucky asked.

"It's hell," Patrick said in a dull voice. "I'm still looking for her in the house. I smell her everywhere. Everyone's walking on eggshells around me and I hate it."

"And Anna?" Laura asked.

He sighed. "She's trying, she really is, and she's been a huge help with Emma, but she's freaking out over Kurt."

"Right now she's stalking Holly."

Laura grimaced.

"What's Holly doing?" Nikolas asked.

"Looking for a house for her and Kurt."

Nikolas raised his brows. "She's staying in Port Charles?"

"She doesn't want to be away from him, I guess. I talked with her earlier, but only briefly. It was … weird. She has so many memories of Robin, good ones, and when she speaks, I can see them in my head. There are things she knows about Robin that I've never heard. It took me a long time to realize that I had never before spoken with her. It had always been Paloma."

Lucky scowled. "What a bitch."

"Lucky," Laura warned.

"She is, Mom. She hijacked her sister's life, ruined all of Holly's relationships, and did her level best to make Holly persona non grata in Port Charles."

Patrick winced. He hadn't thought about it in those terms, but Lucky was right.

"I'll just be glad when Kurt moves out of Carly's hotel," said a dour Nikolas.
"Carly's okay," Patrick said in her defense.

"Well," Lucky hedged, "she's like a totally different person around Kurt, I'll say that much. She's more … human." He shook his head. "I'm still trying to figure out how it all happened."

"What?" Nikolas asked, tilting his head.

Lucky scoffed. "Really? You don't think it's, oh, I don't know, terrifying that Carly and Elizabeth have declared a truce and are actively attempting a friendship? That Holly, Brenda, and Kate Howard have included themselves? That Erica Kane is a part of it?"

"You know why Kurt and Erica are close," Patrick murmured, "and why they would reach out to Elizabeth."

Lucky nodded sadly as Nikolas puffed up in rage.

"No," said a mystified Laura. "Why?"

The men exchanged a look, unsure as how to answer.

She noted their hesitance and thought about what they weren't trying to say. She didn't know Kurt. She had read a lot about Erica Kane. She was very close to Elizabeth. She couldn't imagine what they could possibly have in common.

And then it hit her.

She swallowed heavily. "Oh, my god." She looked at Nikolas. "Was he?"

Nikolas closed his eyes and nodded.

She brought up a shaky hand to cover her mouth. "Does Anna know?" she whispered.

Patrick mumbled in the affirmative.

Laura exhaled slowly.

"But I still don't get where Carly enters the equation," Nikolas wondered.

As it had Laura, unwelcome insight slammed into Patrick. He involuntarily jerked and looked away.

"What do you know?" Nikolas demanded, seizing the moment.

"Nothing I can acknowledge," Patrick primly prevaricated. He so did not want what he was thinking to be true.

Lucky's eyes narrowed. "Doctor-patient confidentiality," he surmised. His eyes then became the size of saucers. "Was Carly raped?" he rasped.

Nikolas cringed. He didn't like Carly, but he certainly would never wish that on her.

Patrick was in a quagmire. He honestly didn't know how to answer, but Lucky was becoming hysterical and he knew that, no matter what he said, he was about to break the law.

"You can never tell any of them that I said this," Patrick growled. "I would lose my license."
"Patrick," Laura began, "you don't have to do …"

"We promise," Nikolas interjected, ignoring his mother's glare.

"Carly wasn't raped."

Lucky frowned. "But someone close to her was? That's it, right?" He paled. "Oh, god. Michael. It was Michael, wasn't it? When he was in jail."

Patrick dropped his eyes.

Laura's breath caught and she stared down at the frozen ground. She couldn't even imagine what Carly was going through. Unfortunately, she knew all too well the pain and rage Michael was experiencing. He was still a child, for god's sake! It was horrifying.

"That's why Carly was talking to Elizabeth at the hospital that day," Nikolas whispered. "Kurt said she was asking for help for her child." He shook his head. "I just thought … hell, I don't know what I thought. Jesus Christ. I can't believe I'm saying this, but poor Carly. She doesn't deserve this."

"Does Sonny know?" Laura whispered.

Patrick shook his head.


"Lucky …"

"No, Mom. Not now and not ever. I have zero sympathy for rapists, no matter how much I love my father. You don't know how often I still wake up in the middle of the night, screaming, remembering Elizabeth crawling out of those bushes. I can't even imagine how she's come so far. I wronged her in every way possible, but there's no one I respect more than that woman."

"You should tell her that," Patrick said quietly. "She needs to hear it."

Lucky was puzzled. "She knows it."

"Are you sure?"

Lucky bit his lip and looked away.

"Hey," Nikolas said, pressing against his brother, "we talked about this, right? If you want a better relationship with Elizabeth, you have to be honest with her, just like you were with me. She's a good woman, Lucky. She's already forgiven you. All that's left is for you to ask her for it."

"He's right," Patrick said. "I wasn't in Port Charles for most of your relationship with Elizabeth, Lucky, but she was Robin's best friend. I count her as one of mine. There's no limit to her compassion. If you feel you've wronged her, ask for forgiveness. She'll grant it. She doesn't know how to be any other way."

"She should," Lucky hissed. "After everything I did to her …"

"And don't forget Jason and Sonny and Sam and all the rest," Nikolas growled. "Hell, if she could get past me marrying Courtney after what Courtney did to her …"

"She loves you, Nikki."
Patrick stared. Nikki?

"And she loves you, Lucky," Nikolas countered. "She always will. That's who she is. When Elizabeth gives you a piece of her heart, it's forever, no matter how badly you abuse it." He glowered. "Most of us have done that to her at one time or another."

"She's an extraordinary woman," Laura agreed. She shook her head. "I'll never understand Jeff and Carolyn's complete disinterest in her. Even Audrey has been unkind on more than one occasion."

"Try most of them," said a bitter Lucky. He loved Audrey like his own grandmother, but her pretentious judgments of Elizabeth had always bothered him. He should have told her. He should have defended his wife. He should have done so many things differently.

"Audrey has had a difficult life," Laura said vaguely. "There's probably a lot you don't know, but it's not my place to say."

Lucky nodded. He could respect that.

"Let's go join the kids," Nikolas suggested. "I don't know about you, but I really don't want Spencer out of my sight right now."

The rest nodded and they walked toward the playground.

Holly rolled her eyes after checking in the rearview mirror to make certain that, yes, Anna was still following her.

Honestly, she didn't know how the woman was so successful a secret agent.

Granted, Anna was unaware Holly had her own training courtesy of GNET. Even though she had never been a field operative, the same level of preparation was required and demanded of her. It only made sense, given the sensitive nature of her work. Of course Anna's tail was easy to spot.

There was also the simple fact that she and Anna knew each other well. She thus knew that Anna wasn't even really attempting discretion; she wanted to Holly to know she was being followed. This therefore suggested Anna wanted to talk.

Oh, joy.

Thankfully Anna had picked her up long after her meeting with Aidan. She was sure the woman wouldn't take kindly to Holly Sutton further inserting herself in the life of her son via her nephew.

Poor Aidan, she thought, sighing. He was utterly blameless in this unfortunate escapade, yet he was perhaps paying the highest price. She did believe she managed to pass along some valuable advice and could only hope he would take it. His past relationship with Kurt was just that – the past – and he shouldn't allow it to color his future. Kurt certainly wouldn't want that for him.

She had time in between her conversation with Aidan and meeting the first broker to stop by the post office and mail off the glass she had purloined from the bar. It helpfully had both a DNA sample and the fingerprints of Damian Spinelli. In roughly seventy-two hours, it would be ascertained whether or not Mister Spinelli was Kurt's half-brother.

Holly had happily paid for expedited results, however, and hoped to have definitive answers for Kurt by the time he returned from the city.
She was frankly glad for all the cloak and dagger. It took her mind off Robin. She didn't know she was going to move past this, and couldn't imagine how Robert and Anna would fare.

And Mac.

Poor Mac.

He deserved so much better than this. He always had.

She helpfully turned on her blinker to signal to Anna they had arrived at the first appointment. She hoped the house would be suitable.

Sonny Corinthos knew he was a fairly despicable person, but he sincerely loved his children.

After he had divorced Carly, he was pleased to have been given relatively open visitation. He knew she could have asked for and received much tighter restrictions given his line of work. That was certainly the case with his daughter, Kristina. Alexis refused to allow him even one second more with Krissy than the court order mandated.

Lately he had been thinking that perhaps Alexis had the right of it. She knew exactly how dangerous his business was and that not every mobster had his minimal scruples; there were often times when children were considered fair game. He had never run his organization in that way: women and children were always off-limits.

He knew it was considered to be a personal weakness of his, one which had been exploited several times over the years by his enemies. His children had been targeted and kidnapped more than once. He had always successfully fought to get them back and they were always unharmed.

Well, until Claudia.

He shook his head to clear it, not wanting to dwell on that evil bitch more than she deserved. All that mattered was that she was dead and rotting.

He stood in the doorway of the living room, smiling as Michael and Morgan competed in a new video game he had purchased for them. It wasn't long before the smile dimmed.

There was something wrong with Michael, he knew this instinctively, but he didn't know what it was. It was driving him to distraction. He was fairly certain Carly knew, but she had played it off when he expressed concern.

That hadn't surprised him, of course. Carly could be a notorious gossip with absolutely no filter, but she was completely loyal where her children were concerned. He understood this didn't mean she didn't feel he had the right to know, only that Michael should be the one to tell him. He respected that.

It wasn't much longer before his grief for Robin crashed over him once more. It was more acute than almost anything he had ever experienced. He had loved Stone like a brother, but not even his death had been this painful.

He had been honest at the funeral yesterday: Robin had made him a better man, had made him human. He was honestly frightened by what he might turn into now that she was gone. Unlike in times past when his disease threatened to toss him into pits of despair, there would be no Robin to pull him out.
There would be no Jason. He was busy with Sam and their baby, and mourning Jake.

He clenched his jaw. He had done nothing for Jake because of his anger toward Elizabeth. Because she had been honest about why she initially wanted Jason to stay away from his son. Because Sonny realized she had been right. This was no life for a child.

Jason, his best friend, had lost his son, and he had done nothing to alleviate that pain. Jason didn't want to talk about Jake, so Sonny didn't press him. There was no excuse, however, for not looking into the accident on his own time. He should have found and murdered the bastard who had run over a toddler and fled the scene with his tail tucked between his legs.

His knuckles cracked as he nodded to himself. He'd look into later, assign some men. Discrete ones who wouldn't blab to Jason.

He wanted to do something for Emma, to honor Robin in some small way, but he knew Patrick would never allow it. He didn't blame the man for not wanting Sonny's lifestyle to affect his daughter. Emma was, after all, all Patrick had left of Robin.

It was still so surreal. How could Robin be dead? She was the strongest person he had ever known. Certainly stronger than he himself was. Stronger than Carly, Jason, Alexis. All of them.

Elizabeth was strong, but hers was a quiet strength. It shamed him how often he had ridiculed her for it. She had arguably survived more loss than anyone.

He grimaced as he listened to Morgan prattle on about Jax. He had always despised the man, mostly because of Brenda, a little because of Lois, and had been incensed Jax had married Carly.

It also made him furious that Jax had been so good for Carly, because he really had. Carly was far more stable with Jax than she had ever been with him, which only deepened his understanding that he and Carly had fed upon and exasperated each other's lunacy.

Whenever he and Carly came into contact, they were transformed into emotional vampires.

He still had no idea how Carly and Elizabeth had become friends. Frankly, it was probably better he didn't know. The longer people were kept in the dark about it, the longer they wouldn't have to sleep in shifts.

He wondered what Robin would have thought about Port Charles' newest odd couple.

And about her brother.

For some reason, he was very preoccupied with Kurt Hummel and not just because of the dire threats issued by Santana Lopez. He had done some basic digging, nothing that would raise red flags, and was reluctantly impressed. The kid's reputation was stellar, just as that of his sister had been. He was a remarkable physician.

He had money, lots of it, more zeroes than Sonny could count, but he didn't appear to be a snob. His father had owned a garage at which Kurt had worked as a teenager. He may have been titled, but he was also humble, a combination which was intriguing.

He was smart. He had to have been to have attended those schools, to have earned those degrees. Money might have played a factor in getting him in, but medicine wasn't like business or law. It didn't care about your name or family. You were either a shit doctor or you weren't. Kurt Hummel wasn't a shit doctor.
His relationships in Port Charles certainly bore tighter scrutiny. He could buy Anna birthing and forgetting a child through no fault of her own; there was precedent. His friendship with Nikolas Cassadine was reasonable; old money knew each other and stuck together. Even his friendships with Brenda and Kate were acceptable; they were fashion icons and Kurt had been a child model.

But coming here and getting tight immediately with Carly set off warning bells. Adding Elizabeth into the mix made them ring that much louder.

Sonny knew he probably wouldn't be considering these things had Kurt not been connected to Santana Lopez, but that relationship looked, on the surface, to be legitimate. He had run with her cryptic hint about cheerleading and discovered they had grown up in the same small town in one of the square states, even attending two years of high school together.

They had indeed been on the same cheerleading team, taking the national title twice. There were videos. Kurt had been the captain and Lopez heavily featured. He'd never before seen cheerleaders who sang, but admittedly they were impressive. Sonny had always been an aficionado of music and Kurt Hummel had a truly beautiful voice. He wondered if he still used it.

He had called the high school and spoken with the cheerleading coach, who threatened to castrate him if he ever called her again. He was inclined to heed her warning. He had then immediately received a phone call from a blocked number. He had his people attempt to trace it, and the best they came up with was that it had been someone at the NSA.

He gave an exaggerated blink and tuned back into his sons' conversation.

"So you met him?" Michael asked.

Morgan nodded. "Only for a bit. Mom introduced us before they left for New York."

"What was he like?"

"Dr. Kurt is really nice," Morgan said. "He said it was his pleasure to meet me because Mom had told him all about us and he said any child of hers had to be extraordinary."

Michael paused the game and slowly turned toward his brother. "Really?"

"Uh-huh."

"So they're actual friends."

Morgan was flummoxed. "Well, sure."

Michael clucked his tongue. "You have to admit, Mom doesn't have a lot of those."

Morgan shrugged. "I don't know. They really like each other, though. It was pretty obvious."

"And Elizabeth was with them?" asked a dubious Michael.

Morgan bobbed his head. "Miss Elizabeth and Mommy were even holding hands. They were finishing each other's sentences. It was weird. Cameron was there. I invited him to come with me, but he was going to the park to play with Spencer and Emma."

Michael's eyes turned sad at the thought of Emma and her loss.

"Dad's really upset about Dr. Robin," Morgan confided.
"I know," Michael said quietly. "Robin was an awesome person."

"She was always really nice to me, even though Mommy was mean to her. That's why the funeral was so weird." He paused. "Do you really think Mom was upset about Dr. Robin?"

Michael took a moment to think about his answer. "Yeah," he said finally, "I really do. Mom's not one for speeches. I don't think she would've gotten up in front of the whole town and said all that great stuff about Robin unless she believed it. Everyone pretty much knows Mom and Robin hated each other."

"Because of Uncle Jason?"

Michael fidgeted. "He's a big part of it, yeah."

Morgan inched toward his big brother. "Can I tell you something?"

Michael frowned. "You can tell me anything, Morgan, you know that."

The little boy bit his lip. "I don't like Uncle Jason's wife."

Sonny suddenly turned into Scooby Doo, ears pricking up.

"Sam?" Michael asked. "Why?"

Morgan flushed. "A couple of nights ago, I woke up because I had to go to the bathroom. I walked by Mom's room and heard her talking to Miss Elizabeth. She was on the speakerphone."

Michael narrowed his eyes. "What did you hear?"

"Bad things," Morgan admitted. "Mikey, some of the things Miss Elizabeth said that Uncle Jason's wife did? They were really, really bad."

Michael placed a gentle hand on his brother's shoulder. "You can tell me."

Morgan looked down. "You remember Jake, right? Miss Elizabeth's other son?"

A sick feeling settled in the pit of Michael's stomach as he nodded.

"Did you know he was Uncle Jason's son, too?"

Sonny felt all the air escape from his lungs.

Michael nodded.

Morgan swallowed heavily. "I kind of remember when Jake was kidnapped. You were in the hospital then, so I don't know how much you know."

"Not much. No one really wanted to talk about it."

"Miss Elizabeth said Miss Sam saw Jake being kidnapped and didn't do anything to stop it."

Michael's eyes widened and burned with intensity. "Are you sure you heard her right?"

Morgan nodded. "I swear! She and Mom talked about it a lot. Miss Elizabeth said Sam saw it, didn't stop it, and then pretended to help Uncle Jason look for Jake. And the whole time, she knew who had him."
Michael's face turned florid with anger. "What else?"

"Sam hired some Russian guys with guns to hurt Miss Elizabeth in the park. She picked Russians so Miss Elizabeth would blame Dad and Uncle Jason. Cam and Jake were with her. She said Cameron still has nightmares."

Sonny clapped a hand over his mouth to hide his snarl. That bitch! How could Jason never have told him that! No wonder Elizabeth held him responsible for so much! He certainly couldn't blame her; he would have felt the same.

Regardless of the baby, how the fuck had Jason put all of that behind him to marry Sam?

Morgan swatted at the tears slipping down his cheeks. "When I saw Cameron today, he was so sad, Mike. I mean, he looked okay and he sounded okay, but I could tell. It was in his eyes, you know?"

"Yeah," Michael whispered, "I know."

"And I couldn't help but think how I would feel if something happened to you or Krissy. I remember when Joslyn almost died. It's only because of Jake's kidneys that I still have a baby sister." He paused, blinking furiously. "I … I remember when you were in the coma. We never thought you would wake up. Mom and Dad were so crazy. It was scary."

Michael gently poked his brother in the side. "Is that when you became close with Jax?"

Morgan ducked his head and nodded. "He's been really good to me, Michael. He doesn't try to be a dad because he knows I already have one. He's just my friend. I can talk to him about anything and he listens. He never says that I'm just a kid or that I'll understand when I'm older, you know? He listens."

"And he told me he'd always be there for me, even though he and Mom aren't together anymore, and not just because he's Jos's dad."

"Did you tell Jax what you heard Mom and Elizabeth talking about?"

Morgan flushed more deeply. "Yeah. He was pretty mad. He told me that he couldn't tell me things he knew about Sam because it wasn't his place to tell, but it must be bad. Usually he's always honest with me, and I guess he was this time too, but he didn't want to talk about her at all. I think it's because he's still best friends with Alexis and Sam is her daughter."

Michael nodded. He supposed that made sense.

A cynical Sonny thought it more likely Jax was still pissed off Sam had slept with them both the same night, got pregnant, lied about the paternity, and threatened an abortion to extort money from them.

He wondered when he had lost his distrust and antipathy for Sam McCall. Because Jason fell in love with her? Because Alexis was her mother? He shook his head. Those just weren't good enough reasons.

"And I guess Jax is really good friends with Miss Elizabeth. He told me that when he was married to Aunt Courtney, they wanted to have a baby but thought Aunt Courtney couldn't, so Miss Elizabeth carried their baby."

Michael stared.
"She had a miscarriage, like Mom did before I was born and then the one before Joslyn was born. Jax says he thinks about that baby a lot." He looked up at his brother. "Do you ever wonder what it would be like if Mom's other kids had been born?"

"Yeah, bud, I do."

Morgan sighed and leaned against Michael's shoulder.

"Did you know that Jax knows Dr. Kurt, too?"

"Oh, yeah?" Michael asked brightly, trying to put his best face forward.

"Yep. They used to be in love."

"What!"

It was all Sonny could do not to faint.

"Well, I guess they were," Morgan continued. "I don't really know. Jax just told me he met Dr. Kurt a long time ago in Australia between his marriages to Brenda." He cocked his head. "Don't you think it's weird that Jax and Dad have married the same women bunches of times?"

Michael snorted.

"Whatever. Anyway, it was the way Jax looked when he was talking about Dr. Kurt. You know, all moony and stuff. Kind of dippy, like Mom and Dad used to look at each other." He shrugged. "I didn't know Jax liked guys."

Michael knew he was on dangerous ground. He wasn't sure what his parents had told Morgan about gay people. They had never really addressed the topic with him, letting him make up his own mind. He had gay friends and they were really cool. He also knew what happened to him had nothing to do with sexuality and everything to do with a violent, sadistic asshole.

"Well, what do you think?"

Morgan shrugged again. "Who knows? I don't think it really matters anyway. There's no such thing as happily ever after. People don't stay together." He shook his head. "I'm never getting married."

Sonny wanted to bang his head against the wall. He'd had no idea his son felt this way and doubted Carly did, either. He was sincerely pissed off at himself and his ex-wife for shattering so many of their innocent child's fantasies.

"Don't say that, bud," Michael said. "You might meet someone very special and want to get married one day. I think, if you're lucky, you find the love of your life and spend the rest of your life with that person."

Morgan gave him a look. "I've lost count how many times Mom and Dad have married and divorced each other. And everyone else in town."

"Okay," Michael said, "that's true, and maybe Mom and Dad aren't the loves of each other's lives, but that doesn't mean they didn't love each other very much. They did. I know that. I think it just means they couldn't live together."

"And maybe some people just shouldn't get married," Morgan said. "Hey, Mike?"

"Yeah?"
"What if I meet someone I do want to marry, but they're a boy? Is that okay?"

"Of course it is. You can marry whomever you want, boy or girl."

Sonny honestly didn't know how he felt about this discussion nor what answer he would give if Morgan posed him the same question. He knew the politically-correct thing to say. He knew the right thing to say, which is what Michael had indeed just said. He had no issues with gay people, but didn't know how he would react if one of his sons were gay. It had never occurred to him.

"It's not weird?"

"Did someone tell you it was?"

"No," Morgan said. "I just wondered. Maybe Mom's been married so many times not because she can't find the right man, but because she really likes girls. Maybe she should marry Miss Elizabeth."

Michael cackled. "I don't think that will ever happen, bud, but if it did, we could sell tickets to that wedding."

Morgan giggled, but suddenly turned serious.

Michael nudged him. "Hey, what is it? You can talk to me, too, you know, even if I'm not Jax."

Morgan shook his head. "That's not it. I know I can talk to you. It's just …" He shook his head again, obviously frustrated.

"Take your time," Michael said easily.

Morgan sighed. "I just … I don't understand why bad things happen to good people."

"Like who?"

"Miss Elizabeth. She's always been so nice to me, Mike, and Mom's been even more awful to her than she was to Dr. Robin. But Miss Elizabeth? She, like, glows with niceness."

Michael nodded. Elizabeth had never been nothing less than kind to him.

Morgan looked down. "Something really bad happened to her, Mike, and I don't understand why someone would do that to her."

"Do what?"

"I don't really know. I didn't want to ask Mom or Dad or Jax, but I looked it up and I still don't understand."

"What is it, bud?"

"That night? The night I heard Mom and Miss Elizabeth talking? Miss Elizabeth told Mom that, earlier, Mister Nikolas had dropped off Spencer at her house so he could spend the night with Cameron. I guess Mister Nikolas likes Dr. Kurt, too, like Jax does."

Michael slowly exhaled. That wasn't good. He remembered when Jax and Nikolas had fought over Courtney. He didn't know Kurt, but thought the man should probably cut his losses and run now.

Sonny's thoughts were similar. He also wondered what the hell it was about Kurt Hummel that
made, by all accounts, straight men want to bang another man. And if he and Jax had the same
taste in women, did that mean he too was eventually going to get a yen for the new doctor in town?
He shook his head again.

"Mister Nikolas told Miss Elizabeth that, when Dr. Kurt was in college, he was raped."

Michael stopped breathing.

For that matter, so did Sonny.

"And then Miss Elizabeth told Mom about when she was raped. She was younger than you; fifteen,
I think. It was in the park, the same one where Jake was kidnapped and those Russian guys went
after her, Cameron, and Jake."

Michael closed his eyes. He felt such tremendous sorrow for Elizabeth and what she must have
gone through. He ached for her. At the same time, however, all he could focus on was that another
man, a boy like him, had also been raped. Someone who could understand what had happened to
him. Someone he could talk to.

"But I didn't know what rape was," Morgan continued, "so I looked it up, like I said. The
dictionary basically said it was having sex with someone without their consent."

He shook his head. "That means the person who was raped was forced, right? That it's not their
choice. I don't understand. Mom and Dad talked to me about sex when she got pregnant with
Joslyn. It's supposed to be special. You're supposed to do it when you love someone and are in
love with them."

He stared into his brother's eyes. "Why would someone want to hurt someone else like that?"

"I don't know, bud," Michael croaked. "I really don't know."
Anna continued to stalk Holly throughout the morning and early afternoon, though she had long given up trying to discover anything of import. Holly remained busy by touring various available houses in the more affluent suburbs but appeared to have difficulty discovering just the right home.

Anna was rather surprised but pleased that Holly had definite ideas in mind. In her estimation, Holly had always been a rather forthright person: she knew what she liked and what she didn't, what she wanted and what she didn't. She'd yet to stumble upon a home which piqued her interest. Or rather Kurt's interest, she supposed.

She wasn't best pleased that Holly had decided to remain in Port Charles with Kurt, but neither could she fault the woman. Holly had to have realized or been made aware that Kurt had walked into a veritable minefield of pain and was determined to stand by him through all of it.

She no longer questioned that Holly was very important to her son; rather, she was consumed by how the relationship began. After Mac's debriefing, she had done some discreet checking of her own via her WSB contacts, but there was almost no information regarding what Holly Sutton had been up to since she had vacated Port Charles more than a decade ago.

Normally Anna wouldn't have cared, but the fact that Holly owned two homes in England, neither with a mortgage, yet had held no position or had any verifiable source of income for the past ten years was strange. Holly hadn't come from money, so from where had the money come?

She could only deduce it had either come from Kurt or that Holly had indeed been up to something these past years, something which went unreported to Island Revenue.

She was also fairly certain Holly knew she was being followed and was unbothered by it. Obviously Holly was waiting for her to make the first move and, by continuing to put it off, Anna was made to look only more desperate as the day went on. It stuck in her craw, yes, but neither did she race to confront the woman.

That begged the question of why.

Why didn't she confront Holly and ask all the many questions to which her mind demanded answer? She had nothing to fear and it wasn't as though Holly could take her in a fight, so why was she skulking around in the shadows instead of just walking up to her and starting an interrogation? Conversation.

Yes, of course.

Well, she guessed that Holly wouldn't be giving answers just because hard questions were asked. The woman had always been stubborn and she owed no answers to anyone. Her relationship with Kurt was obviously close and had existed for years. As far as Holly might be concerned, Anna was the interloper, not the other way around.

Anna knew she had to adjust her thinking about all of this. Mac had been right that first night: just because she was Kurt's mother didn't necessarily mean he needed or wanted her to fulfill that role. Further, Holly had no cause to betray Kurt's confidence. Anna toyed with the idea of bartering Robin's memory for information, but to do so would be repulsive and would only shame her, not to mention infuriating both Kurt and Holly.

Robert would be of no use. Holly had let that ship sail long ago, and any lingering fondness didn't
immediately equate to confessions. Not to mention that all of Anna and Robert's recent interactions with Holly had actually not been with Holly, but her sister. Holly was more than likely annoyed that neither of them had been able to tell the difference. The same would hold true for Luke.

The only person in Port Charles, other than Kurt, to whom Holly might hold loyalty was Mac, but he was too honorable to use their relationship to ferret out intelligence on Kurt. Besides, Holly would see through that, as well.

Anna didn't often like to think on it, but Holly was very intelligent. She had always been a clever girl and, while she had all the airs and graces of the aristocracy, she also had more common sense than any ten people put together.

After she and Robin had been united all those years ago, when Anna's memory was still filled with gaping holes and judgments based on past prejudices were irrelevant, her daughter had been frank about the role Holly had played in her life. Truthfully, Anna had been grateful to Holly then and was unsure when and why that gratitude had vanished.

A large part of it was jealousy, certainly, but part of her had been relieved that Holly had continued to be a constant in Robin's life. She had been a good maternal figure, had done the right by Robin which had never been done toward her, and any of the machinations by which she had once lived her life had no bearing on her relationship with Robin.

It was most likely the same held true for Kurt.

Wasn't it more important that someone had been there for her children when she herself couldn't be? Wasn't it better that it had been Holly, someone who knew Anna and understood what she would've wanted for her children? In the end, Holly had put their antipathy aside and did her best to do what Anna hadn't been allowed to do: be a mother.

And she had been a good one.

There was no doubt in her mind that it had been Mac and Holly who were largely responsible for the incredible woman Robin had become. And then Holly had gone and repeated that miracle with Kurt. He had gone to college, then medical school, and had become an outstanding physician with an international reputation of excellence.

That's when it hit her. She felt as if she owed Holly. What was most absurd was that, if asked, Holly would have insisted there was no such debt. Holly had done the right thing simply because it was the right thing according to her own code of honor and morality. She could've walked away, but instead chose to stay.

Anna honestly didn't know if she would have made the same decision had the situation been reversed. That bothered her.

She darted into the café in which Holly had taken refuge, only to find the woman seated at the first table and pouring a cup of tea. Holly looked up at her and smiled, pushing the cup toward her and gesturing Anna toward the opposite seat.

"I think it's time we chat," Holly said evenly before raising a brow, "don't you?"

Anna sat down, taking a moment to notice Holly had prepared the tea exactly the way she took it.
Robin's funeral, he had made a decision that scared him but nevertheless was one he knew to be right.

Nikolas was more than happy to keep Cameron with him and thus give the boys more time together and with their grandmother. Regardless, Lucky decided he would tell Elizabeth about it when she returned. He was determined to be honest with her about everything from now on, including how he parented their son. He didn't want Elizabeth finding out from anyone else that he had left Cameron's in someone else's care.

After an hour detour at PCU, he drove by Mac's house and noticed his boss wasn't home. Taking a chance, he pulled into the station and went inside, nodding hello to his colleagues and making a beeline for the chief's office. After knocking and being given the okay, he entered.

"Lucky," Mac said with mild surprise. " Aren't you off today?"

Lucky nodded. "For the weekend, actually. I'm babysitting Cam while Elizabeth is down in the city with Carly and Kurt."

Mac blinked. "She's where with whom?"

Lucky chuckled. "It's weird, but it's happening. Who am I to fight it?"

Mac thought about it and at last nodded. "Safer for you if you don't. So what's up?" he asked, gesturing to the chair in front of the desk.

Lucky sat down and gathered a breath. He opened his mouth but nothing came out. He abruptly closed it.

"Is everything all right?" Mac asked with concern.

Lucky ducked his head. "This is harder than I thought it would be." He exhaled forcefully. "I've been talking a lot to Nikolas lately, and my mom, and I've come to a decision. I'd like to tell you about it."

"Go on," Mac encouraged.

"I'm not a very good cop."

Mac reared back. "What?"

"I'm not and you know it," Lucky admitted.

"I don't know any such thing," Mac insisted. "You're a very good cop, Lucky. I know you've had your troubles in the past, as have we all, but you've pulled yourself together. I know just how hard that can be. So where is this coming from?"

"It means a lot that you think that," Lucky said, "but the problem is that I disagree. And that is a problem. I can't be a good cop if I don't believe that I am one."

Mac was silent for a long moment. "What do you propose?"

"I think it would be best if I left."

Mac widened his eyes. "Left the force?"

"Well," Lucky said, "I hope not. I really do want to be here, but I think I could do better in another
department. I know you're already short-staffed in Homicide, but, honestly, how effective am I really? When's the last time I solved a case? More importantly, when's the last time a case I solved made it through trial to the appropriate outcome? Or even made it to trial at all?"

Mac sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "This is about Sonny."

"Indirectly. It's about Jason."

Mac stared.

"For better or worse, and it usually seems to be worse, I have a history with him, and not a good one. I can't say for certain that Jason is responsible for the majority of murders in Port Charles. It's probable he is, or that it's his operatives under the direction of Sonny, but the bottom line is that I spend most of my time investigating Jason. It never goes anywhere. It's never fruitful. I just get more and more frustrated and the squad becomes more demoralized."

Mac sharpened his gaze. "Are you getting blowback from the others about this?"

"No," Lucky said, "but I see the stares. I feel the judgments. They all know my history with Jason, with Elizabeth, and I know that some of them feel I don't do enough. Others feel I deliberately derail investigations. Most of them feel I'm a pathetic cuckold."

"And what do you feel?" Mac asked.

"I feel … I feel those opinions might have some merit."

Mac sat back and observed him closely, wondering just what to say. He didn't want to take a side because he felt whatever he did would only alienate Lucky more.

Lucky sighed. "My father is a former gangster and current con artist. My brother, through no fault of his own, has ties to organized crime because of Helena. Carly comes with her own set of problems, as does Lulu. My mother is the town sweetheart and seen as a perpetual victim, even if the latter isn't true. I have history with both Jason and Sonny."

Mac gave a slow nod. There was nothing Lucky said that could be refuted without coming across as ignorant or completely unconscious.

"I don't trust my judgment anymore, Mac. Not after the drugs. Not after …" he cleared his throat, " … not after Maxie."

Mac held up his hand. "Hold it right there, Lucky. I more than anyone know the character of my daughter and I admit that I came down too hard on you back then. Maxie, though I love her dearly, is a schemer. Yes, you were an addict and made horrible decisions, but she also took advantage of you.

"Frankly, I was ashamed of it then and am now. I've never been blind to her, but I acted unprofessionally. I let my love for my daughter color how I did my job, and that was wrong and unfair to you."

"It's not just her, Mac. It's everything. Almost everyone I'm related to or even know is, well, shady. It's unprofessional of me to investigate cases in which they are persons of interest. My father, Helena, Carly, Sonny, Jason, even Sam. I have no business being involved. Frankly, neither does Dante, considering who is father is."

"You have a point," Mac sighed.
"The problem is that there's almost no other department that would be any different. Vice, Narcotics, Robbery, even white-collar tends to revolve around Sonny and Jason. Considering my record, Internal Affairs is definitely out."

"So what's the solution?"

An eager Lucky leaned forward, eyes filled with hope. "I enrolled in the Forensics program at PCU today. I think I could do really well in it."

Mac turned thoughtful.

"I already know the jargon," Lucky continued, "but I want to learn the science. I think it's interesting." He paused. "I also really want a degree. I need to prove to myself that I'm capable of earning one."

"So you're interested in the CSI Division?"

"Somewhat," Lucky said. He averted his gaze. "Nikolas told me that with Kurt's appointment, next year there will be a new position opening for a Medicolegal Investigator. I would still be part of the force, but I'd be under Kurt's direct supervision and affiliated with GH. There's no conflict of interest in science. You have to follow the evidence, which speaks for itself. It's either there or it's not."

"But your cases still might involve Jason and Sonny."

Lucky nodded. "True but, again, it's all based on the evidence. Plus I'd get the opportunity to work cases outside the local mob. I'm tired of hits and serial killers. I'm close to burnout."

Mac frowned in thought. "There's something more."

Lucky flushed. "I would have more regular hours and more days off. I would have more time with Cameron." He raised his gaze and it was fierce. "I want to be a good father, Mac. I want my son to be proud of me."

Mac could certainly understand that.

"I'd also be in better contact with Elizabeth, since she's right there at the hospital. We're always missing each other's calls or texts, and our schedules typically tend to overlap, which means Cameron spends more time in daycare than either of us wants. Also, Audrey is just getting too old to keep Cam for hours on end. She has a life, too, and it's unfair of us to rely on her so heavily."

"You've really thought this through," Mac mused.

Lucky snorted. "Yeah, for once."

"Lucky, not to be indelicate, but what will you do for income? As you said, the job doesn't start for another year."

"I'll take an unpaid sabbatical, but keep up with my firearms training and continuing education. That will also let me get an entire year under my belt at PCU as a full-time student. I'll be able to take classes in the summer and winter intercessions and hopefully graduate sooner."

"As for money, I have some savings and I qualify at PCU for financial aid and a few scholarships. My apartment is a dump and I won't be sorry to leave it. It's not in a great area and there's not a spare room for Cam. Nikolas wants me to move into Wyndemere, which will also allow Cam and
Spencer to spend more time together."

Mac was quiet for a very long time, pondering the implications and ramifications, knowing but uncaring that his silence was only increasing Lucky's anxiety. The man had made good points, many of them, none of which were lost on Mac. He had known for a while Lucky was on the threshold of burnout and would likely just quit if Mac sided against him.

Despite what Lucky thought, he was a good cop. He had excellent instincts but had been hamstrung by his familial and romantic relationships. He also had experience and a keen investigative mind. Mac didn't want to lose him, especially to a PI license or private security firm. He knew Lucky was on the cusp on a life crisis and he wanted to help.

"Okay," he said finally, nodding. "I'll sign off on the sabbatical, but it's contingent on you keeping up with department requirements, otherwise you'll lose your insurance and other benefits. I also want to see quarterly reports of your progress at PCU. I don't question your intelligence or ability, Lucky, but I do question your conviction. You've let things slide before and, even though I believe you want to see this through, I want some proof."

Lucky smiled and bobbed his head. "That's totally reasonable. Thanks, Mac."

"When will your classes start?"

"The first summer session begins in three weeks."

"Have the paperwork on my desk by Monday. It will take that long for me to push it through."

"You won't be sorry, Mac."

"Make sure I'm not, and you will be the one to tell Falconeri that he's losing a partner."

Lucky winced, but nodded.

"You also need to understand that Dr. Hummel will need to sign off on this. Hiring for the position falls under his purview, and I better not get wind of any pressure placed on him by your brother."

"Nikolas would never do that," Lucky said evenly, struggling to remain calm, "and from what I know of Kurt, he would never allow it."

Mac nodded again. "Good. Like I said, paperwork on my desk by Monday." He paused. "I really hope this works out for you, Lucky. You deserve it and I think you'll do well. On a personal note, I encourage you to work through your past and close the door on it. Learn from it, but like Elizabeth said at the funeral, don't wallow in it."

He stared into Lucky's eyes. "You can do this."

Lucky tried his best to contain his emotions. "Thank you, Mac," he said roughly. "You don't know how much I needed to hear that, especially from you."

Mac smiled. "Yeah, I did. That's why I said it. Now get out."

"Why am I here?" Jason asked Sonny.

Sonny hid his wince. His friendship with Jason had never fully recovered after he had stolen back the business he had forced Jason to accept. Prior to that, Jason had always chosen to believe the best in him despite witnessing the many betrayals Sonny had committed against others. Never had
the thought entered Jason's mind that Sonny would betray him.

They were partners again, of a sort, in the coffee import company. Jason consented to perform mob assignments on the side when he could be bothered and if it interested him. Mainly this was only when Sonny's other employees or family was threatened.

"Normally I wouldn't intrude upon your grief," Sonny began, understanding just how keenly Jason was mourning Robin. He was too, but it wasn't the same. "I need to make you aware of a situation."

Jason's eyes narrowed. "What kind of a situation?"

Sonny sighed as he sat down. "A personal one that affects all of us: whatever the hell is going on between Carly and Elizabeth."

"Leave them alone," Jason snapped.

Sonny suppressed a growl. Instinctively he wanted to punch Jason for his presumption, but this was one of the few moments in which he let his cooler head prevail. Besides, it wasn't as though he didn't have a long history of hurting both women, either directly or through inaction.

"I have no intention of interfering," he said stiffly. "Personally, I'm all for the two of them leaving the past behind and getting on with their lives, but you need to be made aware of some of the ramifications."

Jason turned thoughtful. "Like what?"

"Like the fact that they're talking to each other about, well, everything, and they're not the only ones listening."

He briefly outlined the conversation he had overhead between his sons, noticing and silently questioning why Jason had paled so dramatically when he described Michael's reaction to Kurt and Elizabeth's assaults.

"There was a lot they didn't know," Sonny concluded. "Hell, there was a lot I didn't know."

He paused and waited for Jason to defend his wife's past actions against Elizabeth, but no apologia was forthcoming. That in and of itself struck Sonny as odd. Jason had never hesitated to defend Elizabeth, Robin, or even Carly. His silence in refusing to defend Sam said a lot.

"I just thought you should know the kids are talking about this," he said tiredly, "and that they might ask questions. I hope they don't say anything to Kristina, who would of course go running to Alexis and Sam with what they tell her. I don't want to drive a wedge between Alexis and her daughters and I know Sam is worried about this pregnancy."

Jason gave a curt nod. "Thank you for telling me."

Sonny arched a brow. "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing. There's nothing I can do. I'm not going to forbid Michael and Morgan from talking about Sam. That's not my job and it's not my right. I don't want you to do it either. I don't want the boys feeling that they can't come to you with stuff that's bothering them. Asking help from Carly is ludicrous. She hates Sam."

Sonny nodded. "Now more than ever, I'd guess."
Jason shook his head. "When I woke up in the hospital, Carly was the first person I saw. She told me the truth about Robin, which is more than Sam could be bothered to do. Now the old Carly? She wouldn't have done that. She would have agreed with Sam and kept it from me for my own good. This Carly, though … I don't know."

Sonny grunted. "Probably the influence of Robin's brother."

Jason slowly nodded. "I've never seen her react like this to anyone."

Sonny's silence indicated his agreement.

Jason cleared his throat. "So what exactly are you asking me to do?"

Sonny shrugged. "It's not my place anymore to tell you what to do. I just want you to be mindful of the situation. Michael, whether or not I want to admit it, is an adult. How he treats Sam is his own business. As for Morgan, I'll curb him if he becomes too outrageous, but he was … very offended by what Sam did to Elizabeth."

He sighed. "Morgan is quiet. I don't know where he gets it from. Carly and I yell and scream. Michael holds it in until he explodes. Krissy uses words like weapons; her mother's legacy, I'm sure. But Morgan … he's very methodical in his speech and action. He's slow to forgive and he never forgets."

Jason snorted. "You don't know where he gets it from? Your brother, that's where he gets it from. Morgan is Ric with a conscience."

Sonny barely suppressed a shudder. It wasn't a comparison he favored but, now that it had been pointed out to him, he couldn't easily deny it. That was rather frightening.

Jason, remembering the text he had received just prior to arriving at Sonny's house, stood. "I need to get going. Thanks for telling me about this. I'll do my best to keep Sam away from the boys."

Sonny offered a brusque nod and watched as Jason silently exited the room.

More than losing Courtney, more than accepting his relationship with Ric was unsalvageable, more than his marriages to Carly and his failures with Brenda, he most regretted losing the brother he had chosen for himself. The loss of Jason, though the other man was still alive, rivaled losing Stone.

Those thoughts immediately segued to Robin and his mourning started all over again.

"Lucky?"

A startled Lucky turned on his heel and nodded at Jason. "Thanks for meeting me here."

"Not a problem," said a wary Jason, "but why are we meeting at my office?" He rolled his eyes.

"Do you have a warrant?"

"I'm not here as a cop."

Jason's eyes searched his for a long time. "Lucky," he said quietly, "if this is about Jake, I … I can't …"

Lucky held up a hand. "It's not. I have no desire to talk about Jake with anyone, let alone you," he snapped. He just as quickly blew out a breath. "I'm sorry."
Jason stared. "Why?" he asked, honestly baffled. "You have no reason to be sorry."

An incredulous Lucky burst out laughing. "Jason," he chuckled, "the list of sins I've committed will keep me apologizing long beyond my death. Let's not pretend I've been the good guy in all of this."

"Well, it wasn't me."

"No," Lucky agreed. "We both know who the good one is." He swallowed heavily and looked away. "And the price she paid for it."

Jason dropped his eyes, heart hurting as always when he thought of Elizabeth. "Why are you here?"

"Because I need to apologize to you."

Jason's brow furrowed in confusion. "Why? I mean, I don't … what?"

Lucky sighed and kept his eyes trained on the wall. "Do you remember? Before Elizabeth?"

Jason was silent for a long moment. "Yeah."

"Do you remember what I was like after I came back? After what Helena … what Faison …"

"I remember," Jason whispered.

"We were friends once."

Jason nodded. "We were."

"I became very confused. Whatever Faison did to me, and I still don't what that was, hasn't gone away. The things I do, the things I say, the people I hurt …" He bit his lip and blinked furiously.

Jason called the other man's name for what felt like minutes before Lucky shook his head to clear it.

"What?"

Jason stepped closer, eyes filled with concern. "Are you all right?"

He frowned when Lucky immediately stepped back. Narrowing his eyes, Jason took another step forward which, in turn, caused Lucky to retreat once more, the lower half of his body slamming into the massive desk that dominated the room.

"Please stay away," Lucky begged, his cheeks starting to flush. He sighed. "Damn Nikki for getting me to talk about this."

Jason pulled a face. Nikki? Who the hell was …? Nikolas?

"Lucky," Jason said carefully, "whatever you need to say, just say it. You obviously don't want to be here and I don't blame you. I don't know what Nikolas has to do with what … this … is, but …"

"I was in love with you." He gave a bitter laugh. "Or maybe I still am. I don't know."

Jason didn't know what to say, so he said nothing, which he determined to be the best option.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this now, why I'm telling you at all. All I know is that I can't go
on this way. I loved Elizabeth with all of my heart and always will, but after Helena took me and I came back, I hated Elizabeth. For having you. For having you when I couldn't."

Jason stared.

"I don't know when it started," Lucky continued. "I don't even know why it did. I don't understand what it means or even if it has to mean anything at all. I just know that I've never had a reaction to anyone the way I have to you and it's killing me. It has been for a long time.

"Nikki has feelings for Kurt. He told Elizabeth but was scared to tell me. That hurt. It hurt because, in the end, Nikki was honest with me, with himself, something I've never been able to do."

He drew in a deep breath. "I've never felt for any man what I do for you. I don't know what that means or what it makes me. I think, for a long time, I was scared of that. I was Luke Spencer's son, after all. I couldn't be ... that. And I convinced myself that I wasn't, because it was only you I'd ever loved that way."

He sighed. "And I blamed you that for that, for something you didn't know and wasn't even your fault, and I became bitter and angry and a complete asshole to the people who loved me the most. I hurt Elizabeth over and over again because I couldn't handle that, as much as I loved her, I never felt I could truly be myself with her."

He grimaced. "Taking up with Sam after the divorce ... god, what the hell was I thinking? How could I hurt Liz that way? I guess, by then, it was just how I operated. Hurt first before I could be hurt."

He flushed with shame. "And in a very sick way, I suppose that some part of me felt that being with Elizabeth, and then Sam, was the closest I would ever get to being with you. I hated them for that. I hated you for that. But most of all, I hated myself."

His contempt and loathing for his behavior was a visceral presence in the room. It was almost tangible and completely crushing.

"Lucky ..." Jason hesitantly began.

"Please don't," Lucky begged, choking on a sob. "I don't want anything from you. I'm not telling you this to hurt you or as an oblique way of asking for forgiveness. I've persecuted you for years because I wasn't man enough to own up to my feelings. I used Elizabeth to hurt you. I used Cameron to hurt you. I used the law to hurt you."

Tears began rolling down his face. "And I don't know why," he gasped, "because I've never wanted to hurt you, Jason." He shook his head. "Truly."

Jason closed his eyes.

"Looking back on it now, it was so pathetic. I was so pathetic. I didn't become a cop to right wrongs or to make the Spencer name something to be proud of. I didn't become a cop to help people or to make the world a better place. I became a cop so that I could force confrontations with you, so that I continue to be around you, even if it was only as a thorn in your side. Because being with you, even in that way, was better than being without you. What kind of lovesick high school bullshit is that?"

His entire body spasmed. "I know the things you've done. I know that you're not necessarily a good person, but neither am I, and I'm sickened that I deluded myself into thinking otherwise. I was never morally superior to you; I was arrogant and self-righteous. I used what little power I had to
insinuate myself into your life whenever possible, begging for any scrap of your attention I could garner. That's repulsive."

Jason stepped forward. To do what, he had no idea, but felt that he should do something.

Lucky smoothly sidestepped him. "I've resigned from Homicide. It's not the place for me. It never was. I don't know how many investigations I botched because I couldn't get myself together. I wasted time pursuing you when there were other leads I should have followed. I'll never know how many times I might have looked at someone else because, in some stupid way, I wanted to protect you. I can't trust myself anymore, and I shouldn't be trusted to uphold the law."

"Lucky!" Jason growled.

"No. No, Jason. I came here to apologize to you, because you deserve that and it's how I would want to be treated. Maybe you think I'm just as pathetic as I know I am, and that's fine, I deserve that. Maybe you feel sorry for me. If you do, please stop, because the last thing I want or need is your pity. You don't owe me anything and I expect nothing from you.

"I'm going to move in with Nikolas, go back to school, be a good father, and try to make a life for myself that doesn't involve you. I owe myself that much."

Acting before thinking, Lucky leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on Jason's cheek. "For whatever it's worth, I'm sorry for hurting you. I'm sorry I used you as an excuse to be such an asshole." He pulled back and quickly wiped his face. "Goodbye, Jason."

Jason stood there, staring blankly at the wall, trying to assimilate this information, but he couldn't. That wasn't how his mind worked. He was an excellent analyst, easily capable of split-second decisions in life-and-death situations, but emotions were never his strong suit. He felt them, of course; sometimes he let them rule him when they shouldn't. This, however, was beyond him, so he decided to stop thinking altogether.

"No."

He spun around and grabbed Lucky's arm, pulling him close, shooting out the other hand to slam shut the open office door. He threw Lucky and held him against it.

"You don't just get to come in here, dump all this on me, and leave."

Lucky sighed and closed his eye. "Jas, please."

Jason blinked. "You haven't called me that in years." He shook his head. "Fifteen years, Lucky. Fifteen fucking years and you kept this in, and you decide to tell me now? What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Ignore it. Ignore me. I'd prefer it, actually."

"I wouldn't."

And then Jason kissed him. It was fast and brutal, leaving Lucky no chance to respond.

Jason didn't need him to respond. He just needed to know, and now he did. Lucky Spencer was delicious and he wanted more. He pulled back just enough to give Lucky some leeway.

Lucky made an urgent noise in his throat and began kissing him back fiercely, pressing so tightly against him that everything was made clear.
It was one of those rare moments where Jason couldn't think about anything, could only feel, and he felt a hard cock rubbing against his thigh. He didn't understand why it didn't trouble him, why it wasn't weird. And then it felt as though Lucky was actually trying to burrow inside him, he was so close.


Jason held on tightly and began backing them up toward the desk, his legs hitting it, and he reached behind him and tossed everything on it to the floor, pushing Lucky down and then laying atop him.

Lucky didn't fight, which was something on which Jason was counting because he knew he wouldn't be able to stop himself. Only Lucky could stop him now.

Instead, Lucky reached up and ripped Jason's shirt open, buttons flying everywhere, desperately pushing the offending fabric over Jason's shoulders, trying to feel his skin, trying to feel all of him. He shuddered as he finally had the body, the one that had given him night sweats when he was a teenager, that strong golden body rippling with muscles that Lucky had dreamed would one day take - possess - penetrate - him, in his arms.

He buried in face in Jason's neck, breathing deeply, nipping at the hollow of his Adam's apple and then gently licking at it.

"You taste so good," Lucky moaned. "I knew you would."

Jason grunted and shifted slightly so that their straining cocks rubbed up against each other, causing both of them to gasp.

"Fifteen years, Lucky."

"Fuck me."

Startled, Jason pulled back and looked into Lucky's eyes. He saw no hesitation, only invitation.

And then Lucky's legs wrapped around his waist, Lucky's hands were groping his ass before moving to the front and unbuckling his belt.

"Are you sure?" Jason asked slowly, trying to enunciate his words, brain as full and thick as his cock. Because at that moment, he would. He'd do whatever Lucky wanted of him. He hoped Lucky wanted him to flip him over and fuck him into unconsciousness.

But Lucky hesitated a fraction too long.

"No."

And Jason stopped everything. It was hard. It hurt. He was so hard he hurt.

But Lucky had said no and that meant no. As much as he wanted it, wanted Lucky, wanted to bury himself inside the other man, he wouldn't be that guy. He wouldn't be Carter Williams. He wouldn't be Tom Baker or Connor Bishop.

"I'm sorry," Lucky murmured. "I can't seem to stop apologizing to you."

"Lucky, you don't have to …"

"You're married. You have a baby on the way. I can't be that guy anymore, Jas. I don't want to be."
"I get it," Jason said softly. And he did. He also worried what it said about him, about his marriage, that he hadn't given Sam a single thought during all of this.

Before he knew what was happening, Lucky had slid out from beneath him and vaulted himself toward the door.

"This didn't happen."

And then Lucky ran.

Jason stared after him.

Damian Spinelli was a creature of habit, which often frustrated his erstwhile love interest, the fabulous Maxie Jones.

Maximista was currently holed up in her bedroom crying her eyes out over her lost cousin, the splendiferous Dr. Robin. Spinelli, who had respected Robin greatly, shunted his grief to the back of his thoughts to focus more clearly on Maxie, who was destroyed.

So keeping up with rituals was one way Spinelli was able to soothe the ache in his chest.

Every three days, he ran his full given name through a variety of programs just on the off-chance it might pop up somewhere it shouldn't. Given the nature of the work he sometimes did for Stone Cold and Mister Sir, it wouldn't do for anything to be traced back to him.

Also, he sure didn't want the FBI knocking on his door and locking him up again. That had not been of the fun, not the least of which was because the federal penitentiary didn't serve orange soda, which Spinelli thought should've been against the Geneva Convention. He was still waiting to hear back about his petition to make it an amendment.

He was thus understandably perturbed when there was a hit.

Who was running his DNA? And why?

Twenty minutes later, he had no answers. He had the name of the lab that was most maliciously profiling his genome, but he didn't know who had ordered the test or the exemplar it was being run against.

What kind of sorcery was this! There was no system he couldn't hack!

And then his screen went blue and he fainted.

One of the benefits of staying as often as he had at the Plaza was that he knew every entrance and exit of the massive luxury hotel. He knew how to get where he needed in the least number of steps, so it was no trouble to make a discreet escape their first night in the city. He felt mild regret that it was necessary to drug Carly, Kate, and Brenda's pinot noir, as well as Erica's sparkling water, but he did it anyway. Santana and Brittany, should they notice he had left, would know why and where he was going. They would hold his secrets as they always had.

One of the benefits of being a former counterintelligence agent was the knowledge of how to conduct missions with a minimum of fuss and muss. A can of aerosol spray turned his hair ash blond and a set of brown contact lenses made him look almost unrecognizable, but a prosthetic nose tip ensured it. He dressed simply in a non-descript pair of jeans, a loose oatmeal henley, a
brown suede jacket, and Timberlands. He looked like any other older teen let loose in the Big Apple.

One of the benefits of growing up the son of a mechanic and being a mechanic yourself – still certified, thank you – was being able to size up a piece of shit car quickly and efficiently. Seven hundred dollars in small, non-sequential bills given to an illegal immigrant who spoke only broken English and needed to pay his rent guaranteed no questions would be asked.

An extra fifty meant the seller filled the tank and Kurt wouldn't have to deal with any pesky surveillance cameras at the nearest Exxon. He kept the cruise control set ten miles above the speed limit, kept to the highway except where he knew cameras were located, and made the roughly six-hour trip in just under five.

Allotting one hour for the assassination and another six for the return trip, as he might be dealing with rush hour traffic, would see him back in his suite just in time to greet the ladies for Sunday brunch. And if he happened to sleep in a little late, well, he was sure they wouldn't mind.

One of the benefits of being a physician was knowing how to maneuver oneself in almost any hospital. He was slightly concerned by how easy it was for him to infiltrate Ferncliff Asylum. Considering some of their inpatients, this laxity was troubling if useful. A purloined set of scrubs and a lab coat, and the identification card of a young resident currently unconscious in a secured janitor's closet, meant he could wander the halls at his leisure.

Another benefit of being a physician was knowing how to calculate a fatal dose of insulin for a non-diabetic patient, factoring in their age, other medications, and general state of health.

One benefit of being a forensic pathologist was knowing that, upon postmortem examination, while a competent physician would carefully search the body for puncture wounds, freckles often went overlooked. That was, of course, if there was no IV drip.

That was, of course, if an autopsy was even performed. Given how much his victim was universally despised, coupled with his advanced age, Kurt was confident that nothing more than the bare minimum of investigation would be ordered.

And, if it was, he had yet to take up the position for which he was contracted, which meant some random doctor, not a forensic pathologist, would perform the autopsy. If anything was found, Kurt could easily deal with it later.

He sneaked into the patient's room and leaned up against the adjoining wall, assessing him.

It was so easy. It would be so easy to end the life of one who had caused so much torment and suffering for so many. Who had killed so many innocent people because his arrogance and presumption told him he had the right to do so. He had never paid for his crimes and, while Kurt was not necessarily here to make him do so, it would be a nice bonus.

"Good evening, Mister Zacchara."

He watched with amusement as Anthony Zacchara, already medicated with Ambien, struggled to open his eyes. He slowly walked forward, the corners of his mouth quirked up in a malicious smirk.

"I'll be your assassin this fine night."

Zacchara became slightly more coherent, blinking eyes now open wide and searching, hands fumbling for the call button which Kurt had already disabled.
"Now I'm sure you don't want to bother Cheryl while she's on her break," Kurt scolded. "She works so hard and for so little money. She has two young children she's raising on her own, you know." His gaze turned thoughtful. "It would be nice if some anonymous benefactor paid off her debts."

He nodded to himself. It was the least he could do, really.

He calmly inserted the syringe into the IV line, already helpfully wide open, and depressed the plunger.

"This won't hurt me a bit."

Anthony struggled to form words, but nothing emerged but a dry croak.

"What's that, you ask?" Kurt cooed. "Why am I doing this?"

He tilted his head and considered his response for a long moment, contentedly aware of Anthony's rising panic and dread.

"Well, it might be because you killed Emily Quartermaine, the beloved of my dear friend Nikolas. Of course, it also might be because you terrorized my possible brother at the Black and White Ball. Or maybe it's because you kidnapped and threatened to shoot Kate Howard, a woman very close to my heart. All of these, separately or together, would ensure my presence here tonight."

He leaned in.

"But the real reason?"

He placed his mouth beside Anthony's ear. "You killed my partner." He patted Anthony's shoulder and smiled. "So this is for Claudia."

Anthony gasped and ceased his useless struggle.

"Somehow you figured out she was trying to sabotage your organization. I'm not quite sure how you made her, as I know she was far too skilled an agent ever to have blown her cover, but it doesn't really matter anyway. You drugged her for months and made her mentally unstable. The drugs killed her baby and you let Carly take the fall. You turned Claudia, your own daughter, into a raving psychopath who wreaked havoc on this entire town, and then set up Michael Corinthos, a child, to kill her.

"I loved Claudia quite a bit, Mr. Zacchara, so you can imagine how devastated I was to learn of her death. You can imagine how vexed I was when the pieces of her life here didn't quite add up. You can imagine how horrified I was when I finally put those pieces together and realized what you had done. And I'm sure you have no trouble imagining how much I'm relishing this moment."

He safeguarded the syringe and stowed it in the pocket of his lab coat. He'd dispose of it as he drove past the East River on the way back to the hotel, where it would join so many of its brethren.

He smiled and nodded. "Very pleasant evening, sir."

He turned and left the room, glancing over his shoulder and smiling when he saw the man had stopped breathing. It was a terrible shame his blood pressure monitor had a frayed cord which caused a momentary outage. Hopefully it wouldn't cause a fire, but accidents happen.

He moved swiftly down the hallway, turned right, then left, then left once more, and entered the broom closet. After checking that the resident was still knocked out, he quickly changed back into
his clothes, transferring the syringe to the inside pocket of his jacket, and left the hospital.

He exited a stairwell door which emptied into the employee parking lot. He weaved in and out of the cars until he entered the visitor lot and opened the door of his newly-purchased jalopy. He would abandon it in Harlem before catching the subway to Manhattan, and then a taxi back to the Plaza.

He blew out a long, slow breath.

He didn't subscribe to any religion, didn't believe in the permanence of alleged souls, but he did believe in science. Science dictated that every living being was comprised of energy. When that being died, the energy was released back into the universe that created it. So, somewhere, Claudia existed in some form.

"I'm sorry it took so long for me to avenge you," he whispered, eyes closed, "but I hope you're at peace now."

He pulled out of the lot and headed back the city.

Phase One was accomplished.

Anthony Zacchara was dead and Claudia had received justice. Now all he had to do was maintain the facades he had so masterfully created. Anna had thrown a wrench in the works, but he would deal with it. Aidan had hopefully left Port Charles and returned to wherever he had been stationed these past few years. Damian was an issue he could now take his time to explore.

Carly was a distraction, but a happy one. He was honestly thankful for her friendship and hoped their closeness would only grow. He just had to make sure she never discovered he had known everything about her prior to his arrival in Port Charles. To do that, he would have to distract her.

The easiest way to do this would be to make Jake Webber's case the first he investigated once he took over as Chief Medical Examiner. That would also keep Elizabeth occupied, and Carly, Lucky, and Nikolas at her side. Getting justice for a child murderer would feel pretty great, too.

So much to do! He really should make a list.
Pressed into Service

Anna stirred her coffee absently as she thought about the events of the previous day. Holly Sutton had proven to be a revelation.

Holly had looked at Anna for what seemed like hours, perfectly content to let the silence between them stretch interminably because she would not be the first to speak. Anna wanted answers; Holly understood and appreciated that, and she was not averse to providing them, but she was determined Anna would have to work for this opportunity.

"What are you willing to tell me?" Anna finally whispered.

"I'm not setting limits. Kurt is aware this meeting would most likely happen sooner rather than later and gave me permission to speak on his behalf, provided the questions were not too outrageous."

"Is he incapable of speaking for himself?" Anna hotly demanded.

Again, Holly let the silence loom, knowing it would drive Anna spare. She had too often experienced the woman's impatience and impertinence, but she was the one holding the cards here. She wasn't trying to prolong Anna's suffering, but Anna herself had opened this can of worms by coming to her rather than Kurt, which she should have done.

Kurt and Anna both were too raw in this situation, each wanting to use her as the middleman, so to speak, and while Holly was happy to perform that function for Kurt's own sake, she would not stand for Anna's intolerance of their relationship.

"I'm sorry," Anna murmured.

Holly sighed. "I know. Look, Anna, Kurt is just as confused and hurt. He told me I can answer whatever questions I wish, but you need to understand how truly difficult this is for him."

She held up a hand. "I know you're aware of this on a maternal level, but I also understand how desperate you are for answers. I can't even imagine the situation in which you've found yourself, and while you certainly have my sympathy, even empathy, you need to be aware that, regardless of how badly I feel for you, my primary concern is Kurt."

Anna nodded sadly. "I do understand and I respect you for that. Thank you for being there for him when I wasn't."

Holly clucked her tongue. "I think that statement needs to be qualified, don't you? I know you would have been a wonderful mother to your son had you been allowed. I know you're not the bad guy in this circumstance. Time was stolen from you, Anna, and it's only natural you want it back."

Anna quickly looked up at her with wounded eyes. "I don't know if I would be as gracious if that circumstance was reversed."

"I do. Whatever you might think of me and my relationship with Robin, you were her mother, Anna. I was never confused about that and neither was she. She always knew how much you loved her. I always knew you were a wonderful mother. I might have had a hand in raising her, but the woman she became? That's down to you."

Anna gripped the table. "Why are you doing this? Why are you being so kind to me? It's
"Because this has nothing to do with you or me," Holly answered simply. "It's about your children. What was done to you is unimaginable, but you were there for them in the formative years when it counted. They remembered and revered that; that's why they mourned you so keenly. It's particularly difficult for Kurt because he missed more years with you than his sister did. He doesn't resent Robin, but is he jealous? Probably. He hasn't admitted it, most likely because his grief for her is overriding it, but I would imagine some part of him envies her."

Anna surreptitiously reached up and wiped her eyes. "He … he loves me?"

Holly regarded her with not pity, but a deep sadness. "Of course he does. That's why this hurt him so badly. If he didn't love you, he simply wouldn't care."

Anna nodded.

"The bottom line is this: You are responsible for the amazing people your children became. If I helped at all, I'm honored, but I'm not their mother."

Anna laughed. "Robert was a fool to throw you away."

Holly waved a hand. "Oh, that was never in doubt."

Anna laughed harder.

"In the end, though," Holly said, "Robert didn't throw me away. If he feels that he did, if he feels badly for it, that's a bonus. I stepped aside because Robin was more important."

That was a statement Anna utterly respected. "You're much stronger than I ever gave you credit for being. For that, I am sorry."

Holly nodded.

Anna cleared her throat. "How did you meet him?"

Holly became noticeably reticent. "I presume you've looked into this?" she finally asked.

"Of course."

"And found no answers?"

Anna shook her head.

Holly sighed. "Given your experience, what does that suggest to you?"

Anna stared at her for a long time before sucking in a sharp breath. "What agency?" she croaked.

"GNET."

Anna nodded and looked away. It made sense. GNET was a young organization and had learned from the mistakes of its predecessors. There were no leaks. Espionage was not tolerated. Treason was punished with execution. "Both of you?"

"I was his handler."

Anna let that sit for a while, gleaning new insight into their relationship. She had arguably been
closer to her handlers than she was to members of her own family, even now. Such relationships were intense; bonds formed quickly by necessity and trust was absolute if said bonds were to be maintained.

She had never been a handler herself, but was aware that truly good handlers came to view their agents as family. They were, in a fundamental way, the first and last lines of defense between an agent and the agency. For Holly and Kurt to have been as close as they were, she must have gone to bat for him on every single mission and beyond.

"How long?"

Holly took a sip of her tea. "Ten years."

Anna blinked. "Then he's only recently out of the game?"

Holly nodded. "He was one of their top operatives and they were ... very reluctant ... to release him. You understand how the game is played."

Which meant Kurt had dirt on GNET that was explosive enough to buy his freedom. Good boy.

"What was his specialty?"

Holly paused. "Anna, are you truly sure you want to know?"

Anna paused, realizing just how loaded both questions were. On the one hand, she didn't really wish to know just what services her son had performed. On the other, she didn't want it standing between them. She knew there was a limit to what Holly could reveal. Even if she was no longer employed by GNET, she undoubtedly retained some level of clearance and remained under stringent confidentiality agreements.

Anna wanted answers, but didn't want to compromise Holly's safety – and not only out of concern for Kurt.

"Whatever you feel comfortable telling me."

Holly looked around discreetly. "Perhaps we should continue this discussion elsewhere. I've always enjoyed the park." She placed a twenty under her saucer. "In fact, let's both turn off our phones so that we're not interrupted."

Anna frowned. Holly was concerned not only about being overheard, but that she, Anna herself, or possibly both of them were being bugged. She stood immediately after Holly did.

"Of course. Robin loved the park, too. It would be nice to visit."

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Nikolas gave his brother a hard look as he approached the breakfast table. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

There was no way Lucky was going to answer that question honestly, so he settled for a half-truth. "I spoke with Mac. He was reluctant but agreed."

Nikolas knew it was a lot more than that, but knew better than to press Lucky when he was so obviously on the verge of shutting down. "That's great!" he falsely enthused.

Lucky gave him a wilted smile. "Are you sure about having me here?"
Nikolas stared at him and then looked around blankly. "Uh, yeah. This place is, like Kurt described, a mausoleum. It's only me, Spencer, and Alfred here, Lucky. I have fifteen bedrooms. It won't be a problem."

Lucky chuckled. "Thanks, man."

Nikolas raised a brow. "This isn't the first time I've offered, you know."

Lucky's cheeks reddened. "Yeah, but I'm not as insecure as I was then." He blew out a breath. "It was always so important to me to be able to support myself. It always felt like Mom and Dad were taking care of me, and then Elizabeth … the house is hers, you know? Jason gave her money, but she never touched a cent. She worked her ass off for the cottage."

Nikolas nodded. He had realized a while ago that he would never truly understand Lucky and his issues with money. He himself had been extremely fortunate that money had never been a concern. He'd never had to worry where his next meal was coming from nor did he give much thought when he spent his family's money. He'd also had the luxury of having some of the world's best financial planners in charge of his accounts; he had more money than he could ever spend in several lifetimes.

As far as he was concerned, there was no better expense than his family, but Lucky and Lulu, even Mom, had always been very proudful. At least Mom and Lulu had never resented him for his wealth, but it had been a bone of contention between him and Lucky for a long time. If Lucky was finally ready to let that go, Nikolas wasn't interested in questioning it.

"So what's next for you?"

"I'll need to get my books and I guess school supplies," Lucky said. He laughed and shook his head. "I feel like I'm back in middle school again."

Nikolas smiled. "But you're excited, aren't you?"

Lucky nodded. "I really am! I wasn't expecting it, but … there it is. I really want this to work, Nikki."

Nikolas found he just didn't have the wherewithal to protest the nickname once again. He actually kind of liked it as it had always been reserved to the people closest to him, namely Lulu and Kurt. Mom had never called him that because, he felt, she had, in the beginning, been scared to upset him or be presumptuous. Helena and Uncle Stefan had never called him by that name, far more concerned with him understanding his role in society and being prepared to live up to it. He would have laughed if Alexis had ever called him that.

As he had grown older, Lulu had dropped the diminutive and he had always been a little bit sad about it. That Lucky felt comfortable enough to address him as such, secure enough in their relationship to do so, well, that meant a lot.

"Have you told Mom and Luke?"

Lucky shook his head. "Mom would totally be supportive, I know that. I think she's regretted not going to college." He tilted his head. "Dad? I don't know. He's always rebelled against anything that could be construed as establishment." He shrugged. "Then again, he was really disappointed Lulu was never interested in college. I don't know how he'd react to me going back, though. He's always had different standards for us."

Nikolas nodded, knowing it was true. "So what will you do if he doesn't support you?"
Lucky shrugged again. "Study harder. I'm past the point where I need his approval. I'm doing this for myself, for the right reasons, and that's all that matters."

Nikolas looked down. "I don't know if it means anything, but … I'm very proud of you."

Lucky swallowed heavily. "It means a lot. Thanks, man." He grinned. "So where are you taking Kurt to dinner?"

Nikolas gave him the Cassadine Side-Eye. "Don't push it."

Lucky gave an innocent blink. "Do you have condoms?"

"I hate you."

"Lube?"

Nikolas flushed with anger. "Please don't talk about him like that."

Lucky instantly sobered. "I wasn't implying anything, really. I'm sorry, Nikki. I guess … this is all kind of new for us, isn't it? We've never really done the brotherly teasing thing, have we? I didn't mean to overstep."

Nikolas felt like an ass. "No, I'm sorry. I guess I'm just a little sensitive where Kurt is concerned."

Lucky frowned. "How long have you liked him?" He remembered Nikolas saying twenty years, but was it even possible to carry a torch for someone that long? He thought about Jason and fought the blush.

Nikolas looked away. "A long time," he admitted after a beat. "For years it bothered me. He was so much younger than me, Lucky. It felt wrong."

Lucky nodded. "But you were never inappropriate with him, that's just not who you are, and the age difference doesn't matter now."

"Which is why it's so strange. I never thought I'd have this chance." Nikolas grimaced. "If I even have one."

"Why would you think you wouldn't?"

Nikolas sighed. "Kurt is very proud of who he is, as he should be, and he's always known exactly who that was. I … I've never put a label on myself. If I had to do it now, I don't know what it would be. I've been involved with men before." He grumbled. "Elizabeth said they were booty calls."

Lucky snickered.

Nikolas glared. "But that's kind of what they were. I never allowed myself to invest emotionally in another man and Kurt has never known me to sleep with men. I don't know how he'll react to this."

"But why are you assuming he'd react badly?"

"I don't know," Nikolas finally admitted. "I guess … I'm used to relationships not working out for me."

Lucky snorted. "Yeah, been there. Got several t-shirts."
Nikolas laughed, though it seemed forced.

Lucky sighed. "Can I give you some advice? Even though I have no more experience than you."

"Sure."

"Don't be in such a rush to qualify it. Right now, Kurt may or may not be aware of your feelings. The first thing you need to do is tell him just what those feelings are. He may or may not want to explore them. If he doesn't, just let him know that you'll always be his friend. If he does, let it happen naturally. I don't know Kurt, but from what I've seen, he's sophisticated enough not to worry about what box you check on some random form."

Nikolas released a long, slow breath and nodded.

"Stop it."

Nikolas frowned. "Stop what?"

"Stop dwelling on his rape. I understand you've only just found out about it, but it was ten years ago. Don't presume to know how it affects his life today. I know you, Nikki. I've been where you are and I can tell you for a fact that nothing good will come from you treating Kurt as a victim."

Nikolas closed his eyes. "You saw what a mess I made of things after Connor raped Emily."

"Totally different situation," Lucky snapped. "Connor had your face, Nikolas. He impersonated you for months. He was mentally unstable and, by the end, refused to believe he wasn't Nikolas Cassadine. I've always thought …" he trailed off.

"What?" asked a curious Nikolas.

Lucky ground his teeth. "That some small, rational part of Connor's crazy mind knew that he wasn't you, that he was Connor Bishop, but he looked at this house, the money, and Emily and decided they should belong to him because he wanted them. He bleated about how much he loved Emily, but he never saw her as a person. She was just another thing you had that he didn't. He didn't rape her because he was consumed by love for her. He raped her because she didn't want him. He raped her because he had your face and knew how much it would hurt her."

Nikolas' eyes filled with tears.

"He was a bastard," Lucky spat. "Just like Tom Baker. Just like that sick fuck who raped Michael in prison."

"Why does this happen?" Nikolas quietly asked. "Why has this happened to the most important people in our lives?"

"I don't know," Lucky whispered, shaking his head. "I really don't. I think it happens much more than we realize. It's probably happened to more people, our friends and family, then we'll ever know. I think we're more aware of it because of what my dad did to Mom."

"I've never been able to figure out …"

"Why she stayed with him? How she could have married him?" Lucky's hands curled into fists. "I've never been able to either, really, but both of them told me a long time ago that what happened that night was between them, that it had nothing to do with me, and that I needed to stay out of it. I didn't like it and it took me years to accept it, but they were right. I don't know everything that
happened. I don't want to know, I don't need to know, and it isn't my business."

Nikolas nodded slowly. "Any more than it's anyone's business what happened to Elizabeth and how you faced it."

"Yeah," Lucky agreed. "It's personal. Mom and Dad … growing up, there was never any indication to me that they didn't love each other fiercely. How they got there belongs to no one but them."

"It's hard for me not to hate him."

"I know. It is for me too. When you told me … when I found out what he had done to her, all I could see was what that bastard had done to Liz. Only instead of Liz crawling out of those bushes, I saw Mom."

"God, Lucky, I'm so sorry."

"You were right to tell me," Lucky insisted. "I needed to know. I mean, when Liz was raped, Dad did and said all the right things, but his reaction … he was devastated. At first I thought it was because he knew and liked Elizabeth, but then I realized it was because he was seeing the same thing I was, Mom in place of Elizabeth, only he was Tom Baker."

Nikolas gently nursed his coffee. "Has Mom ever talked about it with you?"

"Not really. I know she talked about some of it with Lulu, and I think she shared more with Elizabeth, but I don't think she's ever really talked about it to anyone. Not Grandma, not Aunt Amy. No one. I heard she tried counseling after it happened, but back then she wasn't even able to admit it had been Dad. She was still married to Scott at the time. I don't know how she dealt with it, or even if she did, but she doesn't let it define her.

"What pisses me off is that other people want to do that for her. They look at her and see a rape victim. They look at Elizabeth and see a rape victim. As if that's all they are. As though they're not mothers and sisters and daughters and friends and women and people. Don't do that with Kurt. He had a life prior to the rape and he's made one for himself after. Focusing on one horrible night in his life will negate everything he's done to move beyond it. Don't do that to him."

Nikolas studied his brother. "You know, I think you missed your calling. Maybe you should be studying psychology."

Lucky scoffed. "Yeah. Maybe if I learn how to psychoanalyze other people, I'll be better adept at disguising my own symptoms."

They laughed.

The dam which had been holding Nikolas' anxiety suddenly burst forth. "What if he doesn't like me back? What if he doesn't want to have to deal with Spencer? Kurt's never expressed any interest in having children. What if …"

"Whoa! Again, Nikki, you need to slow down. You're being way too intense. You haven't even told him you liked him yet, but you're acting as though you're about to propose." He shook his head. "If Kurt isn't interested in you that way, so what? It's not worth throwing away a twenty year friendship to force something that might never happen." He raised a brow. "Okay?"

Nikolas gave a tight nod.

"Now, it's also possible Kurt may have romantic feelings for you. That would be awesome and I'd
be really stoked for you guys, but there's something I don't think you've considered."

"What?"

"What if he just wants to sleep with you?"

Nikolas blinked. "What?"

Lucky rolled his eyes. "Really? Nik, he's twenty eight and hot. You're hot. He might not want to get married yet. Or at all. He might or might not want kids. He might or might not want to tiptoe through the tulips with you and recite sonnets. Or he might just want to get naked and have you screw each other into unconsciousness." He grinned. "Would that really be such a bad thing?"

Nikolas blushed profusely and looked down. "No," he quietly admitted.

"Okay, then. Talk to him and see where it goes. If it doesn't go further than the bedroom, so what? Maybe you're not meant to be together forever, but that doesn't mean you can't have really awesome butt sex."

"Lucky," Nikolas growled, "don't be so glib about this."

Lucky gave him a thunderous look. "Nikolas, yesterday I was in Jason's office ripping his clothes off his body and begging, literally begging, him to fuck me."

Nikolas sharply raised his gaze, eyes the size of moons. "What!"

Lucky merely shrugged.

"Holy shit!"

For some absurd reason, Lucky was floored. "Language!"

"Screw language! Did you fuck him?"

Lucky was annoyed. "If you had been listening, you would have heard that I was the one begging to be fucked." He leered. "While we're discussing it, what's your – heh – position on the subject? For some reason I think you've always been the pitcher in the past. What if Kurt wants you to receive?"

Nikolas blinked. "I … I don't know."

"Better figure it out," Lucky advised, "or maybe you can explore versatility together."

"Did you sleep with Jason Morgan!" Nikolas roared.

"No," Lucky confessed, "but I wasn't exaggerating either, Nikki. I really was begging for it. I've never acted like that before in my life. It was kind of horrifying. I was all over him, groping him, kissing him, pulling him on top of me. I couldn't get enough of him. It's like I was drugged."

"How was it?"

"Nikolas!"

"Don't be such a prude. Jason has slept with almost every woman we know and they've all gone back for more. I hate his guts, but he's not completely unfortunate looking. How big is he?"
Nikolas became very serious. "Did he hurt you?"

Lucky slowly shook his head. "No. I mean, no, we didn't. It was close." He exhaled. "Very close."

"Are you okay?" Nikolas carefully asked. He was trying to comprehend that, from what could be inferred from his brother's statement, Jason sure hadn't turned Lucky away.

"Not really. I went to him because, after talking with you, I realized I hadn't been fair to Jason. He's done a lot of wrong, yeah, but I basically persecuted him because I was hung up on a crush that was never reciprocated and I blamed him for that. After I said my piece, I tried to leave, but he pulled me back."

Nikolas growled.

"He didn't hurt me," Lucky repeated. "He … he kissed me."

A pregnant silence fell between them.

"Did you want him to?" Nikolas asked.

"Yeah. A lot."

"And he didn't … he didn't hurt you."

"Jason's not a rapist, Nikolas, and I'm no one's damsel in distress. I had torn his clothes off his body, I had his hard cock in my hand, and he looked into my eyes, asked if I was sure, and when I hesitated, he stopped immediately."

Nikolas sat back, relieved. He had never thought Jason would force someone, but he was still relieved. "What did he say about … well, anything?"

"Not much," Lucky said. "I couldn't believe it was even happening. Suddenly he was kissing me and I was fourteen again and …" He looked away.

"I understand."

Lucky gave him a pained smile. "I know, and thanks. It just happened so fast. We were so carried away that I couldn't actually think at first. Then I remembered Sam and the baby and I just … I couldn't."

"Because you have integrity."

"I don't know about that," Lucky said honestly. "It was hard, Nik, really hard. I wanted him so much at that moment and to know that he wanted me too? And then to stop?"

"Then what?"

Lucky was mortified. "I told him it never happened and then ran out of his office."

"Are you twelve?"

"Don't start."

"Lucky …"
"No, Nikolas. I'm done talking about this. I was very weak for a moment. Jason was very weak for a moment. Then the moment was over. He's married and I respect that. I'm not so sure I respect Sam or even Jason himself, but I will respect their marriage."

"But it wasn't one-sided."

Lucky flushed, this time with surprise and pleasure he was trying to deny. "No," he whispered, "it wasn't."

Nikolas nodded and dropped the subject. What happened next, if anything, was up to Lucky. If anything did happen, the fallout would not be pretty. Not only for Jason's marriage to Sam, but for both Jason and Lucky's respective relationships with Elizabeth.

The entire thing was a powder keg just waiting to explode and Nikolas knew whatever he thought or felt would not be welcome until then.

Lucky was quick to change the subject. "How does Kurt know Jax?"

Nikolas' lips thinned. "What do you mean?"

Lucky rolled his eyes. "It was pretty obvious at the funeral, Nikki. They know each other."

He decided not to mention the other guy, the fucking gorgeous Brit who somehow knew Anna. He wasn't sure Nikolas could deal with Mystery Date in addition to Jax. Best not poke bears with too many sticks.

"I have no idea," Nikolas said shortly.

Lucky did his best not to laugh, not surprised that Nikolas was so openly displaying his jealousy, though he was sure his brother would insist it was nothing more than concern.

"You know that," Lucky drawled, "by now, Carly is well aware of it. Do you really believe she's going to let sleeping dogs lie?"

Nikolas blinked. "What do you mean?" he asked with suspicion.

"Seriously? Before they were married, Jax and Carly were actual friends. There's no reason to believe they won't return to that once the divorce is finalized. I've always thought they made better friends than lovers, and Carly said she's always been more comfortable with guys. She'll want Jax to be happy, and she'd probably prefer it be with another man rather than a woman."

Nikolas huffed. "That's ridiculous."

Lucky said nothing, merely drawing his brother out. They both knew Carly couldn't help but interfere in the love lives of others, particularly her exes, and it was abundantly clear she'd happily commit multiple homicide if she thought it might make Kurt smile.

Finally, Nikolas gave a petulant sigh. "I know that Kurt was in Australia a few years ago for some medical conference. He probably met Jax there."

Lucky maintained his silence.

Nikolas narrowed his eyes and glared at the baguette before him, as though it had done him vicious and tremendous wrong. "It's not too surprising," he said with false nonchalance. "Jax is very much Kurt's type."
"Really?" asked a surprised Lucky. "How so?"

The glare intensified. "Kurt has always been partial to men who were very tall, taller than him, and especially blonds." He sighed. "I'm not sure why. Before high school, when Kurt still lived in the States, I know there were issues with some boys in high school."

"What kind of issues?" Lucky asked with concern.

"He wasn't treated well, Lucky," Nikolas said softly, "but there were some, I wouldn't call them relationships, but maybe possibilities, one of whom eventually became Kurt's stepbrother."

Lucky winced. "Yikes."

Nikolas gave an absent nod. "There was another boy. Tall, blond, and built like Jax. Fun-loving and fancy-free, too," he said with disdain. "I think his name was Sam. He and Kurt had some kind of relationship but it ended badly sometime after Kurt moved to Paris. I don't know what happened, he would never discuss it, but it hurt him terribly."

"You want me to track this Sam guy down?" asked an ominous Lucky.

Nikolas chuckled. "No, but thanks for looking out for my friend."

"It's not just him I'm looking out for," Lucky said.

Nikolas dropped his head, a small smile on his face, before he finally sighed. "I won't go through this again. Not with Jax."

Lucky paused. "You don't know …"

"I know Kurt; Jax is his type. Kurt has always preferred men who are taller than him, I think it makes him feel safe, and he does have a, well, a weakness for blonds. Look at Carly."

"I've always thought Jax dyes his hair."

Nikolas laughed. "It's okay, Lucky. If Jax makes a play, that's fine. I can compete for Kurt fairly. I'm not worried about Jax." He blew out a breath. "The truth of the matter is that Jax is a very honorable man. What happened with Spencer … well, Jax was devastated by Courtney's death. Even though she had left him for me, I think he was still in love with her, and everyone knows how much he always wanted a child. Carly preyed on that."

He held up a hand. "I'm not even sure I'm still angry at them. They were both grieving and hurt and they made a stupid decision. A horrible one that had to be righted by Robin, but I know both of them truly regret it. I really do believe that part of the reason Carly did what she did was because she was worried about Helena having plans for Spencer. I can't even blame her for that."

"And it's not like I behaved honorably during that time. I was finally married to Emily, the girl I had always loved, and I cheated on her because I was scared to be happy. It wasn't even a one-night stand. I actually married Courtney even though I still loved Emily. I think part of me felt as though I had to, to rationalize my behavior to myself."

He plopped his chin in a hand. "I'm not scared of Jax or of his relationship with Kurt. I know that Kurt has always been attracted to me, so the height and alleged blondness won't put me out of the running."

"But you think something will?" Lucky asked.
Nikolas sighed again. "Jax is a fun guy, Lucky. Everyone knows that. It's not easy to charm Lois Cerullo. She was happily married to Ned, but lapped up every bit of flirting Jax threw her way. I remember how Jax was with Chloe. Before she died, the two of them were deeply in love and spent most of their time laughing and having grand adventures. When Jax was married to Alexis, even though it was for show, well, you know how dour Alexis can be. I'd never seen her laugh so loud or so often than during that time."

Lucky nodded.

"He changed a lot when he became involved with Brenda and then Courtney. Both dragged him into Sonny's world. Then that stuff with his brother and Carly. Jax became a shell of who he once was, almost as though he went dark."

"Jax is charming," Lucky acknowledged, "but so are you."

"In different ways," Nikolas allowed, "but I'd be stupid and short-sighted not to admit that Jax has a certainly quality, a way with people that I simply don't." He nodded to himself. "But that's okay. I just need to remember to be the boy I was when Kurt and I were kids."

Lucky grinned. "What were you like?"

"A lot like Jax, actually," Nikolas confessed. "I was very young, but Helena hadn't gotten her hooks very far into me yet, thanks to Stefan's interference. I was a bit of a playboy. I liked having fun and going to parties. I loved music." He smiled. "Did you know Kurt sings?"

Lucky shook his head.

"Oh, Lucky," he whispered, "his voice … I don't know if he stuck with it, but back then it was the purest, most beautiful sound in the world. I'd never heard anyone with such natural ability. He could sing anything, any style or genre, and it was always flawless." He blushed. "I used to listen in on his lessons. I don't think he ever discovered it. He knew he was very talented, but he was also slightly insecure about how high his voice was."

Kurt's voice was still high, Lucky thought, and it was certainly musical. He imagined it must have deepened somewhat over the years because, from the little he'd heard Kurt speak, his voice was very much a tenor. A high tenor, to be sure, one that was gentle and soothing.

"Well," Lucky said slowly, "maybe you just need to let out your teenage side a little."

"I've felt a lot like that boy these past few days," Nikolas said, "especially with everyone calling me Nikki." He looked askance at his brother.

"My relationship with Nikki is different than my one with Prince Nikolas," said a quiet Lucky. "Not better, just different. I feel very close to Nikki." He looked up and scowled. "Don't you even think about calling me by my real name!"

Nikolas snickered. "Why not, Lucas Lorenzo?"

"You married Sonny's sister."

"You almost banged his enforcer on a desk. Yesterday."

"Rebecca."

"Sarah."
"Cassadines!"

"Luke!"

"Sam is your cousin."

"Carly is yours."

They grinned at each other.

"Let's go check on the boys and Mom," Nikolas suggested.

"We should hold hands," Lucky added. "It's fun to freak her out."

They stood, joined hands, and exited.

"You know, I think Mom thought were getting a little too close," Nikolas said as they headed toward the staircase.

"Probably because we're both so good looking," Lucky said. "Of course, Kurt thinks I'm devastatingly beautiful."

"He has astigmatism."

With Kate away and Spinelli being even more strange than usual, Maxie was happy to shrug off her grief for a few hours and indulge in her favorite hobby: shopping. She and Sam were perusing the maternity wear Lacey's department store was featuring, though neither were very impressed.

"How's Jason?"

Sam paused from fingering through the blouses and frowned. "Brooding."

Maxie quirked a brow. "So, business as usual?"

"I don't know," Sam admitted. "This feels different."

Maxie hesitated a moment. "Elizabeth?"

Sam shook her head. "No, nothing is going on there and I don't think it ever will." She winced. "Elizabeth handed me a few home truths before the funeral and I didn't react well. I said something really cruel to her in response, and of course Carly overheard and couldn't wait to tell Jason."

Maxie blinked. She knew Sam and Elizabeth exchanged barbs on a regular basis and both had hurled some truly awful comments at each other. "What did you say?" she asked carefully.

Sam sighed and hung her head. "Basically that, if she had been a better mother, Jake would still be alive."

Maxie's eyes widened. "Oh, Sam."

Sam winced. "I know. Believe me, I know. I couldn't believe I was saying it even as the words were coming out of my mouth. No matter what I think about Elizabeth, that was not only untrue, but just vicious."

"It really was," Maxie murmured, "especially given your condition."
Sam pursed her lips and said nothing, though she knew Maxie had a point. She knew from firsthand experience what it was to lose a child, so throwing that in Elizabeth's face had been beyond the pale. She knew what happened to Jake was no one's fault but the asshole who hit him. She couldn't even blame Carly for telling Jason, especially considering the woman's daughter was only alive thanks to Jake.

"So Jason's not mad about that?" Maxie pressed.

"Oh, he's plenty mad," Sam said, "but I don't think that's why he's brooding. He won't tell me of course, he never does, and frankly I don't want to know if it's about business."

Maxie nodded. The mob had impacted her life far too much and too often for her tastes. It was one of the reasons she was so hesitant to devote herself fully to Spinelli. She hated that he worked for Jason and thus, indirectly, Sonny.

"Thanks for coming with me," Sam said, smiling. "I don't think I could face this without my fashionista best friend."

Maxie beamed and pressed a kiss to Sam's cheek. "Happy to help."

"I'm just surprised you were available. Doesn't Kate usually have you working weekends?"

"At least once a month. Usually Lulu has to work the rest because I have more seniority, one of the few perks, but Kate took off for the city with Kurt and gave us both the weekend off."

"Robin's brother," Sam muttered. "What's he like?"

"I don't know," Maxie admitted. "Lulu's met him, but I haven't. He must be something, though. You saw who was with him at the funeral."

Sam nodded, somewhat awed. "Erica Kane."

"I have no idea how they know each other, but they looked very close. Holly Sutton was also with him. She's Robin's former stepmother." Maxie shrugged. "Again, no idea."

"What about the two girls his age?"

"Santana Lopez and Brittany Pierce. All I know about them is what I read in the paper. They're married and Santana is some huge Argentinian oil baroness. I did some digging on Google and found an old picture of them from high school. They were cheerleaders and so was Kurt. They won the national title."

"Huh."

"Has Nikolas told you anything about Kurt?"

Sam frowned. "No. Nikolas and I may be cousins, but we're not close. I don't even think I have his phone number. Why?"

Maxie stared. "It was pretty obvious Nikolas has a thing for him."

Sam laughed. "Nikolas isn't gay, Maxie."

"He doesn't have to be. Bisexuals exist in the world, Sam. They're not unicorns."

Sam was floored. "But … but Nikolas … I mean, I can't even imagine …"
"What I'd like to know is how they know each other, as well as how Kurt knows Jax. Nikolas wasn't the only one smitten."

"Wait, what? Jax too? Who is this guy?"

Maxie briefly rattled off what little she knew of Dr. Kurt Hummel.

Sam was suspicious. Why would some hotshot want to settle down in Port Charles? Had he blindly thrown a dart at a map? But if he knew Nikolas and Jax, and Kate and apparently Brenda, and then Robin turned out to be his sister, was it really such a coincidence?

Something was very off about all of this. She needed to talk with Spinelli.

She thought she'd found their next big case.

"What's wrong with you?"

Jax startled and looked at Alexis, who was giving him basilisk glare. "Pardon?"

She arched a brow. "I'm more than pleased to be here. We haven't had brunch in ages and I was beginning to feel rather uncivilized, but what is going on? I know you, Jax, in some ways better than anyone, and I know something is wrong."

He faked a smile which quickly evaporated before exhaling. "Have you ever found yourself questioning everything you thought you knew?"

"Frequently," she drawled.

A pregnant silence loomed before them.

"All right," Alexis said curtly, "I've had it. Explain yourself or face the consequences."

He grinned. "And what consequences would those be?"

"Nothing as filthy as I'm sure you're imagining," she said primly before offering a wolfish grin. "I'm thinking about a cross-examination which would see my brilliance forever ensconced in the halls of legal sagacity."

He rolled his eyes. "If you must know, I've run afoul of Erica Kane and am currently contemplating what actions she might take to ensure I'm denied something I desire very much."

Alexis blinked. "What did you do?"

"Thanks for the show of support."

"Jax, I don't know the woman, but her reputation precedes her. If you've pissed her off, what the hell are you doing here with me? You should be hiding in an igloo at the North Pole and praying Santa Claus will have mercy on your soul."

"It's not like you to be so enamored of celebrity."

"The woman faced down a grizzly bear by demanding it recognize her superiority. It did."

He fidgeted. "That's merely an urban legend."
"Oh, really? Let's ask Adam Chandler about the myriad times she bested him. Let's ask her eleven ex-husbands how they fared after the dissolutions of their marriages."

"Now be fair," he cautioned, "she doesn't have eleven ex-husbands. Some of those marriages were to men she married twice or more."

"Which suggests only how deeply masochistic they are," she retorted, "as are most men."

He sighed. "As much as I would like to unburden myself to my dearest friend, I believe it would be a conflict of your interest."

Her eyes narrowed. "Why? It can't be a professional matter; you have your own attorneys. If it were just a point of law, you would have no reservations about picking my brain. That means it's personal." She frowned in concern. "What on earth do you think you can't tell me? You know how much I love you."

He gave her a weak grin and patted her hand. "I do, but I don't want to set you against your favorite relation."

She blinked. He didn't say child, so he must have meant Nikolas. She shook her head.

"You too? What is it about this man?"

"He shares many of his sister's best qualities."

She sobered. She hadn't been close to Robin, but had liked her.

"So I gather Nikolas has expressed to you his interest."

She gave him a stern look. "I sincerely hope this isn't going to be another Courtney fiasco. Both of you acted like fools then."

He fought off the blush. He was Jasper Jacks. He didn't blush! He also knew Alexis had never cared for Courtney. Of course, given that she'd had a child with Sonny, her opinion was suspect.

She held up her hands. "I'm out as of now. I love both of you too much to be involved."

He nodded. "I respect that."

She hesitated and then rolled her eyes. "In the interest of fair play, I will tell you the same thing I told Nikolas: if you like Dr. Hummel, tell him. You say he's like Robin, who was one of the most forthright people I've ever known. If that's the case, I sincerely doubt he will tolerate either you or Nikolas acting like idiots in search of his attention."

He chuckled. "That helps me more than you know. I fear I have been acting rather like one as of late."

"No doubt in the presence of Erica Kane."

He winced. "I used my master key to surprise Kurt in his penthouse at the hotel."

"As an officer of the court, I am duty-bound to report this to the authorities. I should do it anyway just to give Mac another excuse to laugh at you. However, I will refrain because, frankly, I'm curious just how much of a train wreck this might turn out to be."

"You truly are a Cassadine."
Mac looked around the room, annoyed his weekend had been interrupted by the inconvenience of Anthony Zacchara's death. He was far more interested in celebrating with everyone else once it was known.

"Any signs of foul play?" he drawled.

He honestly couldn't have cared less, which was a dangerous and foolhardy attitude for the chief of police, but he was thankful the man was dead. It had appalled him and stuck in his craw that this bag of bones had skirted on multiple charges of premeditated murder by playing the system.

Oh, he was sure that Zacchara indeed had several bats in his belfry, but he had known exactly what he was doing when he had killed Emily and Layla as he terrorized the entire town.

The tech looked up at him and shrugged. "Not my department. Cause of death appears to be natural, but we won't know anything for certain until the postmortem is conducted and toxicology is back."

Mac grunted. "Who's up on rotation?"

The tech grimaced. "I don't think there is one now. Once word got out a new chief pathologist had been hired, most of the docs didn't bother."

Mac frowned. "Dr. Hummel isn't due to take up the position for another month. He's not even in town this weekend."

"Better call him back. You doing the notification?"

Mac nodded. "Falconeri is off for the weekend and Spencer resigned. Everyone else is tied up."

"Spencer quit? No shit?"

"He's going back to school."

The tech gave a slow nod. "Good for him."

"I've got calls to make."

Brunch at the Plaza was always a sumptuous affair in which Kurt indulged whenever he was in town; he adored even more sharing it with such close friends. Their odd little sextet did, however, garner quite a bit of attention, not the least of which because someone unknown had tipped off the paparazzi that Erica was in attendance.

Erica had a cordial relationship with the press and had once reveled in any bit of attention that paid her. That died the moment they shifted their focus from her to her daughter, Bianca, who had been all but been forced out of the closet. Erica had been powerless to stop it and that they had no shred of decency toward a minor and her privacy was infuriating.

Nowadays Erica tolerated the press – she was, after all, a television personality somewhat dependent on them – but she had no time when they interrupted a private gathering and shouted salacious statements designed to provoke. When they had appeared in the breakfast room, she called the police.

Kurt and Santana were falling over themselves laughing as Erica calmly but effectively told off the
paparazzi, whom it was apparent she knew. She took the time to drop several veiled threats which indicated she had investigated these individuals on her own time and was certainly not averse to spilling their secrets should they annoy her further.

The police led the interlopers from the dining room, the captive audience applauding a triumphant Erica, who accepted their accolades as her due before gracefully resuming her seat.

"I worship you," Kurt cooed.

She playfully rolled her eyes. "Well, of course you do. I'm Erica Kane!"

Santana turned toward her best friend. "You totally stole that line from her."

He sniffed. "I have never purported to be Erica Kane."

She scoffed. "And how many times have you shut down your opposition by saying *I'm Kurt Hummel* before sashaying away?"

A flattered Erica giggled, but Kurt took umbrage with Santana's description.

"I do not sashay."

Carly pulled an incredulous face. "Physician, please. Your hips should be classified as weapons of mass destruction."

Kurt turned beet red as Elizabeth and even Brenda cackled. Kate was much more demure with her mockery. He was rescued when his phone began chirping.

"Kurt Hummel," he answered.

"See?" Santana whispered. "*I'm Kurt Hummel."

She laughed outright when Kurt flipped her off as Brittany snickered into her shoulder.

"Good morning, Chief Scorpio," he said.

They stopped laughing and became solemn.

"Now?" Kurt asked. "I haven't yet officially taken up my duties."

Brittany slowly tilted her head.

"I see," Kurt said. "Yes, of course I understand. I'll be back in Port Charles by late afternoon." He paused. "Yes, Elizabeth and Carly are with me, and so is Kate."

The three women exchanged an interested glance.

"I'll be sure to tell them. I'll call you once I've arrived. Thank you for calling, Chief Scorpio." He smiled. "All right, then, Mac. Please call me Kurt."

He rung off.

"What's going on?" Carly demanded.

"Anthony Zacchara died last night."

"Good," Elizabeth seethed.
Everyone but Kurt and Carly was surprised by her rancor.

"He killed Emily," she spat. "He killed Leyla. He tortured Nikolas. He attacked me and Carly andKate. Spinelli, too."

Kate gave a curt nod. She wasn't going to shed any tears over that monster's death.

"Was it painful?" asked a hopeful Carly.

"He died in his sleep," Kurt said. "Chief Scorpio – Mac – said there were no indications of foul play, but he wants a postmortem conducted in case there are questions later."

"Sounds like a wise precaution," Erica said, sipping her coffee. "I followed the case in the papers. That animal should've been put down a while ago." She clucked her tongue. "Still, it's a hell of a way to begin your tenure in Port Charles, Kurt."

He shrugged a shoulder. "Well, at least it won't be boring."

The others, save Brittany and Santana, offered an appreciative chuckle and lapsed into a discussion about the many crimes of Anthony Zacchara.

And if his two oldest and best friends looked at him speculatively, Kurt pretended not to notice.
As soon as the gulfstream hit the tarmac, Kurt hit the ground running.

Erica had left New York and flown back to Pine Valley, due to pressing business with Enchantment and New Beginnings. She had promised to return to Port Charles within the month to finalize business arrangements with both Kate and Carly. As soon as she stepped into the limousine, she called Bianca.

Santana and Brittany had also departed for Buenos Aires because of reasons Kurt didn’t wish to know. His relationship with them had been monitored by GNET and he had never been able to determine exactly what, if any, interest the organization had in them. He had no intention of letting his former employers use him to target his best friends.

He arranged for town cars to chauffeur the ladies wherever they needed to go. Carly and Elizabeth shared a car, each wanting to go home and visit their children, while Brenda returned to the Metro Court. She would be staying in Port Charles for the foreseeable future to lend Patrick much needed support.

Kate instructed her driver to take her home first so she could change clothes before going into the office. She dreaded the state in which she might find it, courtesy of Maxie and Lulu. As exciting and fun as this whirlwind weekend had been, she knew she was foolish for leaving those airheads in charge of turning off the lights, let alone commanding the magazine.

Mac was waiting with a police escort to take Kurt to General Hospital where he would conduct a preliminary autopsy on Anthony Zacchara. He had made the notification to Johnny, who was frankly relieved his grandfather was dead. Mac didn’t blame him.

As Kurt and Mac shook hands, each studied the other.

Mac again catalogued the similarities between Kurt and Anna which, up close, were more striking than ever. Kurt was as beautiful as his mother.

Kurt was pleased Mac was a competent and seasoned investigator. And incredibly handsome. Only the streaks of gray at his temples suggested his age.

If the handshake lasted perhaps longer than propriety demanded, neither remarked on it.

Mac opened the door for Kurt and began laying out the facts as he knew them. Kurt quickly committed them to memory, but one point stuck out as absolutely ridiculous. Johnny Zacchara was Anthony’s son, not grandson.

What the hell was going on here?

Mac had to return to the station after dropping him off, so Kurt was left with the untenable task of negotiating General Hospital’s cavernous halls until he at last stumbled upon the morgue. He was annoyed that there was no other personnel present, if indeed there was other personnel.
After walking around for a moment, he was met by Monica.

“Good afternoon, Dr. Quartermaine,” he said briskly.

She smiled. “Let’s dispense with the formalities, shall we? I may be the Chief of Staff, but I’m not a stickler for protocol. Just call me Monica.”

He grinned and took her offered hand. “And I’m Kurt.” He exhaled. “I wasn’t expecting to begin quite so soon, but I understand the need.” He paused. “Monica, do I actually have staff?”

She winced.

He was astonished. He knew Port Charles had difficulty retaining a forensic pathologist, but to have absolutely no other morgue staff for a city of this size? “Truly? No autopsy technicians? Not even a secretary?”

She sighed. “As you know, we’ve had a rotating roster of physicians filling in, but we’ve also had to utilize the secretarial pool for administrative work.” She rolled her eyes. “Most of them have been too unsettled to stay here for any length of time.”

He pursed his lips. He understood that not everyone was comfortable working with the deceased, but these were supposedly medical professionals.

“How much control do I have?” he asked.

She gave a mild shrug. “This is your department, Kurt, to run as you see fit. I know you’re more than capable, so I’m perfectly willing to step back and hand you the reins.”

He nodded to himself as he looked around once more. He needed a medical secretary and at least one diener, or autopsy technician. A grief counselor would also be welcome. Eventually he would require a medicolegal investigator, someone to act as a liaison between him and Mac. He would also have to meet the heads of the affiliated departments and discover how they operated and to whom they answered.

“If I had a potential candidate for an administrative assistant, what’s the process for having them hired?”

She blinked. “I assume it’s someone you know and with whom you’ve worked before?”

He nodded.

“They would have to fill out the standard application and associated paperwork, of course,” she said, “and a background investigation would have to be performed. I’d also prefer they were HIPAA certified, though that’s easily taken care of on the job and isn’t a requirement for employment. Perhaps a week? Maybe two?”

“I suppose that will have to do,” he said. “Until then, I guess I’ll continue to use the secretarial pool.”

She nodded. “I’ll make a call.”
Brenda breezed into the Metro Court and waved at Marty, the harried assistant manager. As she headed toward the elevator banks, she heard an unholy screech unleash itself.

“What are you talking about?” the banshee demanded. “This has nothing to do with privacy! We know Kurt’s here. We’re his family. What room is he in?”

Narrowing her eyes, Brenda swung back around and sidled up to the counter. She smiled at Marty and indicated she would take care of this. He praised her name and scooted off as quickly as possible.

Brenda gave a thin smile to the banshee and Frankenstein, whom she assumed was the banshee’s husband. She had to admit their kids were cute and blessedly quiet. She reached out and tickled the little boy, whose giggles she found absolutely charming.

“Who are you?” the banshee roared.

She raised an eyebrow. “My name is Brenda Barrett. I heard you asking after my brother.”

“You’re not. Kurt’s sister is dead!”

Brenda curled a lip and leaned in. “Listen to me, you gremlin, Robin Scorpio was my best friend for over twenty years. Don’t speak to me of her death or you’re going to be the next one buried in this town.”

Finn had the presence of mind to step back with his children in tow, not wanting them to hear what he knew would be a heated exchange and more than content to stay out of it himself. He blanched when the tiny girl arguing with his wife looked over and pinned him in place with her eyes.

“You’re Finn, right?”

He gave an anxious nod.

“Kurt told me about you.” She tilted her head. “Does he know you’re here?”

He whipped his head back and forth. It gave him a migraine.

She studied him for a long moment. She knew Kurt and Finn hadn’t been in touch for years, though Kurt had picked up a ridiculous number of presents for his niece and nephew while in the City. She also noticed that Finn let his wife, she thought the woman’s name was Raquel or something similar, do all the talking. That wouldn’t work, not with Kurt.

She dismissed Raquel from her thoughts and presence and walked up to Finn.

“Do you know what Kurt has been through this past week?”

“Of course we …” Rachel bellowed.

“No,” Finn loudly interrupted. “No, I don’t. He found the mother he thought was dead and buried the sister he never knew he had.” He shook his head. “I don’t have any idea what he’s going through. I don’t think anyone does.”

Brenda hesitated. It was a better answer than she had anticipated.

“Look,” Finn said, sighing, “I know I should have called him before just showing up in Port
Charles, but I was worried. Regardless of our past, I’ve known Kurt a very long time. Whether or not he wants to call me brother, he’s still mine. I need to see him.”

She gave him a considering look and at last nodded. “I’ll make a call.”

A nervous Lucky stood on Elizabeth’s porch and knocked gently.

“We don’t have to knock, Daddy,” said a confused Cameron.

He smiled down at his son. “This is your mom’s house, kiddo, and though you live here, I don’t.”

Cameron nodded. “You’re being respectful.”

“Exactly.” He offered a wry grin. “I see Spencer has been teaching you new words.”

Cameron scoffed. “I already knew that word! I’m smart.”

Lucky chuckled and dropped a kiss on his son’s head. “Yes, you are. You take after your mom.”

Elizabeth stood on the other side of the door, surprised but pleased by Lucky’s thoughtfulness. She opened the door and greeted them.

“Mommy!” Cameron shrieked, throwing himself into her arms. “I missed you! How was your trip? Did you have fun? Where did you go? What did you see? Did you get me a present?”

Elizabeth laughed and held him tight. “I missed you too, honey, and I did get you a present.”

“Yay!”

“Cam,” Lucky began, “why don’t you go put your things away. I need to talk to Mommy for a minute.”

“But Daddy …”

“Cameron.”

The boy pouted, but only slightly. He kissed Elizabeth’s cheek and then rushed up the stairs.

“Is everything okay?” Elizabeth asked carefully.

“Not really,” Lucky admitted. “Oh! Cameron’s fine, nothing to do with him. I’ve just … I made some decisions this weekend and I’d like to talk with you about them, if you have the time.”

She frowned in puzzlement but nodded. “Of course, Lucky. I always have time for you.” She was stunned by the tears pricking his eyes and led him inside, depositing him on the sofa. “What’s going on?”

He took a deep breath. “The first thing I need to do is apologize.”

“For what?”

His chuckle was rueful. “That you even have to ask is just more proof you’re a much better person
than I am.”

“Lucky?”

He exhaled. “I’ve been thinking about a lot of things ever since Robin d-died.”

She took his hands in hers.

He closed his eyes and sighed. “I was a horrible husband to you, Liz. I treated you like shit for no good reason other than that I was a raging asshole.”

Her grip tightened. “Lucky …”

“No,” he said, pulling loose and patting her hand. “No, I was, and it took far too long for me to admit that. Not only to you, but to myself.”

“It wasn’t all bad, Lucky,” she whispered.

He smiled. “No, it wasn’t. And when it was good, there was nothing better.” He paused. “When it was bad, well, that’s on me.”

“You weren’t the only one who messed up.”

He blinked and looked into her eyes. “You mean Jason?” He shook his head. “I drove you into his arms, Elizabeth. You may have crossed a line, but I pushed you over it. If I had been any kind of partner to you, if I had been the husband you deserved, it never would’ve happened. Let’s not pretend otherwise, okay?”

She looked down. “The choice was still mine.”

“It was one night,” he said. “A night where I had done everything I could to make you feel badly about yourself, to cause you to question everything we had, where I had betrayed you on every possible level.” His eyes again filled. “But we got Jake out of it. No matter what happened before or after, he was never a mistake.”

Tears began falling from her eyes.

He gently wiped them away. “I am so sorry I couldn’t be what you needed, what you deserve.”

“What brought all of this on?” she warbled.

“Robin,” he said. “Who she was and what she meant to all of us.” He then told her about resigning from the force and reenrolling at PCU, explaining he was going to live with Nicholas and that Laura had decided to remain in Port Charles for the foreseeable future.

“That’s a lot of changes, Lucky,” she said quietly, yet with hope in her voice.

“Ones that are long overdue.” He looked away. “When I was at the park with the kids, I watched Nikki with Spencer and Patrick with Emma. I realized then how much I had been pulling away from Cam, and not just because of what happened with Jake. Liz, I don’t want to be like Luke.”

“Dad … he was always there for me when I was growing up. He was a good father then. I don’t know what happened, but I never want Cameron to look at me the way Lulu looks at our father. I never want him to question how much I love him or how much he means to me.”

He swatted the tears away, ones now fueled by anger and self-loathing.
“How can I help?”

He laughed and shook his head. “Just like that. I’m a mess and you come running. What did I ever do to deserve you?”

She smiled. “I see him now.”

“Who?”

“The man I fell in love with. It’s been a while, but it’s good to see him again.”

Lucky blushed. “How was your trip?” he asked, grinning when she began bouncing in her seat.

“It was wonderful!” she gushed. “Who would have ever thought I’d go on vacation with Carly and have the time of my life?”

He sobered. “Liz, don’t take this the wrong way, but are you sure Carly is being legit?”

“It’s a reasonable question,” she said, nodding, “and the answer is surprisingly yes. She’s lonely, Lucky. Her divorce is almost final, she’s determined not to fall back into old patterns with Sonny, and she knows a new phase of her life is about to begin. She wants to be there for her kids. She wants to do well with the hotel.”

“Those are good things,” he admitted, “but is that all?”

She sighed. “Jason almost died. Robin did die. I think … I think Carly had become somewhat inured to death because of her relationship with Sonny. Now that that’s over, it’s hitting her hard. She’s losing people.”

He nodded. That made sense.

“She talked a lot this weekend about Lucas, how much she regrets coming to Port Charles the way she did. She regrets she never tried to form any kind of relationship with him. She thinks it’s too late now.”

“I don’t think that’s true. If she called, I’m pretty sure Lucas would talk to her. That’s just who he is.”

Elizabeth nodded. “Erica had a long talk with Carly and I think she got through to her. At the very least, she gave Carly something to think about.”

He took her hands in his again. “You mean other than Michael?”

Her eyes widened. “You know?”

He nodded sadly. “Patrick told us without actually telling us, if that makes sense. Don’t worry, we haven’t told anyone and we won’t, but is Michael getting help?”

“Not yet, but Carly’s working on it. Michael is resistant to therapy, so I offered to talk to him. I don’t want to ambush him, though, so I’ll approach him when I feel he might be receptive.”

“Are you okay with doing that?”

“It won’t be easy, but if I can help someone, I will. Kurt told Carly he’d also talk to Michael, if Michael was interested.”
“What’s he like?”


“I can’t even imagine,” Lucky said softly. “Finding Anna and losing Robin, reuniting with Nicholas, whatever’s going on between him and Jax.”

“He has a lot of good friends to support him.”

Lucky grinned. “Including you?”

She smiled. “Yeah. Yeah, I think so. It’s weird, but nice, you know?”

“I know how hard it’s been on you, losing Emily and then Robin.”

“No harder than it was for you to lose Emily.”

She was taken aback by how quickly he paled and seemed to shrink in on himself. She hadn’t realized just how badly he continued to mourn Emily.

“Lucky,” she gently began, “you need to take time and grieve for her. After her m-murder, everything was crazy. Anthony was still running around, Nicholas got sick. You had to be strong for everyone, but now you have to be strong for yourself. I think you’re starting to do that and I am so proud of you, but you have to allow yourself to feel this loss.”

“I know,” he whispered. “I thought I had dealt with all of it when, well, when we thought the breast cancer would kill her. Then she survived and it was like a miracle. I just, I thought I’d have more time with her.”

She knew he wished to drop the subject, so she obliged. “How’s Laura doing? I didn’t get to talk to her at the funeral.”

Lucky gave a mischievous smile. “She’s fine, but she thinks Nikki and I have gotten too close.”

Elizabeth raised a brow. “Oh, so it’s Nikki, is it?”

“Yep!”

She laughed. “And knowing you and your brother, you’re only flaming her suspicions.”

His eyes brimmed with innocence. “Now, Elizabeth, just because Nikki and I walk around Wyndemere holding hands and hugging and kissing each other’s cheeks, why would you assume we’re trying to prank our beloved mother?”

Both brows rose. “Holding hands? Kisses?”

“Sometimes we have our shirts off.”

Her mouth dropped open.

He laughed. “You should see the look on your face! It’s just like Mom!”

“It’s just surprising. I know how much you and Nicholas love each other, but neither one of you has ever been very demonstrative about it.”

Lucky nodded. “And I think that’s a bad thing. Nikki never hesitates to shower Spencer with
affection. Dad always did that with me when I was a kid. He would always hug me and kiss me. It was good. I knew how much he loved me. Some people may think that’s weird or creepy …”

“Those people are idiots,” she interrupted. “There’s nothing wrong with showing affection to the people you love. This cult of hypermasculinity which insists men aren’t allowed to show their feelings is bullshit. Children should know how much their fathers love them. You and Nicholas have fought hard for your relationship. Regardless of their personal foibles or how their children turned out, both Alan and Sonny have always been loving to their kids. They never had that from their fathers. I never had that.”

He blew out an angry breath. “I know it’s terrible, but there are times I’d really like to shoot your parents.”

“It’s no more terrible than the times I’ve considered asking you to do just that.”

Their laughter broke the tension.

“So I guess Nicholas talked to you about Kurt?” she asked.

“Yeah, and thanks for pushing him to do it.” He paused. “I’m really, I don’t know, offended he thought I was a homophobe. I don’t know where he got that from. I know I can be macho, that comes from Dad and being on the force, but I’m not homophobic. You and I both have gay friends and always have. I supported Lucas when he came out. If Cameron were gay, I wouldn’t love him any less or be any less proud.”

“It really hurt you, didn’t it?”

“It did. I mean, I understand now that Nikki was projecting some his own anxiety and hang-ups onto me, but that’s not fair. All I want is for him to be happy. If Kurt could make him happy, that’s all that matters.”

She smiled. “I wanted to tell Nicholas that, but he wouldn’t have believed me. He had to learn it for himself.”

He grinned. “Thanks, Glinda.”

She snickered.

“I’ve missed this,” he whispered. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you, too. Somewhere along the way, we forgot we used to be best friends.”

He swallowed heavily. “There is something I’d like to ask you.”

“Of course.”

“Can you recommend a good psychiatrist?”

She was surprised but didn’t show it. If Lucky felt he needed therapy, she certainly wasn’t going to dissuade him. Counseling had saved her life. She still saw a therapist when she felt she needed one.

“Liz, whatever Helena and Faison did to me all those years ago, I think it’s still there. There’s something wrong up here,” he said, tapping his temple. “All of the things I’ve done these past years: the drugs, Maxie, all of the anger and confusion and rage … that’s … that’s not me. It never was. I don’t want to be like that.”
She was horrified; for him, by the situation, and at herself. She had never truly considered the lasting impact Helena’s kidnapping and brainwashing might have had on him. She had been so happy once he recovered his memories, she had foolishly thought it was over. Now that she was looking, truly looking, she saw just how terrified Lucky was.

“I know it’s not an excuse for my behavior …”

“You don’t know that,” she insisted. “Lucky, we still don’t really know what they did to you. I know you had counseling after you came back, but …”

“But I resented it, didn’t want to go, and never really did the work.” He looked into her eyes. “I think it’s time I did.”

“There’s a new psychiatrist on staff. His name is Ewen Keenan. I’ll get you his number.”

Monica shuffled paperwork back and forth her desk, attempting the illusion she was actually getting something done.

She felt badly for Dr. Hummel, who had been thrown into this with almost no warning and given no staff. Had the decedent been anyone other than Anthony Zacchara, she would have insisted the body be transported to Mercy and the autopsy done there by a pathology fellow. But the bastard had killed her daughter. She wanted to know exactly why and how he had died so that she could gloat. Maybe dance a jig.

Patrick’s absence was also worrying. He was guaranteed bereavement leave per his contract and of course she wanted him to use it. Had Epiphany not browbeaten him into it, she would have. Still, he was their most prominent neurosurgeon and a department head. Neurology was filled with excellent physicians, but none of them approaching Patrick’s caliber. He was their superstar.

She sighed. Regardless, she wanted him to take the time. If he needed more, she would simply see that he got it.

Robin’s loss was not only personally devastating, but professionally as well. Monica now realized she had somewhat taken the woman for granted. Robin had been their other superstar, a clinician and surgeon, and her research skills had been incomparable. She had been responsible for a significant portion of their funding and, with her gone, her projects were left in the air. Monica didn’t know how she was to replace someone irreplaceable.

For a moment, just a brief one, she wished she still drank.

She was shamed by her relief when there was a knock on her door and forced herself to wait a beat before acknowledging it.

“Come in!”

She was very surprised when her son walked in.

“Jason,” she said warmly, “how are you?” She noticed immediately he was even more preoccupied than usual. “Is everything all right?” she asked in concern.
“I don’t know,” he said blankly.

“Is there anything I can do?”

“May I sit down?”

“Of course,” she said, gesturing a chair before her desk. “How can I help?”

He appeared at loose ends and she gave him a moment to gather his thoughts.

“I need to talk to you about something,” he said slowly. “About me. Before the crash.”

She blinked. This was highly irregular. He never wanted to discuss who he had been before the accident. Anytime the subject was broached, he changed it. He had never felt any connection to the person he had been prior. He was Jason Morgan; he had no need or use for Jason Quartermaine.

She then remembered that Patrick had said there was a possibility that, after the surgery, Jason might start having memories of his old life. She hadn’t dwelt too much on it, it was just too much to hope for, but if there was even a chance …

“I’m sorry if this hurts you,” he said quietly.

“No,” she rushed to say, “it doesn’t hurt. I made my peace with that a while ago.” She paused. “Still, I don’t believe you’ve ever before asked about … him.”

“I guess … I guess I never thought I would need to know about him.”

“What’s happened?” she asked. “Is it Sam? The baby?”

He looked up sharply and pinned her with his eyes. “What do you think about Sam? What do you really think?”

This was a potential landmine and she honestly had no clue how to navigate it. She didn’t even want to attempt it.

“I’m seriously asking,” he pressed. “No one other than Carly will tell me the truth and, though I trust her, it’s Carly.”

Monica gave an absent nod. She could say many things about Carly, and she had, but there was some small part of her that respected the woman for telling Jason what he needed to know, even if she did have her own agenda. Carly really did love her son, sometimes too much and too selfishly, but she did love him.

“What brought this on?” she asked, trying to buy herself time.

Jason fidgeted in his chair, something he never did and which only heightened her worry. “Sam lied to me. About Robin. About when and how she died.”

She took in a sharp breath. If there was one thing Jason could never abide, it was betrayal. Something which Sam already knew. Monica believed the woman was only doing what she believed was best for Jason and she understood that, wanting to protect your husband, but lying wasn’t the way to go about it. It was a lesson she herself had required many, many times.

“I see,” she said slowly. “I assume she was worried about you and potential complications from the surgery.” She gave a weak smile. “That was a legitimate concern.”
“I know, but there are other things she’s done, things no one knew.” He sighed as his hands curled into fists. “But Elizabeth told Carly and they were overheard by Morgan, who told Michael, who told Sonny.”

“Oh, dear.” She was dying of curiosity, but wouldn’t press the subject. She knew from experience it would only cause Jason to shut down.

He closed his eyes. “Sam was in the park when Jake was kidnapped,” he said in a rush of words. “She saw who did it and never said anything. She pretended to help me search even though she knew the whole time who had Jake and where they were.”

Her eyes filled with rancor. That miserable little bitch! How could she do that? Not just to Jason, not just to Elizabeth, but to anyone? What kind of monster was she? This was the woman now pregnant with her grandchild?

And if Elizabeth had known … well, no wonder she had kept Jake’s paternity a secret! Jason not only led a very dangerous life, but had kept Sam involved in it, even after he knew she was partly responsible for his son’s kidnapping! What the hell was wrong with him!

“I know,” he said. “Believe me, I know, and it only gets worse.”

“Worse?” Monica croaked.

“Sam hired Russian thugs to ambush and harass Elizabeth in that same park. Cameron was with her at the time. Sam chose Russians so Elizabeth would believe it was retaliation against me and Sonny. The Russians had guns. Cameron still has nightmares.”

She stood up and slammed her hands on the desk. “Jesus Christ, Jason! I can’t believe you allowed Sam to live, let alone forgiving and marrying her!” She shook her head and began pacing. “And you obviously didn’t tell Sonny, because he would have killed her. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but for once in my life, I’m on his side.”

She couldn’t even imagine what Carly must have thought and said about this.

“How could you have married her, Jason?”

“Sam’s not the person she was then.”

“She’s not, or she’s not that person in front of you?”

He hung his head.

Monica couldn’t help but wonder if he was truly the father of Sam’s baby. Their marriage had been rushed. It was arguable that Jason hadn’t been in his right mind at the time, due to the seizures. There was just so much wrong with all of this.

“I do want to help you, Jason,” she said, “but I don’t know what to say about this. If you really want to know what I think of Sam, I believe it’s obvious I don’t like her and never have. As much as I admire Alexis, I don’t see any traits she shares with Sam. The girl came to town as a grifter. She extorted money. She committed multiple felonies.

“I don’t see where she’s ever really apologized for her behavior, at least to the people to whom she should. The way she treats Elizabeth is deplorable and, in light of this new information, outright reprehensible. I know Nicholas can’t stand her and that Emily never could. In fact, almost everyone I know has nothing good to say about her.”
He nodded.

She sighed and again took her seat. “Regardless, she is your wife and the mother of your child. I will respect that, even if I can’t respect her.”

“It means a lot to me that you said that.”

“You’re my son, Jason. I’ve only ever wanted you to be happy.”

“Was I happy then? Was I happy when I was the other Jason?”

She blew out a breath to hide her surprise. “I always believed you were. You gave me no indication that you weren’t. You and I were very close. I like to think you would have told me if you had been unhappy.”

“I was close with everyone, wasn’t I? Alan, Edward, Grandmother?”

“Yes,” she said warily, “you were. We loved you very, very much, Jason. You were the apple of everyone’s eye and, though you might not like to hear it, that included AJ. He adored you. Yes, he was very jealous of you, he always was, but he loved you. He was devastated that he caused your accident. I don’t think he ever got over it.

“I want you to know, I need for you to understand, that his guilt was never just about the pain and disappointment the accident caused me or your father or the rest of the family. He lost the brother he adored through his own actions, his own malevolence and stupidity. I really do think that’s why he could never crawl of the bottle. He needed to punish himself, and nothing anyone said to him was adequate enough to do it.”

She held up a hand. “AJ did horrible things, to you especially. I’m not denying that nor am I excusing it. At the end of the day, he was responsible for his own choices. We loved him dearly, but he could never make himself believe that. As much as he loved you, he could never move past his jealousy. You were younger, you were the baby, and though he never suffered a lack of attention, he always thought he was entitled to more.

“He was jealous of your intelligence. He was clever, certainly, but you were the intellectual. You never struggled with school. If it bored you, you simply studied in depth that which interested you. You always had more friends, true ones. AJ was popular, but he surrounded himself with leeches more interested in his money than in him. He knew he was being groomed to head ELQ, but he didn’t really have a head for business. He desperately wanted to, to make Alan and Edward proud of him.”

She shook her head. “He could never accept they already were.”

Jason said nothing, though he listened. He had never liked AJ and would probably never forgive him but, after losing Jake, he was thinking about things in new ways.

“I don’t think,” he said shakily, “I don’t think until I lost Jake, that I was ever able to fathom just how much you’ve lost. I’m sorry for that. I’m sorry for … not trying harder.”

Her eyes filled with tears but she quickly blinked them away. “And I am so very sorry that you’re experiencing it. I love you with all of my heart, Jason, even if you can’t feel it. Three of my children were murdered and my husband is dead; you’re all I have in this world.”

He blushed and ducked head.
“But that’s not what’s brought you here today, and neither is Sam. How can I help you, Jason? What do you need from me?”

It took several moments for him to answer. “Something happened yesterday, something that’s never happened before, and I don’t know what to do about it. I don’t know how to feel. But I can’t stop thinking about it.”

“Can you tell me?”

“It’s … awkward.”

She paused. “Because of business?”

“Because you’re my mom,” he whispered.

She bit her lip and again willed back the tears. “Honey, you can tell me anything. I’m always here for you, even if all you need is for me to listen.”

He released a long, slow breath.

She knew she would have to wait him out.

“When I was him, the other Jason,” he began, wondering when it became weird to think of Jason Quartermaine as other; he always had and was never troubled by it, “did you ever wonder, did you ever think he … I … might be … gay?”

She was floored. Absolutely shocked. She didn’t know what to say, but knew the longer she waited to say something, the more alienated he would feel. As it was, the very fact he had come to her with this, so obviously confused and frustrated and looking to her for guidance, was enormous.

She didn’t want to fuck this up.

“I can honestly say no,” she said carefully. “You had strong feelings for Karen Wexler and were hurt when she chose Jagger Cates. You and Brenda Barrett had an infatuation.” She smiled and ignored his grimace. “And you were very serious about Keesha. We all believed you two would marry.”

He sucked his teeth and nodded, looking away.

Her desire to know won out over caution. “May I ask what brought this on?”

He hesitantly and haltingly told her about his meeting with Lucky, the other man’s apology and, with great reluctance, that Lucky had been in love with him years ago.

“I’m … stunned,” Monica admitted. “I’m just stunned.”

“I was too.”

“And all of this came out of nowhere?”

“I never even suspected. Lucky and I were really tight when we were younger, but then Elizabeth …”

She nodded. “Does he still have feelings for you?”

“I think so, yes.”
“Does that bother you?”

Jason frowned. “No. Why would it?” He scowled. “Why does everything think I have something against gay people? Carly thought I would look down on Robin’s brother because he’s gay. I don’t even know him. I don’t care who he sleeps with. It’s not my business.”

“Well,” she said slowly, “Carly probably believed what many do about Lucky, that because he can be, well, let’s say aggressively masculine, coupled with the fact he’s in a highly dangerous and volatile occupation, that …”

“No offense, Monica,” he interrupted, “but that’s bullshit. Being a homophobe has nothing to do with being masculine and everything to do with being an asshole.”

He stared when she beamed at him.

“What?” he demanded.

“I’m just happy you feel that way.”

He shrugged.

It was then she had a realization. She had thought he had asked about his sexuality prior to the accident because he wondered if he had appeared gay in some way, but now …

“Jason, are Lucky’s feelings one-sided?”

He glared at the floor for several long moments. “They were,” he finally ground out.

“Oh.” She thought about that for a minute. “Oh. Did … did something else happen between you two?”

He turned his glare on her.

“I’m not judging you, honey. I’m well aware it’s none of my business, but if you want to talk about it, as I said before, I’m always here to listen. And I hope you know I would never discuss any of this with anyone else.”

“I know,” he said in a defeated voice.

She frowned. “Am I asking the wrong question here, Jas? Did something happen, or did you want something to happen?”

He grunted. “Both.”

“Oh, my,” she said faintly.

“I kissed him. I wanted to kiss him and he kissed me back. It went … I don’t even know what the hell happened or what I was thinking, but it went far. I don’t … how did it happen? I’ve never been into guys.” He looked up at her. “Right? I never dated guys.”

“No, you never did and, honey, please don’t take offense to this, but that was a very different time. I know it might not seem like it, but even twenty years ago, homosexuality and bisexuality weren’t that openly discussed. Perhaps you did have some interest and simply never told me. In fact, were that the case, I doubt you would have discussed it with anyone other than Lila.

“You did have a couple of gay friends in high school and you never treated them any differently
than you did your other friends but, no, I never knew you to be interested in men.”

“Could it have been caused by the accident?”

She blew out a breath. “It’s difficult to say. As you know, with such trauma, personality shifts can be very real and drastic. Your father experienced that after his first heart attack. You also need to consider the evidence both for and against sexuality being genetic. If it is, it’s doubtful a brain injury could cause such a completely radical shift. However, if sexuality is environmental, or both genetic and environmental, I suppose it’s possible that significant trauma might be somewhat responsible.”

She sighed. “I’m sorry, honey. I just don’t know what to tell you.”

He put his hands over his face and groaned. “I don’t know what to think about this, what to feel about it, and I’m angry that he just dumped this in my lap and ran away.”

“Lucky ran away?”

He flushed. “We, uh, we …”

“Got it.”

“Not that,” he frowned, “but it was close. He really wanted it, wanted me, and, well, it was mutual. It had to come from somewhere on my part, right? Some part of me must have wanted it for some time. I’m the one who pursued it, pursued him.”

Her eyes bugged. “Really?”

His flush deepened. “This is difficult for me, okay? I know our relationship is weird, but I understand you’re my mother. It’s hard for me to talk about this stuff in general, let alone with you.”

She nodded. “Okay, I can understand that and won’t press you, but may I ask one question?”

“Yes.”

“Leaving aside your past with Lucky, both good and bad, leaving aside Elizabeth and Sam and all the rest of it, do you regret it?”

He slowly shook his head. “No.”

“Do you want it to happen again?”

“That’s more than one question.”

She didn’t know if he was teasing her or not. She pursed her lips.

“Yeah,” he whispered, “I think I do. There was … it just felt right, you know? I don’t understand why, but it felt right. What am I supposed to do with that? I’m married. Sam’s pregnant. Lucky is Elizabeth’s ex-husband. He’s Sam’s former lover.”

“He was Jake’s other father.”

He flinched. “Do you think … do you think that’s part of it? That maybe it was, I don’t know, solace or something?”
“I think it’s possible,” she said gently, “but I don’t think it explains everything.”

He gave a confused nod.

“And if that’s true, it would be more on your part than his,” she continued. “He told you he had feelings for you for years, Jason. I can’t even imagine what that was like for him, although he twisted it into something that helped neither one of you.”

His face darkened. “That’s what bothers me. That he did that, I mean.”

“How so?”

“His anger at himself, his self-loathing … Mom, it was, it was oppressive. It hurt to see it. It made my heart hurt for him. He was in so much pain. He must have been in so much pain for so long and no one saw it. He didn’t want anyone to see it. He wasn’t ashamed of his feelings, but he was terrified of what people would think of him.”


“I think that was a big part of it, yeah,” Jason said, nodding, “Laura … I don’t know her well, but she’s Laura. She wouldn’t care. Lulu wouldn’t care. Nicholas wouldn’t care. That leaves Luke.”


Jason hunched over and put his head in his hands. “That’s what I was afraid of.”

She cocked her head. “What do you mean?”

“Lucky thinks … he feels that whatever Helena and Faison did to him is still controlling him.”

Her eyes widened. She found that all too plausible.

“And I can understand why he believes that. When I look back at his behavior these past years, that’s not the Lucky I knew. Yeah, I was young and he was just a kid, but the drugs? How he treated Elizabeth? That’s not him.”

“I agree.”

“So how do I help him?”

She hesitated. “May I ask why you two didn’t …?”

Jason colored darkly, before standing and turning away. He couldn’t face her for this. He didn’t understand that, either. He had never really cared what Monica thought of him, and if he was gay or bisexual or something, he didn’t care what she thought of that. Still, she was his mother and, even if he was an adult, there was no way this could be anything other than awkward.

“We wanted it. We both wanted it a lot. We were so close, but …”

“What is it, honey?”

He bit his lip. “I was aggressive with him. I think he liked it. He was that way with me, too. But I didn’t want him to regret it. I didn’t want him to think … I asked if he was sure. And he paused.”
He turned around with tears in his eyes. “And even though I know that’s not what it was, that I
could never do that to anyone, I looked into his eyes and saw Elizabeth, and then Emily, looking
back at me.”

And Michael, though he couldn’t say that.

Her heart broke. It broke for her son, for her daughter, and for Elizabeth.

He scrubbed his face with a hand. “He said no and I stopped. I know he wasn’t afraid of me. He
knew I wouldn’t hurt him, but I think … I think I did hurt him because I didn’t stop to think about
what it would mean to him not only that I wasn’t rejecting him, but that I wanted him too. I didn’t
think at all. That doesn’t happen with me. I always think before I act. But not this time.”

He sighed and sat back down. “He said he couldn’t because of Sam and the baby; that he didn’t
want to be that guy.”

“That’s very honorable of him,” she demurred.

“It was, and it was then that I saw the Lucky from all those years ago. And that’s when I really saw
him. I saw him back then, the way he would look me, the way he emulated me, the way he tried so
hard to please me. And I realized last night what I never saw then. Everything changed.”

“How?”

“When he came back after whatever the bitch did to him, he was so angry, Monica. He was furious
at both me and Elizabeth. His anger at her I understood; she had moved on because she honestly
believed she had no other choice. She thought he was dead. But his anger at me, that was harder to
figure out. I thought it was because he believed I had betrayed our friendship, but now I understand
he felt I had betrayed him.”

“But you hadn’t.”

“Are you sure? I’m not.”

“Jason, what are you saying?”

He threw up his hands. “I don’t know! I don’t know, but this had to come from somewhere. It has
to mean something. If Sonny came to me and said he’d been in love with me for years, I’d laugh in
his face before punching it in and checking him into Ferncliff.”

She snorted.

He shook his head. “Not with Lucky. I grabbed him and threw him up against the door. I kissed
him until we lost breath. I tossed him on my desk and suddenly clothes were flying everywhere and
it felt like I’d found something I didn’t even know was lost. When I first met Lucky, it wasn’t that
long after my accident. I didn’t understand emotions or body language. I couldn’t read cues. I still
have trouble with that sometimes.

“Last night there was never, not once, a doubt in my mind that I didn’t want this, that I didn’t want
him. I’ve never felt anything like that in my life. I don’t think I ever will again. I didn’t question it.
I didn’t analyze it. I just went with it, which is something you know I don’t do. It was … he was
like a narcotic to me, Monica. I felt drugged. I’ve never allowed myself to be so out of control.”

She tented her fingers and rested her chin atop them. “And how does that make you feel?”
His blazing eyes found hers. “I felt like I was free. Free of Sonny and Elizabeth and Sam and all of the pain. Free of all the obligations and the losses and the deaths. I was … Jason.”

“Jason Morgan or Jason Quartermaine?”

He shrugged helplessly. “Just Jason. It was me and Lucky and no baggage. All the stuff that happened between us over the past ten years was gone. It just didn’t matter. For the first time in I don’t know how long, my heart wasn’t in a vise because of Jake. I felt like I could finally breathe. For those few moments I wasn’t grieving. For those moments, my memories of Grandmother and Alan and Emily didn’t hurt.”

She inhaled sharply. “Jason, I need to ask you a question and you have to be honest with me.”

He laughed. It sounded so alien to her.

“How much more honest can I be?”

“You’re here because you needed someone to listen. Do you want my advice?”

He didn’t hesitate. “Yes.”

“As your mother or as a physician?”

He frowned. What was the difference? “As my mom, I guess.”

She nodded. “As your mother, this is what I’m going to tell you: get a DNA test and make sure that baby is yours.”

His eyes widened.

“Those seizures were severe, Jason. They almost killed you and you’d been having them longer than you or anyone realized. You had blackouts. You lost memories. You lost time. There’s a lot you don’t remember about your reconciliation with Sam, and you’ve only her word to go on. I don’t think it’s unreasonable to point out that she lies. Often.”

His mouth fell open.

“As your mother, I’m telling you I think you should divorce her. Whatever your feelings for her, Jason, I don’t believe you truly know what they are. And if you loved her like you loved Robin or Elizabeth or even Carly, you never would have reacted the way you did to Lucky. Because you’re right. Something like that doesn’t come from nothing. For him to affect you that way, there’s more there than you know and you said you want it to happen again.”

He covered his face with a hand. “And as a physician?”

“As a physician, I strongly recommend you make an appointment with a neurologist and have a PET scan. Patrick believed you were already starting to recover Jason Quartermaine’s memories. Robin’s protocol indicated it was very likely you would regain more and then start to integrate them. I can honestly say I have never seen more of Jason Quartermaine in you than at this moment.

“I would also recommend therapy, for both you and Lucky. He’s been self-destructing for years and, like you said, no one saw it. If he is still in love with you, what happened between you last night could very well push him over the edge.

“And you need help, Jason. You need to realize that you don’t owe anyone anything. Not Sonny,
not Sam. If that is your baby, I will love it with every fiber of my being, just as I know you will, but that doesn’t mean you have to stay with Sam, not if your heart lies elsewhere. That wouldn’t be fair to anyone.”

“I don’t … I don’t know how to be anyone other than Jason Morgan.”

She smiled. “You said Lucky made you feel like Jason, just Jason. Why don’t you take some time to find out who that is?”
Later in the afternoon – after her conversation with Jason, a quick lunch, and a preliminary surgical consultation – Monica was heading back to the morgue, intrigued about what Anthony Zacchara’s autopsy results would show. She really had no business attending, but the bastard had murdered her daughter and she hoped he had suffered. She could excuse her presence by arguing she was the chief-of-staff and thus entitled to know about any case she wished.

She was surprised Kurt had concluded the postmortem so quickly, but he was the best and she had hired him for just that reason. She knew he was annoyed by his lack of staff, but appreciated he had put his best foot forward and carried on regardless. She admired professionalism.

She ran into Mac Scorpio, who was escorting a wan Johnny Zacchara, in the elevator. She nodded at him and attempted small talk with Johnny. She knew he hated his grandfather and was ashamed of the man’s crimes. She had never held Johnny responsible, but understood there was a distinct difference between being told something and believing it for oneself.

They exited in the basement and Monica guided them toward the morgue. She opened the door and stared.

“Hello, Monica,” Holly said warmly from behind the administrative desk. She stood and crossed to the front to offer a hand.

“Holly,” said a surprised Monica, “it’s lovely to see you again. I was so sorry to hear of what your sister had perpetrated.”

Holly’s eyes darkened. “Paloma will pay for what she’s done. Helena will see to that.”

Monica’s arched a brow, wondering what the hell Helena Cassadine had to do with this, as well as why Holly was so willing to surrender her sister to a psychopath. Then again, considering what Paloma had done while masquerading as Holly, perhaps a bit of vengeance was in order.

She worried she was becoming as bloodthirsty as Jason. She also worried she wasn’t more concerned about this.

Holly exchanged a hug and kiss with Mac, who, while delighted to see her, was only reminded of Robin. His grief was still too raw and real, so he boxed it up and determined to deal with it later.

“Holly, I’m so happy to see you,” he said. “I thought I would’ve before now.”

“Actually, I’ve been spending quite a bit of time with Anna,” she said quietly. “For whatever reason, we’re allowing each other to share in our mourning for Robin. It’s strange and certainly surprising but, for right now, it’s working.”

“I’m glad,” he whispered. “Are you staying at the Metro Court? Would you care to join me for dinner this evening?”

She smiled. “Dinner sounds lovely and, yes, I’m staying at the hotel for the time being. I’m sharing Kurt’s suite. I’ve decided to move back to Port Charles and am searching for a new home for us.”

Monica startled. “You and Dr. Hummel know each other?”

“Very well, yes,” Holly replied. She looked back to Mac. “Shall we say seven-thirty?”
He nodded.

“Wonderful!” she enthused. “I’ll tell Kurt.” She raised an eyebrow upon noticing the slightest trace
of a blush spread across his cheeks. Well, wasn’t that interesting? She couldn’t even imagine how
Anna would react were anything to develop.

“Holly,” Monica began, “pardon me for being so forward, but what exactly are you doing here?”

“I should think it would be obvious. The paperwork has already been submitted, but will take at
least a week to process. Kurt hired me to be his department manager, though I might not have
accepted had I known just how shoddily this office has been run. The sheer amount of paperwork is
obscene and I can’t tell you how many reports are incomplete, misfiled, or unsigned. It’s
completely unprofessional and opens the hospital to potential litigation. I have a meeting with the
risk manager later in the week.”

Monica blinked.

“I’ve already contracted a personnel agency to send us temporary workers to help me sort this mess
until we can find permanent employees, though I’m not sure where we’ll put them.” She looked
around the office with disdain. “This is the most unorganized space I have ever encountered, and
that’s really saying something. Almost everything was set up with no real thought to function or
style and, believe me, Kurt can be very intolerant of chaos.

“You should also know that, this morning, I put in calls to both PCU med school and the graduate
pathology department in search of autopsy technicians. Neither one of us thought anything would
come of it, but I’ve already received six emails expressing interest. Kurt’s name has more impact
that I realized. I’m sure the students are already dreaming of letters of recommendation.

“By the way, Monica, before you arrived, I had just sent you an email with several attached
requisition forms for new equipment. The computer operating system is horrendously outdated, the
telephone system is antiquated, and we don’t have even the most basic supplies. What kind of
administrative office doesn’t have pens or paper? A kindergarten classroom is better stocked.”

Monica opened her mouth, though no sound emerged.

“I asked Kurt to review the medical supplies as time permits and to make note of what he requires,
as well as what he expects and would prefer for the future. I expect the list to be lengthy and costly,
just so you know. A vague disclaimer is no one’s friend.”

Monica’s brow furrowed.

“I wouldn’t concern yourself overly,” Holly blithely continued. “We’re all aware of the current
budget crisis, so whatever isn’t approved, Kurt will buy himself and deduct as business expenses
later.” She paused and shrugged. “Or Nikolas will underwrite a specific endowment to the OCME.
Perhaps both.”

“Where is Kurt now?” Mac interrupted. “Mr. Zacchara is here for the results of his grandfather’s
postmortem.”

Holly sobered. “It’s my pleasure to meet you Mr. Zacchara, though I am sorry for the
circumstances. Please accept our condolences on your loss.”

“Thank you,” he said robotically, giving a sharp nod.

“Dr. Hummel is currently interviewing a candidate for the position of grief counselor and should
be with us momentarily.”

“A grief counselor?” Monica repeated. “That’s a wonderful idea, and one that’s long overdue. Dr. Hummel has shown nothing but initiative and utmost professionalism under trying circumstances. I’m glad I hired him, despite the board’s misgivings.”

“Misgivings?” Holly asked with an odd tone.

“Simply because of his age,” Monica said, holding up a hand. “His qualifications are impeccable and his recommendations were glowing. I would have been stupid not to hire him, and I’m not a stupid person. The board was reticent about appointing a bureau chief even younger than Patrick Drake, but considering the other candidates, it wasn’t only the best option, but the only one.”

Holly smiled and inclined her head.

Monica sensed just how protective Holly was of Kurt, of how much he meant to her, and she couldn’t help but be curious about their relationship and how it developed, as well as what Anna thought of it. She knew better than to ask questions, but some discreet digging wouldn’t be amiss.

She had no objection to Kurt hiring Holly, though she did wonder just what work experience Holly possessed that made her qualified for the position. She made a mental note to review the application herself. As she had told Kurt, it was his department to run as he saw fit, but they both knew there would be oversight, so she doubted he would have made Holly an offer if she wasn’t fit for the job.

The door to the small conference room opened and Kurt emerged into the outer office, closely followed by Laura Spencer.

“Hello Dr. Hummel, Laura,” Monica said.

They both smiled and walked toward the others.

“Monica,” Kurt began, “thanks for being here. It will save me the time of having to brief you later. For the record, I welcome your presence whenever you deem it necessary.”

She blinked. “That’s not the experience I’ve had with your predecessors. Thank you.”

He offered a mild shrug. “I thoroughly researched General Hospital prior to taking the offer, which I wouldn’t have done had I not been impressed with your stellar career. I’m happy to be here, but the primary reason I accepted was because I would be reporting to you.”

That meant a great deal to her. Most of the staff still mourned her late husband, Alan, who had been a much beloved chief. They respected her ability and intelligence, but she knew there were many who constantly compared her performance to his. It was difficult competing against a ghost, no matter how much she loved and missed him. That Kurt thought so much of her, when he could have had more prestigious positions anywhere in the world, was gratifying.

“I take it we have a new staff member?” Monica said with a small smile, nodding at Laura.

Kurt grinned. “Yes! I strongly believe a full-time grief counselor is necessary, both for family members of decedents and the staff, and was concerned about operating without one. I made passing mention of the staffing problem to Nikolas and Carly, both of whom recommended Laura.”

Mac blinked, but Laura and Monica’s eyes approached the size of satellites. Neither had any idea what was really happening with Carly, other than that Kurt appeared to be influencing her in all the
right ways. Both thought he would deny it if asked, but neither thought it any less true.

“I wasn’t sure I’d be able to land her,” he gamely continued, “as I didn’t know whether she was planning to stay in Port Charles. Happily, she is, and my issue has been resolved.”

Laura offered a sad smile. “After what happened with Robin, I want to be close to my family. Coming home to Port Charles only makes sense. I want to be the best mother and grandmother I can be, but I also want to be useful. When I heard about the opening here, I jumped at the opportunity.”

Monica smiled. She held great respect for Laura and everything she had endured. The woman had faced innumerable trials, many of which would have broken a lesser person, and had always emerged triumphant. She had heard from Nikolas that Laura had completed her Masters in counseling while abroad and agreed with Kurt a full-time grief counselor only made sense. She was pleased it would be Laura, someone who had deep roots in the community and was liked and admired by almost the entire town.

She did wonder, however, how well Laura and Holly would work together, considering their pasts with Luke. To their credit, neither woman appeared daunted or even hesitant.

“Hello, Johnny,” Laura said kindly, taking the young man’s hands in hers. “I’m so sorry for your loss.”

He swallowed heavily and looked up into her eyes. “I hated that man.”

“And I’m not here to tell you to feel otherwise. This is about closing a door so you can open another one, and nothing more.”

His relief was palpable.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Zacchara,” Kurt said. “I’m Doctor Kurt Hummel and I performed the autopsy on your father.”

“Grandfather.”

Kurt faked puzzlement. “Pardon? I’m sorry, but the paperwork I received listed you as Mr. Anthony Zacchara’s son. Was it in error?”

A tired Johnny launched into his fairly recent discovery that Claudia, the woman he believed to have been his sister, was actually his mother. Her father had been Anthony Zacchara.

“Is there evidence of this?” asked a blunt Kurt.

Johnny stared. “I saw the birth certificate.”

Kurt shrugged a shoulder. “Paperwork can be faked. Is there a reason someone would do that to you?”

“Johnny, who told you this?” Laura asked.

Johnny was silent for a long moment. “Sonny,” he finally admitted.

Laura closed her eyes and sighed.

Kurt pursed his lips and nodded. “I believe that speaks for itself.”
“I wasn’t aware you knew Sonny, Kurt,” Mac said.

“I don’t, nor am I anxious to make his acquaintance, but several of my closest friends have been involved with him over the years, not to mention my association with Santana has offered tremendous insight into the character of Mr. Corinthos.”

Mac nodded.

Kurt turned back to Johnny. “Mr. Zacchara, it’s really your decision what you wish to believe, but I strongly recommend you have a DNA test performed to put this matter to rest once and for all, if only for your own piece of mind.”

“Can you do that?” Johnny asked.

“Of course. I’ll do a buccal swab before you leave. We should have the results back in under two weeks.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now, as to why you’re here. Anthony Zacchara actually succumbed to a number of undiagnosed illnesses. Had they been detected and treated accordingly, he most likely would have lived, though he would have required surgery and rehabilitation. He was diabetic, which wasn’t listed among his conditions, and his glucose level was almost four times as high as the current recommended guideline.”

Monica frowned. “It’s odd that went unnoticed.”

Kurt nodded. “Yes, but Mr. Zacchara was actually underweight for his height, with an excellent BMI. His meals were medically prescribed and heart-healthy, with the recommended portions. Also, some of the medications he was taking can elevate blood sugar, so if his levels were checked, they weren’t necessarily fasting blood sugars and high levels could have been explained away as side effects. None of his previous bloodwork indicated that he ever had an A1C test.”

She nodded.

“He didn’t die of diabetes, but it was a contributing factor, one which caused pulmonary hypertension. This was also undiagnosed and untreated. In fact, the beta blockers he was given for his coronary artery disease are contraindicated in patients with PHT and exacerbated the condition. I saw from his chart that his doctors were experimenting with different medications to find the right cocktail to treat him, never realizing they weren’t addressing a serious issue.”

“Malpractice?” Holly asked.

“Doubtful. More like pure ignorance. Ideally, they should have called in a hospitalist to assess him regularly but, as it was, Mr. Zacchara often refused care, including not taking and even hiding his medication. But the primary cause of death was primary mitral valve regurgitation.”

He looked back at Johnny. “Mr. Zacchara had a leaky heart valve which didn’t close tightly. With every heartbeat, there was some blood from the left ventricle which flowed backward into the left atrium, instead of being propelled into the aorta. This condition isn’t easily diagnosed and patients can be asymptomatic for decades. The progress notes indicate he was recently diagnosed with a heart murmur, but by the time it presented, it was actually too late. He died of heart failure.”

Johnny blinked. “I guess he had a heart after all, no matter how black it was.” He shook his head. “Is it genetic?”
“Not necessarily, although perhaps there are, shall we say, propensities. Everyone who reaches middle age will experience some valve regurgitation. Some of the medications he was prescribed would have worsened the condition, and he suffered previous infarctions. I also noticed he had rheumatic fever as a child, which is a very high risk factor.”

“Did he suffer?” Johnny asked darkly.

Kurt tilted his head. “Would it make you feel better if he had?”

“Yes.”

“Then he did.”

Johnny smirked. “Thanks, Doc. Mac, do you need anything else from me? I just want to sit in a bar and drink for the rest of the day.”

Mac looked at Kurt, who shrugged.

“I have some paperwork I’ll need you to fill out and sign, but it can wait. What do you want to do about the body?”

“He wanted to be buried next to my mother. I want him cremated.”

“I’ll contact a funeral home. They’ll call you about arrangements.”

Laura excused herself, explaining that she was meeting Lucky for dinner and drinks. Kurt promised to call her tomorrow and again welcomed her on board before he began patting the pockets of his lab coat.

He grinned sheepishly when Holly handed him a test tube with an attached swab. She rolled her eyes fondly and shook her head. Kurt asked Johnny to open his mouth and quickly swabbed the inside of his cheek.

Johnny considered the man before him. They were probably the same age and, given Dr. Hummel’s cultured tones and wardrobe, they were both privileged financially. Yet he couldn’t help but feel inadequate. This man was obviously highly intelligent and well-educated, and had chosen a career of significant importance.

“Thank you, Doctor,” he said, after the swab was complete.

Kurt nodded. “Mr. Zacchara, I know this isn’t the most appropriate moment, but I have to tell you how much I enjoy your EP. You are incredibly talented.”

Monica and Mac stared at him, and then turned toward Johnny, who was slowly flushing.

“You, uh, you’ve heard it?” he asked, a catch in his voice.

“Oh, yes! It was given to me a friend who raved about your original compositions, and she was right to do so. I try to keep abreast of independent piano releases and was certainly impressed by yours.”

“Do you play?” Johnny asked, eyes lighting.

“I do. I studied piano and voice at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia for five summers.”

Johnny blinked. That was the best musical conservatory in Italy, and one of the premier institutions
in Europe. They turned away students who had been preparing since childhood and he had never heard of summer sessions. This man must have been incredible.

“Parli italiano?” he asked.

Kurt grinned. “Sì. L’italiano è la lingua della lirica e della moda.”

Johnny smiled. Italian was indeed the language of opera and fashion. “It was a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Hummel. Thank you for making something so awful much more bearable.”

They shook hands and Kurt promised to call when the final paperwork needed to be signed and about the test results.

“Well,” Monica said, “that went much better than I anticipated. Johnny is a decent boy, but he can be volatile. Even he was impressed by your competence and professionalism, Kurt.”

He inclined his head. “Thank you.”

“Mac and I are having dinner this evening,” Holly interjected, looking at Kurt. “Would you care to join us?”

“I’d love to, but I’ve already made plans with Nikki.”

Holly smirked.

“Don’t start,” Kurt warned.

“A quiet date?” Monica smoothly asked, catching Holly’s eye.

Kurt rolled his in response. “Doubtful, since Nikki has made reservations at the Metro Court. I’m sure he would say he wished to make it convenient for me, but I’m betting he hopes Jax puts in an appearance.”

Holly arched a brow. “I wonder which alpha male will make a claim for your heart?”

“The only alpha male in this equation is myself.”

She nodded. “True enough.”

Monica said nothing, though she was inwardly bristling. She well remembered the fools Nikolas and Jax had made themselves out to be when they competed for Courtney. She hoped they wouldn’t be so stupid this time, particularly because she doubted Kurt would put up with it.

“You know Jax?” Mac asked in a tight voice.

Kurt nodded. “We met in Australia a few years ago. It was a sweet but short courtship which never really got off the ground.” He sighed. “I’ve seen the way Nikolas and Jax watch each other when I’m in their vicinity, and I’m well aware of their history with Courtney Matthews. If they persist with their ridiculous exhibition of misplaced machismo, I’ll be forced to take steps.”

“Text me with coordinates if that happens,” Monica said. “I could use a good laugh.”

Kurt smirked and nodded, wishing her well as she departed for the elevator.

Holly cocked her head and considered Mac. She knew he and Jax had bad blood between them, something about a girl back in Australia, but she had never learned precisely what had happened.
Perhaps it was time she did, especially because she could sense Mac’s jealousy at the idea of Jax being anywhere near Kurt.

She suppressed a sigh. She loved Kurt like a son, but he was hopeless when it came to romance. He never really knew the effect he had on men. Either he disbelieved that anyone he liked could ever possibly like him back, or he was completely oblivious to when interest was paid him.

It was endlessly frustrating and more than a bit annoying. Obviously she would have to assume control of his personal life because he couldn’t be trusted.

She liked the idea of Nikolas, Jax, and Mac competing for Kurt’s affections, perhaps in some intellectual contest or naked mud wrestling exhibition. She’d wait to form a more cohesive plan after she learned the results of his date this evening.

She excused herself on the pretext of returning phone calls, knowing Mac and Kurt probably had police business to discuss. She pretended to ignore the slight blush on Kurt’s face and how Mac instinctively inched closer to him.

“I heard Kurt is having dinner in the restaurant tonight.”

Carly pursed her lips and looked up from her paperwork, arching her brow at a grinning and abashed Jax. “He is,” she drawled, “with Nikolas.”

She did a wonderful job of not snickering at his thunderous scowl. She couldn’t wait to tell Elizabeth about this.

“I’d stay away if I were you,” she continued. “Kurt was not happy you used the master key to infiltrate his room.”

Jax’s eyes widened. “Erica told you!”

“She did. I doubt she gave you permission to use her first name, however.”

He blushed. “I should have known she would blab. And it wasn’t an infiltration!”

“I don’t know what else you’d call it,” she said, smirking. “As for Erica, of course she told us. She and Kurt are very close.”

He huffed. “And I suppose you’re her new best friend?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Carly said carefully, “but we are soon to be business partners. She wants to do a profile on the Metro Court for her television show. In return, I offered to feature Enchantment Cosmetics exclusively in the hotel boutiques. The paperwork should be ready by next week.”

He frowned. “We’re equal partners, Carly. You should have run it by me.”

“You might have a point,” she said, “but I don’t think so. Get serious, Jax. It’s one thing to have the Erica Kane as a satisfied customer. It’s something else entirely for her to endorse us on her nationally syndicated television show. It was really the least we could do to return the favor, and you and I both know Enchantment is a commercial and critical darling. We can’t lose.”
He hemmed and hawed, knowing she was right but still feeling slighted.

Carly had no patience. “I also told Kate we would double our advertising for the anniversary issue. Kurt suggested having Brenda on the cover, and Kate agreed. Brenda wants Kurt to share the cover with her, but he’s resisting. Erica is also going to increase her advertising, as well as dedicate a special edition of her show to *Crimson*. She’s going to feature Kate, Brenda, and the hotel.”

His eyes widened. He knew if he tried to argue any of it, he would just come across as a petulant child. Carly had put together an incredible deal, and he wasn’t so obnoxious as to turn his nose up at it just because it hadn’t been his idea.

“Well done,” he said earnestly. “I’m proud of you.”

Her cheeks pinked. “I wish I could claim it as my own, but Kurt put it all together. I don’t think Erica and Kate could have said no to him even if they wanted. He’s got them wrapped around his finger.”

His eyes softened.

She sighed. “Look, Jax, between you and me, I’m rooting for you and Kurt, but you have to know that he and Nikolas share a lot of history. Nikolas has made it more than clear that he’s romantically interested in Kurt and he has Helena’s backing. I would strongly suggest you pursue Kurt on your own time and with an honest effort, rather than trying to sabotage Nikolas. It won’t make anyone happy, especially Kurt.”

His mouth fell open. “You’re really rooting for me and Kurt?”

She shrugged. “I want you to be happy. I’m sad we couldn’t make it work between us, but I think we gave it a good shot, and I want to walk away from our marriage as friends. We have Joslyn to consider and Morgan adores you. I don’t want to do anything to ruin that.”

“Thank you, Carly,” he said with great conviction, “I feel the same way. I love Morgan just as much as I do Joslyn. I hope you know I will always be there for him.”

She grinned. “I do, but thanks for saying it.”

“So I shouldn’t interfere, huh?”

“I think you should pull your head out of your ass and think about why Nikolas made the reservations here out of everywhere else available in Port Charles. I’m sure he’s hoping you crash their date and make a fool of yourself. It saves him from having to do the work himself.”

He offered a startled blink. “Good point.”

“Don’t be so surprised!” she barked.

“So what should I do?” he asked, filled with disbelief he had just posed this question to his ex-wife.

Carly clucked her tongue. “First of all, you and Kurt haven’t seen each other for years. You can’t just pick up where you left off, which was pretty much nowhere. Second, he has a life, he has friends, and he has options other than you and Nikolas. Every gay or bisexual guy in town will be beating down his door in the near future. By all means, ask him out. The sooner the better, probably. But do it in person and on your own time. Make an effort.”

“Thank you, Carly!” he beamed.
She snorted. “Well, you obviously need help. Nikolas has Lucky and Elizabeth in his corner, though I suspect Holly will remain neutral. Laura probably won’t. And don’t discount Monica. She works at GH, is Kurt’s boss, and has unlimited access to him. She also thinks Nikolas needs to move past Emily’s memory.”

“Elizabeth has sided with Nikolas?” he hissed, affronted, dismissing Lucky completely. He wasn’t sure what, if any, problems Monica or Laura might pose.

“She’s his best friend and wants him to be happy.”

“I thought Elizabeth was supposed to be your best friend now?” he asked slyly.

Her eyes flashed. “Don’t push it, blondie. Elizabeth is my best friend and we’ve been working hard on our relationship. This past weekend was awesome and I’m not going to do anything to put our friendship in jeopardy, so don’t give me a reason to side with her against you. That said, we each have other best friends. Kurt is mine and Nikolas is hers. We haven’t decided yet, but will probably share custody of Lucky.”

“Honey, I need to tell you something.”

Spencer looked up from his junior chemistry set with scant interest. He really didn’t appreciate his daddy taking time away from his experiments. Child geniuses shouldn’t be bothered when they were revolutionizing the world. Or soon would be.

“What is it, Daddy?”

Nikolas calmly gathered a breath. “I’m going out to dinner tonight with a friend, so Grandma and Uncle Lucky will be here with you.”

Spencer offered a distracted shrug. “Kay.”

Nikolas blinked, expecting a more thorough interrogation. Spencer was at that age where he wanted everything explained to him in minute detail. Actually, he had always been like that, which made Nikolas inordinately proud. He loved that his son was such a curious child.

He jumped when Spencer suddenly pivoted his head toward him like a possessed doll. He wondered if his son had just successfully lulled him into a sense of security only to pounce when his guard was down. A true Cassadine.

“Do you have a date, Daddy?” he asked, eyes lighting with interest and, perhaps, joy.

“I do,” Nikolas confirmed, beginning to blush.

Spencer jumped to his feet and applauded. “What’s her name? What does she do? Where are you going? You’re not wearing that, are you?”

Nikolas bit his lip, debating how best to explain this, before deciding to be honest. He had always wished Stefan had been honest with him and felt he should treat his son the way he had wanted to be treated at that age.
“His name is Kurt.” He said nothing more, wondering how Spencer would approach this.

“Are you gay? I didn’t know you were gay.”

Nikolas didn’t know how Spencer even knew what gay was, at least in regard to romantic relationships.

“No, honey, I’m not gay.”

Spencer offered a sage nod in reply. “Oh, so you’re bi.”

Nikolas widened his eyes. What the hell were they teaching at his son’s school? Should he be worried, or grateful?

“So what’s his name?” Spencer demanded. “What does he do? Where are you going? You’re not wearing that, are you?”

“His name is Kurt,” Nikolas said, sighing, “and he’s a doctor.”

“Oh. He’s Dr. Robin’s brother, right? I remember him from the funeral. He’s very pretty. Cameron met him last weekend and liked him.”

Nikolas just nodded. Why was he perpetually underestimating his child? “We’re going to the Metro Court.”

Spencer pulled a face. “That’s okay, I guess, but Daddy, there are nicer places.”

Nikolas blushed. He was coming to regret making reservations at the hotel. He was now sure Kurt would see through his thin charade.

“Um, do you have any questions for me, son?”

Spencer looked heavenward and appeared in thought. “You still haven’t answered me about your outfit, so I’m assuming it’s not what you have on now. You also really need a haircut, Daddy. If you marry Dr. Kurt, does that mean I would call him Daddy, too, or something else? Maybe Papa.”

Nikolas stared.

“Actually, I do have a question, Daddy. What if, when I grow up and fall in love, it’s with a boy? Can I marry him? Is that okay?”

“Of course it is,” Nikolas said honestly.

“What if I want to marry two people?” Spencer asked. “Can I do that?”

“That’s not legal in this country, sweetheart,” Nikolas said, suppressing a grin and guessing where this was going.

“I know that Cam and I are cousins, but Uncle Lucky isn’t his biological father, so we’re not actually related by blood. Can I marry Cameron, Daddy?”

Nikolas had no idea what to say and wished Lucky or Elizabeth or anyone else were here to field this question.

“Do you know what’s funny, Daddy? Dr. Kurt looks a lot like Auntie Elizabeth.”
Nikolas felt a sick headache coming on.

“If I can’t marry Cameron, then can I marry Emma? Cameron can live with us and we’ll just pretend we’re all married to each other and have lots and lots of kids. And puppies. Can I get a puppy, Daddy?”

“I have to go get ready, Spence,” Nikolas said, desperate to abandon these troubling lines of inquiry. “I’ll come and see you before I leave, okay?”

“Okay, Daddy! I remember Emmie saying you have a great butt, so make sure to wear some tight pants!”

Nikolas fled the room.

A harried Diane Miller raced toward the door to her private office, wondering why her damnable secretary hadn’t alerted her there was a potential client in the waiting room. She made a mental note to dismiss the girl as soon as possible. Besides, she had always wanted a male secretary ever since she was a wee girl with plans of legal superstardom and a separate house for just her shoes.

A competent and sophisticated male secretary. Yes, that was the ticket. Someone European would do nicely, preferably with two first names and a tight butt. She deeply regretted the employment agency didn’t offer the opportunity to place an order for something you really wanted.

“Good afternoon!” she said cheerfully, opening the door. “How may I …”

She was talking to empty air.

“Hello.”

She blinked and looked down. “Morgan? Morgan Corinthos?”

“Hi, Miss Diane. I’m sorry I didn’t make an appointment. I know you’re very busy, but may I please ask you a question? I tried looking up the answer, but I couldn’t find one. I asked my brother Michael, but he didn’t know, either.”

She tilted her head and considered this interesting turn of events, before stepping to the side and made a sweeping gesture with her arm, inviting the little boy inside. Morgan was, after all, Sonny’s son, so she had no qualms about billing the father for the son’s imposition on her time. Not that she minded. She had as much interest in reading depositions as Sonny did in not greasing his hair.

“Come in, Mr. Corinthos, and please have a seat.”

Morgan nodded his thanks and crossed toward her desk, easing himself into the chair facing it.

She sat across him and folded her arms. “How may I help you, Mr. Corinthos? And why have you not put your question to your parents?”

“I don’t think they would tell me the truth,” he said bluntly.

Diane raised a brow. This boy was a smart one. Considering his parents, she wondered how this was possible. Regardless, she was determined to encourage it. She was of the firm belief that when
children had questions, they should be given truthful, accurate answers. Children always knew when someone was lying or prevaricating. She mourned that people tended to lose that ability as they aged.

“Please ask your question, Mr. Corinthos, and I shall endeavor to do my level best to answer it.”

He nodded and began speaking.

Diane didn’t know what she had been expecting, but it wasn’t this. She was deeply disturbed and frankly horrified that a ten-year-old child was in her office asking about one of the most reprehensible crimes imaginable. She had no idea what to say or do.

She could not, in good conscience, simply send him away. She did not want to dismiss him and be yet another adult who had failed him. The boy had done his due diligence by looking up words and memorizing their definitions. He had conferred with a trusted elder to broaden his understanding. He had bypassed potentially hostile witnesses whose honesty he felt was debatable.

This child would be an excellent attorney. In fact, she was seriously considering hiring him as her new secretary. He most likely didn’t need the money, so she could pay him in cookies and certificates of merit. It was never too soon to start compiling a credible CV.

“Mr. Corinthos, I am deeply impressed by the concerted effort you have put forward in this matter. Since you have come to me, I assume that you are interested in learning the legal definition of this crime, as well as the punishment it deserves.”

Morgan nodded. “Yes, please, Miss Diane.”

She nodded and rose to her feet, crossing over to her bookcase and perusing its volumes. She finally selected one, grabbed a dictionary, and returned to her desk. She passed Morgan a pen and pad before opening the codex to the appropriate page.

“This, Mr. Corinthos, is the compendium of legal treatises which deal with the criminal code for the State of New York. Here is the definition for which you are searching, and here is a dictionary. I want you to read the definition and then use the dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words. I need to make a call to a client, and then I will return and we can discuss this matter further.”

“Thank you, Miss Diane.”

“You are welcome, Mr. Corinthos,” she said firmly, nodding to him as she walked toward the door.

She was absolutely calling his parents.

Jason was still confused and unsettled, but he decided Monica had made logical points and he would be stupid to ignore them. Unfortunately this meant he would have to ask for help from someone unlikely to give it.

He supposed he could have found someone who didn’t actively hate him, but the problem was that, in lieu of Robin, there was no one else he could trust. After a quick phone call, he stood brooding on the roof of the hospital before finally gathering the courage to put his plan to action.
Twenty minutes later, he stood on Patrick’s doorstep and realized he had no option other than to beg, so he knocked and prepared to do exactly that.

“Hi, Mr. Jason!”

He startled and looked down to find a cheerful Emma smiling up at him. He was sure he felt his heart break just a little bit more. To his surprise, he dropped to his haunches and gave her a huge grin.

"Hello, Miss Emma," he said, charmed when she giggled.

“Emma!” Patrick said, rushing toward her. “What do we do before answering the door?”

She sighed. “Wait for a responsible adult to come with me,” she recited.

He nodded and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. “Good girl. Please go keep an eye on Mimi. She’s trying to cook dinner.”

Emma’s eyes widened and she flew off down the hall.

Jason slowly stood and met Patrick’s eyes.

“What the hell do you want?” Patrick demanded.

Jason’s eyes looked past him to where he saw Emma disappear. “She looks so much like Robin,” he whispered. He saw the pain in Patrick’s eyes and felt like a complete asshole. “I’m sorry, Patrick. I shouldn’t have come.”

Patrick blew out an angry breath. “No, you shouldn’t have, but since you’re here, what do you want?”

“Maybe we should talk outside?”

Patrick gave a gruff nod and stepped onto the porch, closing the door behind him. If only it was so easy to shut Jason out of his life permanently. Still, he had to admit he was curious as to why the man was here. It certainly wasn’t as though they were friends and, with Robin gone, Jason had no business to be here.

He took a moment to assess Jason as he would any other patient and that’s when he realized the man was in distress, much more so than usual.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” he barked. “You look like shit.”

“Patrick,” Jason slowly began, “Robin died to save me. I wish she hadn’t. I wish I had been able to stop her. I know you hate me and you have cause, but you know I would have died to save her.”

Patrick narrowed his eyes. He wouldn’t give Jason the satisfaction of acknowledging what they both knew to be true.

“Something is wrong with me,” Jason continued. “I don’t know what it is, but ever since I woke up from that coma, I’m different.”

“What are your symptoms?” Patrick asked, slipping into clinical mode and mentally reviewing Jason’s case files.

“Confusion. Personality shifts. Weird dreams.”
“Nightmares?”

Jason blushed. “No,” he mumbled.

Patrick arched a brow.

Jason sighed. “Does this … I mean, this stays just between you and me, right?”

Patrick was tempted to agree just to see what the man had to say, but in the end he nodded because, whether he liked it or not, Jason was still his patient.

“I think I’m gay now.”

Patrick’s mouth fell open and he stared. “What?” he finally, incredulously, asked.

“I wasn’t before!” Jason protested. “But now, I don’t know.” He blew out a breath. “Okay, there’s this guy …”

“There’s a guy?” Patrick helplessly repeated.

“It doesn’t make sense!” Jason insisted.

“I’ll say.”

“I talked to Mom about what I was like before the accident. She says that, as far as she knows, I wasn’t gay. I only ever had girlfriends. She also said that she saw more of the old me than she ever had before, so I wonder if that means my brain is starting to heal from the first accident. You said it might. She thinks I need a PET scan.”

Patrick thought Jason needed a lot of things.

“It’s not Kurt you’re after, is it?” he hissed.

Jason blinked. “What? No. Why would you even ask me that?”

“Because I can’t imagine what guy would have suddenly grabbed your attention like this. It makes me wonder about the psychology behind it. Why this guy and why now? Is it someone you knew before the accident?”

Jason shook his head and held his tongue.

“So it’s someone you met after the accident,” Patrick said slowly, trying to put the pieces together.

“Well, I guess maybe I knew him before,” Jason admitted, “but we didn’t have any kind of relationship. We probably never even said two words to each other. I don’t know for sure, of course, but that feels right. We met a few months after the crash and got very close, very quickly. I think … I think maybe part of me knew he liked me, but I either didn’t recognize it or I didn’t know what it meant. Then something bad happened to him and we weren’t friends after that.”

“Holy shit, Jason! Are you talking about Lucky Spencer?”

“Could you yell a little louder, Patrick? I don’t think they heard you in Uruguay!”

“You just used sarcasm.”

Jason reared back. “I’ve used sarcasm before.”
Patrick shook his head. “No. You use monotone and a dry delivery, but I wouldn’t say you actively use sarcasm.”

“Sarcasm is being funny. I can be funny.”

Patrick was fairly certain he was hallucinating, because this was the most bizarre conversation he had ever held with Jason Morgan. Considering their history, that was saying something. He was also in no mood to explain sarcasm and how its finer points often escaped Jason entirely.

“What intrigues me is that you don’t appear overly concerned about this,” Patrick said. “You’re worried about why it’s happening, I can clearly see that, but not that it’s happening.”

Jason tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m glad you’re not freaking out about this, but it’s a little alarming that you’re not. Perhaps that’s just my experience with you, because I expect you to be angry about things you can’t control.”

“That’s probably fair,” Jason agreed, “and I’m not angry about my feelings for Lucky. I just don’t understand them or why they’re happening now.”

“When you say you don’t understand your feelings …”

Jason sighed. “Patrick, I know what being gay means. I know what gay sex entails, even though, to the best of my knowledge, I’ve never experienced it. I’m not concerned about those things.”

Patrick fixed him with a look. “Did something happen between you and Lucky?”

Jason blushed. “That’s not relevant.”

“It is, because you’re blushing. You don’t blush.”

“Of course I blush.”

“You don’t, Jason,” Patrick insisted. “I’m sure you experienced bouts of embarrassment or shyness but, as a general rule, you don’t blush the way most people do in particular circumstances.”

Jason ignored him, not wishing to consider the implications. “What I’m worried about is my emotions. I don’t have emotions like other people. I feel things, sure, bits and pieces here and there, but nothing like this. I’ve never felt so … so …”

“So what?” Patrick prompted.

“Out of control,” Jason whispered. “Overwhelmed, I guess. I was completely overwhelmed; it was immediate and I liked it. Like I told Mom, I felt drugged. Lucky was an opiate to me, some kind of human aphrodisiac. I couldn’t get enough of him. He kept trying to inhale me and I wanted to devour him.

“Everything felt lighter. I felt less tense, aside from the sexual stuff. There has to be a reason for that, right? No matter how beautiful Lucky is, there has to be some reason that I responded to him that way out of nowhere.”

Patrick felt as though he were underwater. He could hear Jason, but it just sounded like white noise. He wasn’t ready to contemplate Lucky being beautiful and whatever the hell happened between them. Instead, he chose to focus on a point which seemed innocuous, but was nevertheless
unusual.

“You just referred to Monica as Mom.”

“She is my mother.”

“I’ve known you almost ten years, Jason, and I’ve never heard you call her that.”

Jason fidgeted and at last sighed. “Things are different now. I’m different. The things that used to anger or upset me no longer do. I don’t think I even noticed until Lucky … well, until last night. I think I called my mother Mom earlier today. She talked about AJ and I didn’t feel the hatred for him I usually do. Before that, I had a meeting with Sonny, and I didn’t feel the anger for him I should feel. It was more like indifference.”

“That’s what you meant about personality shifts.”

“Yeah. I feel a lot calmer now. I feel a lot more of everything now. Before, the strongest emotions I experienced were dark, but now there’s more … balance? I guess that’s the right word.”

“And Lucky? What do you feel for him? Be honest, Jason.”

“Fear. Desire. Fear.”

“Why fear?”

Jason groaned with frustration. “Because, like I said, I’ve never felt that way before. It was like he was consuming me. All of the dark stuff went away and I wasn’t Jason Morgan anymore. I wasn’t Jason Quartermaine, either. I was just Jason. It was just Jason and Lucky in that room, and all the baggage was gone.

“I’ve been in love before, Patrick. I loved Robin and Elizabeth. I know what love is. Whatever’s happening with Lucky isn’t love, but I can sense the potential for it. I sense it will be different than anything I’ve ever experienced. That scares me. For the first time, it’s not just that I’m afraid I could hurt someone, but that I’m terrified they could hurt me.”

Patrick shook his head. “Sit down,” he said softly, indicating the chairs.

“You’re not throwing me out?”

“We’re already outside.”

“Was that sarcasm?” asked a confused Jason.

“Sit down,” Patrick repeated with more force. “May I ask you a few questions?”

“I guess so, yeah,” Jason said, dropping into a seat.

“You said you knew what being in love was like because of Robin and Elizabeth,” Patrick said. “What about Sam, Jason? What about your wife?”

Jason looked down at his knees. “Everyone I care about hates her. They think she’s a horrible person.” He paused. “She’s done truly horrible things, Patrick, and she did them to people I love. I know my family and friends are bothered that I could have married her after that, but I’ve done horrible things too. How can I judge Sam when I’m not any better than her?”

“Who hates Sam?”

“Preaching to the choir,” Patrick cut in. “Did you marry Sam because you truly love her, or because she’s pregnant and you felt like it was the right thing to do?”

“It was the right thing to do,” Jason answered, unconsciously sidestepping the question.

“But did you want to do it?” Patrick pressed.

“I … I don’t know anymore. I just felt I should marry her. I don’t actually remember proposing to her, but she says I did. I don’t even remember … honestly, Patrick. I don’t remember sleeping with her. Mom thinks I should get a DNA test to see if the baby’s even mine.”

Patrick blew out a breath and shook his head. “Damn.”

“I’m sorry to dump all of this on you, especially now.”

“Whatever I feel for you personally, Jason, you’re still my patient, and the symptoms you’re describing are a cause for worry. I’m not saying that they’re necessarily bad or indicative of some kind of pathology, but I do agree with Monica that you should be examined and PET scan is warranted. I’m going to set one up and call you with an appointment time.”

Jason nodded. “So … what do you think about all of this?”

“A lot of things,” Patrick admitted, “but I’ll highlight the things that stand out most. First, as we’ve previously discussed, you’re referring to Monica as your mother. Second, you always referred to Jason Quartermaine as just that, but a moment ago, you said the old me. Third, and I’m not sure you’re aware of this, but you sound much younger than your age. The pitch of your voice is slightly higher and you’re not speaking with the absolute authority you usually use.

“Along with that, you’re exhibiting autonomic functions typical of adolescence, which is when your accident occurred. You’re blushing and fidgeting and having difficulty looking me in the eye.

“Finally, you’re feeling anxiety because you’re experiencing emotions that, as far as you know, you haven’t felt before. I think that anxiety is reasonable and isn’t a cause for alarm.”

“Okay,” Jason said, exhaling and nodding. “Good. What else?”

“It sounds like you had reservations about your marriage prior to whatever happened with Lucky, and it was your experience with him that caused you think about those reservations in a more conscious manner. Your history of seizures and the lost time you experienced coincide with your engagement and marriage to Sam. It’s not unreasonable to correlate them.”

He raised a brow. “I gather you haven’t raised these concerns with Sam?”

“I don’t think she’d tell me the truth,” Jason said quietly.

“Do you trust your wife, Jason?” Patrick asked, after a long moment of silence.

“No.”

Patrick felt it best not comment on that. He didn’t want to involve himself in their marriage. He actually didn’t want to be involved in this at all, but he had been foolish enough not to slam his door in Jason’s face and pass his file to another colleague. Now he had to suck it up and do what he
could to help a patient he couldn’t stand, without letting Jason’s life take over his.

“As far as Lucky is concerned, what I’m hearing is that you’re more worried about how right it felt rather than that you felt anything at all. You’re not scared you might be gay. What concerns you is there’s a part of you which may be unknown to yourself. Is that right?”

Jason bit his lip and reluctantly nodded.

“Most people, myself included, believe that sexuality falls on a spectrum and can be rather fluid in nature. I personally don’t believe that your accident either caused or removed any theoretical homosexual desires. I think it’s more likely that you were perhaps always bisexual, or at least latently curious, but it was irrelevant because, until Lucky, it wasn’t an issue.”

“But how is that possible?” Jason wondered. “I’ve known Lucky for years and I’ve never had any inkling that I wanted to throw him down on my desk as he rips off my clothes and …”

He suddenly realized what he was saying and blushed profusely, looking away.

“That sounds intense,” Patrick said gently, “and I’m sure it must have taken you by surprise but, Jason, by your own admission, you welcomed it. You wanted it.”

“I really did. I’ve never wanted anyone as much as I did him in that moment.”

“But you didn’t have sex?”

Jason shook his head. “We both wanted to, but when I asked if he was sure, he hesitated. I couldn’t … not after Elizabeth. Not after Emily.”

“That was very decent of you,” Patrick said honestly, surprised at just how touched he was by Jason’s integrity.

Jason scoffed. “Yeah, and then Lucky said it never happened and ran away.”

“Then he was a dick,” Patrick said bluntly, “but he was also probably just as scared as you. I’ve known him for as long as I have you, and I never thought for a moment he was interested in men.”

“He said I was the only one,” Jason mumbled.

“Just as he was the only man to garner your attention?” Patrick asked. “Maybe the situation had less to do with who might be gay and what that means, and more to do with two people who have a twenty-year relationship that ping-pongs between animosity and camaraderie.”

“What do you mean?”

“Really, Jason?” Patrick demanded, before sighing with disappointment. “Both you and Lucky have been involved with Elizabeth, and then Sam. Emily was the only member of your family to whom you laid public claim, and she and Lucky had been best friends since they were ten years old. Carly has been your best friend since she rolled into Port Charles, and she’s also Lucky’s cousin. Jake was your son with Elizabeth, and she and Lucky were raising him together.

“My point is, even leaving aside your personal relationship with Lucky, you have loved and lost the same people. You have been constants in each other’s lives, for better or worse, for as long as you can remember. Did your feelings for each other really come out of nowhere, or is it more likely they were always there, but distractions kept you both from ever acknowledging them?”
“Have you ever been with a man?” Jason asked baldly.

“That is none of your business and not germane to the subject at hand.”

“That means yes.”

“No, it really doesn't. Stop projecting, Jason, why do you want me to judge you over this?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what to do or say or feel.”

“What do you want? Right now, in this moment, what do you want?”

“Lucky. I want to be with Lucky.”

“To have sex with him?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. I’ve never had sex with a man. It’s pretty obvious how things work, but I don’t know if I’d be any good at. I just want to be with Lucky again. I want him to kiss my cheek again. I want him to tell me he loves me again.”

Patrick stilled. “Lucky told you that he loved you?”

Jason nodded. “He said he always had, since we were kids.” His eyes hooded. “Did Robin ever tell you what Helena and Faison did to him?”

“Bits and pieces,” Patrick said, feeling his stomach sink.

“Lucky thinks he’s still being affected, and I think he’s right. The Lucky I knew would never have used drugs or hurt Elizabeth or slept with Maxie. There’s something wrong and Lucky is terrified of it. That makes my heart hurt. And I don’t understand why this is happening now and all at once.”

“Maybe it’s not a coincidence,” Patrick whispered.

Jason sat up straight. “What do you mean?”

“Robin’s death. Kurt’s arrival. Holly returning to Port Charles.”

“I’m not getting it.”

“Helena and Faison have history in this town, Jason. Faison kidnapped Robin several times to hurt Anna, with whom he been obsessed for decades. She firmly believes that Faison programmed her with the identity of Suzanne Hummel and took her from Kurt when it amused him to do so, before then erasing her memories of her child. Again. Was Robin’s death really an accident, or was it engineered to take one child from Anna and give her other one back to her?”

Jason shook his head. “Jesus. That can’t be true, can it? Jesus.”

“Faison worked for Helena to brainwash Lucky and, as far as I know, no one ever really got to the bottom of why, except for Helena wanting to destroy Luke and Laura by taking away their child, which is a play right out of Faison’s book.

“Now Kurt has come to Port Charles, bringing Holly with him, reuniting with his childhood friend, Nikolas, and immediately takes up with Carly, Lucky’s cousin and Luke’s niece. Somehow, Carly has brought Elizabeth into all of this. According to Kurt, and supported by Nikolas, Helena adores him and always has, preferring him even over her own grandson. She actually told Kurt she wants
him and Nikolas together.

“Kurt also said that Helena said Robin’s death was regrettable, as she had always found her to be a clever girl. I remember Emily once telling Robin that Helena said Nikolas would have done better had not married her, but Elizabeth instead.”

“I don’t know if it’s the brain damage, but I’m not putting these pieces together.”

Patrick’s hand shook. “I’m not sure I am either, but it feels like there’s something more happening, something just out of my mind’s reach. Robin’s death has changed everyone we know and everything we believed. What if Helena and Faison are still working together? What if they have plans for the people we love and we’re either meant to be pawns or sacrifices?”

Jason was silent for a long moment. “What do we do?”

“I’m going to have a long talk with Anna, and possibly Robert. I suggest you talk to Lucky and get him to speak to his parents. The Scorpios know Faison best, just as the Spencers know Helena. Then, we all need to have a meeting together.”

“Then what?”

“I don’t know, Jason, but if my daughter’s in danger, I’m packing up and getting the hell out of town.”

All Jason could do was wonder if his son had been run over on purpose.
After the others had left, Holly turned toward Kurt.

“Was it wise to suggest Anthony Zacchara was not his grandfather?”

Kurt gave her a look of disinterest. “We both know he wasn’t. Claudia and Anthony are dead, so I don’t see the point of perpetuating this lie. Johnny deserves to know the sister who loved and fought for him was just that: his sister. I can’t even imagine what he’s been through, believing Claudia was his mother.”

She nodded. “I’m not going to ask.”

He raised a brow. “Why should you? You know the answer. At least Claudia can now rest in peace.”

She snorted. “Were any of your findings true?”

“All of them, actually,” he said, deep in thought. “He wouldn’t have lived much longer and probably would have died in significantly more pain.”

“Is that a good or bad thing?”

“It was for Claudia.”

She nodded and dropped the subject. In truth, she wasn’t bothered that he had killed Anthony. The man had been despicable and deserved nothing less. She did wonder, however, just how truthful Kurt was being about his motives. She rather thought the assassination was also in revenge for Emily Quartermaine on behalf of her fiancé, though Nikolas would never know. She supposed it didn’t matter.

“By the way,” she said, “while you were conducting the postmortem and then interviewing Laura, you received several calls from Brenda. She wouldn’t leave a message other than to return her call as soon as possible, and that it was quite urgent.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Brenda considers the latest Kardashian sighting urgent, but I suppose I should check in with her.” He looked away. “So you’re having dinner with Mac?” he asked with utmost casualness.

She grinned. “Don’t think I didn’t see what I know I saw. I’ve known you for too long.”

He snared her in his gaze. “Are you interested in him?”

“No,” she said honestly. “Mac and I have never been anything more than good friends, and that’s all we will ever be. Considering how we’re both in such short supply, I don’t want to risk losing it.” She arched a brow. “I can plainly see the relief on your face.”

He sighed. “Your relationship with Mac very closely echoes mine with Nikki. I’ve been friends with him for twenty years, Holly. He’s my oldest and dearest friend. I’m scared to try and make it anything more.”

She nodded. “I understand and will support your decision, but I think you should give him an honest chance, honey. Sometimes the greatest lovers begin as friends.”
“I know,” he said quietly, before turning sour, “but I won’t be used as some kind of trophy in the ongoing war between Nikolas and Jax. Frankly, I’m considering dropping out entirely and suggesting they date each other.”

“You might want to have a threesome with them first,” she teased. She quickly sobered. “That was a joke, Kurt,” she added, worried that he was obviously considering it.

“I might offer up the suggestion, just to see how they’d react,” he said. “It would be amusing, if nothing else.” He shrugged. “Besides, they both have young children, and I need to think about that before getting more deeply involved.”

“And Carly?”

“She’s a concern,” Kurt acknowledged. “She says she’s fine with the possibility of me and Jax, and it’s probably true but, at this point, it’s only theoretical. She might change her mind later, and I don’t want to fall in love with him only for it to hurt her. My friendship with Carly is worth more than any man, no matter how handsome and charming he is.”

“Mac has a child,” she said.

“She’s an adult.” He blushed. “I can’t explain my attraction to him. Is it gross?”

“Not at all. Mac is gorgeous and, excepting you, the most decent person I know. I was somewhat taken aback that he made plain his interest, but I think you would do very well together.”

He sighed. “Perhaps, but dating Mac comes with its own host of problems.”

“You mean Anna.”

“Of course.”

“And that he was Robin’s uncle?”

“He’s no blood connection to me, which is definitely a step above Aidan, though I guess it looks rather incestuous, doesn’t it?”

She shook her head. “Kurt, you and Mac are both adults. It doesn’t matter what anyone might think or say.”

He exhaled. “I suppose, but Mac and I are also colleagues and, when those relationships turn personal, it can get messy if it doesn’t end well.”

“Why do you assume something is doomed before it’s even begun?”

He snorted. “Look at my track record.”

“Yes, well, you’re preaching to the choir.”

He smirked. “Perhaps I need to do some matchmaking for you.”

She narrowed her eyes. “I might never have been an agent, but I still know how to kill you.”

He laughed and drew her tightly to him, kissing her forehead. “I love you, lady.”

“I love you, too,” she said fondly, before pushing him away. “Call Brenda.”
“Ugh. I suppose I must.” He looked around. “Where did I put my cell phone?”

She grabbed it off the desk and handed it to him.

“What would I do without you?”

“I honestly don’t know. If it wasn’t for your love of fashion, I doubt you’d be able to dress yourself.”

“That would never be a problem.” He unlocked his phone and stared at the number of missed calls and texts. He shook his head and decided not to read them, instead just deleting them and calling Brenda directly.

“Hey, what’s going on?”

His eyes widened as she furiously hissed into the receiver.

“I’ll be right there,” he said curtly before hanging up.

“Problem?” Holly asked.

“Finn and Rachel are at the Metro Court.”

Sonny and Carly ran into each other in the lobby of Diane’s office, each wondering why they, and their former spouse, were there. Other than receiving a cryptic phone call from the attorney about their son, they were both in the dark.

“Did Diane tell you what this was about?” Carly asked.

“No,” Sonny replied, “but I do need to talk to you about Morgan as soon as possible.”

“Is he all right?” she demanded.

“Physically, yes, but there are other issues.”

She frowned and opened her mouth, but held her tongue when Diane appeared before them like a demon rising from Hell. “Thank you for coming.”

“What’s going on?” Sonny asked.

“Morgan is currently in my office, perusing some law books. He believes I’m taking a brief meeting with a client, so we should have some time to discuss this.”

“Discuss what?” Sonny barked.

“He’s reading law books?” asked a mystified Carly. “Does he want to be a lawyer? Since when?”

“I believe your son would make a fine attorney, Carly,” Diane said, “but he’s searching for answers which I believe are inappropriate for me to provide, so I called you.”
Carly blinked. If Diane Miller believed Morgan would make a good lawyer, it was probably true. Diane disliked pretense and very much enjoyed telling the truth, whether or not the listener was receptive or appreciative. Much more worrying was the reason for Morgan’s unsupervised visit.

“How did he even get here?” she asked.

“He took a taxi,” Diane said. “He felt grabbing an Uber was a good waste of money and not as safe. He’s an incredibly intelligent and logical boy. I’m considering hiring him as my new secretary. I believe he could make paralegal before he starts high school.”

Carly stared at her. She was fairly certain Diane was not joking. She admittedly felt very proud that someone as accomplished and competent as Diane thought so much of her son.

Sonny ran his hand over his face. “This is about Elizabeth, isn’t it?” Diane gave a sharp nod and he sighed. “Carly, Morgan overheard your phone call with her.”

She looked at him with confusion. She and Elizabeth talked several times throughout the day now. “Which one?”

He pretended that question wasn’t startling, still unused to the idea of Carly and Elizabeth as anything other than bitter enemies. He cleared his throat and looked at Diane. “Anything we say here is covered by attorney-client privilege, right?”

She tilted her head. “That depends. I’m on record as the personal attorney for you and Jason, but not Carly or Elizabeth Webber.”

He frowned. “Would you be willing to serve as Morgan’s attorney, should he require one? Since Carly and I are his parents and he’s a minor, anything we discuss would remain private, yes?”

She pursed her lips. “Conceivably, yes.”

“Do you also represent Sam McCall?”

“No,” she said curtly, her distaste for the woman obvious. She still couldn’t believe Sam was Alexis’ daughter.

Carly’s eyes widened, realizing what this was about.

“And you won’t tell Alexis?” Sonny pressed.

Diane glowered. “Mr. Corinthos,” she said crisply, “Alexis is my best friend, but first and foremost, I am attorney. My ethics and license mean more to me than any gossip session, and Alexis would be the first to appreciate that.”

“I’m just making sure,” he said, holding up his hands. “I don’t want to put you in an awkward situation.”

“Since when?” she barked.

He couldn’t help his smirk. “Fair enough.”

“Sonny?” Carly asked. “What the fuck is going on here?”

He heaved another sigh. “The night before Jason woke up, I guess you and Elizabeth were on the phone. Morgan passed your room to get a drink of water and overheard your call. He said you had Elizabeth on speaker.”
“I was folding laundry,” she said defensively.

Diane didn’t know whether to snort or stare. She settled for both.

Carly’s shoulders sagged. “He heard everything?”

Sonny nodded. “He knows Sam stood by and watched as Jake was kidnapped. He knows she knew where the baby was and pretended to help Jason search. He knows she hired Russian thugs to ambush Elizabeth in the park and point the finger at me and Jason.”

Carly’s eyes filled with indignation. “I didn’t know about any of it until Lizzie told me.”

“I’m not blaming you, Carly. I blame Jason for not telling us. No matter his relationship with Liz or Sam, or his with us, he shouldn’t have kept it quiet.”

She bit her lip, but nodded. Her first instinct was always to defend Jason, but she was still pissed off with him about this.

“Now Morgan doesn’t trust him and despises Sam. I can’t blame him.”

Diane shook her head in wonder. “What? Samantha McCall did what? And Jason didn’t eliminate her?”

“Don’t even get me started on that,” Carly spat.

“Morgan went to Michael and asked him if he knew about it. I overheard their conversation. Michael, of course, had no idea and was appropriately furious. He’s now avoiding Sam and Jason as much as possible. I told Jason, who felt no need to defend Sam. He said the boys were free to make up their own minds and he would respect it.”

Carly glared at him. “Sonny, if you expect me to tell Morgan that he has to treat that bitch with respect …”

“Never,” he interrupted. “It’s all I can do to keep from killing her. I … Jesus, Carly, I blamed Elizabeth for that and she took it because she already felt guilty enough. I’ll never forgive myself for that. I can’t believe Jason let me do that to her. She and I have never had the best relationship, but now I understand why she wanted to limit contact between Jason and the kids. She made the right call.”

Carly curled a lip. “For all the good it did her,” she hissed. “I can’t even imagine walking outside your house and finding your child dead in the street. If I ever find out who did that to Jake …”

“Right there with you,” he assured her.

She smirked. “Kurt is going to review the evidence in storage and conduct new tests. If there’s anything to find, he’ll find it.”

“Good. Keep me updated.”

She nodded.

“This is all very compelling,” Diane said, “and frankly quite enraging, but not germane to our purpose here today.”

Sonny nodded. “Morgan told Michael he heard Elizabeth and Carly discussing her rape, and that of Dr. Hummel.”
Carly gasped before slowly closing her eyes.

“Dr. Hummel was raped?” asked an aghast Diane.

“While in college,” Carly growled out. “His rapist was murdered.”

Sonny cocked a brow. “Santana Lopez?”

Diane blinked. She’d been aware of Lopez prior to her arrival in Port Charles. Given how close the woman appeared to Dr. Hummel at Robin Scorpio’s funeral, Diane wouldn’t have been surprised if Lopez had killed her friend’s attacker.

Carly glanced at Diane before looking back at Sonny. “No. She wasn’t even aware of it until Kurt told us after Robin’s funeral.”

“When you say us …”

She sighed. “I already knew; so did Erica. Kurt told Santana, Brittany, Brenda, and Kate.”

“I cannot even imagine how Kate took that news,” Diane murmured.

Carly harrumphed. “She was pretty amazing, actually. Whatever I think about her, she loves Kurt and would do anything for him, which I respect. Brenda, of course, became hysterical. Santana was furious and Brittany was terrifying.”

Sonny shuddered.

“That blond girl with the pigtails?” asked a skeptical Diane.

Carly snorted. “She’s Santana’s enforcer and is more successful at it than Jason. She’s also much more … creative.”

“Well,” Diane said slowly, “that’s utterly horrifying.”

Sonny furrowed his brow. “If it wasn’t Santana …”

“This doesn’t leave this office,” Carly snapped.

Diane nodded her assurance.

“Holly killed him.”

Sonny stared at her. “Holly Sutton? Robin’s stepmother?”

“That’s the one. Come on, Sonny, we both knew Robin. She was the most moral and ethical person I’ve ever met, but if she had known Kurt was her brother back then and that he’d been raped?” She shook her head. “She would have launched an unholy war against the asshole who did it. She was raised by Anna and Holly, and Mac. We know what Robin would have done, so why is it surprising Holly would do the same?”

“I didn’t know Sutton and Hummel even knew each other.”

“Oh. Well, I guess I put the cart before the horse on that one but, yeah, they do, and they’re very close. I don’t know how Anna’s dealing with that, but I’d guess not well.”

He shook his head in amazement. “Anyway, Morgan first went to Jax with his questions, but Jax
refused to answer, probably out of loyalty to Alexis. He told Morgan to come to us, which I appreciate and respect, but Morgan apparently thought we wouldn’t tell him the truth, so he went to Michael.”

Carly sighed.

“Michael, of course, had no idea about Sam, or about Elizabeth and Hummel. He was disgusted with Sam and Jason, and … Carly, Morgan said that he didn’t believe in love and would never get married because he’d spent too many years watching us bounce back and forth between each other and everyone else in town.”

Her eyes filled with tears.

Diane again thought about what a bright boy Morgan Corinthos was.

“He really said that?” Carly whispered.

Sonny clenched his jaws and nodded. “He did, and who could blame him? I don’t think we’ve ever truly realized the effect our yo-yoing has had on our kids. Michael was great about it, though, and told his brother that Morgan might meet someone one day who he would want to marry, but if he didn’t, that was okay.”

“Michael’s a good boy,” Carly warbled, thinking about what her baby must have been thinking when he heard about Elizabeth and Kurt’s rapes. She hoped it might spur him to go to one of them, since he was still resisting counseling.

“He really is,” Sonny said gruffly, “considering everything we’ve done to him. Then Morgan asked Michael if it was okay if he grew up and fell in love with a man. Apparently he knows about Kurt’s relationships with Cassadine and Jax.”

Diane raised a brow. She didn’t know Doctor Hummel and Jasper Jacks had a past. How interesting! He certainly had good taste.

“What did Michael say?” Carly asked.

“All the right things,” Sonny admitted. “I don’t think I would have done nearly as well, or had been as kind and patient, had Morgan come to me. And, yeah, that bothers me. A lot.”

“What else?”

“Morgan looked up the definition of rape but really didn’t understand it,” Sonny said quietly. “He couldn’t imagine someone doing something like that to another person. Michael couldn’t either and admitted as much.” He turned toward Diane. “I guess that’s why we’re here.”

She gave a sharp nod.

“Oh, god,” Carly murmured. “Is he okay?”

“He is more than okay,” Diane said. “He is the brightest child I’ve ever encountered outside of Cameron Webber, Emma Scorpio-Drake, and Spencer Cassadine. At this point, Morgan is only able to consider the concept of rape in a concrete, academic manner. He wants to know what it is and what would drive someone to commit such a heinous crime. He also wants to know what the punishment is for said crime. When his research stalled, he came to me.”

She paused. “I know I do not know him well. I am also not a parent, but I am an attorney and you
pay me for my advice. Do you wish to hear it?”

“Yes,” Carly said immediately.

“Be honest with him. Don’t put him off or speak in abstractions. He’ll know you’re lying and will never trust you again. You then would have to consider whom he might next approach for answers. Take control of this now before someone you don’t want does it for you.”

“Diane …” Sonny began.

“You’re right,” Carly cut in. “Will you help us explain it to him?”

“Of course,” Diane said, “and I believe he’ll understand the facts, but he might also wish to contextualize them. You might consider asking Elizabeth to speak with him, if she feels comfortable doing so.”

Carly gave a shaky nod and allowed Diane to lead her and Sonny into the private office.

Lucky was bouncing across campus, feeling far too giddy and ten years younger than his age. He was wearing a PCU sweatshirt and carrying bags from the bookstore.

He remembered Elizabeth complaining about the cost of her texts all those years ago, but he supposed he hadn’t dwelled on it too deeply. Now he knew better. Almost a thousand dollars! His books cost almost as much as a three-credit course!

Granted, he was taking six classes and each had several assigned books, but he couldn’t get over their prices. He supposed it was a good thing Nikolas had set him up with an account for academic expenses. They had fought over it, of course, as they always did whenever money was an issue, but this time Lucky had swallowed his pride and gratefully accepted. He was going back to school to improve himself and further his career opportunities. It would be stupid to self-sabotage before he’d even taken a class.

Besides, he knew if he’d refused, Nikolas simply would have called the school and made arrangements to pay for everything.

He had grabbed the sweatshirt at the last moment, an impulse buy which had made him feel momentarily foolish, but now just made him happy. He was proud of himself for making this effort, and if a sweatshirt helped to make him feel like a real student, like he actually belonged on this campus, why not?

He was having dinner and drinks with his mother tonight, and looked forward to sharing with her his new plans. He knew she would support him and would probably have some good ideas about how to break it to his father. He also knew she had interviewed for a job at the hospital today, though she didn’t tell him what the position was, and he hoped they would have two things to celebrate.

He tamped down the urge to call Dante and ask about the autopsy findings on Anthony Zacchara. It wasn’t his business anymore and word would probably echo down the grapevine soon enough.

“Hi.”
Lucky snapped out of thoughts, tripping with the effort, and fell right into Jason’s waiting arms. He flushed and looked up warily, disarmed to see Jason grinning at him.

“You look cute.”

Lucky felt his entire face burst into flame. He was a bit annoyed that Jason obviously wasn’t kidding. He wanted to toe the ground, duck his head, and then punch Jason’s arm and run away, when he then remembered he was over thirty years old.

“What are you doing here?” he mumbled.

“Looking for you.”

Why was Jason still grinning? It was bizarre and not a little frightening. “How did you know I was here?”

“I took a chance. I wasn’t sure it would pay off, but here you are.”

“What do you want?” Lucky ground out.

Jason lost his smile. “Right now? I want to kiss you again.”

Lucky bit his lip and denied the groan wanting to escape his lips. He wanted another kiss, too. Ever since the first, he had thought of nothing else. Except, of course, about how good it felt to be wrapped in Jason’s strong arms, to feel that firm chest and soft skin gliding against his own. A part of him truly regretted not letting Jason fuck him that night. He wanted to feel that big cock buried deep inside of him. He wanted to clench down on it and milk it dry.

As he watched Jason turn red and his eyes dilate, Lucky realized he had said all of that out loud.

“I want you so badly right now,” Jason rasped, “but I know we’re not ready yet.”

“Yet?” asked a panicked Lucky. “Jas, it’s not going to happen! Not ever!”

“I told Mom.”


Jason frowned. “Why does everyone ask me that?” He blinked and put the tip of his nose against Lucky’s own. “Call me Jas again. I like it.”

“What the fuck is happening here?!”

“You started this,” said a defensive Jason.

“I … I had to say the words so that I could move on.”

“And have you?” Jason asked. “Tell me you don’t want me, Lucky, and I’ll stop right now, just like I did that night. I’ll do whatever you tell me.” He eyes darkened. “But don’t lie. You know I’ll know if you do.”

Lucky swallowed heavily and tried to pull away, but Jason held fast, leaning in and smelling Lucky’s hair.

“I can still taste you on my lips,” he purred.
Lucky closed his eyes and fought to breathe. He had no idea, none, that Jason could be so … seductive. Never in his life had he wanted to be seduced as much as he did right then.

“Nothing’s changed, Jason. You’re still married and I’m still a mess.”

Jason sighed, then pulled up and dropped a gentle kiss on Lucky’s forehead. They both ignored the two girls walking past who looked at them and squealed in delight.

“Aren’t you worried?” Lucky hissed. “You’re being far too … open … about this!”

Jason cocked a brow and smirked. “About what?”

Lucky looked away, knowing there was no good answer to that question. “Just tell me what you want from me. Nothing dirty. Please, Jas.”

“I don’t love Sam. I don’t know if I ever did or if I just convinced myself I should. I’m going to get a DNA test, Lucky. I don’t remember sleeping with her. I don’t know if the baby’s mine.”

Lucky’s eyes widened as he slowly exhaled. “What if it is?”

“Then it is, and I’ll take care of him or her, always and forever.” He inched closer. “That doesn’t mean I have to be with Sam.” His eyes searched Lucky’s. “I want to be with you.”

“You can’t mean that,” Lucky insisted, pushing away, grateful and saddened when Jason let him.

“I’ve had these feelings for fifteen years, Jason. You didn’t even think about me that way until two days ago. You can’t risk your marriage over something so stupid!”

Jason curled a lip and growled. “There’s nothing stupid about you or this. I want you, Lucky. Maybe I didn’t know that before. Maybe I did and repressed it. I don’t really care. You’re all I think about and all I dream about. Two days without you has felt like a lifetime.”

“When did you become so poetic?”

“Since I woke up from the coma.” Jason paused. “You came to see me, Lucky. You held my hand. I remember that.”

“Oh, god,” Lucky whispered, closing his eyes. He said nothing and allowed Jason to turn and walk them toward the parking lot. He didn’t resist when Jason took his hand and held it firmly.

“Thank you,” Jason said earnestly. “Thank you for doing that. I know how much Robin meant to you. You could have blamed me for her death like everyone else has.”

“It’s not your fault,” Lucky said harshly. “Of course Robin risked her life, but she would have done that for any patient. Especially you, sure, but …”

“How many times have we risked our lives to save each other, Lucky?”

Lucky furrowed his brow.

Jason cleared his throat. “Patrick said …”

“Patrick! You told Patrick?” Lucky all but screeched.

“He’s my doctor,” Jason calmly explained, “and he’s bound by his oath.” He shook his head. “Don’t even pretend you haven’t told Nikolas about that night. Don’t I deserve to talk to someone too? To work out my feelings?”
“Yes, of course you do,” Lucky said quietly. “I’m sorry, I never meant …”

“To make me fall in love with you?”

“This isn’t love, Jas. This is … this is hormones and guilt and a lot of other stuff, but it’s not love.”

“Would you like it to become love? I would.”

Lucky turned and looked into his eyes. “You’re serious.”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you,” Jason said, trying hard to keep the frustration from his voice. “Do you really think I would take this to Monica or Patrick if I wasn’t? Yeah, I’m serious. I want to be with you. I know it feels like it’s too soon, but is it? Lucky, the longest relationship we’ve had in our lives has been with each other. Not Elizabeth. Not Sam.”

Lucky’s shoulders slumped. “But without them …”

“Without them, we wouldn’t have had Jake,” Jason interrupted. “We wouldn’t have Cameron. I might not have this new baby, if it’s even mine. But Mom said something that made a lot of sense: had Elizabeth and Sam not come into our lives, would you and I have been together all this time?”

Lucky shook his head. “Sonny …”

“Fuck Sonny!” Jason spat. “He doesn’t control my life and he never has, despite what he might think. I used to work for Sonny and, at one time, thought of him as my brother, but he has never dictated who I love or who shares my bed. Don’t ever be confused about that, Lucky. I want us to happen, I want it badly, and Sonny has never been and will never be an issue.”

Lucky was about to speak, but Jason held a finger to his lips.

“I’m going to divorce Sam regardless. I don’t love her and don’t want to be with her. Staying married for the sake of a child almost never works, Lucky. If you tell me no, I’ll leave and we’ll never speak of this again. I promise I won’t bother you. I won’t try to change your mind. I won’t pressure you.”

He drew in a sharp breath. “But if you say yes, if you tell me only that it might be a possibility, I promise you that we’ll make it work. I know there’s a lot in the way. I know neither of us has ever been involved with a man. I know that people will talk. I know Sam will be hurt, and maybe Elizabeth, and Luke and Carly and my grandfather will all have something to say. But in the end, this is our life, not theirs. I don’t know about you, but I’m getting too old to live my life for other people.

“I want to be happy, Lucky, and I haven’t been for more years than I can count. Two days ago, you told me you loved me and I felt happy because I knew you meant it. There were no ulterior motives. I didn’t feel tortured or guilty or scared. You didn’t get anything by confessing something so personal that’s been tormenting you for years. You kissed me and told me you loved me, and I felt it.”

Lucky’s breath caught as Jason’s tears spilled over. He reached over and gently wiped them away.

Jason closed his eyes and put his forehead to Lucky’s own.

“Please don’t take it back,” he whispered.
Kurt stormed into the Metro Court, Holly scampering after him. He’d told her she needn’t have come, but she replied she wasn’t about to let him go alone. He rather felt she was more interested in having a ringside seat, and who was he to deny her?

He grunted and pushed past Jax, who tried to stop and talk to him, and threw a side-eye at Carly. Her confused stare and arched brow suggested she had no idea anything was wrong, and he was relieved that she was in the dark. He wanted to believe she would have warned him about Finn and Rachel had she known.

He cocked his head toward the elevator. She nodded and raced over to meet him.

“The fuck?” she asked, pressing the button several times.

“My stepbrother and his wife are here,” he said tersely.

She frowned. “I thought you didn’t speak to them.”

“I don’t, but they saw my picture in the newspaper and read about Robin.”

“Well, shit.”

“Precisely. I was stupid not to reach out to them, at least by email, to inform them of the situation. They didn’t even occur to me, which is rather pathetic on my part.”

The door dinged open and they piled inside. Kurt pressed the button for the penultimate floor.

“Where are we going?” Carly asked.

“Brenda has them in her room.”

“Are they conscious? Has there been a ransom demand?”

Kurt burst into laughter. Carly beamed with smug triumph.

“Thank you,” he said earnestly. “I needed that.”

“Ditto. Wait until you hear about my day.”

He arched a brow.

“I fucked up,” she admitted, “and inadvertently dragged you into it. It’s nothing bad! It’s just … well, it’s personal, and I would never talk about you behind your back.”

“I know that, Carly.”

She chanced a peek at him, realized he meant his words, and had to fight not to burst into tears. He honestly believed in her. Why did that keep taking her by such surprise? Probably because she had been a bitch almost her entire life.

He patted her arm. “We’ll get through it, but first I have to take care of this.”

She nodded and blew out a breath. “What are we facing?”

“My stepbrother, his harpy wife, and their two adorable children, whom I’m quite sure Rachel
brought with her to make me more malleable to her screeching. I’ve never actually met the kids before, but I do love them and consider them family. Their parents, not so much. It’s been over two hours since they arrived and, since ten minutes with Rachel is equal to three years at Guantanamo Bay, I’m sure Brenda is teetering on the brink of insanity.”

“That’s nothing new for her.”

Kurt started laughing again. “You’re awful.”

“You love it,” Holly snerked. “I really do.”

A desperate Brenda rued she had ever allowed Raquel – Rachel, she corrected – into her room. Finn was at least courteous and kept his mouth shut, tending to the children, who were also well-behaved, which left his wife to act as interrogator. Hell, for all Brenda knew, this was the norm for them.

She also had the sense, however, that Finn was regretting the foolish action of coming to Port Charles without first at least trying to reach Kurt. He obviously knew Kurt would not appreciate it and act accordingly. Rachel was either ignorant or crass enough not to care; perhaps both.

Suddenly, Brenda looked up and tilted her head, noticing Finn doing the same. Kurt must be close, she realized, surprised that Finn sensed it as well. The look on his face suggested excitement and fear. Weird.

Seizing that thread of hope, she stood and crossed to the door, throwing it open. She was relieved to see Kurt standing there, flanked by Holly and Carly. Never in her life had Brenda ever been relieved to see Carly Corinthos, so this was a new experience. A sadistic part of her couldn’t wait for Carly to engage Rachel.

“Thank you, Jesus,” she whispered, closing her eyes.

Kurt reached out and grabbed her arms in comfort and understanding. Holly looked sympathetic. Carly widened her eyes, surprised at how disheveled Brenda appeared. Normally, this would be cause for taunting and snickers, but after their weekend in New York, she had vowed to be at least civil to Kurt’s other friends. With Holly and Erica, and Brittany and Santana, this posed no problem. Kate and Brenda would be more difficult, but she was determined.

“Are you okay?” she asked the other woman.

Brenda released a slow, controlled breath. “Wait until you get a load of this one.”

Carly’s lips thinned in anticipation. She was actually spoiling for a fight, so if Kurt didn’t want to deal with his sister-in-law, she would gladly do it for him.

Brenda stepped aside and allowed them entrance.
“Unca Kurt, Unca Kurt!”

Kurt stumbled when a four-year-old missile launched herself from the couch and into his arms. Surprising everyone, he laughed and held her close. “Bon soir, Cosette. Comment-allez vous?”

“Bien, merci,” the child chirped. “Et vous?”

“I think that remains to be seen,” said an amused Kurt, crossing into the room and carrying the little girl back over to the couch, depositing her upon it.

He was amazed to see she was the perfect combination of her parents. She was blessed with their best physical features and, apparently, with Finn’s personality and Rachel’s brains. Astonishingly, she appeared to be using her powers for good. He wondered how long it would last.

He looked over and into the dark eyes of Caleb, not yet even a toddler, who appraised him for a long moment before offering a gummy smile. Kurt grinned in response and leaned over to tickle him. Caleb giggled and batted at his hands.

“Cosette, my darling, would you please do me a great favor?”

“Yes, of course,” she promptly replied.

“I’m sure you and your brother must be hungry, so I would like you to go with my friends, Miss Brenda and Miss Holly, to the restaurant on the top floor of the hotel. You may have anything you want.”

Her eyes lighted.

“That your parents would allow,” he amended.

She scowled at him.

“Kurt!” Rachel hissed. “I hardly think …”

He slowly turned around and met her eyes. “I didn’t ask.”

Her eyes widened before she blinked and took a step back.

Cosette watched this in wonder. The alpha of her pack had respectfully acknowledged a new and stronger alpha. This was fascinating!

Holly swooped in and picked up Caleb, bouncing him in her arms, charmed when he released gales of giggles. Though she smiled, her eyes were pained.

Kurt felt like a complete asshole, knowing how desperately Holly had always wanted children, but he needed his niece and nephew gone from the room before he engaged their parents, and there was no one he trusted more than her.

Cosette skipped over and took Brenda’s hand, babbling about how pretty Brenda was and how she had seen so many pictures in so many magazines. She wanted to know about Paris and Milan and London. Brenda was instantly renewed and began regaling her with stories.

Each with a child in hand, Holly and Brenda turned to Carly, who affirmed with a look they could count on her to have Kurt’s back, before leaving the room.

Once the door closed, Kurt reined in all of his emotions, the good and the bad, and turned toward
Finn and Rachel with a flat look. Carly was immediately at his side.


“That’s it?” Rachel shrieked. “That’s all you’ve got to say?”

Carly couldn’t believe the decibel this bitch could reach.

“Why should I say anything?” was the bland reply. “I didn’t invite you and owe you nothing.”

Rachel huffed. “You could at least show gratitude that we, your family, have arrived in your hour of need!”

“My what?” he demanded. “I’m sorry, I must have misheard you, my what?”

Finn winced. As much as he wanted to stay out of this and let Rachel get it all out of her system, he knew he had to step in. Kurt had never tolerated her very well, and Finn didn’t blame him for it. He also didn’t want to bury his wife this evening and, besides, Kurt was his brother.

“I’m so sorry about Robin, Kurt,” he said quietly. “Did you at least get to meet her?”

Everyone froze.

Rachel flushed horribly, appalled with herself for slipping back into old habits and completely forgetting why she was here. Carly appreciated Finn’s opening salvo and respected its genius, knowing it caught Kurt off guard and caused him to lower his walls just a fraction, but she would wait before her judgment was complete.

Kurt blinked rapidly, refusing to allow any tears which might be gathering to fall. He was still trying to assimilate that Robin had been his sister. Every time she was mentioned directly to him, he was reminded of it. From everything he knew and had learned of Robin, she would have welcomed him, loved him, and been there for him. It hurt.

“No,” he said stiffly. “She passed shortly before I arrived.”

“I saw her picture in the newspaper,” said a hesitant Finn. “She was beautiful, Kurt. I can see her in you.”

Carly cocked her head and turned to Kurt, considering the statement and surprised she hadn’t done so before. She too could see Robin in Kurt: the shape of their faces, the set of their mouths. She wondered if Kurt had noticed the resemblance, as well as how much both of them looked like Anna.

Rachel opened her mouth, but Finn held up a hand and cut her off.

“No,” he said sternly. “You’re not doing this, Rachel. We are here only to offer Kurt our condolences. Anything else is just not important.”

Her eyes flared with indignation but, before she could blast her husband into orbit, she thought better of it. It was incredibly rare that Finn put his foot down, but when he did, she knew to listen. She had never had a good relationship with Kurt, but he and Finn had at least been friends once upon a time. She also knew Kurt was one step away from throwing them out. If he did that before Finn had a chance to talk to his brother, she knew he would never, ever forgive her.

She offered a swift nodded and glided over to the bar to pour herself a drink.
“You’re Carly, right?” Finn asked the other woman. “You were in the picture with Kurt and the other girls. I’m Finn Hudson, and this is my wife, Rachel. It’s nice to meet you.”

Carly gave him a cordial nod. “You, as well,” she replied, not sparing Rachel even a glance.

“You own the Metro Court?”

“With my ex-husband, yes. I’m Kurt’s best friend.”

Finn looked at her, and then at Kurt, and offered a small grin. “It’s almost like being back at McKinley. Kurt was always surrounded by a pack of beautiful, powerful women.”

She relaxed somewhat, recognizing that Finn was at least trying to behave, which counted for a lot. She would be polite but distant, waiting to take her cue from Kurt.

“It’s really good to see you,” Finn warbled.

Kurt sighed. “I missed you, too, Finn.”

Surprise and pain appeared in Finn’s eyes, along with a hope that almost made Carly’s heart break, were she a lesser woman. Whatever had happened between them all those years ago, it was apparent that Finn cared deeply for Kurt, even loved him, and though Kurt was wary and guarded, that affection returned.

“You don’t have to say that,” Finn said, blushing slightly. “Not unless you mean it.”

“I do mean it,” Kurt insisted. “I can’t say that this doesn’t hurt, nor that I’m not angry about this ambush, but I have missed you.”

It was apparent to the others just how much Finn wanted to pitch himself forward and grab Kurt in hug, but he restrained himself.

“I apologize for not getting here sooner,” Kurt said, after clearing his throat. “Brenda did try to contact me several times, but I was conducting a postmortem and couldn’t be interrupted.”

“We understand,” Finn said quickly, turning a little green at the idea of an autopsy. He still didn’t understand why Kurt had chosen that field and wasn’t off curing cancer or something, but he guessed the work was important.

“How did Anthony die, anyway?” asked a gleeful Carly.

Finn and Rachel stared at her in horror, both at her knowing the victim and her apparent delight.

“Mitral valve regurgitation,” Kurt said. “Nothing glamorous or appropriate, sadly.”

“Kurt!” Rachel gasped.

He rolled his eyes. “Considering the decedent was a serial killer who strangled the wife of one of my dearest friends, you’ll pardon me if I’m not in mourning, Rachel.”

She turned chalk white.

“Jesus, Kurt,” Finn said heavily, sitting down. “Who was this guy?”

“Anthony Zacchara, local mob don and complete asshole,” Carly said.
“And who did he kill?” Finn asked.

“Emily Quartermaine, among others,” Kurt said. “Emily was the wife of my friend, Nikolas.”

“Nikolas Cassadine,” Rachel said. “He’s a prince, right? I always thought he was just a figment of your imagination.”

Carly pulled a face. “Why would you think that?”

Asked a pointed question, Rachel found she had no ready answer.

Carly ignored her and turned back to Kurt. “When is Nikolas picking you up?”

Kurt glanced down at his watch. “Two hours.”

She nodded. “I convinced Jax to leave you alone and not do anything stupid.”

“Really? Thank you. How did you manage it?”

She shrugged a shoulder. “I told him he’d end up making an ass of himself and playing right into Nikolas’ hands.”

He smirked.

“Uh, what?” Finn asked.

“Kurt and Nikolas have a date,” said a helpful Carly. “My ex-husband, Jax, has a thing for Kurt and was planning on interrupting it to get Kurt’s attention.”

He stared at her.

“And you don’t have a problem with Kurt getting cozy with your husband?” demanded an aghast Rachel.

“Nikolas isn’t my husband,” Carly said, raising a brow. “If you’re referring to Jax, you’ll notice I referred to him as my ex-husband and, no, I have no issue with him dating Kurt, if it happens.” She smirked. “I have to wonder why you look so worried,” she said, voice silky as she spared Finn a glance. “Worried about Kurt getting cozy with your husband?”

“Wha?” Finn asked.

“That would never happen!” Rachel screeched.

“Not now,” Carly agreed, “but I heard it might have, back in high school. Apparently you were really concerned about it.”

“I was not!”

“What are you talking about?” Kurt asked in a strange voice.

Carly shrugged and twirled a lock of hair around her finger. “Oh, just something Santana told me.”

Kurt blinked. What the fuck was going on here?

“You shouldn’t believe anything she has to say!” Rachel hissed.
Carly nodded. “I see. So, what she said about you stealing Kurt’s letters to one Sam Evans was a lie?”

All the color bled from Rachel’s face.


Finn raced over to steady him, keeping a suspicious eye on Rachel. “Did you do that?”

“Of course not, Finn! I would never …”

His eyes darkened. “You’re lying.” He shook his head. “Why would you lie to me, Rachel? You know I can always tell.” He wrapped an arm around Kurt’s shoulders and guided him toward the sofa, gently pushing him down on it. “I’m so sorry, Kurt. I never knew. I thought when you broke up with Sam …”

“I didn’t break up with Sam!” blurted a distressed and agitated Kurt, his voice jumping an octave. “I loved Sam. I wanted to spend my life with him! Even though I was in Paris, I knew we could make it work! He said he would wait for me and I believed him! And then his letters stopped and all of mine were returned unopened.”

“What the hell did you think you were doing?” Finn screamed at his wife.

She sighed. “It wasn’t going to work, Finn. We were juniors in high school!”

Finn’s glare reached epic proportions. “So were we, Rachel, and we’re married. So were Brittany and Santana, and they’re married.”

“Kurt had moved across the entire world! He was off being rich and spending money and becoming a semi-famous model!”

“Everything that never happened for you, right?”

“What was Sam supposed to do, Finn?!”

“Wait for him!” Finn barked. “Just like he told Kurt he would! We all knew how in love with each other they were. It would have happened!”

Kurt looked up at Carly. “How did Santana know?” he whispered.

Her eyes softened. “She tracked Sam down a few years ago and asked him, because she wanted a real answer. She didn’t understand why you two didn’t work and I guess Sam would never talk about it. She asked why he stopped answering your letters. He got very defensive and said you had stopped writing. She knew then something was wrong, because she remembered you telling her that your letters had been returned-to-sender.”

He closed his eyes. “Oh, my god.”

“At first she thought it was Finn, because you had stopped writing to him, and then …”

“I didn’t stop writing to Finn!” Kurt hissed. He turned toward Finn. “I didn’t! I never got any responses, so I thought you …” he trailed off, eyes widening with realization.

“Rachel,” Finn rasped, voice cracking, “leave now. Go upstairs and take care of our kids before I say something to you I won’t regret and can’t take back.”
Tears filled her eyes and, giving them both an anguished look, she ran from the room. Silence descended for several pregnant moments.

“Why didn’t Santana ever tell me?” Kurt asked.

Carly sighed. “Honestly? I don’t know. She didn’t, either. I think she was scared to open that can of worms. By the time she confronted Sam and then put it together, you were about to graduate from medical school. You had a whole new, exciting life before you and she didn’t want you to be dragged down by the machinations of a vengeful, bitter bitch.

“No offense,” she said to Finn.

He snorted. “None taken.” He cuddled Kurt closer to him. “I’m so sorry, Kurty,” he whispered, dropping a kiss on top of his brother’s head. “I swear to you I didn’t know. I thought you stopped writing to both of us because it was just too hard for you after losing Burt. I didn’t blame you for that. You were in new country, living a new life, and I thought you just wanted a fresh start. I wanted that for you, because you deserved it.”

“But why, Finn? You knew I stayed close with Santana and Brittany, and that I kept in touch with Tina, Artie, and Quinn. You knew me better than almost anyone. Didn’t you think it was odd? If I wasn’t interested in writing you, I would have just told you. I don’t play games like that.”

“I did think that about it,” Finn admitted, “but I was hurt and sad and sixteen. Yeah, we were tight, but that friendship came a lot later for you than yours with the others. I thought … I don’t know, I guess I just thought they were more important to you than I was, and considering the way I acted, why wouldn’t they be? They were true friends to you. I was a dick.”

“But I loved you,” Kurt insisted. “We were brothers. That meant something to me. When I didn’t hear from you, I just thought … I thought I didn’t mean anything to you anymore. When I got my letters back, from both you and Sam, I just gave up.”

“Why wouldn’t you?” asked a bitter Finn. “I wouldn’t have kept writing to people I believed didn’t want to hear from me. Sam and I both thought you’d washed your hands of us. We blamed each other for pissing you off in some way. Never did I think Rachel …”

He looked at Carly. “Did Santana say Sam told her it was Rachel?”

She nodded. “He didn’t find out until later. After you got married in senior year, Sam helped you get ready to move, remember?”

Finn nodded.

“Well, Rachel apparently didn’t send back every letter. Sam found some in a box he was moving from her house onto the truck. A few were addressed to you, a few to Sam, and a couple to a woman named Carole.”

“My mom,” Finn said tightly.

“I don’t know why Rachel kept them,” Carly continued. “Maybe they made her feel accomplished or triumphant, but when Sam saw them, he figured out what she had done. He never said anything because, by then, Kurt was long gone from Lima and you were newly married. Opening his mouth meant torpedoing the lives of a lot of people he cared about.”

Finn hung his head. “I guess that’s why he fell out of contact with me, too. It probably hurt too much even to look at Rachel.” He blanched. “Oh, shit. What if he thought I was part of it?”
Carly winced. “He did, or does. I don’t know anymore, and neither did Santana.”

“So why did she tell you and not Kurt?”

“Honestly? She anticipated you and Rachel would turn up in Port Charles sooner rather than later. She knew either you or Kurt would eventually bring it up. She told me so that I would force the issue if you two didn’t. I did it now just to see how Rachel would respond, because I’m a bitch and wanted to see if she would lie.

“Santana knew if she were the one to tell Kurt, he would blame her for not telling him before and would resent her for letting him be blindsided.”

Kurt huffed. “I take it Brittany doesn’t know.”

“No,” Carly said, sighing, “and Santana knows that when Brittany learns the truth, it won’t be pretty. She’s prepared to handle that, though, because she knows she deserves it.”

Kurt shook his head. “Santana isn’t to blame for this. She tracked Sam down and asked him a question. I sincerely doubt the answer she got was the one she expected. Suddenly she was sitting on a landmine and was afraid to be the one to detonate it. I can’t blame her for that. No matter what she said or did, or didn’t do, she’d be caught in the middle and take the brunt of the blame.”

Finn growled but, after a long moment of thought, gruffly agreed. He knew Santana didn’t deal with emotions well, particularly those of others. She had had gone after Sam to get vengeance for Kurt, only then to be saddled with a situation out of her control and one which didn’t really involve her. He was somewhat surprised she hadn’t appeared on his doorstep and slit Rachel’s throat. Unlike Rachel, who would never believe what Santana truly was, Finn knew exactly what she did in South America.

“I want to be furious with Rachel,” Kurt murmured, “and I suppose I am, but not … I mean, I want to say she took away my choices, but she didn’t. Not completely. We live in a world rife with technology. Letters weren’t answered, and instead of manning up and placing a phone call or sending an email, I just wallowed in my pain and lost two of the most important people in my life.”

“You’re not alone on that boat,” Finn said miserably. “I had your number. I could have called. The least I should have done was send a text. But, at the same time, what were we supposed to think, Kurt? Sam and I thought you were done with us; you thought we were done with you. We were kids and were in pain. We were afraid to reach out and possibly make it worse.”

Kurt sighed and closed his eyes, leaning against Finn. “What do we do now? We should talk to Sam. I don’t even know where he is. Do you?”

“He keeps in touch with Puck. I talk to Puck about once a year, but we never discuss Sam. I don’t know if Puck knows about all of this, but I doubt Sam told him, or else Puck would’ve shown up at my house and placed some Yiddish curse on Rachel. Last I heard, Sam was living in Texas.”

“Ask him, okay? Then you and I will talk to Sam together.”

“All right, but can we wait just a little while? I need to figure out how I’m going to deal with this.”

“You deal with it by forgiving your wife.” Kurt said. “No matter what, Rachel is your wife and the mother of your children. This hurts, and it’s probably going to hurt for a while, but your family is more important.”

“You’re my family.”
Kurt blushed and nodded, smiling softly. “I am, but she’s your wife, Finn. I don’t want you to lose that because of something that happened back in high school, no matter how horrible it was. She was young and stupid and jealous. Don’t think I don’t want to kick her ass, but that’s not more important than you and my niece and nephew.”

Finn grinned. “They’re cute, huh?”

“They’re adorable, and Rachel is their mother.”

Finn sighed. “Yeah.”

“I could kick her ass for you,” Carly offered.
Kurt finally convinced a begrudging Carly to give Finn, Rachel, and their children a suite in the hotel for the next two days before sending his brother to talk to his wife. He knew that he and Finn had a big discussion before them, but had no interest in starting it tonight. He also knew Carly would make Rachel particularly uncomfortable during the short stay and was just fine with that. He was okay with being a petty bitch on occasion.

He was both anxious and relieved by his reconciliation with Finn. It was more than ten years too late, but better late than never, he supposed.

He didn’t know what to do about Rachel. In truth, he wasn’t much interested. They had never been friends and never would be but, if he wanted any relationship with Finn, Rachel was a factor he had to consider. They had been together for twelve years and had two children. Kurt sincerely doubted their marriage would implode in the fallout of Rachel’s revealed perfidy.

He wanted them to stay together. They had defied the odds and he didn’t want to see that overturned because Rachel had been a selfish, thoughtless bitch in high school, for that had been true of all of them. Not that he was ready to forgive her, because he absolutely wasn’t, but he was able to view the situation without the blinders he wore at McKinley.

Therefore, he chose to accept Rachel had matured over the years from the girl she had been. Even if it wasn’t true, it was what he needed to believe if he was to put it past him. He was a respected physician and refused to succumb to the childish need to rub Rachel’s nose in her mess before spanking her with a newspaper.

Besides, he had a date.

Carly, however, was not feeling nearly as charitable.

After showing the Hudson family to their suite, a task she assigned only to herself, she managed to finagle Rachel into the corner of the entry. Her eyes hardened, making the smile on her face look all the more menacing.

“Don’t think this is over,” she said pleasantly. “Kurt doesn’t need to soil himself by dealing with you. That’s why he has me.” She smirked. “I bet you thought you were safe when you learned Santana has known about this for years and did nothing. Just remember that, when it comes to Kurt, he holds her leash only because she allows it.”

Rachel averted her eyes and swallowed.

“But it’s irrelevant. Santana is a scary bitch, and Brittany is even more frightening, but they’re not here. I am. I can’t kill you here because there are cameras in the hotel and children are present, but you’d better sleep with one eye open.” She grinned. “And remember, I have the key to your room.”

Carly waved gaily at Finn and the children before making her dramatic exit.

Rachel slowly turned and flinched at the enraged glare on Finn’s face. She sighed and began
preparing the children for bed. She knew she was in for it as soon as Cosette fell asleep.

And that was okay. This wasn’t high school, and she knew she had this coming.

Lucky winced, deciding that allowing Cameron to ride on his shoulders probably wasn’t the best idea. Cam was only six, but he was heavier than he looked, leaning toward solid muscle. He was pretty sure his son was destined to play high school ball, and Lucky couldn’t wait to attend every game. They were on their way to meet Laura at Kelly’s Diner. Even after all these years, it was strange to walk in and not see Ruby standing behind the counter.

“How was school, honey?”

Cameron bounced, knocking the air out of his father. “It was fun, Daddy! I learned how to spell Massachusetts!”

“Good job, bud! What’s the capital of Massachusetts?”

“Boston,” Cam promptly replied. “I know all the capitals, Daddy. I learned them before I could spell them.”

Lucky raised a brow. “Is that so? What’s the capital of Texas?”

“Austin.”

“Kansas?”

“Topeka.”

“California?”

“Sacramento.”

Lucky frowned in thought. “Do you know the capital of Norway?”

“Oslo.”

“Portugal?”

“Lisbon.”

“Peru?”

“Lima.”

“Austria?”

“Vienna,” Cameron chirped. “Daddy, why are you testing me? Don’t you believe I know the answers?”

“Of course I do, kiddo. I just don’t remember studying the capitals of other countries with you. Did Mommy?”
“No, I learned them all by myself,” Cameron said, with a curious mixture of pride and defensiveness.

“Any particular reason?”

“Spencer knew them, and I want to know what he knows, so I learned.”

Lucky’s frown deepened. He wasn’t sure he liked the idea of Cameron and Spencer being in competition. He and Nikolas had wasted so many years trying to one-up each other.

“It’s like how Spencer’s been learning harder math because I’m good at it. When one of us doesn’t have an answer, we ask each other.”

Lucky exhaled slowly. Well, that wasn’t so bad. Actually, it was very good.

“Daddy, Spencer asked Uncle Nikolas a question that he couldn’t answer. Can you answer?”

“I can try.”

“You’re my daddy, but not my biological daddy, so that means Spencer and I can get married one day, right?”

Lucky blinked. Harshly.

“Because Spencer asked if we could both marry Emma, but Uncle Nikolas said that wasn’t allowed in this country. What country does allow it?”

Lucky paused, grabbed Cameron’s legs tightly, and tilted back his head to look up at his son.

“You’re pulling my leg, right?”

“You’re pulling mine, Daddy!” he giggled.

Lucky raised an eyebrow.

Cameron just laughed harder.

For the first time, Lucky was sure his son had gotten his mother’s sense of humor.

Mac gently knocked on the door to Kurt’s suite, smiling when Holly answered just seconds later. He was so happy she had returned to Port Charles; happier still she was staying. He knew almost everyone in town, but had few good friends. Ever since Georgie died and Maxie had moved out, and now with Robin gone, his house felt haunted.

Having Anna and Robert there helped, but not much. They bickered frequently, although rarely fought outright, but their presence made Robin’s absence so much more acute. He was fairly certain Anna would move back to Port Charles to be close to Kurt, but had no idea about Robert. Frankly, he wanted them out of the house sooner rather than later.

“What’s going on, my friend?” Holly asked.
Mac gave her a sheepish smile and sighed. “I never could get anything past you.”

She grinned. “Few can. Our reservation’s not for a bit. Come in for a drink,” she said, grabbing his arm and pulling him inside.

“I’ve really missed you,” he said quietly, staring at the ground.

She gave him a measured look as she quickly fixed their drinks; whiskey sour for him, vodka rocks for her. She handed him his and pushed him toward the sofa.

“I’ve been a shit mate to you, Scorpio,” she admitted.

“Bollocks to that,” he said sternly. “You’ve been the one shit on, Sutton. If anyone should have known your cow of a sister was impersonating you, it’s me.”

“No, darling,” she insisted, shaking her head. “No one is to blame for that but Paloma.” She paused. “Though I was rather disappointed Robert never caught on. We haven’t been close for almost twenty years, but I was married to the man. He should have known. Anna, too, frankly.”

He toasted her. He was also disappointed with them.

She sat down, legs underneath her, and sighed. “Paloma was smart. She knew I was too busy to track her and she preyed on that. Don’t get me wrong – I blame her completely – but I was lazy.”

His eyes met hers. “Why were you so busy?”

She sighed again, more deeply. “I’m going to tell you because I trust you more than anyone, save Kurt, and Anna already knows. Normally I would never even ask, but …”

“You know I can keep a secret, Holly. Especially yours.”

She nodded. “Are you familiar with the Global Network Intelligence Initiative?”

He arched a brow. “GNET? I’ve heard rumors, but nothing concrete.” His eyes widened. “You work for them?”

“I did, but have since retired. I was Kurt’s handler.”

Mac blew out a slow breath. “I suspected something. Not this, I’ll grant you, but when I did a background check, there were far too many redactions for me not to wonder. I didn’t say anything to Anna or Robert.”

“Like I said, Anna knows. Whether or not she’s told Robert, I don’t know, but I doubt it.”

“Is Kurt here on assignment?”

“No,” she said smoothly. Kurt had already completed his assignment, after all, and it had been off the books. She certainly wasn’t going to sell him out, let alone to the chief of police. “Kurt and I left the agency together.”

“They just let you go?”

“Let’s say Kurt … persuaded them.”

He smirked. “Good for him.”
She laughed. “Indeed, but they didn’t fight him too much. Kurt was a gifted agent who helped to make GNET the success it’s become, but he’d been in the game for ten years. You and I both know that agents rarely stay active beyond that point, excepting Anna and Robert. Besides, the more Kurt’s reputation grew as a physician, the harder it was to maintain any cover. It was time for him to go and they knew it, so they only put up a token resistance. As he was my only agent, they released me with no qualms.”

There was a lot he wanted to ask, but he knew better. “Confidentially agreements?”

“Naturally.”

He shrugged. “Good enough for me, but I do have one question. Is he as good a pathologist as his reputation suggests?”

“Better. Kurt has a gift for dealing with death. He knows all of the latest science and understands cutting-edge technology better than its creators, but his intuition is remarkable. I’ve never known his gut to be wrong and he always backs up his hunches with irrefutable evidence.”

“Okay, then.”

She smirked. “That was a fun deflection, and thank you for not pressing me on points I know are nigging at your curiosity, but we’re still having this discussion. The truth of the matter is that I have been a shit mate to you, Mac. You’re one of my only true friends, and I should have been here when Georgie died. In my defense, there was a situation with Kurt which I didn’t trust anyone else to handle, but I still should have come. I am so sorry.”

“Holly, you have a life. I never …”

“I’m sorry she died, Mac,” she said gently, taking his hand in hers. “I’m so very sorry your daughter died.”

His breath hitched as his eyes filled with tears. “They say time heals everything, but not this. Never this. And now, well, now we’ve lost our daughter, haven’t we?”

She closed her eyes. “I couldn’t have loved Robin more had I given birth to her myself. Every day since she was diagnosed, I’ve been waiting for a call. But it never came. Her cocktail worked. She got married. She had a child. And now, for this, this stupid, senseless tragedy … there are no words. I’m angry and I’m completely destroyed. I cannot even imagine how you’re coping.”

He gave her a lopsided grin. “Who said I was?”

She nodded. “Good. It’s good you recognize that. I know it’s cold comfort, but allowing yourself to mourn is the best thing you can do right now. Anna told me Robert is in complete denial, that he believes Robin is off on some extended holiday. When he crashes, and he will, the fallout will not be pretty.”

“I know,” he sighed.

“I need you to promise something, Mac. Don’t allow your love for your brother to dictate your grief for Robin. I know it wasn’t his or Anna’s fault that they weren’t there for her but, at the end of the day, they weren’t. You were. You raised her, Mac. You’re responsible for the incredible woman she became. Anna and Robert know that. Don’t let anyone take it from you.”

“You were there with me every step of the way.”
She shook her head. “I never should have left Port Charles and gone off with Paloma. I will regret that for the rest of my life. I felt as if I owed her something and she took advantage of that. She took everything I had to give, even my name.”

“Do you know where she is now?”

“Yes, and it’s better if you don’t.”

He took the warning and let it go.

There was a knock at the door and he watched Holly rise to her feet to answer it. She thanked and tipped the courier, her eyes widening when she spied the return address on the envelope. She quickly shut the door and ripped open the letter as if oblivious to Mac’s presence.

Her eyes restlessly scanned until she found the information of which she was in search. She drew in a sharp breath and slowly released it.

“That remains to be seen,” she said. “I just received confirmation of something I suspected. What happens next is anyone’s guess.

Damian Spinelli was indeed Kurt’s brother.

Nikolas stepped off the elevator and into the restaurant, somewhat chagrined Kurt hadn’t offered his suite as their rendezvous point. It was fairly obvious Kurt was aware of his interest and hadn’t yet decided how to respond. Kurt had been playful and teasing with him since his arrival in Port Charles, but never had Nikolas gotten the sense Kurt was interested in a deep, romantic relationship.

Again he heard Lucky’s voice in his head, telling him to stop overanalyzing Kurt’s every word and instead on the fact Kurt had agreed to an actual date. Surely that meant there was some interest, even if it wasn’t consumptive infatuation for which Nikolas was hoping.

Jesus, he had it bad. The more time he spent considering his feelings for Kurt, however, the more confused he became. Was it love? Lust? Did it matter? He also felt, on some level, that he was betraying Emily’s memory, which he knew was his guilt bubbling to the surface anew to castigate him for not better protecting her. He determined to put it out of his mind.

He repressed a sigh and stepped over to the hostess’ station, blinking when he realized Carly was waiting to greet him. He had to admit, only to himself, that she looked stunning. Her cocktail dress was a delicate dove gray chiffon with a scoop neckline and an asymmetrical cut on the A-line, baring just enough leg to be adventurous but not salacious.

Her only jewelry was a pair of double diamond strands that stopped just above her shoulders. Her normally brassy hair had been toned down and swept up into a French plait, at the base of which was a large night-blooming jasmine flower.
Nikolas vaguely remembered one of his tutors lecturing about Victorian floriography, recalling jasmine symbolized sensuality. Carly certainly looked sensual this evening, and it was a pleasant change. She had often failed to understand there was a line between appearing sexy and sexual. Tonight, she looked like a goddess and he had no problem telling her.

“You’re breathtaking.”

She quickly searched his eyes for any trace of mockery and, finding none, a light blush appeared. She gave him a soft smile and nodded. “Thank you, Mister Cassadine. I wish I could take the credit, but Kurt has decided to overhaul my wardrobe. From the reactions I’ve been getting, I would say it was long overdue.”

A corner of his mouth quirked up. “Kurt does good work, but you have never been anyone’s blank canvas, Carly.”

She was touched and it showed. “He convinced me I should dress for the occasion, not attention. I can be a powerful woman and still be feminine, sexy but with mystique.”

“I’m happy he succeeded.”

“I must say, you’re looking quite dashing this evening, Prince Nikolas.”

He offered a small grin in reply, not wanting to admit he had dressed himself according to his son’s direction: tight pants. The black gabardine was extremely form-fitting, but he did feel sexy and hoped Kurt might appreciate it. He wore a slim-fit, blinding white Oxford shirt, which brought attention to the hard planes of his muscled chest. The shirt had French cuffs and a Greek key embroidery around them and the collar, which was open to highlight his dusky olive skin. He had topped it all off with a carnelian dinner jacket with a black shawl lapel.

Carly discreetly checked out his package and repressed the urge to make a comment about his hopes of delivering it later. She wasn’t used to censoring herself and couldn’t say she enjoyed the experience, but did notice people were reacting positively to the little changes she was making. If she wanted to be a smart, competent businesswoman, she had to act like one, which meant not blurting out every observation that popped into her head.

“Kurt should be here in a few moments,” she said. “He had a few issues which required his immediate attention.”

“Nothing serious, I hope,” asked a curious Nikolas.

“He should be the one to tell you,” she said, realizing Nikolas had yet to hear about Anthony’s death. “I’ve reserved you a secluded table by the French windows and made sure that Jax is otherwise occupied.”

He stared. “No offense, Carly, but Lucky thought you would be rooting for Jax in all of this.”

She pursed her lips and looked down. “To be honest, at first I was. Lizzie and I even made bets and were prepared to be the personal cheerleaders of our chosen suitors, but after this weekend in the City, I realized I was focusing on the wrong things. I don’t care who Kurt chooses to date, if anyone. The only thing I want for him is his happiness.”

His stare intensified. “You’re a good friend, Carly.”

She smiled. “It took me a while, but I think I’ve finally learned how. It was worth the wait.”
He laid his hand over hers and gave a gentle squeeze. “So you’re playing hostess tonight?”

“No, I just wanted to make sure you knew Kurt was on his way. Jerrica will show you to your table when he arrives. I actually have a date myself.” The elevator dinged. “And here she is.”

Nikolas offered an owlish blink. *She?*

He turned around and his mouth fell open.

Elizabeth emerged from between the doors like a princess about to meet her court. Dressed in a knee-length white satin dress, over which was red tulle with appliques, with a bateau neckline and a ribbon sash, she was the belle of any ball. Garnet chandelier earrings glittered at her lobes. Her sable hair was set in a waterfall braid, into which red hibiscus were woven, the rest of her hair spilling down her back in spiral waves.

He remembered her second wedding to Lucky. When she had come down the aisle, he thought, in that moment, there had never been a more stunning woman in the world. Elizabeth rarely emphasized her tremendous allure. Then again, it wasn’t needed; that face spoke for itself. Still, she was a vision. The flowers were appropriately chosen: delicate beauty, indeed.

“Hello, Nikolas,” she said, a large smile on her face as she walked toward him.

He bowed and took her hand in his, placing a soft kiss on her knuckles. “Good evening, my lady.”

Her tinkling laughter caught the attention of the room, who turned to the source and offered looks of appreciation. “You look spiffy, yourself.” She stood on tiptoe and kissed his cheek. “Have fun tonight.”

He arched a brow. “I understand you have a date with Carly. Will you be having a side of dinner with your plotting?”

She smirked. “Don’t worry your pretty little head about what Carly and I do.”

“Alas, I cannot,” he said with great pomp. “The entire world waits with bated breath.”

“As it should,” she said, nodding. She crossed over and took Carly’s hand. “Wine?”

“Always, please and thank you.”

His brow arched higher at their joined hands. Surely this wasn’t an actual date.

Carly turned to escort Elizabeth to their table and, for her part, Elizabeth threw him a wink over her shoulder, quickly turning back around so he wouldn’t see her laughing at his terrified expression.

“Apparently he and Lucky do this to Laura,” she whispered to Carly, who grinned.

“Then let him wonder. It serves him right.”

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Lucky was surprised to find his sister pulling duty at the counter. Lulu turned around and offered him and Cameron a large smile.
“My two favorite guys!” she beamed.

“Auntie Lulu!” Cameron cheered.

“Hey sis,” Lucky said. “When did you start picking up shifts?”

She shrugged. “Mike had a thing and I offered to help out. Considering the number of times I flaked out on him, I owe him one. Or several. Besides, the tips are good tonight. Are you boys having dinner?”

“We’re meeting Mom, actually. She had a job interview today and I want to hear how it went.”


“Something at the hospital,” he replied. “I don’t really know the details.”

“And Nikolas?”

“Uncle Nikolas has a date with Dr. Kurt,” Cameron chirped.

Lulu raised an eyebrow. “Does he now?”

“Don’t interfere,” Lucky softly warned.

“I would never,” she said with mock offense, “but since when has our brother dated men?”

“Apparently years, though under the radar,” Lucky admitted, “but I’m pretty sure they were all imitations of Kurt.”

Her eyes widened. “So this has been going on for a while?”

“Since they were kids. I think Nikolas believed it was one-sided and a little inappropriate, considering the age difference, but now they’re adults and nothing’s stopping them.”

There was a flood of emotions on her face, ranging from fear and worry to concern and hopefulness. She well knew the toll Emily’s death had taken on her brother, and while she had loved Nadine and thought they were a good match, the pairing had just seemed to run out of steam after a while. If Nikolas could find happiness with someone, that was all she cared about.

“How’s Elizabeth?” she asked, always hopeful Liz and Lucky would someday reunite.

“Mommy has a date with Auntie Carly,” said a helpful Cameron.

Lulu offered a slow blink in reply. “Huh?” she said, after a beat.

Lucky just nodded.

The idea of Elizabeth and Carly being friends was far more troublesome to Lulu than Nikolas dating a boy. She also found the fact that Cameron was now referring to Carly as Auntie rather offensive. She liked Carly, even looked up to her, and was one of the few to have always respected her. They were cousins, but the rest of the Spencers had always kept themselves somewhat removed from her.

“Mom should be here with Spencer in a few minutes,” Lucky added.

Just then, Sonny walked in with Morgan.
“Hi, Morgan! Hi, Mr. Sonny!” said a cheerful Cameron, waving.

To everyone’s surprise, Sonny greeted Cameron with a big smile and wave of his own. He still felt incredibly guilty at how he had treated Elizabeth. He was sure Robin must have been galled by it but, as was typical for her the last few years, she had kept her thoughts about his behavior to herself. He deeply regretted having been one of her few blind spots, for it had never done her any favors.

Morgan grinned and ran over to say hello.

“Down, please, Daddy,” Cameron said, shrieking with delight when Lucky grabbed him and flipped him over before depositing him on the ground.

He was grateful to be relieved of the burden, but winced when a twinge in his back announced itself. He really was getting older.

“Ibuprofen,” Sonny mumbled at him.

Lucky shot him a wry grin and nodded his head in thanks.

“How’s Laura?” Sonny asked. The friendship he and Luke had once enjoyed had long since cooled, but he had always been fond of Laura.

“She’s well,” Lucky said. “I’m actually expecting her soon.”

“How are you?”

Lucky looked at him, surprised to find nothing but concern in Sonny’s eyes. “About as well as you, I expect. The loss has hit us all.”

Sonny nodded and looked away.

“Did you take a picture?” Morgan asked Cameron, who nodded and pulled out his cell phone.

Lucky was still unsure about a child Cam’s age having a phone, but after losing Jake, Elizabeth wanted to know where Cameron was whenever he was out of her sight. Lucky understood and agreed with that, sad that it was even necessary.

“A picture of what?” Sonny asked.

“Of Miss Elizabeth,” Morgan said. “She and Mom have a date tonight.”

Sonny stared at his son, blinked, and then turned to stare at Lucky.

“I doubt we even want to know.”

Sonny gave a stiff nod.

Cameron and Morgan exchanged phones, their fathers looking over the boys’ shoulders.

“Carly looks amazing,” Lucky said with appreciation.

“Uncle Kurt picked it out,” Morgan said. “I think he did a good job.”

Sonny and Lucky both raised brows at the address, the latter suspecting it wouldn’t be long until Morgan was calling Liz Auntie Elizabeth.
“Your mother looks beautiful,” Sonny told Morgan, “and Elizabeth has always been a stunner.”

Both boys smiled at him. Sonny found it rather nice to be an object of affection rather than disdain. It had been a while since he was anything but the town pariah.

Lucky was surprised the boys were so familiar with each other, considering they were in different grades.

Cameron stared at him in confusion. “Morgan is my cousin, Daddy,” he said, frowning. “You and Carly are cousins, so Morgan, Michael, and Joslyn are my cousins.”

Lucky blinked, feeling stupid because he had actually never considered that.

Cameron turned back to Morgan. “I think Daddy’s confused because Spencer and I are cousins and we want to get married when we grow up.”

Lulu and Sonny’s eyes became the size of moons.

“I never want to get married,” Morgan said. “Everyone just ends up divorced.”

Cameron nodded. “That’s true, I guess, but I’d rather love someone and get divorced later than never have anyone to love. I mean, my parents are divorced, but they still have me. Your parents are divorced, but they have you and Michael. Don’t you want kids someday?”

“I don’t think so,” Morgan said slowly.

Cameron shrugged. “That’s okay. Not everyone does. If you never get married, you can live with me and Spencer. We want to marry Emma, but I guess you can’t marry more than one person at a time.” He gasped. “But if you married Emma, we could all live together!”

Lucky shook his head as Lulu and Sonny continued to stare.

“I still don’t think I want to get married, Cam, but if I did, I guess I would marry Emma or someone like her. She’s really nice.” He bit his lip and paused. “Have you seen her lately?”

Cameron gave a somber nod. “She came to the park with me and Spencer yesterday. She was very sad. She’ll be sad for a really long time. I still miss Jakey and Spencer misses Emily.”

Sonny bowed his head at Emily’s name, still devastated she was gone.

Morgan was determined to snap Cameron out of his now depressed mood. What he loved most about his cousin was how happy and cheerful Cameron was, despite all the bad stuff that had happened to him.

“I got a job!” Morgan announced.

Cameron’s eyes widened. “Wow, really? That’s so cool! What are you doing?”

Lucky looked at Sonny, who sighed and shook his head.

“I’m going to be Miss Diane’s assistant on the weekends,” Morgan said proudly.

“I like her,” Cameron said. “She’s funny and wears amazing shoes. Does that mean you want to be a lawyer like her?”

“I don’t know,” Morgan said. “She’s really smart and knows a lot about everything. I like laws
because they explain things, but Miss Diane told me there’s a difference between the law and justice. She said it’s sometimes really hard to … to … rec … reconcile them.”

Cameron nodded. “Because sometimes bad people do bad things and get away with it because it can’t be proven they actually broke the law.”

Morgan nodded, happy he didn’t have to explain it.

Sonny stared at Cameron. This kid was smart, smarter even than Morgan. He and Carly had Morgan tested a couple of years ago and found out he was more advanced intellectually than many of his peers, but he had the feeling Cameron had even more potential.

“I’m going to be a doctor,” Cameron announced, “and I’ll have Mommy as my nurse.”

“You want to be a doctor?” asked a surprised Lucky.

Cameron nodded. “I want to help people.”

“Your son is amazing,” Sonny whispered to Lucky.

“I know,” Lucky said. “Thanks.”

“Do you think Lulu could watch the boys for a minute? There’s something I need to tell you.”

Lucky glanced at Lulu from the corner of his eye. She nodded.

“Boys, why don’t you tell Lulu what you want for dinner,” he said. “Sonny and I have to talk for a moment.”

“Okay, Daddy,” Cameron said, grabbing Morgan’s hand and dragging him toward the counter.

“Sonny, if this is about a case, I’m not on the force anymore.”

Sonny raised his brows. “It’s not, but … what? You’re a good cop, Lucky. Did Mac …”

“It was my decision. I’m moving in with Nikolas and going back to school.”

Sonny was silent for a moment. “I think that’s admirable,” he said finally. “I wish you luck.”

“Thanks. So what’s up?”

Sonny sighed. “Carly is probably telling this to Elizabeth, and I think you should know, as well. One night they were on the phone, and Morgan overheard them discussing things he probably shouldn’t have heard.” He grumbled. “Although he seems to be handling it better than I am.”

He cleared his throat. “Morgan knows that Elizabeth and Kurt were both raped when they were younger.”

Lucky blanched.

“He looked up what rape was, but didn’t understand the concept, how someone could do that to another person. That was what prompted Diane’s involvement. Morgan took a taxi to her office and demanded she explain what rape was and the penalties for it.”

Lucky was helpless but to stare.
“We asked Morgan not to discuss this with anyone, explaining that it’s a private matter, which I think he understands, but I don’t know if he would say something to Cameron. I thought you should be prepared.”

Lucky swallowed hard. “We’ve never told him. I hoped we’d never have to have that conversation.”

“I can understand why, but you might want to consider preparing yourselves.”

Lucky gave a stilted nod. “Thanks for letting me know. I’ll discuss it with Elizabeth.”

He knew then that Sonny had no idea Michael had been raped, and he wasn’t about to tell him. That was Michael’s decision.

“Morgan knows about Sam, too.”

Lucky’s thoughts immediately went to Jason and he felt his face heat up. “What about her?”

Sonny gaped. “You don’t know?”

“I know she’s pregnant.”

Sonny grabbed Lucky’s arm and pulled him further from the boys, whispering furiously.

Lucky was completely disgusted by what he was told, positive this was why Jason was planning to divorce Sam. He was actually somewhat relieved it wasn’t just about him. The more Sonny told him, however, the more he wanted to kill Sam himself. Cameron and Jake were his sons, regardless of what biology dictated. This bitch had attacked his children and wife, and what had he done? Nothing, because he had been too busy hooked on pills and sleeping with a teenage girl.

He’d had no idea about any of this and was appalled by Sam. He was appalled with himself for sleeping with her and deluding himself into thinking they might have had a future. He was devastated that Elizabeth hadn’t trusted him enough to tell him this, though he certainly couldn’t blame her. He was infuriated Jason had known all of it and married Sam anyway.

How Sam managed to live with herself, he had no idea. Frankly, he didn’t want to know.

He would discuss it with Nikolas tomorrow. Sam was his cousin and he was entitled to know how she was conducting herself. Lucky felt a temporary sadness for Alexis, but Sam was an adult with a history of being horrible. An evil thought of siccing Helena on Sam flitted through his mind.

“Thank you for telling me,” he told Sonny, who cocked a brow.

“I was expecting more of an outburst.”

“I’ve been working on keeping my temper,” Lucky said. “It cost me my marriage. I won’t allow it to cost me my relationship with my son.”

Respect dawned in Sonny’s eyes, making Lucky blush and look away.

The door opened and Laura entered the diner with Spencer in tow. He immediately released his grandmother’s hand and ran over to Cameron, tackling him in a hug, both boys falling to the floor and giggling. The adults smiled at the display while Morgan felt slightly jealous of Cameron and Spencer’s close relationship.

“Hey, Mom,” Lucky said, taking her in his arms.
“Hi, baby,” she said. “How are you? Hello, Sonny.”

Sonny nodded. “Laura. You look lovely, as always.”

She smiled at him and turned back toward her son, cocking her head. “Something’s different about you.”

He grinned. “I have a lot to tell you, but first tell me how your interview went.”

“I was offered the position,” she said, obviously happy about it. “Kurt hired me this afternoon. I’m going to be on staff as a grief counselor.”

“Congratulations,” Sonny said. He couldn’t think of anyone better for such a job.

She nodded her thanks.

“I’m so proud of you,” Lucky said, dropping a kiss on the top of her head. “Will you be reporting directly to Kurt?”

She nodded. “Technically, I’m under his purview, yes, but I’ll also be during rotations in oncology and the children’s ward.”

“Did Nikolas put in a good word?” asked a sly Lucky.

She rolled her eyes. “He did mention to Kurt that I had received my Masters in Counseling, but it was actually Carly who recommended me.”

Sonny and Lucky stared at her.

“That was my reaction, too,” she confessed, “but I’m grateful.”

Lucky bit his lip. “And if things don’t work out with Kurt the way Nikolas is hoping?”

She shrugged. “Then it doesn’t work out for them. I’m too old, and my children are too old, for me to be interfering in their love lives. Kurt also made sure to stress that he was hiring me for my credentials and intelligence, not because I’m his friend’s mother.”

“Good for him.”

“I think so,” Laura said. “I believe I’ll enjoy working for him. He’s an incredible doctor, but it also very compassionate, though I don’t believe he shows it much. I’ll also be working with Holly, so it’s nice I’ll already have a friend in the office.”

“With … Holly?” asked a skeptical Lucky.

“Holly and I have never had any issues between us, honey. We were both involved with your father at different points in our lives, but that's in the past and he’s married to Tracy now.”

He nodded. “Okay. Did you know Nikolas and Kurt are on a date?”

“Of course. Just as I know Elizabeth and Carly are out together this evening, as are Holly and Mac.”

Sonny turned thoughtful. “Holly and Mac would actually work.”

“I don’t really know Holly that well,” Lucky said, “but it would be nice for Mac to have some
happiness after Georgie and now Robin.”

Sonny nodded.

“I didn’t get the impression it was romantic,” Laura said. “If anything, the relationship between Holly and Mac is much like yours was with Emily, sweetie.”

Lucky flinched, but only just. Sonny missed it; Laura didn’t.

“Would you like to join us for dinner, Sonny?” she asked.

“Thank you for the offer, but Morgan and I are just picking up an order. Michael’s waiting for us.”

“Please give him my best,” she said, eyes placid.

“I will,” Sonny said. He didn’t understand why, but he had the feeling she knew something about his son that he did not. “Enjoy your dinner.”

He went and paid Lulu, took their bags, and ushered Morgan from the diner, both Morgan and Cameron protesting the action. Spencer frowned at their reluctant parting. He was very aware that though their fathers were brothers, he and Cameron didn’t have a biological connection, though Cameron had one with Morgan.

Cameron and Spencer climbed onto the swivel chairs before the counter and allowed Aunt Lulu to coo at them while they waited for their food.

“What’s going on?” Laura softly asked her son.

Kurt made his entrance and Nikolas immediately regretted the tight pants, his cock pooling with blood. He made sure to keep his mouth closed to hold back the flood.

Kurt was dressed in a tailored three-piece suit of midnight blue, which shimmered with his every movement. The cut emphasized his long limbs and trim waist, making him appear taller than he actually was, and he was already taller than Nikolas. His shirt was Spanish blue, which made his gorgeous eyes pop, and at his neck was a silk bowtie the color of sunflowers. In his breast pocket was a matching handkerchief with red polka dots, coincidentally the same shade as Nikolas’ dinner jacket. His hair, normally perfectly set, was untamed and all the better for it, falling away from the side part in loose waves.

It was a strange dichotomy, for Kurt looked both older and younger than his actual age. He appeared a consummate bon vivant and gentleman about town, but also a young man who was in the prime of his beauty and knew it.

Nikolas thought Kurt was wearing far too many clothes and wanted to spend hours slowly peeling them from his body, kissing each part of his exposed skin until Kurt had been utterly claimed by his lips.

Kurt greeted him with a seductive smile and an outstretched hand, which Nikolas immediately captured in his own, offering a bow.
“Good evening, Your Grace.”

Kurt bowed as well. “It’s a pleasure to see you, Your Highness.”

“Well,” said a gusty Nikolas, “now that the formalities are out of the way, please allow me to tell you how absolutely delicious you look.”

Kurt raised an eyebrow at the underscored carnality. “I see we’ve decided to dispense any pretense. Excellent!” He leaned in, placing his lips at Nikolas’ ear in the guise of a polite kiss on the cheek. “You’re looking extremely fuckable yourself, Nikki. Let’s both save time and acknowledge this is a done deal. After dinner, I’m going to eat you alive.”

Kurt became Jerrica’s favorite person ever after he slipped her two hundreds for escorting them to their table and taking their drink order. Kurt decided on a glass of Merlot, while Nikolas asked for a double bourbon. After Jerrica flitted away, Kurt smirked.

“Are you sure you want something so hard so early, Nikki? I wouldn’t want you to run out of steam later.”

“I assure you, that won’t be a problem,” Nikolas said in a husky voice, eyes gleaming.

“This has been a long time coming, hasn’t it?”

“Yes, and I want to make you come for a long time.”

Kurt’s eyes dilated. “There are things I want to ask, but I won’t because I can’t be bothered. That said, you’ve been with men before?”

“Not the one I wanted.”

Kurt blew out a breath. “Nikolas, I’ve wanted you for years. You were my first love, before I even understood what that feeling entailed. The first time I touched myself, it was you I imagined touching me.”

Nikolas flushed. “Kurt …”

“I was too young and you were too noble,” Kurt interrupted, “and I appreciate that now in ways I couldn’t then. But we’re not children anymore, Nikolas, and you need to be mindful of how this will change our relationship. Don’t misunderstand me: we’re going to have amazing sex tonight, but things will change. Are you prepared for that?”

“I don’t know,” Nikolas said, deciding honesty was the best policy. “What I do know is that, even if tonight is never repeated, I will have no regrets.”

Kurt offered a beautiful smile and a nod. “Thank you, Nikki. I needed to hear that. As much I want you, I want your friendship more.”

Nikolas reached over and laid his hand atop Kurt’s own. “We’ll always be friends, Kurt. You’re too important to me for any other outcome.” He paused. “Are you sure?”

Kurt began stroking Nikolas’ palm. “I wanted you to be my first. My first kiss and my first time.
That hasn’t changed in twenty years. I’m very sure.”

“Do we have to bother with dinner?”

“I’ve had a long day and I’m hungry. I also want to let the anticipation build because I’ve been hard from the moment I first saw you again and, as much as my cock aches, I’m starting to get into it.”

“I’ve never more appreciated your blunt words,” Nikolas grinned. He suddenly turned bashful. “Was that true? The first time you touched yourself, you thought of me?”

“Of course,” Kurt said. “Nikki, I was very young when we met, but you had to know that I adored you. Every time you looked at me, every time you touched me, every time you hugged me … surely you noticed that I clung to you and never wanted to let go. I didn’t understand those feelings then, how I could long for someone so much, someone who wasn’t my mother or father. Each time we were separated, I could feel my heart break.”

“It was mutual,” Nikolas said quietly. “Please know that, Kurt. I wanted you, too, but you were so young and I would never take advantage of you.”

“I do know that, but you can’t take advantage of something freely given. And I would have given myself to you, Nikki, despite my age then. Never doubt that I have wanted this, wanted you, for a very long time. I don’t know what the future holds for us, if anything, but there’s nothing more I want than this night with you.”

“What are you going to do to me?” asked a breathless Nikolas.

“That is entirely up to you. I may be prim and repressed about some things, Nikki, but sexuality isn’t one of them. I’m a libertine in the bedroom and a very skilled lover. I take great pride in that and feel no shame. So, Prince Nikolas, what is that you would like me to do you?”

Nikolas closed his eyes and struggled for breath.

“Nikki,” Kurt called softly. “Nikki, it’s just me. This is just us. Outside of my family, there is no one I’ve known longer or better than you. Don’t be afraid of me, and don’t be afraid to ask for what you want.”

“I want you to fuck me,” Nikolas blurted.

Kurt’s eyes widened and darkened with desire. “Do you? Is that what you want, Nikolas? You want me to bend you over, take your hips in my hands, and drive myself into you?”

“Please.”

Kurt tilted his head. “We can do that. Anything else? Perhaps you’d like to sit astride me and ride my cock? I may look delicate, but trust me when I say I can bear your weight. I can give you whatever you ask of me, Nikolas, and will take all you have to offer.”

An extremely aroused hostess clumsily sat their drinks before them.

“Thank you, Jerrica,” Kurt said smoothly. “We’ll be ready to order in twenty minutes.”

She offered a shaky nod and scampered away.

“Eyes on me, Nikki,” he said sharply when Nikolas looked at the woman in concern. “This is
about us, not others. Tell me what else you want from me. I want to hear the words.”

“You’re killing me here, Kurt,” Nikolas all but whined.

“I should hope not. There are many things I want to do to you before I leave you a dehydrated husk come morning.”

“You’re enjoying this.”

“Immensely,” Kurt agreed. “There’s nothing more provocative than a lover who so clearly desires you. You should know by now that it’s entirely mutual. I desire your cock, Nikolas. I want it in my mouth. I want it dragged across my face. I want it in my hole.”


“And you love it. You love to hear those words spill out of my mouth, and your come will be spilling out of it later. Well, some of it. I like to swallow.”

“Jesus, Kurt!”

Kurt dismissed him with a wave of his hand. “Let’s get down to brass tacks, Nikki, because, after dinner, I’m going to fuck you unconscious. I want you to know that I have always been safe.” His eyes turned distant. “Except once.” He shook his head and shook it off. “But I was tested immediately after and every year thereafter. I’m clean. Are you? Because I would prefer if we could forego safety this evening. I want to feel all of you with nothing intruding.”

Some of Nikolas’ ardor diminished with the acknowledgment of the rape, but he was determined not to let it come between them. “I’ve only been with Nadine after Emily, and we were safe. That was two years ago. I’ve been tested and am clean.”

Kurt bobbed his head. “Good. So there’s nothing stopping me from milking you dry.”

“Except Jax,” said a suddenly moody Nikolas.

“Jax has nothing to do with this, unless you make him a part of it.”

Nikolas understood the implicit warning and didn’t want to run the risk of Kurt deciding Prince Cassadine was more trouble than he was worth. He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled.

“May I ask how you know each other?”

Kurt gave him a mild side-eye and at last nodded. “You may. I was attending a medical conference a few years ago in Brisbane when we met. This was after one of his many divorces from Brenda. I myself was recently single, having gotten out of an almost three year relationship in which I was very happy.”

Nikolas startled. This was the first he had heard about such relationship.

Kurt gave him a weak smile. “He was the first after the rape. His name is Aidan and I loved him very much.” He paused. “I didn’t … I wasn’t sure …”

“Just take your time,” Nikolas said gently, taking Kurt’s hand. “I’m right here and I’m not going anywhere.”

Kurt bobbed his head. “I was a virgin when it happened,” he whispered, closing his eyes. “I never knew that such pain existed, let alone that I was able to withstand it.” He took a cleansing breath
and nodded to himself. “But I did. I got through it, with a tremendous amount of help from Holly, and went on with my life.”

Nikolas wanted to interrupt, but instead bit his lip.

“This isn’t a subject I enjoy discussing, Nikki, but considering how close we are and what I hope will happen later, there are some things you should know. I had just turned twenty and went out with a few mates from school to celebrate. It was all very low-key, which I appreciated because I’m not really that interested in my birthday. My whole life has been about surviving one traumatic event after another, so I don’t see the need to raise a glass because the wheel has turned.

“Anyway, at the pub there was a guy I recognized from a few classes and he invited himself to join us. I didn’t really know him and had no interest in getting to know him, but I wasn’t paying the check and he knew someone in my party. He flirted with me, I made it clear it wouldn’t happen, he let it go, and I thought nothing more about it.

“I rarely drank, not even socially, but I remember thinking it was odd that I felt so … off … after only two glasses of wine, which I had with dinner. I decided to leave early and fell out of the booth when I tried to get up. The man assured my friends he would hail me a cab and see me inside it.”

Kurt pursed his lips very tightly. “The next thing I remember, I woke up with him inside me.”

Nikolas turned red as his eyes filled with tears.

“I won’t describe the rape itself,” Kurt gamely continued. “There’s no need for you to know or me to relive it. After it was over, I threw him out of my apartment. I think he was surprised by how strong I was. He could tell looking at me that I would report it and ran as fast as he could. I remember being dumbstruck at what a coward he was. He didn’t even have the guts to come after me head-on; he just dropped a pill in my drink. Even more pathetic was that he miscalculated the dose. I called the police, and then Holly, and caught a cab to the hospital.

“In many ways, my experience after the attack was a good one. I reported immediately, gave full disclosure, and there was more than enough physical evidence. I never felt disrespected or disbelieved by the hospital personnel or the police. My memory was spotty, which wasn’t good, but the police were able to construct an excellent timeline. They questioned my friends, who gave them the man’s name, and he was arrested. He admitted to drugging my drink but insisted I wanted to have sex with him.

“He knew he would be prosecuted and convicted. The evidence was too strong. My friends who were with me that night supported my statement. Other victims came forward. He didn’t realize I had the money and connections I have, he just thought I was Yankee trash for him to abuse, so he believed his wealth and storied lineage would see him through with nothing more than a slap on the wrist. When he was made to understand that wouldn’t happen, he planned to leave England, probably for a country outside the EU with a non-extradition treaty.”


“I’ve always assumed that, by then, Holly had been stalking him and tracking his every movement. When he turned up dead, I knew it was her, though I never asked. I know when she did it, and recently learned how, but I don’t know anything else. I don’t want to know anything else.

“I feel that my experience wasn’t the same as that of other survivors. I never went into denial. I felt some modicum of shame, mostly because I couldn’t do much to fight him off, but I also knew that I was drugged and helpless. I went straight to anger, and remained angry for a very long time. I
received counseling; it helped. I had Holly, and then later Bianca and Erica. I wasn’t alone. I didn’t isolate myself. I worked through it.

“After he was dead, part of me relished it. He would never hurt me, or anyone else, again. Still, I resented Holly because she took from me my day in court. She did it with the best of intentions and I understand that, but part of me needed to face him again, to look him in the eye and tell him that he hadn’t destroyed me. He may have taken something from me, but I took my life back.

“Sometimes … sometimes you don’t get closure, and you have to accept that life has irrevocable moments that change you forever. Then it moves on, and you have to make the decision to move with it.”

Nikolas was helpless but to stare. These words and the emotion behind them were so profound that they took his breath. This was wisdom not born of age, but of experience. As worldly as he was, as much as he had endured, what Kurt had been put through was so far beyond his own reality.

“I finished medical school, and then my residency and specialization, and began practicing,” Kurt continued. “I met Aidan through Bianca. She never suspected we were anything more than friends and never found out until it was over.”

“Why did it end?” Nikolas asked. “You said you loved him very much. I can tell from the look in your eyes just how true that is.”

“I think …” Kurt paused, his eyes turning distant. “I think we always expected our paths would cross again and we would pick up where we had left off. It wasn’t that we had stopped loving each other or fallen in love with other people. We hadn’t grown apart so much as we grew more into our own skins. I was a vastly different person after loving Aidan than I was before I knew him, and I’m so grateful to him for that.

“He made me feel wanted again, and for the right reasons. He made me feel … beautiful … and sexy and unspoiled. Our life together was very passionate, but also very loving. I think the truth, at the end of the day, is that Aidan is my Emily.”

Nikolas blinked back tears. “Then you should be with him, Kurt. As much as I want this to happen, as much as I want you, your happiness is more important.”

“Nikki, what I had with Aidan is over and might-have-beens are off the table. My time apart from him has seen another metamorphosis, and I’m not the man I was with him. That’s also a good thing. Knowing Aidan, loving him and being loved by him, was one of the greatest gifts of my life and I will treasure it for the rest of my life, but it’s over now.”

“But …”

“He’s my cousin.”

“W-What?”

“Until I arrived in Port Charles, I never had cause to question anyone with the surname Devane. Now I know better.”

“Oh, Jesus, Kurt.”

“It hurts,” Kurt admitted, “and it will probably hurt for a while, but …”

“Sometimes you don’t get closure.”
Kurt nodded. “I think he’s someone I would’ve liked to have met.”

Kurt grinned. “You did. He was standing next to Jax outside Robin’s funeral.”

Nikolas widened his eyes. That fucking gorgeous British stud? With his tight, lithe body and the perfectly symmetrical face?

Kurt’s smile lengthened. “That’s him. If you think the face is incredible, you should see what’s below the belt.”

“He was good?” Nikolas asked, eyes dilating at the thought of Kurt and Aidan in bed together.

“Aidan is an amazing lover, one who gives even more than he takes. I learned much from him and look forward to showing you later.”

Nikolas flushed.

“As for Jax, it was nothing more than flirtation, another might-have-been. Jax is very handsome and incredibly charming. After Aidan, I was sad and directionless and wondered if I would ever be happy again.”

He shrugged. “Jax made me happy for a few days. He made me smile and laugh and reminded me that life goes on. We never slept together. We always assumed something would happen later, when we had more time, but it never did.”

“He wants it to happen now.”

“He’s recently divorced and is lonely. We both should understand that.”

Nikolas ducked his head.

“I do think we need to talk about our expectations,” Kurt said seriously, “because I don’t want to go into this blind, Nikki. We have the potential to hurt each other, and I would prefer we remain only friends rather than risk that for something which might only be fleeting.”

“That’s reasonable,” Nikolas said. “What are your expectations?”

“I have none, and it’s important you know that. I don’t want a relationship, Nikki. I’m not ready for one, nor do I expect to be anytime soon. In a lot of ways, it feels like, for the first time, my life is my own. As much as I love you as a friend and desire you as a lover, I won’t surrender my independence to anyone for any reason.”

“I understand.”

“Do you? While our age difference no longer stands in the way of a physical relationship, it’s still there. We’re in different phases of life. You’ve been running Cassadine Industries for years; my career is only just beginning. You’ve been married more than once; I’ve never been married and don’t particularly want to experience it. You have a child, and he has to be your priority; I don’t want children. I’m sure that, once I get to know Spencer, I’ll adore him, but I will never be his stepfather.

“I don’t want you to put all your eggs in my basket, Nikki, because I can’t deliver. I can’t be your happily-ever-after. But, if you would like me to be your happy-for-now, well, I believe I’d like to
Nikolas was silent for several long moments, desperate to deny the many fantasies he had constructed were now falling to pieces before his eyes. Everything Lucky and Elizabeth had told him was now roaring in his ears, reminding him he had jumped into pursuing Kurt without once stopping to regard him as a person and not as the boy he remembered or the man with whom he wished to make love.

Kurt’s profession was his priority, as was only right. He had spent a lot of money and a decade training for it. He was already highly regarded and had only been practicing for less than three years. His job as Chief Medical Examiner would most likely demand a significant portion of his time.

Nikolas, as a major shareholder of General Hospital, out of which the CME practiced, understood Kurt would be overworked and overburdened and currently had no support staff, let alone a roster of forensic pathologists to cover him for vacations or even a night out. Once Kurt took up his duties full-time, it was highly likely he would often be unavailable.

Kurt didn’t want to get married. Nikolas silently admitted this was somewhat surprising, for Kurt had always been a fairly traditional person. He briefly wondered if the rape had anything to do with this decision before ruthlessly quashing that obnoxious thought. Maybe it was that boy from high school, or Aidan, or any number of things.

Maybe the simple truth was that he hadn’t taken the time to get to know the man Kurt had become.

He also appreciated the subtle warning. Kurt didn’t want children; even if he did come to love Spencer, he wouldn’t love him as his own. That was significant. Nikolas couldn’t afford to have his son become attached to someone who …

Wait. Stop and think.

Marriage and children? How did the sexy talk of earlier segue to this? Because he was rushing things again. Lucky had asked what he would do if Kurt just wanted to sleep with him, so … what, exactly, did Nikolas Cassadine want?

“Heavy thoughts?” asked a gentle Kurt.

“No so much heavy as multitudinous,” Nikolas said after a moment. “You’ve given me a lot to think about and … I like that. I like how honest you are. I like that you know who you are and what you want, and that you don’t apologize for it.”

Kurt raised a brow.

“Not that you should,” Nikolas rushed to add, “it’s just that you’re far more self-aware than I was at your age, or even the age I am now. It’s, well, it’s a little intimidating, actually.”

“Maybe this is a topic we should revisit later in the evening,” Kurt suggested.

“As long as we agree not to table it permanently.”

“Agreed.”

Nikolas smiled, somewhat relieved. “How did Mom’s interview go?”

Kurt grinned. “Well. I hired her, of course. I’d be a fool if I didn’t. Monica approved.”
“That’s terrific! I’m sure she’s happy. She and Lucky are having dinner tonight with the boys. So now you have one staff member.”

Kurt sipped his wine. “Two, actually. I hired Holly as my department manager.”

Nikolas furrowed his brow.

“I asked them separately if they foresaw any problems working together, but both assured me they didn’t. I’ve heard about their history from Holly, who told me she had nothing but respect for Laura. Any other rumors about them have been manufactured by outside sources. Isn’t it sad people feel the need to do that to women?”

Nikolas said nothing, aware that he had never asked his mother about Holly, only listening to the stories of others, most of whom hadn’t even been present when it occurred. He cleared his throat.

“Carly told me you had quite a day.”

Kurt made an affirmative hum. “My stepbrother and his wife, along with their children, showed up today at the hotel without warning.”

Nikolas frowned. “Finn, right? I didn’t know you were in contact.”

“We weren’t. Rachel, his wife, saw my picture in the paper and decided to take a family vacation to Port Charles. Brenda intercepted them before they could wreak too much havoc and babysat them until I was able to leave the hospital. I owe her. Big time. Hours alone with Finn and Rachel deserves at least several carats of semi-precious stones.”

Nikolas snickered. “So what happened when you got here?”

Kurt spilled the story about his relationship with Sam and what Rachel had done to them, as well as her interference in his relationship with Finn.

Nikolas stared. Who was that conniving in high school? It boggled the mind.

“Wait,” he said, holding up a hand. “You’re telling me she decided, on her own initiative, that you and Sam were destined to break up anyway, so she helped it along? And how does severing ties between you and Finn help anyone?”

“In her convoluted mind, she was saving all of us from our relationships deteriorating because of distance and my life outside of Lima. I actually think she somewhat believed it. That’s Rachel: always doing the wrong things for the right reasons. I choose to believe she wanted the best for me, but she didn’t know how to be a good friend. I hope she’s learned by now, for her children’s sake.

“Rachel and I were always jealous of each other’s talents and she often tried to undermine me to make herself shine. That’s really sad is that it was unnecessary. She’s tremendously talented and I’ve always been the first to say it. I was not her friend and I think that bothered her, and I certainly didn’t care for her ridiculous antics, but I’ve always respected her ability.”

“Did she respect yours?”

“I think so,” Kurt said slowly, “but she automatically equates anyone with talent as her rival. That aside, she also believed I was really her only competition, so I was often her target.”

“Do you still sing?”
“Sometimes,” Kurt said softly, smiling and ducking his head, “but only when I’m moved. I used to perform because I felt that was the only thing that was special about me. Singing was my way of proving that I had worth as a human being. Now when I sing, I do it because it makes me happy.”

Nikolas wanted to ask more, including asking Kurt to sing for him one day, but sensed it was a sensitive subject and let it go. “So what are you going to do about Rachel and Finn?”

Kurt blew out a breath. “They’re here for another couple of days. I’ve reconciled with Finn, but we both know we can’t orbit each other for very long. It never works out well. As for Rachel, I want to forgive her, but haven’t yet figured out if I’d do it because it’s the right thing or because I want to appear the bigger person. Until I determine that, I won’t do anything. The wrong thing done for the right reason is still the wrong thing.”

“You’re very wise.”

“I don’t know if that’s true, but I hope it is. At least, I hope I will be, one day.”

They smiled at each other.

Kurt cleared his throat. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

Nikolas frowned and straightened his shoulders. “All right.”

“I asked Mac to allow me to tell you, rather than you learning it in the papers tomorrow.”

The frown deepened. “Kurt, what is it?”

“Anthony Zacchara is dead.”

Nikolas stared for what felt like minutes. Kurt waited patiently, knowing Nikki would have to assimilate this on his own time.

“Would you repeat that, please?”

Kurt nodded. “Anthony Zacchara is dead. I conducted his postmortem this afternoon.”

Nikolas swallowed heavily and looked away. “How did he die?” he finally rasped.

“Officially, from natural causes.”

Nikolas swung his head back around and searched Kurt’s eyes. “What does that mean?”

“Exactly what I said,” Kurt said carefully, knowing but not caring about the seeds he was planting within Nikolas’ mind. In this case, discretion was not the better part of valor. Nikolas had suffered too long and too much. “According to my findings, he died of natural causes.”

“Kurt, what are you saying?” a terse Nikolas demanded.

“I’m saying Emily has been avenged.”

Nikolas began breathing shallowly as Kurt sipped his wine, his eyes on Nikolas the entire time.

Nikolas understood the allusion; he just couldn’t believe it. He didn’t want to believe it, yet he did. He thought he knew Kurt, knew his character, but if this night had proven anything, it was that he didn’t know Kurt at all. The question was: did he want to know this person?
He loved Kurt. He trusted him and would trust him with Spencer. He also remembered there had always been darker aspects of Kurt’s personality; they just hadn’t manifested often when they were children. His grandmother Katrine, or whoever the hell she really was, had been considered the French version of Helena, minus the madness.

Helena had despised Emily with a passion and was therefore unmoved by her death, but Helena had often killed those who had wronged her. Once upon a time, she had done that to those who had harmed the ones she loved. It was all too possible Katrine had done the same and Kurt had learned at her knee. Vengeance and retribution were still very much a part of the very old families.

Kurt had only known Emily tangentially, but would have understood what her loss meant. He was a loyal friend and an excellent ally, and could be ruthless when the situation demanded. So how was this any different?

Nikolas couldn’t lie and say he didn’t feel tremendous relief, even happiness, that monster was dead. Zacchara had been nothing but gangster scum known for killing the family and friends, including the children, of his enemies. He had murdered his wife. He had tortured his children, including pimping out his own daughter, and had tried to kill Claudia and Jonny more than once.

He had stabbed Rick, attacked Nadine, attacked Maxie and Spinelli, attacked Lulu several times, attacked Elizabeth, and shot Kate. He had murdered Emily and Leyla.

So why should he care if Zacchara was dead? He didn’t. The man had threatened everyone Nikolas loved and murdered the love of his life. He launched an insanity defense which everyone knew was bogus, but it had worked. Instead of rotting in jail as he deserved, Anthony had laid in a bed in an asylum and his every need was tended.

As for Kurt …

Kurt had done what Nikolas knew he hadn’t the guts to do himself. He felt guilty and ashamed for his inaction. He even felt somewhat emasculated. His code, the one with which he had been raised, demanded recompense for Anthony’s crimes against the Cassadine family. He might not have agreed with or practiced the code, but he understood it. It was rooted deeply in his bones. He wasn’t about to proclaim any moral superiority or spout righteous indignation over what Kurt had done. Many of his own actions over the years had robbed him of the opportunity to play the principled prig with any credibility.

There was a part of him, one he often tried to deny, one that hallmarked his descent from Helena, that not only approved but deeply appreciated Kurt taking control of the situation. Perhaps Emily could now rest in peace. She deserved that, and so did Monica and even Jason.

At the end of the day, there was no difference between Kurt killing Anthony and Holly killing Kurt’s rapist, an act Nikolas lauded and of which he was envious.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

Kurt looked at him, eyes brimming with innocence. “For what?”

“For telling me in person,” Nikolas quickly said.

“Of course,” Kurt said evenly. “It was the very least I could do for one of the most important people in my life.”

They both relaxed and spoke of inconsequential things after they ordered and then consumed their meals. Holly and Mac made an appearance and nodded in their direction. After everyone had eaten,
Kurt had excused himself and invited Holly to dance, waltzing her across the floor. He then danced with Elizabeth and Carly, before returning to the table and claiming Nikolas’ hand.

“Do your best to keep up,” Kurt grinned.

“I beg your pardon?” asked a highly offended Nikolas. “We shared dance classes, Kurt. You know very well I know my way around the floor.”

“True,” Kurt acknowledged, “but this time you’ll be following.”

“You’re leading?”

“I always do.”

Nikolas gave him a shy smile and followed Kurt onto the floor. It was an interesting experience and, for the first time, he appreciated the level of trust demanded on behalf of the follower. But he already trusted Kurt implicitly and allowed him to move them across the floor with elegance and ease.

They danced several times that evening, much to the fawning of Carly and Elizabeth and under the watchful eye of Holly. There were a few others in the crowd whom Nikolas recognized, and he was sure those people would set tongues wagging come tomorrow, but he truly didn’t care.

No, he didn’t know everything about Kurt, this adult Kurt who was holding him tightly in strong arms, but he knew what he felt. He wanted Kurt, wanted to be with him, and nothing said this night had changed that.

After Kurt had paid the bill, much to the vociferous protestation of his companion, Nikolas followed him into the elevator and, later, into his room.

He didn’t emerge until the next morning.
Nikolas fought his return to consciousness, wanting to cocoon himself in Kurt’s warm embrace forever, but he knew he should get home to his son.

He opened his eyes carefully, turning his head and looking at Kurt. He looked like an angel. Strange, considering the debauchery of the previous evening. He muffled a groan at the spasm of pain erupting at the base of his spine.

It had been worth it. Being with Kurt had surpassed even his most fevered dream.

Kurt was indeed a skilled lover, and never before had Nikolas felt so satisfied and satiated. He felt momentary guilt, as though he were betraying Emily or his other lovers, but then he realized his lovemaking with Kurt had been a vastly different experience.

Never before had he felt so vulnerable, and yet so safe, as he had with Kurt last night. He had opened himself both literally and figuratively, and he didn’t regret it. He wanted even more, as if they hadn’t already committed acts which were punishable by death in some countries.

He still felt pleasantly full, as though Kurt were still inside him, and he relished it, his muscles involuntarily clenching. He thought entering Kurt had been the apex of ecstasy, an action he had long thought would be forever denied him, but the moment he had felt Kurt push his way inside him, he knew what true hunger was.

He had been so wanton, his body so yielding, and he had been shameless in his begging. He felt no shame, however, only desire.

“Such heavy thoughts for so early in the morning,” Kurt whispered in his ear. “Regrets?”

“Not a single one,” Nikolas said with a happy sigh, tightening his hold. “Last night was amazing. You were amazing.”


Nikolas shivered with need. “I was good?”

Kurt shifted and faced him. “You were incredible. Surely you don’t doubt that?”

Nikolas blushed. “I … I wasn’t sure. I had never …”

Kurt held a finger to Nikolas’s lips, which slowly parted as Nikolas lovingly sucked on it. “You were magnificent. I always knew you would be.”

“I should get going,” Nikolas said mournfully. “Spencer has school soon.”

Kurt offered a half-smile. “Don’t apologize for being a good father, Nikki, and don’t feel as though this won’t be repeated.”

“You still want me?” Nikolas asked carefully, embarrassed by his bashfulness.

Kurt carefully took the other man’s face in his hands. “I’ve wanted you for years, Nikolas. That doesn’t stop because of one night together.”

Nikolas blew out a breath, not wanting to push for more than he knew Kurt was ready. He knew he
needed to be respectful of Kurt’s boundaries. “What do we tell people?”

Kurt blinked. “I don’t see why we should tell them anything, but if you wish to do so, I’m more than happy to confirm I spent the night with a man I’ve loved for more than half my life.”

Nikolas ducked his head. “I just … I don’t want to presume or make you feel as though I didn’t hear you last night at dinner.”

“I understand, and I thank you for it,” Kurt said, “but please don’t feel as though this is something you feel you should hide, or that I’m in any way uncomfortable in acknowledging that we’ve become lovers. I meant what I said last night: I don’t want a relationship right now, but that doesn’t mean I’m opposed to having a very satisfying affair.”

Nikolas pondered the thought. “An affair. I like the sound of it.”

Kurt leaned forward and captured Nikolas’ mouth in a passionate kiss. “Good,” he purred.

Nikolas moaned and his hands traveled down the silky skin of Kurt’s back, clutching the tight ass in his hands. “Please tell me we can do this again soon?”

“How about tonight? I’m a doctor in real life, but I’ve never played one in the bedroom.” He smirked and arched a brow. “Interested?”

Nikolas was sure his hardening cock expressed his interest, so he took the opportunity to rut against Kurt.

“Feels good,” Kurt groaned. “Would the prince be so kind as to fuck the duke in the shower?”

“Do you even have to ask?”

Kurt smiled and trailed kisses across Nikolas’ jaw. “I love the way you taste, but this time, I want you to come inside me.”

“Are you sure?” Nikolas panted, his words slurring.

“Yes. And what would you like, Nikki?”

Nikolas’ eyes fluttered. “My face. I want you to come on my face.”

“Well, aren’t you a dirty boy? Let’s go soil you a bit more before cleaning you up.”

Forty minutes later, Kurt and Nikolas emerged from the former’s bedroom. Kurt was dressed in a pair of silk pajama bottoms and a fluffy white bathrobe. Nikolas was outfitted in last night’s attire, wondering when Kurt had found the time to have it washed and pressed.

“Good morning, boys,” Holly said easily as she sipped her tea and scanned the newspaper.
“It’s a beautiful morning,” Kurt said, crossing the room to drop a kiss on her cheek before pouring himself some coffee. “Would you like a cup, Nikki?”

Nikolas wasn’t sure what to do or say. It was obvious Holly knew what had happened last night, yet she appeared utterly unruffled. Nikolas understood that was because she was an adult and was treating them as adults. Nikolas often forget he was a an adult, even though he had a child of his own.

“Holly isn’t judging us, Nikki,” Kurt said softly.

Holly looked up with a raised eyebrow. “Of course not! Whatever happens between you is your own business.”

Nikolas shook his head to clear it. “Sorry. I just …”

“No explanations needed,” Holly said with an indulgent smile. “Would you care for a croissant?”

“Thank you, no,” Nikolas said, his voice finding strength. “I really should get going. I want to see Spencer before he leaves for school, and Lucky wanted to have breakfast together.”

Kurt walked toward him and placed a gentle kiss on Nikolas’ lips. “Please give them my best.”

“May I call you later?” Nikolas asked.

“Of course, and I’ll see you tonight.”

Nikolas pressed several more kisses on Kurt’s mouth, no longer caring that Holly was in the room. “Thank you for last night,” he whispered.

“Thank you for making me feel loved.”

“I do, you know. Love you.”

“I love you, too,” Kurt said with an easy smile.

Another kiss and Nikolas was gone from the room. As he walked toward the elevator, he realized that being with Kurt was worth anything, and he found he truly didn’t mind a relationship on Kurt’s terms. In fact, it was very liberating. There were no expectations other than incredible sex and their already existing, and now deepening, friendship.

He couldn’t wait for tonight.

Jax was in the lobby when Nikolas emerged from the elevator.

He saw red.

That bloody prince appeared even more smug and pompous than usual. It wasn’t terribly difficult
to discern Cassadine had passed the night in Kurt’s room.

He seethed with envy, but little surprise. He had rather expected Kurt would sleep with Nikolas and now he better understood Carly’s warning. If he had interfered at all during their date last night, he would only have driven Kurt further into Cassadine’s waiting arms.

But all was not lost, and Jax made sure to keep the goal in sight. Yes, he was disappointed Kurt and Nikolas had slept together, but he wouldn’t be surrendering his claim anytime soon. Sex was sex, and he well knew Kurt was a very sexual person. Frankly, so was Nikolas.

There was a distinct difference, however, between sex and making love, and Jax doubted that what Nikolas and Kurt shared last night was the latter. He knew of Aidan, of how much Kurt had loved him, and part of the reason he and Kurt hadn’t crossed certain lines during their time in Australia was because of that love. When Jax made the decision to court Kurt, he had already accepted that some part of the other man would always be in love with Aidan Devane.

Devane.

Oh, god.

Jax immediately made the connection and was devastated for Kurt. He couldn’t even imagine what Kurt had been through since his arrival in Port Charles: discovering his mother, losing a sister, and now incest? He felt sorrow for both Kurt and Aidan, for he knew how much they had loved one another, and for that love now to be tainted by something completely out of their control was horrifying.

“Are you going to say anything to Nikolas?” Carly asked, sidling up to her ex.

Jax looked down and shook his head. “It’s not my place,” he said quietly. “I’m not going to give up on Kurt, but he’s made his decision for now. I won’t chase him, either. I want him to be happy, and not because I forced it.”

Carly looked at him with startled eyes.

“What?”

She smiled. “I see the man I fell in love with. It’s been a while and I’ve missed him.”

He stared at her for what felt like minutes, unable to say that the woman he saw before him was becoming the best version of herself he had ever known. “I was wrong to blame you.”

“No, you weren’t,” she said staunchly. “Sure, we both made mistakes, but my sins far outweighed yours, and I’m owning that. It’s time I did. We’re both to blame for the loss of our marriage, but I meant what I said yesterday: I want us to be friends.”

He grinned, though it was pained. “We are, Carly.”

She nodded and put her chin on his shoulder. “Are you thinking about Courtney?”

“Yes,” he admitted, “and Emily. Nikolas and I set both of them on their paths to destruction because we were too invested in besting each other.”

“I disagree. Courtney was ultimately killed because of Helena’s machinations and Emily was murdered by a psychopath. Taking on the onus of that diminishes them both. They were strong women. They fought hard all of their lives, and they fought hard to remain with the people they
loved. Blaming yourself and Nikolas takes away their agency. Own your choices, Jax, not those of others.”

His eyes widened. “What on earth is happening to you?”

She stepped away and then in front of him. “I woke up. I woke up and looked around and realized half the people I knew, for better or worse, are gone. I loved Sonny, but we made each other crazy. I’m glad we ended when it did, before it drove our children into an asylum. I loved you, but we were always better friends than we were lovers. I hated Robin for half of my life, but no one has ever, nor will ever, understand me the way she did.

“Lucas left town. Tony’s dead. I lost years with Michael.” She shook her head. “No more. I realized I became so obsessed with losing people, with losing control of my life and the people in it, that I was actively driving them away. No one is responsible for that but me, and it ends now.

“I love Jason, but I’m not in love with him. It took me a long time to realize that, and even longer to accept it. I never should have interfered in his relationship with Elizabeth. It was the healthiest one Jason has ever been in, even more so than his with Robin. I built my life around him, I sacrificed a part of myself for him, and the worst part is that he never asked me to do any of it. I did that myself because I was terrified of losing him.”

She looked away. “I’ve had boyfriends, lovers, and husbands, but I’ve only ever had one true friend.”

He took her hand in his. “I understand.”

She looked back toward him, confusion marring her features. Now that she considered it, she knew Jax had many friends and considered Alexis his best friend, but knew there were parts of him he kept removed from even her.

“Mac.”

She frowned. She knew Jax and Mac knew each other years ago in Australia, but truthfully hadn’t thought much on it. She now remembered their encounters, the uneasiness which lied between both men whenever they orbited each other.

“I did a horrible thing to him, Carly, and even though I apologized, it was insincere. Mac knew that. He accepted it, but he has never let me back into his life, and I can’t blame him.”

She tilted her head. “Robin’s funeral … you came back for Mac, didn’t you?”

“He was a big part of it, but I loved Robin in her own right. I hated her for a long time after she exposed what we did to Nikolas, but she was right to do it. No parent should be kept from their child as we tried to do with Spencer, as was done to Robin and Anna, and then Kurt and Anna.”

She bowed her head, bile on her tongue. She had done a lot of heinous things since setting foot in Port Charles, but that bitter regret haunted her the most. But she was no longer that person, and Kurt had made her realize that. If she wanted to be better, and she did, then she had to do better. She was trying. She was putting forth an honest effort and, so far, the dividends were more than paying off.

She had Kurt, and he had shown her what true friendship was. She still loved Jason deeply and would probably always consider him one of her best friends, but she had allowed herself to be consumed by him, constructing some fantasy world in which she was the most important person in his life. It wasn’t enough that he was her friend, that he loved and defended her every action; she
had wanted more.

This crevasse of loneliness which had appeared within her as a child was a constant, gnawing, craven mass that was always demanding more, that never allowed her to be satisfied with what she had. For years she had been trying to fill it to no avail. It wasn’t enough that she had found Bobbie; she felt the need to punish her mother for seemingly abandoning her. Then came that awful mess with Tony, and then A.J.

She had destroyed both those men and never felt a whit of guilt, instead insisting she was owed whatever she wanted simply because she wanted it. She believed everyone had wronged her and therefore excused her own trespasses. She had seen Robin and Elizabeth as mountains she had to traverse in order to conquer her own life, never stopping to realize that they existed as their own women, not merely as roadblocks to her desired goal.

She was ashamed. It was perhaps the most raw and honest feeling she had ever experienced. But it was over. She had Kurt, she had Jason, and she had Elizabeth. She knew that, in a pinch, she could call upon Kate and Brenda. She probably never would, but the potential was there, and that was disarming and bracingly new.

“Piece of advice?” she asked.

Jax blinked and then nodded.

“Apologize to Mac again, and, this time, mean it.”

“Are we going to be all right?” Rachel quietly asked Finn.

“Eventually,” he said with a shrug, “but not anytime soon. It’s going to take a while for me to accept and forgive the fact that you basically kept me from my brother for half our lives, and that doesn’t begin to cover what you did to Kurt and Sam.”

She dropped her eyes.

“We both know you did that to hurt Kurt, not out of any desire to help Sam or anyone else. I don’t know what you have against Kurt, but there’s something. We all know it. We talked about it then.”

She set her jaw.

“We’re pushing thirty, Rachel. We’ve got two kids, a mortgage, and a life. This isn’t high school and, frankly, it was ridiculous even then. Kurt says I should forgive you because you’re my wife and the mother of my kids, and I get that, but that doesn’t mean you don’t owe restitution to the people you hurt, and you can begin with telling me why you really did it.”

“He never once picked me,” she murmured.
“What?”

“Kurt. He never picked me. I was never his duet partner. I was never his friend. I was nothing to him.”

“You sang together.”

“One time, and it was a throwaway. It didn’t mean anything to him.”

Finn stared at her. “Is that what this has been about? You’re jealous? Of what? Why?”

“Do you remember what Kurt and Mercedes were like back in high school?”

He blinked. “I remember that Kurt was a lot more of a bitch when he hung with her full-time. I know that she’s the one who convinced him not to tell me about Beth, though he wanted to and tried more than once.”

She pulled a face. She didn’t know that.

“I remember Mercedes treated him more like an accessory than a friend. I remember her shooting down any interest he had in anyone: me, Sam, Blaine. I’m glad he listened to her about Blaine, though.”

His eyes widened. “Wait a minute. Was that why you went after Blaine at your party? Because you thought Blaine had Kurt and you didn’t?”

She flushed.

“Are you serious, Rachel? Kurt was never with Blaine!”

“I know that now,” she said, “but yes, that’s part of the reason I pursued Blaine that night. Part of it was also about making you jealous.” She bit her lip. “And part of it was about showing Kurt that I could take anyone from him, like I did you.”

He blanched. “What?”

“Finn, if you want me to be honest, then you need to be honest, too.”

“What are you even talking about?” he demanded.

“You were in love with Kurt and, in a way, you always have been. You forced those feelings to become something else when your parents married, but if we’re talking about things we all knew back then, we all knew you liked Kurt as more than just a friend. Everyone knew it but Kurt.”

He stared at her. “You’re right.”

Her mouth fell open. “What?” she finally gasped.

“I was in love with Kurt. At the lowest point in my life, he was the only one who stood by me, who was all about me, who tried to make me realize that I mattered as a person. He was a better friend to me than Puck ever was. He was a better partner to me than Quinn ever was. He loved me for me, not for what I could do for him.

“But the bottom line is that I can’t be what I’m not, and I’m not gay. If I ever thought for a moment I was, I would’ve grabbed Kurt years ago and never looked back. He wanted to be my everything, and I could’ve twisted and pulled and made him just that, but I could never be that for him. I could
never make him happy the way he deserved.

“Yeah, I was in love with Kurt, but it wasn’t a sexual love. That’s what you and everyone else in Glee tried to insinuate, that any feelings I had for him were gay and therefore wrong.”

“I never meant for you to feel that way,” she whispered.

“Yes, you did.”

She looked up at him. “That’s not true, Finn.”

“Yeah, it is. You just admitted you wanted with Kurt what he had with Mercedes in high school. Well, it’s apparent you weren’t looking very hard, because they didn’t have much. All she ever did was boss him around and tell him what he should feel, all while disregarding and downplaying what he did feel. That’s not friendship. That’s control. Once he broke free of her control, well … Kurt kept in contact with Santana and Brittany, and Quinn, and Artie and Tina, and Mike, but not Mercedes, who was supposedly his best friend. Why do you think that is?”

“I never realized …”

“No,” he agreed, “but you realized other things back then, didn’t you? Like the fact that I probably would have chosen Kurt over you had he ever asked, but that’s the thing, Rachel: he didn’t ask. He never would.”

She inhaled sharply.

He laughed. “For all your obsession with Kurt, you don’t know him very well. Do you think he liked being Mercedes’ lap dog? He didn’t. Do you think Mercedes truly loved him as she said? Perhaps to some extent, but who was she without him, Rachel? She had no other friends, but Kurt did. She shot off her loud mouth often enough, but when it got her into real physical trouble, who rode to the rescue?”

“She wasn’t really his friend?” Rachel asked, filled with disbelief.

“She was his friend because no one else was willing to be hers,” Finn spat. “You’ll notice Artie and Tina, Kurt’s oldest friends, couldn’t stand her. Mike and Matt had nothing to do with her. She and Puck loathed one another, for their own selfish reasons. Whatever goodwill she earned with Quinn eroded quickly when Mercedes told her she couldn’t be friends with both her and Kurt; Quinn chose Kurt.

“She warned Kurt away from me because she knew I would take Kurt from her, and I would’ve. I never liked her. She’s toxic. She warned Kurt away from Sam because she wanted Sam for herself. She’s controlling and manipulative. Actually, she’s a lot like you. I saw it then, too, but I was willing to look past it because I never believed you could be so hurtful. But you were. You hurt Kurt horribly. You hurt me and you hurt Sam. You hurt all of us for no good reason. You hurt us because you could.”

Tears sprung to her eyes. “I really am so very sorry, Finn.”

He glared at her. “I think you are, but like I said, I’m not going to get over this anytime soon.”

“I understand, and I agree with you about restitution. I’ll apologize to Kurt later today.”

“I really think you should just stay away from him, Rachel, unless or until he initiates contact. He’s not the little boy you remember and you’re nowhere near his league.”
“What is that supposed to mean?” she barked.

“Really? Just like that, you fall back into competition with someone who was never competing with you. This is Kurt’s town, Rachel. His mother is here, and so are some of his best friends. He’s the Chief Medical Examiner. He works with the police. Last night he was on a date with an honest-to-goodness prince!

“With the exception of Brittany and Santana, who are both as scary as hell, his other girls aren’t Quinn or Tina or Mercedes. One’s an international supermodel with ties to the mob who can probably have you eliminated with one phone call. One owns and publishes her own magazine, and is renowned the world over, but especially in New York; one call from her and the only time you’ll set foot in a theater again is to clean it. Finally, one owns this hotel, is divorced from two mafia dons, and could give the Wicked Witch of the West lessons in how to appear menacing. And let’s not forget Erica Kane.”

“So what should I do?” she asked in defeat.

“If you lie very still, he might just sniff you and leave you alone. Just remember, Rachel: for all of his money and friends and education, Kurt is still Kurt Hummel. He could’ve taken any one of us apart with ease back in high school, and I imagine he’s only better at it now. Don’t antagonize him.”

“What are you trying to avoid telling me?” Kurt asked Holly as he popped a bit of croissant into his mouth.

She blew a raspberry. “I wasn’t avoiding. I was merely waiting for the right time.”

“And when will that be?”

She raised a brow. “Now.” She passed him a file. “The DNA is back.”

He widened his eyes and took the folder with a noticeable tremor in his hand. “What does it say?”

“I think you already know,” she said kindly.

He closed his eyes and exhaled. “Damian really is my brother.”

“And you’re still Kurt Hummel. Burt is still your father. This doesn’t change anything.”

“I have to tell him.”

“If you wish.”

He opened his eyes. “You don’t think I should?”

“I never said that. All I’m saying is that the decision is yours. If you wish to keep it to yourself, then do so. You don’t owe him anything, Kurt. He’s an adult. We both read the dossier. He’s
involved, at least tangentially, with Sonny Corinthos. He’s partners with Jason Morgan’s wife. He has more money than that of his questionable claim to Burt’s estate would entitle him.”

She paused. “You have to decide if you wish to pursue a relationship with him because that’s what you want, not because it’s something you feel compelled to do. So what do you want?”

“I don’t know,” he softly admitted after a moment, “but I just lost a sister I never knew, Holly. I don’t want to lose a brother, too.”

She grabbed his hand and smiled, tears in her eyes. “Then I think your decision is made.”
Kurt hovered outside the door of Jason Morgan’s penthouse apartment, his mind whirling with the implications of what he was about to do. He had hemmed and hawed, debated the pros and cons, listened to welcome advice from Holly and Carly, and still didn’t know if this was the best course of action.

He knew his feelings about this were irrelevant. He had to do this for his father.

There was no doubt in his mind that, had Burt known about Damian, he would’ve taken care of him, loved him, and been a real father to him. Even now, almost fifteen years after his death, Kurt could still hear his father’s voice in his head. Over time, that voice had replaced his mother’s as Kurt’s conscience.

Anna. He supposed she should be told, as well. The news didn’t really affect her, but he knew it would impact her. Selfishly, he wanted to delegate the task to Holly or Patrick or anyone else, but he knew he had to deal with his mother sooner or later.

Later was now. He had taken too long, trying and failing to pull himself together, leaving Anna to wonder and worry and mourn. He hadn’t been fair to her. Yes, he had been hurt and abandoned and spent his life mourning his mother, but that wasn’t her fault. His silence, no matter how he intended it, was hurtful to her. He didn’t have to let her be his mother, but he owed her a conversation.

He took a deep breath and knocked.

Sam was watching her husband carefully but with apparent nonchalance. She knew something had changed about him, about their relationship, but she didn’t know what it was. Her automatic response was to blame Carly or Elizabeth, but she knew Jason hadn’t spoken to either of them since before Robin’s funeral.

That was strange. Despite Carly’s previous rancor for Robin, she should have been haunting their apartment, demanding Jason talk about his feelings. Maybe that would have been for the best. He certainly wasn’t talking to his wife.

She could have initiated conversation, but she was scared. She sensed there were questions coming her way for which she had no answers. Questions about their marriage, about the baby, about what had happened in Hawaii.

She wasn’t hiding anything from him. She had learned long ago it never worked. She truly didn’t know what had happened.

The marriage had been rushed. She was still surprised it had happened at all, that Jason had even asked. She had never believed he would, no matter how close they had gotten. He had been so unlike himself, almost as if he were another person. She hadn’t understood then his lost time or the severity of his seizures.

Hawaii was a blur for them both. She was scared to admit she didn’t remember most of their time there. They had awoken one morning in bed together, which was natural enough, she supposed, and
then had made their way back to Port Charles on schedule.

No one was more surprised than she by her pregnancy. She had been told, and had believed, she
would never carry another child. Then she was pregnant, and they were both astonished but
grateful.

Now, however, there were doubts. She was pregnant, that wasn’t in question, but how had it
happened? She didn’t remember making love with Jason. They hadn’t made love since they had
returned home, and Jason was frighteningly distant with her. She thought at first it was the surgery,
then Robin’s death, then the arrival of Robin’s brother and what that meant, his continual
mourning for Jake, but there was something else.

*Someone else,* her subconscious hissed.

Robin had told them after the surgery there was a chance his memories of being Jason
Quartermaine would surface, that there might be personality shifts. She had never known Jason
Quartermaine, so she wouldn’t know if remnants appeared.

Jason didn’t have personality shifts so much as skips. There were moments he appeared completely
blank, as if he had stopped functioning altogether. These were entirely different from his moments
of purposeful stillness or quiet; they seemed unnatural, uncontrolled.

She wasn’t scared of him, but she was scared for him and didn’t know how to deal with that or
even approach it. She was always on tenterhooks with him, terrified that if she said or did the
wrong thing, she would lose him as she had before. He might take the baby. Spinelli was her
business partner, but he would side with Jason.

She wasn’t the woman she had been when first coming to Port Charles, though. She had resources.
She had friends. She had found her mother and, through her, two sisters. She knew she was loved.
She had options if she and Jason didn’t work out.

What scared her now was how appealing that realization was. She had spent years, so many years,
pining for Jason, desperate to get him back, to have another chance. Now she did and she wasn’t
happy. She wasn’t unhappy, true, but when he had slipped the ring on her finger, everything she
had believed she would feel in the immediacy of that moment hadn’t come.

That had shocked her into complacency. She went about her days, preparing for the baby, working
with Spinelli, and going through all the motions she knew were expected of her, but she felt
nothing other than numb.

The elation of the pregnancy soon ebbed and was replaced with astonishment and fear. She had lost
one baby; she knew she couldn’t handle losing another.

And the stakes were higher. She was ten years older. She wasn’t the girl she had been then and had
no desire to be, but she didn’t know who she was supposed to be now. She was finally married to
Jason, but all the things that hadn’t seemed important the last go around now bore much more
weight.

It mattered to her that his family didn’t like her. Yes, her mother didn’t approve of Jason either, but
Alexis approved of almost no one. Monica would be this child’s grandmother. Edward was cordial,
but she sensed the distaste. Tracy couldn’t stand her; Emily never could. Carly, who was outright
contemptible, was still Jason’s best friend and had no use for her. Neither did Sonny.

Regardless of what she felt for these people or they for her, they would be in her baby’s life. She
didn’t know how she felt about that. She rather believed she didn’t like it.

Her baby would be in danger because of Jason. She hadn’t appreciated what Elizabeth had gone through and, while she would never like the woman, she understood that fear now in a way she hadn’t then.

She had no idea what to say or do. If she brought these doubts and concerns to Jason, he would think she was hiding something or playing some game. They might have been husband and wife, but she knew he didn’t trust her fully, not like he had Robin or continued to trust Elizabeth. And she was coming to think she didn’t trust him either, not totally, not like she once had.

She was terrified of telling Jason she didn’t remember their honeymoon because there was every possibility he didn’t remember it either. And the implications of that were horrifying.

She watched as he prowled around the living room like a caged panther. She knew he was nervous about the PET scan tomorrow and what it would reveal. She knew he was uncomfortable with Patrick as his doctor; he felt guilty and responsible for Robin’s death and probably always would. She knew she couldn’t help him with that; she and Robin hadn’t liked each other, and he would interpret any attempt at comfort on her part as a dismissal of Robin’s sacrifice.

Her eyes slid toward Spinelli, who was acting even more manic than usual. She didn’t know precisely what was going on, which irked her since they were supposed to be partners, but he had admitted someone had hacked his laptop, which shouldn’t have been possible. She knew there was more to the story, but she’d had no success at pulling it from him. Frankly, she was as worried as he was; if someone was good enough to hack the Jackal, it surely didn’t mean anything good.

The knock at the door startled them all. Jason jumped, which disturbed both Sam and Spinelli. They watched as he stalked over toward the door and threw it open.

“Good afternoon. You must be Jason Morgan. I’m Kurt Hummel.”

Jason blinked and stared down at the man before him, unconsciously searching his face for traces of Robin. They were slight, but they were there. What he noticed most were the eyes. He couldn’t describe them as anything but beautiful. They were so compelling he found it difficult to maintain eye contact, which was something he had never experienced.

He realized after a beat that a hand was hanging midair in aborted greeting. Again, Jason blinked, unused to people wanting to touch him or affording him simple courtesy. He quickly shook the offered hand, surprised by the softness of the skin.

It was a surgeon’s hand, like that of Robin, the fingers were long and elegant. How odd they had been kept separated from each other all their lives but had both gravitated toward medicine, toward healing.

“How do you play the piano?” Jason asked softly.

Kurt startled. “I do, yes. How did you know?”

“Robin did, too.”
Jason saw the affect of those words, of the pain he had thoughtlessly inflicted. Everyone who had talked to him about this mysterious brother had wondered what Robin’s reaction would have been, but he had never stopped to think how Kurt Hummel was dealing with this. Finding his presumed-dead mother and losing a sister he would never know.

“Thank you for telling me,” Kurt said roughly. “I didn’t know that about her.”

Jason smiled. “Not many people did. She was taught by one of her father’s old girlfriends. I think her name was Katherine. Robin wasn’t very secure in her talent, so she never played in front of others. I only discovered it by accident.”

He paused. “She was better than she knew. That was true of many things about her.” He stepped aside and invited the man in, curious as to his presence.

Kurt nodded in thanks and stepped across the threshold, waiting to be introduced to the others.

“This is my wife Sam, and our friend Spinelli.”

Kurt shook hands with both and then turned back to Jason. “Please forgive me for coming by unannounced. I’m actually here to see Mr. Spinelli, but I’m glad you and your wife are here, too.”

Spinelli cocked his head.

“As you may know, I’m the Chief Medical Examiner of Port Charles. I thought you should be made aware that yesterday I conducted a postmortem on Anthony Zacchara.”

Sam stared as Spinelli gasped. Jason narrowed his eyes.

“As he committed crimes against all of you,” Kurt continued, “I hope this news bring you some measure of relief, if not comfort.”

“Did he suffer?” Jason hissed.

“His grandson asked me the same question, so I’ll give you the same answer. If it makes you happy to believe that he did, then he did.”

“How did Nikolas take the news?” Sam asked, wondering about her cousin’s mental state.

Kurt frowned. “It was more an absence of feeling than anything else. There was relief, of course, and justified righteousness, but his death doesn’t mitigate what he did.”

“But that’s not why you’re really here,” Jason said.

“No. As I said, I came to speak with Mr. Spinelli.”

“Why?” Spinelli blurted.

Kurt cleared his throat. “What I’m about to tell you, Mr. Spinelli, is something that may not be welcome news. If you would prefer Mr. and Mrs. Morgan to remain, I have no issue.”

Spinelli stared for a long moment and at last nodded.

“Why don’t you sit down?” Sam asked, taking a seat herself and placing a hand over her bulging stomach.

Kurt gave her a weak smile. “I’m afraid that if I did, I would lose what little nerve I have left.”
“Are … you’re not scared of me, are you?” Spinelli asked.

“I’m afraid of upsetting you, yes.”

“How would you do that?”

Jason backed away and took a seat in the armchair next to the couch, content to let Spinelli handle this. Whatever this was.

“As I’m sure you know,” Kurt said, “your network was recently hacked. I am responsible.”

Spinelli stiffened. “How? The entire system was coded by me. It’s unhackable.”

Jason and Sam were struck by how coherent Spinelli was. Gone was his occasional stutter, his aphorisms, his use of sobriquets. He was angry, to be sure, but they also sensed he was intrigued. He was gathering information in a methodical way, just as he had been trained.

Kurt repressed the urge to shrug. “It wasn’t done by me but, like I said, I am responsible.” He took a deep breath. “Before I left Paris, I received a letter that had taken years to find me. It had been first sent to my former home in Ohio, and then to every residence at which I lived until my last. It concerns you. May I show it to you?”

Spinelli gave a careful nod, surprised but pleased the man was willing to surrender it. His watched as Kurt withdrew the letter from his blazer pocket, eyes widening when he saw the familiar penmanship.

“You recognize the handwriting?”

Spinelli nodded again, this one shaky, as he licked his lips. “It’s my grandmother’s.”

“Would you like to read it, or would you prefer I tell you what it says?”

“The second. Please. I … we don’t have the best relationship. I don’t want …”

“Understood.” Kurt gathered a breath. “There’s no easy way to say this Damian, so I’m just going to summarize its contents and then explain to you what I’ve done since I’ve been in receipt of the letter.”

“Okay,” Spinelli warbled.

“This letter was originally sent to my father, Burt Hummel, who passed away when I was a senior in high school. From the dating, it was sent more than five years after his death, though it’s apparent your grandmother was unaware he had died.

“She wrote that you had recently arrived in Port Charles and she was concerned you were involving yourself with unsavory people.”

Jason and Sam frowned.

“Whether or not that’s true, or if that descriptor is true, is of no interest to me. I don’t judge people for their decisions, Damian.”

Spinelli cocked his head again, wondering why this man cared.

“She wanted my father to come to you and intervene, to make sure that you were all right and being cared for properly.”
“Why?” Sam asked.

Kurt locked eyes with Spinelli. “Because he was your father, too.”
Sam raised a brow. “With my cousin?”

“I was with Nikki, yes.”

Sam had no idea what to say to that, so she wisely said nothing.

Jason stared. Nikolas, his former brother in law, Lucky’s brother, also liked men? He felt an irrational swell in his chest, a longing for Lucky, one which was getting more and more difficult to conceal from his wife.

“You’re dating Barnabas?” Spinelli blurted.

Kurt surprised them all by bursting into laughter, bending at the waist and clutching his stomach. “That’s priceless,” he gasped. “Wyndemere is so very Dark Shadows, isn’t it? I can’t wait to tease him with that.”

“You tease Nikolas?” asked an uncomprehending Sam.

Kurt smiled. “I’ve known him since I was eight years old. The wealth of material I possess with which to tease him is tremendous, but there’s always room for more.”

“So the test confirmed the contents of the letter?” Jason asked.

Kurt sobered. “Yes. Damian and I share approximately twenty-five percent genetic material, and the test conclusively shows we share the same father. Your mother is your mother, Damian, that hasn’t changed.”

“Would you have told Spinelli about this if the test wasn’t a match?”

“No. I wasn’t going to upend a life for no reason.”

“Is this why you moved to Port Charles?” Sam asked.

“It was ... a very motivating factor,” Kurt said slowly. “I’d been wanting to return to America for a while. Paris is wonderful and will always hold a place in my heart. It was my home for a very long time, but it was also a haven. I needed to prove to myself that I could face the reasons I left Ohio.

“The proximity to New York City was a perk, and Monica’s offer was exceedingly attractive. She’s basically given me carte blanche to run the OCME as I see fit.”

Sam nodded. “After Maxie mentioned you to me, I did some checking. Your reputation is stellar. You could write a ticket for yourself to anywhere in the world.”

“That’s true,” Kurt acknowledged. “and Damian living here was a huge draw, but so was Nikolas. I’m very impressed with Monica and look forward to working with her. I also researched Mac before agreeing to the position, given how often we will interact. He’s a good chief and a good man.”

“And Robin?” Jason asked.

Kurt swallowed and looked away. “I thought after I buried my father and then my grandmother - or the woman I believed was my grandmother - I would never experience pain like this again. I honestly don’t know what’s worse: losing the man who gave me life and defined it for so many years, or learning a woman I had admired and even idolized was my sister.”

“He didn’t know, did he?” Spinelli asked. “Your dad, I mean. He didn’t know about me.”
Kurt crossed over and sat on the table before Spinelli and looked into his eyes. “He didn’t. I promise you that, Damian. Neither of us knew. If my father had any inkling he had another child, he would have had me swear on his deathbed to find and care for them. I would have done that regardless, but that’s the kind of man my father – our dad – was.”

Spinelli nodded, but said nothing more.

“May I tell you about him?”

Spinelli nodded again.

Over the next half hour, Kurt opened a vein and talked about his father. Spinelli was quiet through it all, though he listened. Jason and Sam could tell how just even speaking of the man was painful for Kurt, who was obviously still mourning him keenly. Inadvertently, he told them more than he probably realized about his memories of Anna, as well as what he endured in that hellhole of a hometown.

Sam was appalled, her thoughts drifting to her late brother Danny. He had been different; special. She had witnessed how he had been treated by strangers and acquaintances alike. Gossiped about. Teased. Bullied for something he couldn’t control.

Kurt described his experiences in Lima from the perspective of his father, who had been there at his side for all of it, supporting and loving him, protecting him whenever possible, proud of his son though not always knowing how to express it. There was not a doubt amongst any of them that Burt Hummel had been a very good father, but Jason and Sam were horrified by Kurt’s life in Ohio.

“I wish he could have done that for you, Damian,” Kurt whispered. “I wish I could have done that for you.”

Spinelli finally looked up, tears streaking down his face. “You don’t even know me.”

Kurt hesitated for a moment, then reached out and took Spinelli’s hands in his own. “I just lost a sister I’ll never know, Damian. I don’t want to lose a brother, too.”

Mac was seated at his desk, mind racing with coordinating the press release to announce the death of Anthony Zacchara. Many in Port Charles had a vested interest in the case and he was surprised the news hadn’t already leaked.

He knew Monica was the soul of discretion, and Johnny was in no hurry to acknowledge his father, or grandfather, in any circumstance. Kurt had asked for permission to tell Nikolas, which Mac had granted.

Still, when even a small number of people knew something meant to be kept quiet, it usually exploded sooner than this. Then again, Holly had assured him she controlled the information flow out of the OCME, and who was he to doubt her?

He was so glad she had returned to Port Charles, and even happier she was staying. He had missed her so very much these past years. She truly was his best friend; though they had never described each other in that way, but it was accurate.
He had made so many mistakes these last years, particularly with Felicia and their daughters. He always had to be the strong one, and he often wondered how he would have fared had Holly had been here to slap some sense into him.

Not that he blamed her for his decisions, he had just been so lonely for so long. Felicia had abandoned him and the girls for Frisco, Robin had grown up and moved out, then so had Maxie. And Georgie …

He was never going to get over losing her.

He had tried dating again, but his best shot had been with Alexis, who was too neurotic to let herself be happy. Friends had tried to set him up with mutual acquaintances, but he was too reserved and frankly awkward when it came to things like that.

He had no issues with dating older women, but Monica and Bobbie? He had known them for too long, and he had known their husbands. Besides, he certainly didn’t want to contemplate becoming the stepfather of either Jason Morgan or Carly Corinthos.

He missed sex, sure, but he could do without it. He had been for years. It was companionship he wanted. He wanted to pick up the phone and call someone who wanted to hear from him. He wanted to go home to something other than memories of his dead niece and dead daughter.

He had too many years left to spend them alone.

His attraction to Kurt was unexpected, but he knew nothing would come of it. He was at least twenty years older than the man, and Kurt was apparently involved with Nikolas.

He sighed, roughly clearing his throat when there was a knock on the door.

“Come in!”

He was surprised when a nervous Jasper Jacks walked in. He couldn’t fathom why Jax was there or what he wanted. He also couldn’t recall the last time he had seen Jax nervous about anything.

“Mac, may I please speak with you for a moment?”

“Sure. Have a seat.”

Jax did so, then proceeded to fidget and adjust his collar for several long moments.

“Jax?”

He didn’t respond, however, though he did mouth words as though he were mentally reviewing a prepared statement. Mac was sure he didn’t want to hear it. They weren’t friends and hadn’t been for more years since he could count. The last thing he wanted was to revisit his memories of Australia.

“Jasper.”

Jax startled and looked up.

“What is it?” Mac asked patiently.

“How are you doing?” Jax asked, wanting to stall for as long as possible.

“Sometimes it’s all I can manage to remember to breathe.”
“I’m so sorry about Robin, Mac. I’m just … so sorry.”

“I appreciate it, Jax. I know there were issues between you, but she was very fond of you.”

“I owe you an apology,” Jax said quietly.

Mac straightened in his chair, his eyes shuttering. “You don’t.”

“Yes, I do, and Carly helped me realize that. When we last spoke about …”

“You apologized then, and I accepted.”

“And it was insincere,” Jax said, “and you knew that. You were the better man, Mac. You always were. I’m sorry about Miranda, I truly am. I’m sorry I hurt you.”

Mac gave him a pained smile. “I deserved it.”

“You didn’t. I was hurt and humiliated and miserable.”

“Don’t, Jasper,” Mac whispered. “That was long ago.”

Jax raised blazing eyes. “Not for me. I think about it every single day. I think about you every single day.”

“Please don’t do this, Jasper. I cannot do this with you. That chapter is closed. We turned the final page over twenty years ago.”

“And I haven’t been happy in over twenty years, Mac. Surely you’ve noticed.”

“You were happy with Chloe.”

Jax glared. “Not as happy as when I was with you.”

“Please leave, Jasper,” Mac hissed, voice rough and wet. “Please.”

“No. We’re going to talk about this, Malcolm. We should have long ago.”

“There’s nothing left to say. I was a horrible person then, and I was particularly horrible to you. I am truly sorry for that.”

“Did you ever love me, Mac, or was that just a game? Was our relationship just a charade?”

Mac swallowed heavily before exhaling. “I adored you, Jasper. I loved you like I have never loved anyone in my life, nor will I ever love anyone or feel for them what I did for you.”

“You left me!” Jax charged, eyes filling. “You just left me and didn’t even have the courtesy to tell me you were doing so! You let my father do that for you.”

Max closed his eyes, trying to steady his breathing. When he opened them, his tears spilled over. “I never took the money.”

Jax’s eyes widened as his face drained of color. “What?”

“I never took his money,” Mac repeated. “When your father came to me to purchase my soul, I raged at him before laughing in his face. Then he doubled the price. I didn’t clock him because he was your father, but then he started talking and I listened. And I realized he was right.”
“Right about what?”

“That I was wrong for you, that I wasn’t good for you.” Mac sighed. “And I wasn’t, Jasper. I wasn’t any good for you. As much as I wanted to be with you, as much I loved you, I would’ve only ended up hurting you. Your father knew that, and he made me realize it, too.”

“That’s shit!”

“That’s the truth. I took advantage of you.”

“The hell you did, no matter how much I begged! We never slept together!”

“We did other things, though, things that were very much illegal.”

“Christ, Malcolm, you didn’t rape me!”

“The law had a different view, Jasper, and your father made clear he would pursue things legally if I didn’t end it with you.” He shook his head. “I couldn’t do that to you. I couldn’t allow you to be humiliated that way. I didn’t want to turn you against your family.”

“I loved you!”

“You were sixteen! I was twenty-four. It was wrong, Jasper. You’re a father now. If Joslyn were the age you were then and told you she was in love with a man, a grown man eight years her senior, you would be appalled. And you should be.”

Jax said nothing, obviously struggling with the truth of the words despite the maelstrom of emotions raging inside him.

“Your father loved you so much, Jasper. You were the light of his life. I was scum, then. We both know it. I was a grifter, a con man, doing everything in my power to move out from under my brother’s shadow, no matter the cost. I was not going to let you pay the price for my mistakes.”

“Is that all I was? A mistake.”

Mac stared at him. “You were the best thing in my life. You made me so happy. I looked into your eyes, those remarkable eyes, and I saw how you looked at me. I tried to convince myself that it was enough, that I was the man you believed I could be. Maybe I could have been, but the thought I would never be him … you deserved better than that. Better than me. You deserved everything.”

Jax stood and began pacing. “And the money?”

“I refused the money. I told your father to fold up every bill in his suitcase and shove them where the sun didn’t shine. Suddenly he was no longer the arrogant aristocrat who thought he could buy whatever he wanted. Instead, he was a father in pain who was terrified for the future of his child.

“I think … I think he finally saw how much I really did love you, and perhaps he even respected it, but you were so young, Jasper. You had your entire life in front of you, and I was keeping you from it.”

“That’s not true!” Jax roared.

“Instead of the gay way, you mean? A woman?”
“A girl or a boy. Your father wasn’t bothered by your sexuality, Jasper. He wasn’t worried what people would say about him or the family. He was worried what they would say about you. He was worried what they would say about me and how that would make you feel. He wanted to give you the world, and so did I. And there was no place in that world for me.”

Mac cleared his throat. “I was a coward. Once I realized your father was right, I knew I didn’t have the guts to face you. I would never have been able to look you in the face and walk away. I told him to tell you I took the money, because I’d rather you were mad at me than at him. I’d rather you lost me than your family.”

“I would have given them up for you. I would have given up everything.”

“I never wanted you to do that, nor would I have allowed it.”

“I close my eyes and still feel you holding me,” Jax whispered. “I can still taste your lips on mine. I still smell your hair after the rain.”

“Jax, please stop. I’m begging you to stop.”

“You loved me.”

“I did, and I always will, but it wasn’t right. I wasn’t right for you.”

“And who is?” Jax barked. “How many times have I married, Mac? How long have any of them lasted?”

Mac closed his eyes. “It’s been so hard watching you, Jasper. After Chloe was murdered, I saw your devastation. I honestly believed you wouldn’t allow yourself to love another after her, but you fell in love. I was happy for you, I truly was, because I want nothing more for you than your happiness.”

“I haven’t been happy in years, Malcolm. Brenda, Skye, Carly. I loved them, they loved me, but it wasn’t enough. I wasn’t enough for them.”

“That’s bullshit, Jasper. You have always been more than enough. The problem is the women you choose. I love Brenda, she was Robin’s best friend, but I saw how Sonny destroyed her, just as he did Carly, just as Alcazar destroyed Skye. They looked at you and saw Prince Charming.”

Mac stood and crossed the room, hesitantly reaching up and cupping Jax’s face in his hands, his breath catching when Jax closed his eyes and leaned into the touch.

“But you’re more than a fairytale, Jasper. You’ve twisted and turned yourself about to be what these women needed, but they never did the same for you. They thought you could fix all their problems, but they never were true partners to you. I’m sorry for that. You deserve better. I blame myself, because if I had never come into your life . . .”

“Don’t say that,” Jax begged. “Please don’t say that. Please don’t take that away from me. My memories of you . . . they’re what I wrap myself in when the world gets dark and cold and I’m all alone.”

“Oh, my beautiful boy,” Mac murmured. “I’m so sorry you’re so anguished.”

“I’m sorry I slept with Miranda all those years ago. I’m sorry I tried to hurt you the only way I knew how. I know you loved her.”
“Not as much I loved you, and that wasn’t fair to her, but she was also no one’s victim. She knew who you were to me, what you were to me, and she knew how much sleeping with you would hurt me.”

Jax sucked in a breath. “She … she knew?”

Mac wiped the other man’s tears away. “I could have forgiven her for anything else, for anyone else, but not for that. She knew … she knew I would always love you, and she was angry that I couldn’t love her the same way.”

“Do you love me still?”

“I will always love you, Jasper.”

Jax slid his hands over Mac’s own, biting his lip and nodding. “Then give me a proper goodbye this time. Please, Malcolm?”

Mac kissed his cheek. “Goodbye, Jasper.”

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