

Book 2 - The Spy and The Chrono Mage

"Who trained you?" Christos is bouncing from one foot to another, the burning hulk of a helicopter filling one side of the street in fuel and steel fragments, brought down with an impossible shot to a tail rotor from ground level. He's got cuts, bruises and a stab wound on his right side.

Katherine's grinning ear to ear, "Can you feel it Christos? Can you feel your *chances* to escape getting away?" Then she pointed at the lamp posts that had all, unfortunately, barely even screwed into the concrete to begin with on *aging* bolts that could shear at any minute. The city *constantly* putting off maintenance on them as, improbably, they start to collapse falling towards the marine layer comes in from, which also happens to be where Christos is standing.

Slower than usual, he turns, grabbing the post with an exertion that forces his body to *ripple*, throwing it aside, metal crashing into the concrete.

"By the way, did you slip a disk lately?" She asked him, "You're getting pretty far up there."

His face twitches, then unfolds into a smile, "Do you wish to engage in a battle of *curses*?"

"No I want Belltower to shoot you in the back of the head because you talk too much." She responds.

A gunshot echoes, and Christos takes a step forwards as a bullet rips through his sternum, "Damn, was aiming for the head." Belltower complains, looking *rough* after Christos gave him three minutes of personal attention in hand to hand. A split lip, black eye and plenty of fractures besides. The Traditionalist is getting his bearings again.

Katherine doesn't rush, instead taking very ginger steps forward. Smiling like a Cat. Twitching in amusement. "How many times have you gotten away, you think?" She says, this is her favorite part, reminding him that this is a game where *he* has to win hundreds, but *they* only have to win once. Constantly reminding him of inevitable backlash, letting it settle on him like weights.

Reaching up, he pulls a finger across the injury, tracing blood idly in the process while speaking, "I think I've gotten away *every* time." Christos's voice is rough, lung filling with blood as he seems to be tracing his body for injuries.

"One time I got your tongue, do you know that?" She says, as another lamp post creaks, just creaks though. All of them of course, just a little creaky. Each threatening, but none *doing*. The entire street vibrating as if something *might* happen at any moment.

He says something, Greek, an ancient dialect of it from reports. The idle tracteries of blood gleam, "Of course, but if you didn't know what I was doing, you've *never* gotten close." His body starts to ripple.

"You're standing on a water main, over a sink hole. That's not even time magic, I just looked that up." She said as the ground beneath him started to crumble, the lamp post having weakened it. That pulling the other lamp posts in as well. Suddenly the center as an *entire* city block seemingly about to fall in on him. "Remember, before you dig call 811."

The water main *bursts* firing water into the sky as finally the pavement caves, and *everything falling* into a randomly useful pile of debris that shatters down into a giant crater from which there would be no escape. The pavement is like quick sand as it buckles and falls apart, creating a vortex of urban landscape as each lamppost fails into the water electrifying it with terrifying sparks, more and more falling in, one of the lampposts catching a car, that falls in, causing a minor fire, that leads to a minor *explosion* as something in the car spectacularly fails.

A giant plume of black smoke escapes from the now twenty yard crater, loud zaps escaping in angry arcs.

"Christos you dead?" She shouts.

The smoke thins, and the man can be seen, none the worse for wear, floating slightly above the carnage and chaos. "*Good attempt.*" His voice is ethereal, barely audible yet somehow easy to understand. "*You'll be closer next time.*" Christos ripples.

"Then why not give up?" She says.

"*And take the joy from you?*" He grins with bloody teeth, beginning to fade into the air, "*Never, Lady Doukas.*" Somehow, this loop, he knows her name, vanishing just before any questions can be levied.

"Did you know he could do that?" She says to the bleeding and bruised Belltower, "Also when are you going to stop letting him kick the shit out of you."

"When I can *stop him kicking the shit out of me.*" Belltower complains, slumping against a wall. "The bastard's file is nine hundred pages long. And that's *after* redaction. There's a mile-long list of feats there." He puts a cigarette in his mouth, lighting it.

"Ok, but like, look at the crater," She says pulling her own blue cigarette out, with a smile. "That was *mostly* planning, I had kids loosen most of the bolts in the surrounding blocks. Or just whack'em with hammers."

Belltower nods, "Yeah, just need to make it a little easier, then you can do a lot." He coughs suddenly, "*Fucker. Damn it.*" A little glob of blood hitting the ground. "Fuck *him* specifically."

She pulls from a small hip saddle, the closest she's gotten to modifying her uniform so far, a stim hypo. Without asking, she jams it into Belltower's shoulder. The man hisses as the chemical and machine mix pumps into him, stopping bleeding and heating him up at the same time.

"You are getting *way* too comfortable stabbing me with needles." The Director complains, standing slowly as his strength returns.

"There, you're at least good until we get you to Sophia." Katherine says, with a smile. "Though, I forget people have a thing about needles. Well, like a bad thing."

Rolling his eyes mostly in amusement, he points to a somewhat ruined car, "Let's get back to the office before we find out you have a brain bleed. He put you through a wall before he got his hands on me."

"Yeah, but luckily it was mostly drywall, and he *just* missed the studs." Katherine said grinning, "At this point I don't even know what's luck vs me being a bad ass anymore." She gets into the driver seat, putting her hand on the dash turning the car on as Belltower gets in. *Slamming* her foot down on the accelerator, she *careens* through the city streets like a bat out of hell, going eighty weaving through crowded traffic, occasionally overshooting a turn and at one point hitting a hydrant.

"*Christ!*" Belltower shouts, just as Katherine slams the breaks, coming to a perfect stop in front of the office. "Why do I let you *drive?*" He grumbles.

"Because during rush hour we got from downtown LA to the Miracle Mile in like, ten minutes?" She says, "Did you *feel* like sitting in an hour's worth of traffic?"

"You got a point." The man slips out of the car, making it through the front door with a lazily inputted code, starting to turn to the clinic while Katherine follows. It's a familiar hospital room, medical supplies a century ahead of anywhere else kept practically unsecured on a cabinet with no lock, and Sophia, currently wearing a short black dress and completing her makeup for what looks like a night clubbing is waiting for her patients.

"Sophiaaaaa!~" Katherine croons, "You look lovely, also Belltower got the shit kicked out of him again. I am fine, *no need* for a check-up." Walking into the room with a light bounce in her step, as her mood seems to be at the *nines* today even *with* the mood stabilizers. Though that may be due to the *copious* bite marks on her neck and wrists.

"But Katherine!" Sophia turns, smiling broadly with green lipstick, "I want to get a *close* look at those bites!" She's as always, very happy.

"You have to buy me dinner first," Katherine says, "And then normally there's jewelry and chocolates involved. Eleanora gave me a *Bentley* the first night here. I'm a *material* girl."

"Oh, so you're free Saturday night?" Sophia smiles somehow broader, nearly a grin as she offers a date. Belltower sighs, laying on a bed and then getting his suit jacket off.

"Maybe. Will you buy me a Bentley?" She asks, though suddenly she has a flash of fear as Sophia scowls. She feels the tiniest bit of wet... Something on her ear. "My ear's bleeding isn't it."

Sophia very not gently moves Katherine to a bed, brooking no discontent in the motion, "You two are going to make me *unfashionably* late." She bemoans, cutting clothes off quickly, getting syringes and IV's ready. "Though...I don't think I buy Bentleys, maybe a Mercedes?" Sophia considers as she jabs in an IV into Belltower first.

"I'll be honest with you, I know nothing about *eep*-" She squeaks as the IV is placed into her without warning. "*Cars!* She finishes."

"Neither do I, I just don't want to buy English." Sophia smiles at the reaction, staring with consideration at Katherine's other arm, in case she needs a second IV. "So, I'll pick you up Saturday in your new Mercedes, sound good?" She's mounting a bag on the IV stand that quickly pumps painkillers and regeneratives into Katherine.

"This saturday is wargames in the woods actually." She makes a whooshing noise as the meds hit her, "Estelle, Eleanora and I run around the woods and play... It's like vampire tag? Eleanora chases us, while we try to shoot her."

"Is it a private activity?" Sophia considers, leaning over to grab something out of a drawer.

"I'll ask, but there's a *very* real chance of death. It's happened... Twice, before we changed some of the rules of the game." Katherine admits morosely.

Sophia smiles, "Oh don't worry Katherine, I can't do that unless you're very thorough." She finally finds the syringe she was looking for, moving to Belltower and jabbing him *directly* in the chest with the viciously long thing, putting some chemical directly into his lungs much to his silent discomfort.

"The marrow implants are a *hit* by the way. Thank you for the suggestion." Katherine says, pulling her sleeve up to reveal *several* bites. The display makes the doctor smile, even after she got *very* focused on jabbing Belltower accurately.

"Excellent! I'm always glad to hear my work's appreciated." Belltower's phone buzzes thrice, making him look over to it. Grabbing it, he reads the text, sighs, gets up and leaves much to

Sophia's sputtering. Unlike normal, no amount of being in his way stops him, something important.

Sophia looks *aggravated*, "That....*man* never stays in bed and then complains when his injuries don't heal right!" She's looking through needles, threatening everything around her with the points, "It makes me want to *jab* something!"

"Okay!" Katherine says, her biology getting in the way of her intellectualism. "With... Healing things right?"

"Mostly!" She says, jabbing Katherine in the opposite arm with some mix of chemicals. "That should make you heal faster. Likely." The needle is pulled out and discarded as she picks between a pink fur-lined jacket and a red false-leather one, considering deeply.

"Pink if you're trying to bottom, red if you want to top." Katherine offers, looking at them both. "At least that's how we signal to each other when we don't feel like having a conversation."

"Oooh, I usually wear green, so I'm experimenting." Sophia slips on the red, keeping the front open, "Thank you Katherine! Is there anything you need? The pain should be managed well enough."

"Are eyes li—" She stops herself, "You have a date, answer my e-mails!"

"I answer them on Sundays! Sometimes!" Sophia laughs, escaping the clinic to go to whatever she was getting dressed up for.

Very quick to leave once the room was empty, Katherine snooped around finding a pack of her favorite cigarettes. A prescription with *her* name on it. She pockets it with a smile then runs out to go home, before stopping to check in on the break room. Though she felt... Distant from the other workers in the Union, most of them gone, other than the redhead she sat in silence with sometimes. Probably because she smelled like Blood powder and guns. Wait. No reverse that.

Her alarm went off, and she reached into her side saddle, quickly pulling out a small capsule with all of the meds for that time of day and popped them. The ritual giving her a sense of calm. Her newest car, after rolling the last two was a Cayman S with a built in roll cage, and *many* safety features. Though the outside still tried it's best to be unassuming and grey, as she peeled out on her way home a *much* quicker drive mostly against traffic. Though cops started to speed trap around the country club.

Sure enough, she almost side swipes one as she peels around the corner, and gives the LAPD the bird and is off before the Sirens can even come on. The estate had been coming along nicely, the entire block having been bought out, and Estelle's tiny abode now had a large lawn, a fenced area so that the cat could have unsupervised outdoor time, and a state of the art gun

range. Also a small area of leaning plates and vases that Katherine liked to test her procedures on, trying to keep them spinning or falling in a safe way whenever she's in the area.

Finally, she reaches the larger more sprawling living area that has basically been plopped connecting to the original house, simply transferring the back door into a larger home without modifying the original. She quickly jogs past an indoor pool and spa to get back to her familiar kitchen, where she occasionally fed Director Belltower, or calmed her own neuroses cooking. Reaching the bottom of the stairs *just* as the sunset and the Vampires awoke. Always gone moments before they slept, always back just before they awoke. Except for business trips. Of course.

"Mes amours, I am home!" She yells out letting her voice ring into the loving paradise she carved out for herself.

"Fuckin' *finally!*" Estelle *shouts*, voice carrying through the house like a gunshot, "I've been sittin' here watching Eleanora *read* for two hours!" She's lounged across a seat, staring at a placid Eleanora.

"Wait *what?!*" Katherine said, checking her phone again, stopping, and doing her spreadsheets now at the kitchen island. Very quickly making sure all of her meds were right, that she weighted all of her food properly. A fancy watch that knew *all* of her macro and micro nutrient levels and needs gave her helpful display readouts that she manually recorded into her spreadsheets before hearing Eleanora say something in the distance.

"*We've been awake for less than an hour, Estelle my beloved.*" Eleanora flips a page on her book, "*Maybe less than half an hour. Stop worrying Katerina.*"

"I... I actually am late then," She says, but feeling oddly... Calm with it, "I feel like that should bother me more." The anxiety hadn't gripped her the way it normally did.

"*Perhaps you were late.*" Eleanora unfolds her legs to stand up and move to hug Katherine, putting her head on the taller woman's chest, "*But it is equally likely it is merely the turn of seasons. Night is long and dark in winter, mon amour.*" Her curls are especially bouncy today, she took the time to prepare them before torpor the other night.

"I'll come home earlier, tomorrow then," She says smiling, giving Eleanora a kiss. "I need..." She hisses "These loops break at weird times, it's never the same even when I try to do everything the same. I need every second of this I can get before it changes. Your hair looks beautiful by the way."

"Hey!" Estelle stands up, hugging both women from the side, "Don't just leave me sitting there!" She's grinning despite the complaint, "Fuckin' missed you." Estelle whispers.

"I'm so *sorry* Madame Estelle, I was unaware that both your legs broke in the night." She said before hugging her as well. "Yeah, I'm probably going to stop volunteering for overnight stuff for a while. The director keeps telling me not to throw my life away for the company, and I kiiiind of agree."

"Good!" Estelle separates, going back to lounging on her couch, a...new one. She leans it back, controlling every exact angle of relaxation, turning on a heated massage function.

"Careful, the remote next to it is for the Claymores." Katherine said pointing to the one with bright hazardous yellow tape that said "Warning **will** kill you. Mines do not know **Mercy**."

"We do need more usable seating, I would like to host guests eventually." Eleanora idly says, prodding the side of Katherine with her nails just to incite reactions purposelessly.

She squeaked a bit, half running away from the painful but ticklish scratch. "Hey! Also, do you want to host guests, because I do *have* a guest setting for the home defense system. Turns off the camera's everywhere erm... Private, turns off the mines, and those korean turrets that auto track targets and everything."

"Ah, parfait!" Eleanora smiles, mostly at Katherine jumping away, *"Now, come, lie with me."* She whispers with the self-same mischievous smile as she sits down, patting the cushion next to her.

Another alarm on her phone goes off though that one she *loves* a tinkling chime like wind goes off, and she pulls out a familiar blue packet of cigarettes, letting purple smoke tame herself as she sits down next to Eleanora. "Do you like the younger face?" She asks, Katherine had for the last few hundred loops looked a decade older. Side effects of her medication had stiffened muscles in her face making it hard to show the extreme range of emotions she was feeling. Now, she had heavily modified herself inside and out. Her violet hair had bioluminescent strands in it, and they came out easily enough if necessary. While her normally hazel eyes were now a *far* more vibrant and exotic purple that matched her hair, while also adorning herself with freckles, despite never having them before.

Inside she was brimming with the latest flesh-tech that Sophia could invent that was proven safe enough for Katherine. Though most of it was to increase, keep up with, or maintain a consistent flow of blood for her family. The blue cigarettes causing them to feel just as satisfied as if they killed.

As she sat next to Eleanora, Gaius, their cat leapt onto her lap as well. Creating a sort of familial conga line. Eleanora looks at the cat with bemusement, *"It is surprisingly well used to Kindred. Most do not get friendly. Ever."*

Sheepishly Katherine admitted, "Sophia had a quick snoop around, and re-wired some things, you smell like dinner to it enough now that it overwhelms the other parts a bit." Pulling out her phone to pull up a .tor network, she showed Estelle it as one of the many products on the new

somewhat dated looking site. "Though it's cheap enough, and able to get into a pill form for animals, so it's one of the things my little underground company is doing! Another little piece of my arsenal to let Vampires find a bit more normalcy in their lives."

"Jeez, you're a big shot now." Estelle grins from where the massage is slowly draining her of all will to live, "You gonna be the one handing out spending limits soon?" She tries to shift in the seat, but is too ensconced in the motions to do so.

"We had limits?" Katherine said looking at Eleanora, "How high must they have been?! I've *never* even been warned."

"I believe I had you at...half a million? And Estelle at the same." Eleanora nods, *"But that was per card. I am, thankfully, wealthy."* There's a smirk at that last word, *"It's a very slow woman who cannot make a fortune with five centuries of time to do it."*

"It's not really about the money the price is *only* really there so people trust it. I give samples to pretty much anyone who messages me for free." She admits with a shrug, "For every vampire like you and Eleanora you see like eight that are barely capable of staying above water. I think a little pet, or the Blood Kool-Aid or any of that stuff adds little treats that makes life a bit more bearable."

A text hits Katherine's phone, buzzing with a ring tone that suggests Belltower.

*Got an assignment. Volunteer only.
Details tomorrow. Long-term. Important.*

*How long-term and important? Seriously.
Want time with family, but I can be flexible.*

*Undercover work, six months.
Possibly under turncoat cover.
Contact may be regularly possible*

Will discuss tomorrow. Thank you for the heads up.

She turns to Estelle and Eleanora, looking *pained* and miserable. "Can we talk in the wine cellar?" She groaned that she couldn't just rest.

"Oh my god, something *annoying's* gonna happen." Estelle complains, standing up off the chair. "I'll be there." However, despite the games, she's moving. Eleanora has no such qualms, just looking worried as she follows the other two.

She stood up annoyed, with a deep breath, putting her phone into a lead box, that's kept about ten feet from a solid lead door, that leads into what is *called* a wine cellar, but is a technological

dead-zone, built in solid rock deep beneath the foundation, and then lined with foam panels, and a high plus carpet. Katherine watched both the other women put their phones in the box, and then through a metal detector. Though the entire time she looked apologetic. It was *rare* they had to have conversations here, but the *context* was important enough to go the extra effort.

"They want me to do a six month assignment as a double agent," She says with a sigh, "I made it clear that it can't interfere with family, and it seems that wouldn't change since I'd be 'flipped' to the other side. It's spy work though, it's NWO work. Stuff we normally **both** agree would be terrible for me. Which means that this probably could only be done, or at least trusted to be done by me."

Eleanora nods, "*Its also dangerous, mon amour. A spy's work is fraught with death.*" She pauses for a moment to let the words sit, "*However, you know if it is worth the danger to you. I do not imagine you work for the cheque.*"

"The Union and I have it pretty clear, I do this for technology I can siphon away for vampires and other human-types that get treated unfairly." Katherine admits, "So no, while it's rarely for god and country, it's either a personal favor for Belltower which as *maybe* if you squint could have come up once, or there's a pretty good carrot in front of me. I *really* want them to make the same super drug that's in this cigarette," She holds it up, "Into something we can add to blood bags. In order for that, I need them to do research, to do that we need a budget, so my pay all gets put back into the company, to go to research that technically is out of our scope, to make a drug that almost no-one wants."

"So you could try and squeeze 'em for that." Estelle thinks business, "How far you think you can push demands here?" Her foot's tapping in an indicator of consideration.

"If Belltower *desperately* needs me I probably won't push at all, otherwise I'd *like* to get a half million added to our budget monthly for research into this. The problem is, one carton of these cigarettes cartons costs a million dollars to make." She says inhaling one, "Literally, in man hours and resources."

Eleanora nods, "*Then, it sounds as if your decision hinges on knowledge we do not have.*"

"I was wondering if you guys could look out for me like... *actively* if lowkey, and teach me how to be...." She says, the last word being very mumbled and garbled, not wanting to make eye contact, "duplicitous. The one other undercover mission I did I botched entirely and didn't know what I was doing."

"That's *all* Eleanora. Closest thing I've ever done to undercover's saying 'I'm not a vampire!' to people." Estelle laughs, looking at the room with a keen eye, refamiliarizing herself with the 'Wine Cellar'

"Right, but I don't even say... 'I'm not a time mage' to people. The *only* thing I lie about is if people ask me about vampire stuff, and when they do. I shoot them, immediately, without hesitation." She says kind of concerned, "Belltower's getting a little upset that I keep using company resources to disappear bodies."

"You do know you can ask me, my love." Eleanora quirks an eyebrow, *"I may not be the...Union. But making a body go away is well within my means."*

"I just... If someone is like, 'Do you know The *Sheriff* of Los Angeles,' in a very pointed way. I just ice them, then I don't want to call you because it'd confirm their suspicions." She says with a hint of worry, "One guy asked me about Estelle, so we interrogated him for eight hours, and nothing. So I just iced him, found his family, took care of them, and then found the extended family and took care of them. It was like... Two hundred people in all."

"Ah, perhaps the issue lies in how far you go. Typically we stop at first cousins." Eleanora seems *adoring* even despite her words, staring with love and joy at her murderous Katerina.

"Oh." Katherine said quietly, "I should have probably asked you first. I just... get concerned, and it feels like just ending the blood line is the straightest path forward. Or at least to stop *asking* overt questions where I can hear them."

"I do not think we need to be in the wine cellar any longer." Eleanora leans to grab Katherine's hand as she's led out.

"Right sorry." She says, leading them out, opening the door and returning everyone's phones and things, before again, waving a wand over everything before, trying to sense anything... That could have shifted... Then closed the door, locking it.

A reinforced lock *clunks* shut, as Eleanora stays with Katherine the whole way, Estelle ranging ahead to look around a familiar home before sitting down on her massage chair again. *"In the future, ma Katerina. Come to me with your worries."* Eleanora smiles as she stands with Katherine, *"I always delight in caring for you."*

Katherine took a deep breath, rubbing her temples slightly as stress started to creep in. "I know I just... It's been almost half a year now, and I'm starting to get... This is the longest loop we've gotten yet, something ***always*** manages to happen when I least expect it." There's something on the wall, and Katherine flicks her head quickly, but the shadow is gone before she can focus on it.

"Hey, maybe you can ask them to like, move the loop up or something." Estelle considers, "They've got a satellite network and stuff, I dunno, maybe they can?"

She shakes her head, "The loop is an extra-dimensional entity. Nothing short of a god can affect it, I think it's directly related to whatever Belltower was doing in Washington. When reality got

ripped there, I got caught in it. We used to think I caught him, now I'm not so sure." She pulls her phone out, showing a gif, "I think we're just caught in the orbit of something, Christos is aware of the loop as well, there's a center we're all gravitating around. Like a gravity well in space-time."

"A whirlpool dragging you all in." Eleanora considers, a thinking frown appearing on her face. *"I encountered something...similar once. Three centuries ago now. A wood which would drift a traveller through time, sometimes exiting months after or before."* Her voice is even, with some distaste, *"I had it cut down."*

"Well, I don't want that necessarily," Katherine admits, "I *like* the loop, especially since it seems I live a life fraught with danger, it's been almost a dozen more times since I broke it that I've had to start over. I'm *tired* of starting over, I just want to survive. I signed a twenty year contract so I can't turn down work, and I do this for you all, but I also want life to stop kicking me in the ribs."

Eleanora nods, *"We will understand it together."* She attempts comfort, though stumbling over the words, seeming like she doesn't *quite* like *understand* there. *"The secret, I think, isn't in living a less...dangerous life, but figuring out what is your point of weakness."* The vampire's gaze is serious, *"In my five centuries, it's always been one weakness, something singular that brings immortals down."*

As they walk into the Kitchen, Katherine sees the shadow again, and reacts immediately, discharging five slugs into the wall before she was aware her gun was in her hand. Lights flicker as she hits the circuit breaker, with small sparks shooting out. "There's something spying on me." She says her jaws clenching, "It's been there for a week now." A small fire breaks out where the wires were exposed, and Estelle runs to get an extinguisher.

Eleanora stiffens at the sight, a dread widening her eyes as she stares at the flickering flame, making her squeeze Katherine *too* tightly for a few seconds as she gets control of herself. *"Ma Katerina,"* Eleanora breathes out, *"Perhaps you do need a change in scenery. We can go to my vacation home on the Great Lakes, away from anyone."* Her grip untightens, as Estelle puts the flame out quickly.

"Can't, briefing is tomorrow." Katherine says. The shadow still frustratingly dancing on the edge of her vision. Suddenly aware of the consequences of hunting it as she sees the look on Eleanora's and Estelle's face. Gritting her teeth knowing she'll just have to *live* with it. "I know it's been there for a week."

She pulls out her phone and pulls up her spreadsheet writing down her observation. Frowning, *Did someone touch my spreadsheets?* The shadow **wasn't** on the sheet, but she *must* have seen it she remembered... "Did I mention this before?" She asked Eleanora as she looked through the sheet. Looking at the edit history, "Something watching me? A shadow." There was **nothing** there. She knew it had been watching her, but why wouldn't she have written it down.

"*Not before tonight, my love.*" Eleanora frowns again, holding onto Katherine with a building worry. "*You've taken your medicine?*"

Katherine growls as she hears *someone* calling her from another room. Which **can't** be possible, because they never have guests. No-one else is reacting. She pulls up a recording app very quickly, and records ambient noise, then plays it back to herself. There's nothing on the audio. *Fuck*. She shakily pulls one of the blue cigarettes, a dissociative drug that separates her from her own senses. Lighting it with a shudder, the voice, the shadow, and the feeling of being watched go away as she inhales.

"Hey Estelle, can you tell me to chill out?" This attack was particularly bad, and needed extra help then normal.

Estelle focuses at that, breathing out and giving a *thrumming* sentence, "***Calm down, breathe easy, relax your body.***" She gets through the sentence and then coughs as black veins come *alive* around her throat. She's still smiling through it in achievement though.

The LAPD had made her so *easy* to fall for domination magic, and she was so willing to be calm, that the dark words felt like chai tea on a cold day. A warm spice that gave her mind a moment of peace. She smiled, leaning into it. "Thanks..." She said quietly, the charm immediately taking effect. "I think I'm stressed about the thing we talked about. I'll see the Director in the morning and know more about this. Do you want to stay in and bang instead of the War Game?" As Estelle failed to answer, she nibbled her on the ear calmly.

Estelle snaps out of the cough at the nibble, jerking at the sensation. "Sure, yeah, *haven't won one yet.*" She grumbles.

"Eleanora, she forfeited," Katherine yelled suddenly with a wicked grin, picking Estelle up like a bundle of potatoes and trucking up the stairs.

002 - Betrayal

Belltower looks *worlds* better, even if he was six hours late to the office. He's currently managing a report in his office, having acquired a type-writer at some point, the chitter and clack of keys filling the room as he finishes the last piece of it before fully turning his attention to Katherine, the room smelling of ink.

"Alright, the mission's not...complex. Just complicated. The Traditionalists in the area have lost all of their Masters-" He pauses, "That's a rank of theirs, means they're one step above me in authority on their own side." He pulls a page free of the typewriter and puts another in. "You're a new recruit, we can play the legend that you are dissatisfied with our treatment of your family. It fits with their propaganda of our side, have an argument here or there that gets back through

their moles in our Construct, and finally, the hard *part*." He twitches at that last bit, looking annoyed and going back to typing for a few seconds, a conversational opening.

"An argument about what? Oh, wait the— *actually* let's talk about that. I want those blue pills for vampires the ones from the cigarettes." She says instead of conversing, talking about pay and compensation, "I keep telling the HR person and they say I gotta ask you, I ask you and you tell me to ask them."

Belltower sighs, "Upper management isn't ever going to implant *north american blood bags* with highly expensive mood stabilizers."

"I want to give them to the vampires so that they can pass them on to their ghouls, or to grind up in their blood bags." Katherine says very quickly, pulling out a small piece of printer paper, unfolding it, "I've got a system. I distribute through my website, the vampires get it at a low rate, since it takes away the sting of killing, and allows them to prey without killing they'll use it. Like... Vampire contraception."

He stares at a very particular part of the page, "Entry cost for *San Francisco* has *seven digits*." Belltower groans, putting his head in his hands, "I'd have to cut three employees to afford that. Which I'm *not* going to do."

She flips the page over, "Plan *two* then," She grins, a much higher cost, but spread out over a *much* larger scale, "We make a little space in the budget to research why that drug works the way it does, and make a cheaper alternative. Which would be useful, because—"

"So I have to hire an Enlightened researcher, probably from the fanciest laboratories we have." He stares, "And a team of assistants, from the same place. Build a lab, and then pay them while they work." Belltower seems purpose made to crush dreams at this rate, its too natural.

"I'd give up my salary?" Katherine offers. Though folding up the paper and putting it in her back pocket. "What if... I kidnapped some from the Traditionalists? We could lock them up with those little ball and chains?"

"A veteran researcher makes three digit millions." He sighs. "If you can catch a major traditionalist asset, or flip them to us, you'd have a *lot* of political capital sure. At that point you'd be playing above my head, and can probably get a couple billion thrown your way on a whim." Belltower *does* relent at that.

"For the record is Christos a *major* traditionalist or a *minor* traditionalist just so I know what my long term goals are here." Katherine says, little dollar signs forming in her eyes, with stars gleaming in her soul.

"Minor. They get much scarier than that. He didn't make the air turn to iron dust in our lungs." Belltower states calmly.

The stars go out at that, sadly, "Shit." She said, "Well... Shit. I'm pretty hot, maybe I can add one to my polycule?"

"You can figure this out in the field, for the assignment you're volunteering for, yeah?" Belltower offers a paper slip, a signature box at the bottom.

She nods, "If for some reason," Her paranoia, or maybe a funny feeling getting her to ask, "You get kidnapped, and I have to kill you to prove my allegiance, do I do it, get the information, then reset the loop?"

"No, you exfiltrate." He has a mildly amused look on his face, "If keeping your cover means harming a Union Agent. Break cover."

"Any Union Agent?" She asks very pointedly, gesturing to the wider office.

"Any." He nods firmly.

She snorts, "So what exactly is the *bad terrible* thing the NWO does if it's not offing our own people?"

Smirking with a practiced ease, "That's classified, ask your co-workers for rumours if you want."

"That would require having conversations with them, and they seem to be scared of confident women in black suits." Then adding under her breath, "Who once shot at the coffee maker."

"Now, for the *last thing*. There needs to be a clean break of our connection as organization and individual. The best way for this is for you to...*beat me in a fight*." Belltower grumbles.

She grins pulling her gun out, the overly large handgun that fires .600 Nitro Express rounds "Ok, so here or?"

"No, not in my office." Belltower answers, looking at the gun with distaste. "And neither of us is using a gun on the other. We'll play it into a fist fight."

"Wouldn't that be wildly out of character for anyone who knows me? I stuck a gun in a Barista's mouth the other day for getting my coffee order wrong." She admits, before wondering if Belltower knew about that.

"Yes, *I'm familiar with that police report. I will be disarming you during the initial stage of conflict*." He growls, eyes narrowing.

"Ok, I carry six now, Knife on left ankle, Sig on right, conceal carry on the front waist, conceal carry on the mid back, S&W 500 on the side holster, and then.." She lists off showing every gun,

except for the last one where she coughs with a slight blush "... I tape a tiny .22 under my chest."

"Alright, I'm going to shove you out of my office, after that, you're gonna get to the outside of the building, I'll chase, we do property damage mostly, you knock me out or break a leg, bolt." Belltower explains.

"Just one thing, we can really sell this, but don't say anything overly mean." Katherine admits, "I'll shoot you in the foot to make sure the fight seems real."

"I...don't talk while I'm fighting. Don't blow off my toes, I hate new toes." He stands up, gloves straining.

"How do you feel about your scapula?" She asks, as the man gets ready to shove her, trying to get into the mindset.

"How do you?" Belltower throws the question back, trying to get a good angle for a clean *through the door* shove. "I just need one working arm to write the report."

She takes the .22 out from under her chest, "I'm going to put this one in my hand, the least awkward one." It tears free with the sound of tearing tape.

And then, the theatre starts. Belltower palms Katherine in the chest *hard*, sending her stumbling through the door and making an intern spill coffee everywhere, thankfully iced. Belltower is coming through the door with dark eyes, face mildly tense, as if enraged, dress shirt already rolled up and gloves hands balled in fists. Trying to match his energy, Katherine yells "Fuck you!" And then points the gun at the intern, opening fire, forcing Belltower to run to his side, as the man caught multiple slugs in the shoulder.

She drops the gun when it's empty and flees the building. Pulling out the larger russian revolver, firing a round into the closing Elevator doors, hitting the cable, and causing the Elevator to fail, and the emergency brakes to lock, before firing the rest off and using time magic to slowly arrest their failing. Before using the last two rounds to burst open the glass door to the front of the building. Though, at least now she knew that Belltower would be *really* pissed.

The growl that follows her out confirms this as Katherine *feels* strings being tugged expertly, rather than one or two major changes, more than a dozen minor alterations surround her, fate being woven into one another rather than strings being pulled.

Very *confused* by the sensation, Katherine panics, pulling her S&W but finding it jam almost immediately. She tries to whip out at the strings, but she can't *tell* what they're trying to do. Instead standing into traffic, trying to send a stray car at Belltower though now minorly concerned as the man seems *feral*.

The road collapses. Dozens of cars falling underneath in a miraculous zero-casualty sinkhole, Katherine slips into it and has to brace as she lands hard on the sewer floor below, covered in layers of asphalt and surrounded by screeching cars and mildly wounded people. Belltower leaps down, pointing a finger at Katherine as he storms, "You shot my *intern*."

"Vampires need help." She yells back, then, "I'm about to shoot *a lot fucking more*." Trying to give her all into the duplicity, reach some inner rage, that she suddenly found easier to access. **"Vampires DO need help."** She says getting into it, now with her Sig and her knife in hand, holding the knife behind and pointing the gun at him. Trying to still *brute force* probability, bouncing bullets into his shoulder and thigh. Hoping ricochet and splattering asphalt assault him from odd angles.

The ricochets are altered, impacting his armoured pants and merely pulling his footing out from under him, driving Belltower to a knee before he rushes up and, with a harsh impact, disabled the Sig, the metal slightly creaking as entropy is forced on it, process eased by his fist hitting it. He swings past that, but Katherine ducks, dropping the gun and going with a knife.

Katherine rushes up and jabs the knife to Belltower's neck, forcing the man to block her. The impact pushes him against a wall as he strains against her, holding the knife back with shaking arms, on the edge of being overpowered. When weaves of time cause her glock to fire in her back conceal carry, and she relents, as the neoprene band falls away and she discards it. Getting into a low stance holding the knife ahead of her. Taking very simple steps forward as she tries to think of how to use entropy better, noticing a tiny fray on the suit, trying to tug at the thread gently, letting the thing fall apart.

The suit comes apart, an achievement that is quickly countermanded by Belltower *kicking* her in the stomach with *significant* force, hard toe dress shoes making it nearly blindingly painful. She grabs the leg and stabs it with the KABAR, going for the tendons behind the ankle, before rushing him forward, and trying to knife him again in the chest. Katherine momentarily fearful as she goes to bring the knife down on his chest, whether Sophia could get to him in time. Closing her eyes as she attempts to slam it home.

The blade sinks into the flesh, his hand in an almost seemingly random but almost certainly planned diversion, moves the knife a quarter inch right, forcing it to skip *just by* his heart, the pulse transferring through the blade and into Katherine's hand. He gives a bloody gasp as his lung is pierced, red fluid splattering on Katherine. "Oh, oh god." She says looking at him, "Oh *fuck*, I just..." Remembering her cover, "Oh fuck I just *killed* The Director." She suddenly bolts down the sewer, at full speed both to get away, but also to not see the man's bleeding face. Hoping he didn't see the fear and shame in her eyes at the last moment, seeing what she had *almost* done.

003 - Christian Christie Chistopher?

Vanishing through byways and tunnels, the sinkhole is left behind. Its nearly an hour before anything happens. A whisper catches Katherine's attention, seemingly carried by wind through the tunnel, ethereal and familiar, "*Ah, Katherine, have you finally turned your back on the Union?*" A smooth, only lightly accented greek man speaks in the wind, a *mirth* evident.

"Fuck you Christian," She yells angrily, kicking the wall, "I'm not in the mood right now, I *liked* The Director but..." She sits down angrily, "Fuck. I think I killed him."

"*His gods won't let him die. A Belltower is much too important.*" Christos chuckles in the wind, "*You, on the other hand, are much more disposable. Follow my voice, safety is its destination.*"

"I have to look out for my *family*. This whole fight was for them." She snarls, reaching for a gun to shoot the voice. "Fuck. Can you keep them safe?"

"*If Director Belltower goes after your family, I will take his life personally. He has honour.*" Christos says evenly, threatening a powerful man's life without much concern. "*Concern for yourself first.*"

"Can you not give directions? Or do I just walk through the sewer yelling Marco?" She grumbles, trying to sell the dejected frustrated agent. Confused and pissed and lost, leaning into the very *real* fear that she might have gone too far with the Director.

"*I have no idea where you are, Katherine. Follow my voice.*" Christos answers.

Katherine groans as she marches through the sewers occasionally stopping to kick rubble waiting for Christos to speak again. "FUUUUUUCK." She yells at no-one in particular, "I lost *five* of my favorite guns. The Pfeifer Zeliska costs like fifteen grand!"

The sewers open into a central chamber, where a ladder leads up to a manhole. "*Get out of the filth, a friend is there for you. I think you'll like her.*" Christos once again direct Katherine.

She starts to climb the ladder while muttering darkly under her breath, "Yeah I *fucking* bet I will." Swearing to herself, "Got in a fight. Lost my fucking job. Lost my fucking gun. Just *know* the house is getting re-posessed. Fucking *Union bullshit*."

"You're having a bad day." A woman says from a barrel she's sitting on. Thin, small and short with a pack of gum in one hand and a crystal-quartz gem in the other. Her eyes are behind sunglasses and she's kicking her feet as she waits.

"Yeah, I'm looking for an adult, have you seen one?" She says to the tiny woman as she climbs out of the sewer lifting the manhole cover with one hand and dropping it easily on the sewer. "Fucking. **Goddamnit.**" She says as something tweaks in her back.

Raising an eyebrow as she stands up, shirt riding up and showing her midriff before sliding back down, briefly revealing almost *neon* tattoos. "I'm twenty nine, jackass." She says at an impressive five foot.

"Yeah, but what's that in human years." Katherine snaps back, putting a hand on her back, "Sorry. I'm having a bad day."

Rolling her eyes visibly even through the sunglasses, the woman speaks, "Faith, what's your name?" She asks a question to steer the conversation.

"Katherine, unless you bite me, then it's Kat." She says, pulling out a pack of the blue cigarettes. "Ah *fuck* my prescriptions." Before taking one out and lighting it angrily.

"Prefer rope to teeth." She idly comments, moving to a car, a beater of a familiar stripe, the type Katherine's been getting used to *not* seeing.

"I would too if I was bite sized." Katherine says looking at the shitty vehicle. Taking a big puff, setting herself straight. "Sorry, do we know each other?"

"They asked me to kill you once, said it seemed stupid." Faith comments, starting the engine with a rattling cough of smoke and fumes.

Katherine snorted, "Yeah, sounds like you have a better sense of your capabilities than they did. Am I getting in?"

"You wanna walk sixty miles?" She asks, "And no, I just didn't want to flatten a neighborhood for one gal." The engine finally starts fully.

Katherine laughed hopping into the car, "If you'd met my wives you'd know how unbelievably *little* that'd do for your long-term life goals."

Faith shrugs, "Dunno, pretty good at killing things. It's like my shtick, that and fire." The car pulls down the road and starts on its pathway through the city, "I think we served similar purposes to be honest. 'Cept I'm better."

"I'll turn the lights green," she offers as they drive, gently pushing entropy to cause timers to fail forcing lights to green, before letting them return to normal as they passed through. "Yeah? You ever been to Fresno?" She says taking another drag on her cigarette a dark thought in their mind.

"Who the fuck willingly goes to *Fresno*?" Faith frowns at the idea.

"Someone who stopped EDE's, Werewolves, and five dozen ATF agents. With a sniper rifle and Broadway tunes." Katherine snorts, bragging letting the bravado talk.

Faith thinks, "I think I did a hit in Oklahoma with AC/DC in the background."

"You can not talk shit about Fresno than say you went to *Oklahoma* willingly. At least Fresno's in the fucking state." Another puff as she changes another light green.

She points a finger at Katherine, "I was not *willingly* in Oklahoma, I fell out of a plane. Complicated situation."

"So to be clear." Katherine says, as she waves her hand at *another* red turning it to green, "You're the super assassin who was going to kill me, but you fall out of airplanes, and do singular hits."

"Huh? You're an assassin? I thought you were like...property damage and mass carnage." Faith looks honestly saddened.

"That's... That's part of the problem? I guess? I'm not very good at the assassin-ing part. I just kind of level places." Katherine admits a little quiet taking a deep puff.

"Yeah! That's the fun part innit? Getting to cut loose and just rain hell, make the sky spit fire, the ground quake, geysers vomit magma, the air split into vortexes." Faith asks.

She looks at her and laughs, "I think Christos is over-selling how badly I've beaten him to save face. It was two city blocks, a water main, and like, eighteen lamp posts, and then one of those city circuit breakers in the water."

As the car turns and starts on the highway, Faith nods, "Oh I know Christos is an old fogey, that's normal. I was talking about like, when you guys brought the helicopter." She looks in her rear view window, seeing a flutter of rotor's behind and high above, "Like that."

"Yours?" She asks looking behind them.

"I work at McDonald's, we don't have helicopter money." Faith starts getting out of the driver's seat.

Katherine shrugs, *helicopters* were easy, barely wanting to fly at the best of times. Helicopters seemed to be made to fall apart and crash. Katherine very, *lightly* pressed on entropy and a breeze causing the thing to wobble dangerously and go sideways before the entire thing started to spin dangerously crashing towards the ground. "Should I kill them?" She asks.

Faith sees this halfway out of the car, and the tattoos on her flare out, spreading across her left arm in an almost *growth* of interlocking neon symbols, foreign and occult. A point of heat builds in her hand that sparks into fire before flickering into a *heat haze* that moves to the helicopter and turns the front half into white hot goo that *detonates* a second later.

"Yeah, they're just drones of the Union." She shrugs, getting back into the seat.

That got an eye roll as she gently pushes on the wheel to keep them from drifting into the next lane, "That was *subtle*." Katherine said with a groan, quickly figuring her place out in this new... Work relationship, suddenly feeling *very* similar to Belltower. "The copter crash would've at least *looked* like a copter crash."

"*Fuck* subtle. What's the cops gonna do? Get into a shootout with a wizard?" She smirks at the idea.

"Oh fuck, I'm with *Gandalf* today?! Is the other half fo him in the back?" Katherine looks behind her mockingly.

"Don't make me force choke you." Faith grumbles cutely. Focusing on the road.

With a smile Katherine scrunches up her face, "If you're nice, the next time you try to start the car, I'll just kick the engine over for you."

Faith tilts her head, "Soooooooooooo...Do you *want* me to force choke you? That message wasn't exactly clear." She takes another turn.

"I know," Katherine admits, "I tend to play it by ear, Brats get dommed, and Dommies get serviced." *Maybe don't say 'I tend to play all sides' right now Kat. As funny as that might be.*

Faith has something to say, but then stops as she coughs out a puff of sulfur, "*Fucking backlash fuck.*" She growls out, sounding astonishingly like Estelle with her tone and depth.

"Yeah, that's why I was saying let me handle it, but if it's any consolation, you were *very* impressive." She couldn't help but giggle. This one was *adorable*, she wanted to keep her.

"Fearing paradox is the little death yada yada yada." Faith says, "Take the backlash to the chin, eventually the universe bends over and takes it when you go far enough. Just have to weather the storm 'till then." She is confident in that statement, "Lotta storm though, *lotta storm.*" Her eyes flick to a scar on her arm, circular at the elbow.

Katherine lowers her glasses at that, looking at Faith, "My wife's french, la petite morte means something very different where she is from. Are you translating that right?"

"I was quoting *Dune*." Faith stares incredulously at Katherine.

"Who the fuck is Dune?" Katherine says, tilting her head at her. "I don't know any of you."

"A *book*, by *Frank Herbert*, they made *two movies recently*?" She's *more* incredulous at the complete lack of awareness.

"Were they good?" Katherine asks, "Look, I'm either fucking or killing people, with almost no in-between." That was fairly true.

"Put on a fucking Netflix movie in the background while you're getting spanked or something, jeez." Faith bemoans the media illiteracy.

"That defeats the *entire* purpose of kink play." Katherine grumbled suddenly, *finally* getting annoyed, "It's a scene, it's an *art*, you're making something."

"And why can't Dune be a part of the scene? You're thinking too small, must be the thin air up there." The wizard chuckles as Katherine finally notes there's an actual fucking *staff* in her back seat, complete with gnarled oak tip.

"I've never thought about that." Katherine admitted, sitting there in silence for a moment. Lighting a new cigarette, taking a deep inhale, holding it, then exhaled.

"See, I've got it planned out right. Get them in some sorta comfortable tiedown, or just bare. And you're watching the movie. Hopefully you or whoever the domme is has already seen it so they can ignore it, and the challenge is remembering enough of the movie to answer questions during and at the end." Faith isn't looking at the road, eyes drifting up and to the corner as she imagines, "I'd do like...maybe a crop for wrong questions? Answers, excuse me."

"That... I like that a lot." Katherine admits quiet for a moment longer, "We normally all go into the woods with guns, and whoever is that last person not shot is the bottom that night. We call it War Games."

Faith chuckles, "I work a day job, ain't got the knee health or sanity for that." She takes another turn, and gets on another highway. "It's all about using limited resources to best effect. See, if I had like, a proper harness or mountings, I could do a lot more, but what I have is Netflix, crops—"

"Oh *fuck*, hit up an ATM wait." Katherine realized suddenly, "Like now, before they pull my accounts."

Faith spins the car around, driving backwards in a lane and taking a highly illegal exit to get back on a road, finding a roadside gas station. "Go, pull the like ten grand they have."

Katherine sprints puts the card in and then *empties* the ATM, watching the bills fall out into a huge stack. Before quickly getting to the car, "Still haven't hit my limit, next ATM." In response,

Faith kicks the car back into gear and hits the next gas station, and the next until by gas station six, and about ninety thousand dollars in cash, the card is declined and blocked, leaving Eleanora's card.

Katherine hands Faith forty-five grand counting it out, "Gas money," she says simply, "Get a car that runs."

"Shit, you want a massage to go along with it?" Faith asks, looking at the money. "Cause that's like two years gross income."

"I remember, when I was like, ten years younger." Then she thinks on it, "Well I have a journal about it, LAPD fucked my memory for ten years."

"I blew up a precinct once. They said gas explosion." She admits to a felony easily enough.

Katherine laughs, taking her phone out while she was driving, "This is the Captain of the LAPD Jarred Ox." Pressing play as Eleanora does something *horrifying* with a knife, something scarring and permanent.

"Is that your.... Wife?" Faith is ignoring the road completely as she stares.

With a big winning smile Katherine says, "Yeah that's the love of my life Eleanora, in the back on the buzzsaw with the hand? That's Estelle."

"I think I love your wife too, damn." She admits, bringing herself back into the left lane after drifting through several. Her eyes track other cars with a honed paranoia, looking at everyone as a threat.

"None of us knew they just popped out like that before." Katherine laughs as her hackles raise. Though watching the other *fucking cars* like a hawk, trying to reach for a gun as her own *spiders* start to crawl.

"You need a gun or something Kat?" Faith asks, reaching into her glove box and trying to find something

She takes a deep breath, "No. I guess no, I'd just start shooting at people who get too close." She says moving to close the glovebox gently, but not on the other woman's hand. "You haven't bitten me yet," Katherine says, pointing a finger dangerously close.

Rolling her eyes, Faith bites down hard on the finger, barely not drawing blood in a sudden *snapping* movement.

Katherine grasps her by the chin around the snap, "Good girl." She whispers quietly, trying to suck down the *sharp* pain that was blossoming. Faith's eyes flicker with a blue light that's visible

through the sunglasses at the comment, and a *fierce* pressure forms on Katherine's neck, squeezing down.

In a panic, Katherine gently tries to swerve the car into the median before wondering how much time magic she had used, and how far she was from it snapping back. The force vanishes as Faith has to focus on not dying, twisting the car back onto the road with a hiss and grin, "*Chickened out?*"

"I was willing to die there, you were the one who saved us." Katherine said with a deep breath, and a very uneasy laugh.

Faith's grin grows crooked and entertained, "I'll keep you safe, *Kat*." She promises with a bruise forming on her hands, as if she grabbed something much too hard, though Katherine ignored it, the lashback seeming to be a point of pride.

"I um... I'm not really trained." Katherine admitted quietly, "I've only been doing this like six months, is the... Am I doing it wrong if it's not lashing back constantly?"

"Hmm? Oh no you're doing fine, I'm a sado-masochist with *wild* amounts of narcissism." She laughs loudly, "Its gonna like, kill me at some point."

"Oh, okay, good." Katherine said with a sigh of relief, "I was worried that I was like, way under utilizing shit. Where the hell are we goi— You know what I'm not going to ask the super assassin who blows up helicopters where we're going. I'll let it be a suprise."

Finally turning onto a road, now many many miles out of the city, she says, "They teach you guys subtlety and like, precision over there. We don't believe in hiding." Ignoring the other half of the question as she stops in front of a house. "Casa Faith!" It's well built if in the *middle of nowhere*. One story, broad, off a highway exit and backed with a forest. "Do *not* dig in the backyard."

"Oh how could you tell that I was a big *burier of treasures?*" Katherine asks looking around her, "Was it my pirate eye patch, and giant shovel? Why am I going to be digging holes."

"You seem the type to need a body disappeared often." Faith admits.

"Yeah, I have entropy magic, I just make it rot." Katherine says shrugging, "Wave of the hand and pray to god it doesn't explode rotten viscera everywhere."

"You know, I like that they haven't gotten in your head, its usually like, "Procedure this or that". No man, it's *magic*, I can cast *fireball*, its fucking *awesome!*" Faith grins, getting out of the car.

"I was... Separated due to my two defining traits, being unsocialized and disrespect for basic human dignity." Katherine admits, that part also being true, "The Director was pretty much the

only person I fucking *talked* too while I was there, the rest thought I was creep. It got worse when I shot at a spider on the Coffee maker with the Pfeifer."

"You paid me forty-five bands. You can shoot my oven if you want." Faith is waiting at the door, opening it as Katherine catches up, revealing a home with reasonably well maintained *everything*. Clothes on the floor here or there. Approximately every Doordash bag in existence still on her kitchen counters, and a massively expensive gaming computer setup in a corner of the living room, she *obviously* lives alone.

"Shoot my PC and I'm stringing you up for five days." Faith threatens with a glare.

Katherine rolls her eyes, "I don't run around shooting things I—" She slaps a hand on her other in a small panic grimacing. "I see spiders sometimes. I don't have my meds." She realized suddenly, grabbing for the carton in a small panic. Whipping one out putting it in her mouth as she follows.

"That's okay, I get fucked up too. I can see radio waves sometimes, makes the whole world scream." Faith admits as she sits on a massively oversized couch in front of a TV, "Its why I live out here." Her voice is calm and yet still with a roughness to it, she's screamed a *lot* in her day.

The house didn't stink like cigarettes, which made Katherine concerned, "Do you smoke outside?"

"You talking about my voice?" Faith asks, looking over the edge of her couch.

Katherine grunts and points at the stogie in her mouth.

"Don't give a fuck, just use Febreeze after." She lies back down, "Can't smell shit."

"Your house and clothes don't smell like cigs," Katherine says more to herself, "When it's sundown I gotta call my partners." She moves for the zipo wondering if wandering off on her phone is going to look bad. "You gonna freak if I use my cell on the front porch?"

"Huh?" She frowns, "I'm not paranoid, what're you gonna do? Be a double agent and get killed by me?" She lies back down again, staring at Netflix with the look of deep consideration of *what* to watch.

"There is literally, almost no-one capable of taking me hand to hand, but no. I just **am** a paranoiac, and would have shot me for trying to wan— forget it." Katherine groans walking of before coming back, "Opsec is real and important." She can't help herself.

"I can make the sky catch fire. Opsec's for people who aren't designated as "WMD" on their Union dossier's." She grins.

She rolls her eyes, "You're... Oh god you're frustrating. Opsec is for everyone *around* you not just you. It's normally not **you** that gets hurt when you fuck up, it's someone you care about six miles over and—" She growls.

Faith smirks, thought its not entertained, just an expression, "Lucky me, I live alone in the woods with no one, and have for eleven years."

"You... It's... I don't know why I'm trying to convince you to not let me make a call." Katherine says annoyed, "Just bugs me."

She lifts up to the lip of the couch again, smiling broadly, "It's 'cause you want me to control you, that's my bet." Faith is *very* entertained by the prospect.

"Oh god, I'm going to get adopted by a fucking shit show." She muttered angrily, stomping out of the house. "No opsec, no funds, no *talent acquisition*. **No fucking VIGIL.**" Dialing the number into her phone she ringed Eleanora just as the sun was setting.

"*Good morning, mon amour.*" Eleanora says, yawning with the daysleep's fade.

Katherine said, "I talked to Belltower about that thing. We got in a fight and he threw me out of The Union I'm hiding out with some friends stay safe." Quick, curt, to the point, "They don't smoke inside and I don't think they keep schedules. I'm... Frustrated already."

"*Hmm, would you like me to come over? Or I could send for Estelle. Keep you company?*" Eleanora considers.

She looks inside, "Hey DW," She yells into the house, "Or WD or whatever you called yourself. Can my wives come over?"

"They're vampires right? Ask them about the Massassa. If they know what it is, they can't come. Unless they're not the bad kind of know what it—Ask them about it." Faith shouts back.

"What do you know about the..." She turns back, "You said Mufasa? Like the Lion King?"

"**Massassa.**" Her voice hits a volume that shakes glass.

"Marsala," She says loudly into the phone with a small giggle.

"*Ah, the war between wizards? Is it still ongoing?*" Eleanora asks.

"She thought it ended." Katherine yells back, "That good enough?"

"It was a short ceasefire! We'll kill all your wizard vampires soon enough!" She shouts back.

"Hey if you threaten my family, ever again, your insides will be outsides, I don't give a fuck **what** you rain down on me. I fought the union for them, you think I won't make every **fucking** joint of yours bend backwards?!"

"You know, if you were going to ask me shit constantly, why didn't you just stay inside?"

"Because I didn't want to make your **fucking clothes** smell like cigarettes. You can't smell it, but people notice and they make assumptions beca— Shut the fuck up." Katherine roared angrily, "Yes, come over, please, I'm going to skin this woman."

"I heard that!" She shouts, "By the way, I didn't mean to threaten your awesome wives! They aren't vampire wizard fucking traitors!" Faith is shouting.

"People don't always get to *choose* to be vampires," Katherine roared hanging up the phone, and walking into the now **very** annoyed. "It just *happens* sometimes."

She looks as if she can't imagine that, "Bitch I can set a vampire on fire with three syllables! How are they gonna non-consensually turn me?!"

"You called *other* vampire wizard's traitors, they can't *help it* if they're turned it fucks with their head and makes them love their sire unconditionally. It's not a goddamn choice." This has *always* been a sticking point for her, and the bile in her throat is rising, face visibly turning red.

"Oh shit for real?" Faith asks frowning, "That makes this morally complicated." She's thinking on it carefully now.

She groans, "The whole *reason* for this fucking fight, is because I have this black market site where I 'sell' shit to vampires, but if they're credit card declines I send it out anyways. Fucking... Pills that make them not smell bad to animals. Stuff to help them eat longer and stuff." Still trying to find a goddamn gun annoyed.

"Oh, well the Massassa War started like, eight hundred years ago cause a bunch of 'pires turned a bunch of wizards in the night by surprise, and we swore to exterminate the traitors that pulled down the defenses." She explains, "It's kinda like our 9/11."

"Oh cool, so I switched from the Authoritarian side to the Genocide side, that's *awesome*." She said hissing quietly.

"Oh *come on*, the only one with a successful genocide on record was the Union!" Faith shouts, simultaneously aggravated and excited.

"Well! I didn't **know** that." Katherine admitted still being snotty, but clearly subdued. "I just... Vampires... Argh. People matter." As if stuttering settled the entire matter.

"Can I just say I *love* shouting at you, it's great, you don't back down an inch." Faith compliments Katherine before immediately jumping into the debate again, "And yeah, people matter! Traitors don't, so if I see a vampire wizard and confirm they didn't get like, *mindfucked* into it, I'm gonna set them on fire."

"That seems... Fair." Katherine admits taking a deep breath, "That's a very fair set of values. I just don't... The Union. The vampire thing has been a sticking point for *months*. Where I beg them, to make lives just a *little* bit easier, and it's always 'Oh well, why would we do this for the vampires and not for the sleeper,' or 'oh to be immortal is unnatural, to be human is divine' or some shit. Just the stupidest fucking things, and it's like. 'OK, Great, you made a fucking space laser and cure cancer can we *share that? No?! Well why the fuck not?! And there's never an answer, then I'm flying off to fucking Washington to launch a cruise missile at a cult because I fell into working helicopter blades that decapitated me and fucking...*' She looks to Faith, "You know?"

Faith nods, "I *know*, I got this thing." She gestures with a gem, "It's my little fun trick, my soul's in it. So there's been a lot of incidents where I've been in a ditch for three weeks 'fore someone found me and healed me. Dying sucks and then they're like "Why did you die, why were you doing that, focus on the mission, not your personal ambitions—" Bla fucking *bla*."

Katherine throws her hands up, "Like, yeah! NO **shit** I didn't want to fucking die, we don't need to do an AAR on how badly I fucked up when the end result was 'Ah, you memorized the future up to this point, and were in a new situation, sucks to fucking suck.'"

"YEAH!" Faith nods, matching energies and then heightening them. "Its like every fucking *flaw* is their business, and that one mistake you made way back is suddenly the *talk of the town*." She's stood up and is pacing around now.

"Like ***I don't know***, Maybe getting ***Eaten, Seventy two thousand, eight hundred and fifty six times, shooting myself in the head sixteen times, getting hit by a fuck CAR THIRTEEN times, and then getting Demolished by a tank launched out of a third story window isn't my GODDAMN Fault***. When am I trained for FALLING tanks!?"

"They don't get it! Every fucking situation you're supposed to be some *pro*!" She's falling into the complaints, "What am I supposed to do? Sniff the sniper out with my actual nose?! Oh, no of course, I should just ***know that they're there!? Fucking know the airplane's infested with vampires?!?***"

"I can *actually do that* and they still get mad when things go EXACTLY how I say. I can literally control fucking probability of everything, I do ***math magic*** on the entirety of the fucking timeline, and I still get bitched out when something I didn't expect happens. It's like, I'm not the only *time wizard*!? It's not ***my fault*** that no-one told me that Christos can turn into a fucking cloud after I drop a city block on him. Ninety nine out of a hundred times, a city block kills a man."

"Fucking **RIGHT?! Brute force *usually fucking works!***" She's in front of Katherine now, also red in the face, voice scratchy, "AND THE ONE **TIME** IT DOESN'T, 'Oh why didn't you try this clever solution-' Go *fuck yourself*, you try thinking clever with a knife in your chest!"

Katherine finally feels good to yell and let it out. "Getting eaten fucking *hurts* after the orgasm." She says angrily, "Like. Really *really* bad. Then you love the person, and they're crying because they killed you. And it's like ***well maybe don't fucking kill me next time I dunno!***"

Faith is insensate now, "YEAH, 'Oh sorry love, I didn't realize-' GO **FUCK YOURSELF**, don't EAT PEOPLE YOU LOVE." She screams, a flicker of fire leaving her mouth.

"Your mouth is on fire." Katherine says pointing, "Should I be ducking for cover?"

The point out takes the wind out of her sails, making her breathe and focus, "Wow, I fucking lost it." Faith idly says. "I had a lot to get out. That was pretty great." She looks up at Katherine, brown eyes gleaming with enjoyment and catharsis.

"I feel like I definitely said way more than I probably should tell people I just met," Katherine admits quietly, rubbing her eyes. "I... I just want to kill people, why does it have to be so goddamn hard."

Faith nods, "You know, if you weren't like six foot fuck my life, I'd probably have tried to kiss you at the end of that rant." She admits, going back to the couch.

"My wives would have killed you and my entire life would have been ruined. I get permission before those things, they say follow the heart but I like... Rules, codified agreements." Katherine nods, pulling up her phone to text the family group chat, "Can I kiss the terrorist?"

"she cute right?" Estelle texts back.

Katherine holds the camera up to Faith, "I'm getting permission to fuck, pose?"

Faith quickly holds up a peace sign, shrugging, "I'm flat, I dunno what you want."

She snaps the picture, sending it to Estelle and Eleanora.

"she's cute." Estelle sends back.

"*I agree, she is very small and adorable. Is she irish?*" Eleanora finally sends.

"?????" Katherine texts, "That's still a weird question to ask someone before fucking in 2024"

"*Nevermind then, mon amour. Follow your heart.*"

"Is that a yes or is that a no but i dont want to be controlling"

"It was a yes."

"Is the mood ruined?" Katherine asks putting the phone away.

Faith thinks, "It's not like 100%, but it's like still 85%." She answers.

Katherine stands up, walks over and grabs her by the throat, lifting her up to kiss her deeply, aggressively pressing herself to Faith, pinning her against the wall. A second later asking, "Ok how about now?"

"Mood's back." Faith says, quickly wrapping her legs around Katherine and holding on as she pushes back into the kiss, surprisingly forceful for her size. In a second separation for breath, she asks, "So, like, are you actually a switch?"

"Yeah, mostly praise kink either way." She says breathing deep. "Just don't say mean things, pretty much my one hard red flag rule I learned. Estelle called me a cunt once and I cried for about five minutes."

"Kay." She nods as a force shoves both of them into the couch, her ontop, "Cause like, I'm *not* a bottom." Faith grins, flickering air all around her, force in every surrounding mote of space.

"Oh sorry, you're so tiny, I just assumed." Katherine said, suddenly switching to the brat position **very** quickly. "Do we need to get you a little step ladder?"

"You know that's like the five hundredth time someone's said that, right?" Faith says, as blades of air feel like razors on Katherine's skin, barely not cutting.

"Really? I assumed I'd stand on it so you're eye level with your work." Katherine says, trying to switch tactics inelegantly, a bit flustered realizing she was with someone from this century, and not two vampires where everything still sounds new.

"You like these clothes?" Faith asks, dragging a finger down the suit jacket, fabric splitting with a blade of air."

"Okay, wait *nooooo*." Katherine yelps, "This is like, literally a million dollars worth of technology."

"You want me to stop?" She continues dragging a blade of air through it, splitting more fabric.

"Yes, *please* how are you even **doing** that?!" Katherine gasps watching as the suit gets torn, gently feeling the cut to see if the gel was leaking.

Pulling her finger up, the cutting stops as Faith leans away, "I can probably fix it, no worries Kat. Now, take it off."

"Oh thank god." Katherine said, getting undressed *very* quickly and nervously. "I will *literally* never get a custom tailored anti tank-round suit again."

Faith takes her shirt off, revealing tattoos that trail around burn marks on her torso, trailing green, blue and gold symbols in geometric pattern around amorphous scars where heat and cold tore at her. "You mind the scars?" She asks, undoing her belt.

"Is it objectifying to say I find them *really* hot?" Katherine says as she lounges on the couch naked letting every part of herself be on display. Internally very nervous with this *third* woman. Was she becoming a bit of a gadabout? She needed to hang out with more young people.

"At this point its just flirting. By the way you are *smokin'* holy shit." She stares at Katherine, starstruck.

Katherine grins ear to ear, "Thank you! I work out, I lift like two hours a day, and I watch my macro and micronutrients *like a hawk*. It's a constant effort."

Climbing onto the couch and overtop Katherine, Faith smiles down at her with little arcs of electricity spilling from her lips. "I eat ramen and doordash once a day." She says, lowering.

"I can cook, I'll... Cook. La—" Their lips intertwine and the kiss tastes like tingling battery acid, like she had just licked a sea anemone. The sparks of lightning tickling her insides make every part of herself become a glowing light. Faith tries to pull away, but the *new* sensation is immediately ripped back with a kiss, until Faith bites her lip and she lets go. "Sorry. Sorry. Third... I don't norm—" She gasps.

Faith's smirking, as the lightning passes through her fingertips, brushing them along Katherine's sides and making her muscles twitch as the electricity pulses, barely not painful for now. "Normally what? Finish your sentences, *Kat*." Faith croons, smirk growing to a grin.

"I normally don't just grab people. There's a lot..." The zaps continue again, and she is suddenly quiet. Grinning ear to ear, though she *did* wish it was a little less warm. Though, that wasn't a thing morsels could control right. Is that a weird request? She was lost in her own head, until a spark of lightning brought her back to reality.

The lightning got just a bit more intense, causing Faith to buck a little. Resisting the urge to just pull Faith into an embrace while shaking and stuttering from zaps. She leans down, whispering into Katherine's ear, "*What do you want? More shocks? Hot? Cold? Something else?*"

"Cold, please." She says with a grin, "Uh... And razors. And needles. And ummm..." She had never made a list before. "Do you have a braided whip?"

"I have *just* the thing." She breathes out, mist from her breath forming into an icy *dagger* in front of Katherine. "Any rules?" She asks, resting it on Katherine's collarbone, letting her *feel* the chill.

Katherine thinks, "Red means stop, yellow means go back a bit and ummm... Don't kill me, but scars are cool." She smiles wildly looking at the dagger. "Oh, not too much blood loss, the girls will be hungry when they get here."

"Mkay." She nods, "Funny thing about a knife like this." Faith drags it down, cutting a thin, *cold* line on Katherine's chest, "It's so cold the capillaries shut. Just gotta keep it above—."

"**YES.**" Katherine screams interrupting her, "Do it. *Doitdoitdoit.*" Almost bucking into the blade happily, the line making her hiss. "It's cold. I think that's the best."

Faith smiles darkly at that, starting to cut in geometric patterns, putting symbols and sigils on Katherine's skin with a careful, dead steady hand. Like she's done this exact work a million times. "You mind if I scar the symbol for Venus into you? I think it's fitting." She asks, already doing it.

"The planet or the goddess?" She winces as the *biting* chill splits her open, and she feels her body tingle and a shiver to run down her spine, as every part of her stands at attention, her body feeling leached of something precious.

"Goddess." Faith answers, sinking the blade a half inch deeper to make sure it sticks, eyes lost in the artistry, staring at the travelling edge with almost dreamlike fascination. "But its the planet too, technically." She adds absentmindedly.

"Wait, so the myrtle or the rose then? Venus has two symbols." She says trying to distract her, bring her hands up to Faith's waist. "Or do you mean Aphrodite? Are you just doodling over there?"

"You're thinking pop culture." She puts a curve to the cut, "I'm working off Master Gott's symbology. Fifteenth century magic." Faith smiles at the touch, but continues.

"Venus the goddess is definitely older than fifteenth century magic." She says as she winces at the cut bringing the hands from the waist to the thighs. Holding *tight* about to do something terribly stupid, and dangerous.

"Sure, but I didn't want to just put the female symbol on you." She takes another curve, "At that point I might as well just write my *name*...*Can I?*" Faith is nearly done, taking a moment to look up at Katherine. Seeing a *very* dangerous look in Katherine's eyes as she moves her hands to the tiny woman's ankles.

"I don't know *can you?*" There was a moment of pure stupid blind panic in Katherine as she thought about what she was about to do, and wondered if Faith had an inkling of her intentions, before *yanking on* her ankles, pulling her down deep while the knife dangled dangerously close over her chest.

With *fast* reactions, Faith turns the blade sideways, merely cutting *into* Katherine as she has to shift suddenly with a yelp, "You *crazy*-Oh you said not to say mean things." She stops herself, instead, pulling the *knife* out slowly.

"That one's a compliment." Katherine said wincing loudly as it gets pulled out. "You just seemed comfortable."

"Let's fix that." Faith mutters, one hand sparking as she lowers it to the symbol of Venus, the sparks increasing in volume, "This is gonna hurt, it's gonna feel good too this low though." Contact, electric shocks transfer through Katherine's body, lightning up nerves and tensing muscles *dangerously* taut, it shocks pain and pleasure alike as the cuts are gently brushed over with the electric heat, permanently sealing them over *minutes* of breathless, senseless, thoughtless contact.

It feels terrible, and amazing, and like a victory and a failure. Every nerve vibrating in ecstatic randomness as the shocks buzzed through her body. She tries to gasp to say something but can't get a word out, as the sparks start to finally peter out, Katherine wondered. "So... Would that have just gone through my heart?"

"*Mhmm.*" Faith mumbles, staring at the burnt symbol with a *deeply* interested stare.

"I assumed you'd break concentration, like a DnD wizard." She gasps, "I almost fucking died," She laughs manically, shocked and scared. "I... Think I just let me being horny allow you to do a crazy magic thing though." She breathes again, paranoia kicking back in, being pushed off by again, just wanting to kiss this crazy woman. The two feelings fighting hard with each other.

"You trust me yet?" Faith idly asks.

"No!" Katherine laughs loudly, "I have Schizophrenia, I don't trust anyone. That's like... Impossible."

Faith moves the knife to an unfinished line, "No other question then, can I finish this rite on your skin? It's gonna blow your mind." She rechecks her work.

"What does it do?" She asks, "Fuck it your hot, I'm stupid and immortal, go ahead."

Its one deft cut before the world turns white, somewhere far in the background a sense of electric shocks is felt as every nerve is somehow stimulated at once under the very watchful eye of Faith. False stops barely last a second before Katherine is thrown back into the tumbling

abyss of sensation, shaking and sputtering, breath only possible when the other woman allows, *thought* only possible at her allowance. It feels like hours, it might be minutes. Finally it stops as Faith gives a hiss, an arc burning her hand, adding to the damage as the backlash strikes.

"You...still alive?" She asks, gently brushing Katherine's cheek.

Katherine blinks blearily, looking up into space, "Why you already giving up?" Though everything in her tone, face, and breath said this was false airs. "Is that permanently a thing you can do to me now?"

"With a word, yeah." She says, "Unless you break the rite." Even without seeing her face, Katherine can hear the grin.

"Which is carved into my skin." Katherine says quietly through pained breaths.

"Wouldn't be hard, just a knife and some mangling of the delicate symbols." Faith whispers into Katherine's ear. "But if you do that, I can't say...." She lets that trail off into nothing for a second, "And make you feel *everything*."

"True," She gasps loudly again, "I make poor decisions I'm realizing. What happens if you carve two of them?"

Faith smirks again, "Wanna find out?"

"Yes." Katherine admits shivering. The chill settling into her bones, as the blade dances across her flesh much faster this time, though she wondered shortly into the cuts whether this was necessarily a good idea. Trying to remember why she was even *here* in the first place was, what *here* really meant, where was *here*?

The feeling of the knife pulling away blanks that thought. "So. This is gonna be extreme, I felt a little artistic and think I managed to make them a little different." Faith chuckles.

"Ok, go!" Katherine said, holding her tightly into an embrace, but careful not to plunge the knife into herself this time.

"**Vapulo.**" Faith commands, and the familiar utter shocking agony-pleasure mixes with a deep chill that settles into bones, skin and body alike, intensifying everything with that wintry edge of sensitivity, reaching a height that *equals* a bite, an overload of sensation that matches up to the unmatchable. It stops....sometime later.

"Thi—Thi—Third one?" She whispers quietly... Small happy tears in her eyes.

"*You want warm too?*" Faith asks.

"No," She whispers quietly, "not—not really no. Don—don't like war—warm."

Faith considers, starting the work idly as she starts taking artistic liberties here and there with this ancient spell to restrain prisoners. "You know, they made this to arrest people. So much low voltage shocks you couldn't talk, think or cast anything."

"I get bitten reg—reg—regularly." She stutters trying to pull herself together, "It's all fun. Worst case scenario, I just buck it like everything else." She says quietly, weirdly confident of *something*.

"I won't kill you, I know exactly how far a human can go." Faith mumbles, "*Haven't even had to resuscitate yet.*" She mentions as the symbols come together.

"You—you're—you're too good— good to me." She whispers as the new cuts are carved in, still shivering. Wondering if maybe her body wants more than her mind can bear, or vice versa.

"Excellence in all things." Faith smirks with the last cut. Before anything else can be done, she then commands, "**Vapulo.**" Everything goes white, sensation completely passing by sense or the ability of the mind to withstand it.

White turns to black as life ebbs away from the pressures.

004 - Fear sets in

As fetid ocean waters rise under the Santa Monica pier, the sound of joy and laughter echoes out from the distant festivities. There's a blocked off part of the street, an animal attack tarped over and covered by uniformed officers idly mumbling conversations in flickering lamplight.

Watching from afar, someone with broad shoulders and a large coat pretends not to watch. She has a cigarette between her lips, her eyes are empty and sallow. Large dark circles making them puffy and the red cracks betray months without rest. Her hair is thrown into a tight auburn bun, and the smell of tobacco permeates every part of her being. She ashes it with mis-matched fingernails, covered in chipped emerald nail polish. Her trench coat has stains of something dark, and the very edges are frayed from years of use. Her phone is out, with a professional lens attached to slyly take photos.

The corpse is barely visible under the cover, looking like an industrial accident. It's just one of a dozen distractions that keep everyone's attention tightly wound to the life around them rather than anything more worrying. A diner calls to travelers in the night, Surfside, a place that looks like it should have closed down decades ago, but somehow clings to life.

Click, the near-silent photograph as the officers don't even bother to care to notice is saved, blood spattered pier recorded on the device. A buzz pulses in the background of the sight, like a speaker set to infrasound. Finally, an ambulance arrives, more clicks, more photographs. The body is moved, slipping out from under the tarp to show the vomit-inducing horror of ruined flesh, shattered bone and deep organ-spilling furrows that happened across its frame.

Katherine pulls her gun out and wings the EMT and the two police officers in a practiced maneuver wounding, but not killing, dropping them to the floor. "*Mon amour, régálons-nous et commençons notre temps ensemble.*" *My love, feast on them and let us start our time together.* Katherine opens her phone and calls the Washington number, "Yeah it's Katherine Doukas, get a chopper ready, I'm going to save Director Belltower, the Washington Mission went tits up." Then turning to see Eleanora finish her meal she said, "I love you dearly, I must save a man, and then we begin a wonderful life together. It's beauty unimaginable." She says walking forward to grab her by the waist.

Eleanora tilts her head, smiling at the touch, her mouth opening.

"*You're mine.*" It's a painful *start*, something in time ripping as an electric discharge blasts out. Heart smashing back to life and destiny cracked apart. Faith's ensconced in a cloak of backlash and forces, the universe on her back trying to rip at her and failing.

"Oh that's bad." Katherine sad suddenly, no longer having fun, "Oh you're not allowed to do that." Suddenly as time tears around her, and she feels these tiny tingles and cracks in entropy threaten to tear *Katherine* apart. "What did you *do!*?" She yelped, "You can't be fucking the timeline like that, bringing me back isn't like bringing other people back. ***It's very very dangerous*** on a very different level." Suddenly freaking out as she tries to grab Faith and protect her from the backlash.

"*I know.*" Faith gasps through the aftershocks of lightning on her skin, "*Isn't it amazing?*" She grins bloodily, a whisper of fire from her mouth.

Katherine just holds her tight, now a little scared for Faith, "I'm impressed, but don't do that, not for me." She's running her fingers through her hair scared, "That's so bad. That's *so bad for you.*"

"I didn't do it *just* for you." Faith whispers, "*I did it for **me** too.*" She laughs *dangerously*. Power and hubris intermixing in a heady atmosphere, she feels invincible.

"Don't fuck with the time stream," Katherine says quietly, "It doesn't respect anyone. It's not like other things, it's ***cruel*** it knows how to hurt you in ways you think aren't possible, and will create ***new*** ways to hurt you for having the hubris to think that time is something that can be stopped." She's very much panicking now, trying to reach for her medication, which of course isn't there. "I don't care if you bring that on you, don't bring that shit on me. The last time I fucked with time I got eaten. A lot."

"You're so *inexperienced*." Faith chuckles, "Backlash is just magick. Grab it, weave it, its all the same, just not from you." She's smiling.

She reaches for her cigarettes, lighting them up in the house no longer caring about her clothes or anything else. "No, time's different, because it's not a *force* it's not a *physics* it's" She starts very quickly starts to smoke sucking it down trying to finish the entire thing before something *worse* happens.

"*Watch me.*" She growls out, power flaring out from her as the house shakes, something *very wrong* happening as the flaring cloak of twisted backlash falling under her will, nose bleeding slow drops in the process. The paradox is grasped, twisted, bent and forced to *vanish*. Faith drops like a sack of potatoes immediately after.

"The fuck did... Did you just break my time loop?" She said angrily, looking at her. "The fuck did you just do?"

"*Huh?*" Faith asks confused, "*No,, the...paradox. You know what that is...right?*" She asks.

"NO! I don't even know why I go back IN TIME!?" She says lighting a second cigarette with the first, holding the first in her hand.

"Don't trust me, trust my knowledge." Faith straightens out, smiling at the exertion with something resembling a smile.

She looks at her panicked, "No? Absolutely fucking not." Katherine is shivering fully at the thought and is curling up, "I have been trapped for a hundred some odd years because of that thing you can't go fucking with it."

The smaller woman frowns, looking at Katherine. "You...they *really* got in your head, huh?" She considers. "We're Awakened, Katherine. The universe is our canvas. You can break, bend or bind to your will *anything* you want. Pay the pied piper his due and *push through*." She growls out, "There's nothing *trapping* you except yourself. Don't *bow* to a fucking loop, make it *yours*."

"I *like the loop*." Katherine says, "I don't want you ***fucking*** with my safety net." She's looking for a gun, or a knife or a weapon, suddenly ***very*** focussed on *exiting* this particular loop.

"You want to leave?" Faith suddenly gets quiet, looking down with a frown.

She freezes, her panic trying to be pushed down, but her body is covered in magic scars she didn't understand, and now she was fucking with forces far beyond her comprehension she wasn't *safe*. This wasn't *safe*; *they* could pull her out of her permanent safety net, the spiders crawling in from everywhere. Their legs skittering making tiny clicks like a million gears of clocks creating a cacophony that makes her eyes screw up in pain as she tries to flee but not wanting

to seem scared. "No, I just... I'm scared now. I thought that was untouchable." She did want to leave, but if she left now she'd get brought back, she needed a way to destroy the brain permanently so that didn't happen again but how.

"It's just magick. You can learn it too, Kat." Faith says, "You'll need awhile to get as good as me, but it's all just...magick."

"Wi—Wi— Will you remember me next loop?" She says very scared, only Belltower remembered her, and maybe Christos. Juries out on him still. Maybe. Her heart is going a million miles in her chest, and she doesn't have a *gun*.

"I *can*, with the right spell." Faith admits, frowning, "Should I cast it?" She asks, hands behind her.

"No!" She yells, "It's my loop, people need to stay out, I don't even want **Belltower** there. No-one belongs in *my* loop." Katherine is having a full on meltdown trying to figure out how to flee how to get away from someone who can follow her through *time*. Her one escape her get out of Jail free card. "Fuck, fuck, fuck. Fuck. Shit."

"Do you...wanna like—?" Faith tries to ask.

"Yes, give me a do-over." She says quickly looking for a gun, a knife anything. "I need to start these last six months over, now."

"Kat." Faith stares with a frown, "I'm not letting you go that easily. When you calm down, we can talk *more*." She says sternly, "There's no weapon to start over with, I can sense every bit of metal in the house.

Katherine has *time*. She starts to reach out at the house itself shaking it from the very vibrations, to tear down the entire house on top of them, to **obliterate** this. You know what's fucking random? What would be **nuts** if a volcano erupted underneath them as the sun went supernova, as a gravity well formed on top of her as the house collapsed if lashback of all that hit her at once as well.

Magma flows start up outside, earth cracking as probability shatters, time changes, a million million years ago altered to make something happen *now*. Backlash forms in the air, something... *cosmically* large. Its terrifying, bone chilling, unbelievably powerful. The second attempted change fails, reaching that far back making backlash so much worse, so much more infinite in scale.

"*Kat*." Faith growls, reaching out with her bright, perfect *essence*, grabbing the backlash, holding it *back*. Trying to delay punishment for hubris with a desperate might, magic flaring out in every direction, trying to hold it all, get to everything, *command* her universe.

"I'm the master of everything? THEN I'M FUCKING LEAVING." A brain aneurism, a pulmonary embolism, a fucking stroke, a gravity well. Something something kills her, kills this, kills everything sending her **back**. How is anyone this strong.

The pier flickers, a shock breaks the illusion, the memory, the loop's attempt at restoring. Another death, back on the pier, another shock, back here. Faith is struggling, even her seemingly bottomless wells of power hitting a limit, facing stress and then started to creak and crack, "*Katherine j-just g-give me t-time.*" She begs, falling to a knee, bleeding from her eyes and nose.

"Fuck no, **Fuck no.**" She yells, "No-one is this strong, No-one *should* be this strong." She tries to bite off her tongue now, no longer able to rely on magic anymore.

"Omnes ut pulvis." Faith roars out, a wave of magic hitting everything, pushing lava down, blasting the backlash back and making her crumple limply to the floor, bleeding a puddle into the floorboards. Stiff, pale, still.

"I remember saying you survive past death, I'm getting the fuck out of here." Katherine says running to grab her car keys, and get the gun from the car. Opening the door quickly, reaching into the glovebox searching for it, hunting, digging, scrounging, before putting it up to her head and pulling the trigger.

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The corpse is barely visible under the cover, looking like an industrial accident. It's just one of a dozen distractions that keep everyone's attention tightly wound to the life around them rather than anything more worrying. A diner calls to travelers in the night, Surfside, a place that looks like it should have closed down decades ago, but somehow clings to life.

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"FUCK." She screams, "Fuck. **Fuck.**" She screams again, "Eleanora please I'm scared." She says pulling her gun out just killing everyone there. "Please I'm scared, there's a checklist and I'm scared."

The vampire is *very* confused, tilting her head at Katherine with no recognition.

"Eat the bodies, don't kill me. I make you happy, but I'm really scared right now, and I can't, and if you kill me I don't know when I'll calm down and everytime the loop breaks it gets worse so I need you to just trust me and not kill me because I fed you and I love you and please."

A flicker of something like electricity *terrifies* Katherine as it is felt through her, a weak attempt, an effort from beyond the edge of exhaustion.

"**NO.**" She screams firing her gun into the glass storefront unloading on whatever that might be before dropping her gun and picking up her phone. "The. Agent... Katherine Dukas, I need... I need to get Washington. Belltower in trouble. Go, I need coffee and chocolate." Then looking at Eleanora, "Don't kill me."

Buzz, it sparks again, trying to revive through time, trying to reach back with a worry, refusing to give up on her objective. Faith *not* accepting defeat, rejecting loss in any circumstance.

"Mother **fucker.**" She finally screams trying to lash at it with *time* and entropy. "Fuck you **decay.** **Fucking rot you crazy bitch.**" She screams, before picking up the gun and shooting herself again, hoping *another* loop will make it... Harder some how.

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She pulls her gun out, firing, killing the cops, then says, "Eleanora, I'm having a terrible day. I need..." She feels the buzz, "Fuck **off**." She screams, putting it to her head and firing again.

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Katherine, please, I don't want to die. An ethereal voice, fragile and crackling, *I can't push much further. I can't.* It's a desperate request, begging Katherine to not push to the edge, not force her to dangle. Almost angrily she screams at no-one "**YOU'RE AWAKENED REMEMBER. JUST PAID THE FUCKING PIED PIPER, IT'S THAT EASY REMEMBER. JUST DRAW ON YOUR STUPID FUCKING CANVAS!**" She picks up the gun and fires into her head again.

The black is interrupted by a few more weak shocks, extending it seconds as the mind on the other side plans, considers, thinks of solutions from a degrading timeline, a collapsing something. Spells race through Faith's mind, dozens, hundreds, thousands, *more*.

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Katherine pulls her gun out, and shoots the cops and the EMTs executing them on the spot. "Eleanora, Eat." She says quietly shivering, "I love you but... I can't handle being lovey dovey right now." She pulls out her phone, calling The Union, "Shut the fuck up. I'm Agent Doukas, it's in my file, I'm not having a conversation about it. Get the fucking chopper going."

I figured it out.

"FUCK." She screams, putting the gun to her head again and pulling the trigger.

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It's true, your loop's strong, I can't break it. Maybe an Old Master could.

She puts the gun to her head again, pulling the trigger.

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But with the right words, the right actions, the right solutions. I can survive it. Enter the whirlpool at the edge, like you. Ride your wake.

"Fuck **NO!**" She screams, "**GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME.**" She puts the gun to her head again, but she doesn't pull the trigger. It doesn't matter, she realizes this is just a message, it was already done. "**FUCK**" She screams "**FUCK.**"

"Are you...well?" Eleanora asks, curiously getting low and near to Katherine.

"No." She cries curling into a ball, "I'm a time mage in a time loop I got really arrogant. I thought I knew it all, and now something's fucking with my perfect loop. Now it's going to fall apart."

And if I do it just right. I can bring others in your wake.

"I feel like I know you.....Katerina?" Eleanora asks,

"You say that but you never d—" She looks at her and then *immediately* puts the gun in her mouth pulling the trigger. Needing to flee from whatever *the fuck that was*.

005 - My Loop!

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Do you not want her along? I'm operating in the dark here, I can't see much, I don't exist yet.

Get out of my loop. Get out of my head. Get out. GET OUT. Oh god, what did she do what did she do, oh she's so stupid. Oh she's so fucking dumb. She fucked up so bad.

You're not alone.

Who asked you to fuck with my loop. She screams, putting the gun to her head again, knowing it wouldn't help, then remembering that everytime, it would fuck up Belltower. That she had just shot him six or seven times in a row in the chest.

I can help, Kat. Let me.

You want to help shut the fuck up. Katherine SHOUTED in her mind, "Where the fuck is my chopper," She says the minute the Union phone is picked up, "I make three quarter of a billion dollars and kill for you fucks, I ask for one goddamn plane and it takes twenty minutes. Generally I'm nice, if it's not here in ten, Olivia, I'm going to put this revolver in your **FUCKING** mouth and paint the ping pong table with it." Then she hangs up before the nice lady could answer.

Is it fair to do this to other people?

Was it fair to kill all the people you kill? Shut the fuck up, you were so perfect and masterful weren't you. Knew what you were doing didn't you. Do you feel all powerful and might right now?! Do you!? She seethes "Eleanora I'll meet you at the house. I'm going to fucking **scream**."

I feel like I care about a broken girl I met in a sewer entrance. I want to help her.

"I'm not **broken** I'm **very very** functional. I have a dream home. I have two wives. I have a million fucking guns, so you just shut the fuck up. Or I swear to god, I will bring the Entire

fucking Union on your GODDAMN head." She demands of the ether. Demanding the aura around her to give her peace.

You've killed yourself seven times in six minutes. You've forced someone into pain that you care about because you are scared. Let me help, I can change the game, alter the rules, make it winnable.

"I like the **game**. Faith. I always **won**. **Everything was FINE**." She growls, her perfect time sense telling her it's been eleven minutes, picking up her phone, "Olivia *where the fuck is my chopper!?*"

Then why can't Eleanora remember? Why can't Estelle? Why don't you want them to love you truly forever.

"Because Faith, it's not THEIR loop, it's MY loop." She shouts, **"I don't want to deal with consequences. It's a reset I don't want to have an eternal forward. It's a save point, a do-over get the FUCK out."**

"It's on the way agent, nine minutes as of last call-in." Olivia answers professionally.

"Why if we know my **fucking** file isn't there ever a chopper waiting for me here." She yells into the phone for the first time.

Do you want to start in Washington? Or start Belltower here instead.

"No, don't touch my save point. Don't touch my Bu—" She stops, freezing. "You can't do that." She says quietly, "You're just saying shit because you're trapped in my head, this is a curse. It's a figment of my fucked up head."

I can teach you how to do it. Power and magic is my domain. Time and space is yours.

"So you can't do it." She says angrily, "So you **can't** do it. You just **say** you can do it. Shut up." Katherine roars. "Olivia I asked a question. Why the fuck is there **never** a chopper waiting for me."

*Stop asking for help. **Be there for him**. Space is a lie, an illusion. Will it away.*

"You have my infinite file, but you all can't be assed to save anyone. How the fuck do you send reports back in time, but let a man die eighty thousand times over." Katherine yells angrily, waving the gun around knowing that if she fired at herself she'd just be wasting more time.

*They don't care. Gods in the machine. Powerful beyond reckoning, cloaking in science and technology. **Will yourself there**.*

Katherine fumes, waiting for the fucking chopper quietly. "Fuck you." She says to herself angrily. "Fuck you."

Maybe Belltower can talk sense. You won't listen to me.

She fires her weapon into a convenience store, opening fire on the clerk, before grabbing some shitty chocolate and a glass bottle of iced coffee. Someone on the street tries to stop Katherine, so she opens fire on them too, just as the Helicopter lands. Rotor wash spinning over her body as she tries to clear her mind. "Get to the V-TOL." She says climbing, just as before, she's in the V-TOL, loaded with a weapon and at the compound, quick roping down, killing the priest and then unlike normal where she is supportive she curls into the fetal position crying. "No more magic." She whispers, "No more magic."

The flight starts up, Belltower breathing hard. He watches Katherine for half a second, having gone through iteration after iteration of torment because of her, ripped from his life over and over. And then calms his breath, stands up on a compound fracture, lays next to Katherine and, inexpertly, crudely and coldly, tries to hug her.

"They got into my head. It follows me through the loop, she carved runes into me. I can't do it." She whispers, "She's telling me to move time and space to try and force changes, I fucked up. I'm not that strong, I fucked everything up."

The coppery smell is heavy, intermixed with cordite as he answers, "*We'll figure it out. Nothing's insurmountable, just need to plan before we act.*" Its a rough and grizzled voice.

"I still have coffee and chocolate, but it's not as good," She whispers, handing him a glass bottle of Starbucks and a cheap stolen box of See's Candy. "I fucked up." She said, "I can't, how do you do this? They're so strong. She tore apart..." She can't speak, "I reached back in time to make a **volcano** erupt and she just batted it aside, everything aside, I kept trying to die and she kept ripping me back."

Belltower keeps his breathing steady, trying to let his heart rate come down.

With shakey hands she gives him his cigarettes, "So—so—sorry." She whispers, "sorry."

The smoke calms him, and with a twist of the cigarette, he offers his dosage to Katherine. Who immediately takes it and takes a deep puff calming not truly, the spiders and shadows are *everywhere* now. Something *tore* inside her, broken and wicked and rotting. "What do I do? I didn't know..." She whispers as she gets into the VTOL.

"Investigate, collate, solve." Jacob keeps his confidence steady, not letting this rattle him. Cosmic forces given the same weight as every other problem he's solved. "*We'll find out how to fix it, put our solutions together, execute the solutions.*" His explanation feels like a mantra repeated just once.

The flight culminates quickly, and Belltower takes Katherine to the office, stopping just out front with a concerned look. "*Do you want to go home instead?*" He asks, turning to the woman.

"I want to be with someone who understands this shit." Katherine says, still bundled up and frightened, "They don't know enough about this, I don't know enough about this. I didn't know people could *do* that."

"*Okay, you want to be here or my apartment?*" He asks gently, an undercurrent of pain in his voice.

She looks at him, biting her lip nervously, "Is it safe here?" Katherine's genuinely asking, she's completely lost, they touched her loop, and now she felt like her safety net had been threatened. Belltower goes to a car, sliding Katherine into the passenger seat.

"It'll be safer there." Jacob says, getting into the drivers seat and making the journey to his home in bloody tactical gear, drenched in the stuff. Prioritizing someone else far before himself. The drive's mostly quiet, punctuated only by soft sobs from Katherine, lasting ten or fifteen minutes at this time of night. The young woman took a deep breath shuddering, and then said something different.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I can get better." Feeling a small fixed point ripple and fall away, if it ever existed in the first place.

The Director, concerned, looks over and shakes his head, "There's always options Katherine. We'll talk about them at my place, alright?" He tries his hardest to inject emotion into his voice, achieving some small thimble of worry and care transmitted. Rotting palm trees dot the path as trees far from home wither and decay into the night. Bright blue leds making the drive seem clinical without warmth, an entire city over the last twenty years had been turned to a morgue decorated by decay.

His apartment building is a ghost in the mass, untouched by anything, as if locked in time. The parking lot is half empty, he slides into the first available spot and leads Katherine up and to the apartment. The door opening, cracking the seal formed over years and letting a puff of aged dust out. He waits for the woman in his doorway, flattened to one side to let her pass while he watches for threats behind her.

She's still covered in blood from the convenience store clerk and few pedestrians she shot on the way over, she's shell shocked and jumping at every shadow in her vision, her eyes darting from corner to corner of the apartment bleary and worried. It was a marvel she thought about Jacob at all, and hasn't let go of her gun since, holding it close to her chest as she curls up in a chair, occasionally pointing the weapon at a shadow ready to murder something that wasn't there. Muttering prayers, incantations, or something less tangible saying different probabilities she saw, trying to use the chatter to drown out inner demons. "What's the odds?" she mumbles

over and over and over and over, taking a rag out and slowly polishing the gun, taking the glock apart before reassembling it. Then starting to take it apart repeatedly.

"You're in bad shape, Katherine." Belltower says, a trickle of blood dripping from his forehead, still thick enough to do that after hours. "We have to talk about an intervention." He pulls free a pill and places it on the short coffee table in front of him.

"Intervention? I can't stop the loop. It's in my head. She's in my head." She muttered putting the gun back together again, "They touched it, they keep saying I can change it. They want me to do things I don't want to do."

Belltower nods, "Alright, I understand that." He carefully speaks, "But it's not what I'm talking about. You aren't stable right now. The stress is overflowing. I can *change* that. But its psychosurgery." Jacob is grim in his recommendations.

Katherine scrambles out of the chair, curling away to the corner. She points the weapon at Jacob, shakily, as small puffs of dust and a thin smear of blood trails a path from the seat to the corner of the apartment. There's a brief moment of panic where she considers actually pulling the trigger before remembering that *he* will be there next time. Instead she points it at him, then herself, then at him again trying to figure out how to reset the situation, the power balance, how to get back into control.

Jacob's not afraid of the gun, if he's in tactical gear and his suit can normally flatten pistol rounds, it'll have to be a headshot. He winces as a fracture in his leg audibly crackles, but doesn't give any more signs of pain after, walking to Katherine's position, pill in his hand. "*Katherine*, I've known you for over a hundred years of this, I don't *want* to hurt you, I want to help."

The slim grey tablet is offered, "Take this, the worries stop, I'll make sure they do, you'll be better, happier, more in control of...*everything*."

Control. The word snaps through like a broken guitar string in a complicated solo, the gun dropping to point closer to his legs, and slightly off the mark instead of the face. Considering, the other woman was promising the same thing though. Then a worse thought, a more fearful one as she considers, "How do I know I'm not trapped in my head right now? Nothing should affect the loop, nothing should be able to stop a volcano erupting or ***bring me back from the dead*** multiple times in a row. I died, and came back, and died, and came back. It wasn't... Normal, I felt time and reality *tear* they ripped through and pulled me back to somewhere I didn't want to be. How do I even know what's real anymore?"

"You know what you can perceive." Belltower says, "That *has* to be at least partially reality, or else there's no point." He kneels down with a hiss of pain.

"Why are you so nice to me..?" She whispers quietly watching the gun rust and start to turn to iron in her grasp. "This isn't fair to you, this isn't fair to anyone."

"It's never fair to me, that doesn't matter." Belltower speaks, "It doesn't have to be fair to anyone but who I...like." The word comes out slowly, a replacement for something else made in the moment. "Let me help." He finishes with a firm request.

She takes the pill from him, looking him in the eye, "I'm... Scared." Katherine admits, taking it with concern.

"*I'll be there with you.*" Belltower whispers, eyes bright in the dark, what he can't say or show displayed in them in complex emotional arcs.

The minute the pill touches her tongue, everything goes dark for Katherine her reality suddenly melting away. Belltower is the only thing that remains as the room fades into something dreamlike, real, false, imagined and perceived intermixing before he says, "*Stop.*" The command ripples the inner world to black, silencing paranoia as, with the pill, he is now master of this soul. A *terrifying* control over another.

In this space, he stares at the fractures that were created by the tearing. In one corner a Bookish obsessive writing and pouring over spreadsheets, wearing two watches, and constantly checking a phone very quickly logging. It looks to Belltower for a moment with a raised eyebrow writing an *angry* note before going back.

The second a Coquettish college aged Katherine, this one wearing daisy dukes and cracking open a beer bottle with her teeth, spitting it out at him with a wink before turning it's bottom to the sky draining it quickly. She starts walking over to bother the Bookish who raises a finger and the two start to glare daggers at each other.

A third, far more Dangerous fracture glares daggers at Belltower, not in control of anything instead choosing to *sear* his soul with her eyes. This one is battered, bruised and scarred. Torn with millions of slices, with exposed bone and rotting flesh that sloughs off its face at times, and a *dull* shattered sword sits in a scabbard at its side. It tries to speak but it's not in *control* so it can not. Instead the Dangerous one spits and points a ragged gasp.

All three together turn to face Belltower, the Coquettish one almost immediately trying to drape herself over him, reaching around his waist, smiling as she tries to breathe in his ear before stopping moments before touch while the Bookish one angrily catalogs everything for good record. Though swears as each printed log is immediately shredded somewhere behind her.

The black space is filled with book cases, but most of the books have been emptied, Empty bindings lay in tatters amongst random pages, and the Bookish when it hears tearing sniffs angrily, and goes trying to re-arrange the books and put them back on the shelf. Once a row is

arranged and placed, another falls off spreading pages and bindings everywhere. All the documentation only getting more and more scattered.

The floor of the space is a clock with no numbers, simply three hands, and a loud constant thunk. The tick and tock of seconds going by each ringing out like a gunshot.

"As the adult in the room," The Bookish Katherine says, "I would like to remind you both to behave. I have enough *messes* to clean up." Another book falling off the shelf, which she scans with a barcode scanner at her side, like a librarian would have, before putting it back up.

The Coquettish Katherine whispers, "I'm just doing what we're all thinking, look at him... He smells like gunpowder, and blood, and expensive cologne." She tries to get close, but again is stopped by some invisible force, "You can't stop me from looking lover-boy~" She says with a wink.

The Zombie, the Dangerous Katherine just stares, trying to win some sort of testament of will. Spitting on the floor again in front of her derisively. Pointing a shattered sword at him, both of them knowing it was useless here, in this time, in this space.

Belltower looks around, intaking the new space with a nod, blood pooling from him, the mental image somehow more war-torn, more ripped apart. The scent of gunsmoke headier and accompanied by a light mist rising from his shoulders, or more accurately, a light smoke.

"Show me where her memories are, *now*." He's growling, looking around darkly, giving no quarter for any sort of game. Blood dripping from his gloved hands, something like an image of death in this place.

The Coquette looks at him with an *evil* grin, "No time for fun Director," she whispers *pushing* against his barriers, getting just centimeters from his skin but not touching. "You gonna slash and burn until only your *perfect* little soldier is in place?"

"No time for fear." Belltower answers, pushing past his own barrier to shoulder the Coquette away, looking at the books, trying to find something, *anything*. Working fast. As he bumps into the Coquette, her skin has the slight crumple of something desiccant, and the room smells heavily of lavender.

She falls on her rump and makes a childish pout, "Well we were *going* to play games but I guess you'll just hack everything up then."

"I'm not going to let you prolong *her*..." Belltower trails off, looking through the wall of poorly bound texts, trying to find something *useful*.

The Bookish one with a bun and thick glasses on a chain gives him a book almost immediately. "We can't open this one, whenever we do... You'll see." She gestures to the dark *rotting* shape

in the corner, which looks feral, the shattered sword gleaming dangerously. Red eyes on fallow skin burns holes into the back of his head watching him reach for it, the book clearly labeled "**DO NOT OPEN.**" No other words on it, or labels, but clearly one of the better maintained books in the room.

The minute Belltower's hands touch the book, he feels something *sharp* lash out, the shattered blade swinging through the air as the disconnected beast *roars* in pain. The Dangerous Katherine's body twitching and jerking at odd angles as she screams in inhuman hisses at him for daring to touch something forbidden. For daring to enter this place. The Coquettish runs behind and snatches the book, running to a far corner of the room as the other hisses again but acquiesces.

"*Give it to me.*" He demands, stomping in this space as a ripple of rage courses through it, a *need* to help. A revelation of something approaching obsession in *helping*.

"Uh-oh~" She says smiling, "Got your book. You can have it back if you solve my riddle. I am not flesh, feather, or scale," She wiggles the book in front of him trying to goad him into a game, "Not something you can buy, sell, or mail. I can be given but never taken, often a sign of love unshaken. What am I?"

Belltower twitched, gun on his vest becoming tempting before he crushes down rage with steely resolve. "A glove." He growls out, snatching at the book. Somehow, the master of a domain that keeps *fucking* with him as it jerks just a centimetre out of his grasp.

"Sorry lover-boy, nope," The Coquette grins wildly, taking a half-step away, "You're not thinking right. You're in the wrong *headspace* for a glove to be the answer." She wraps a hand around his waist, wrapping around him sending distaste and disgust *rocketing* through his body as she drapes over his shoulders dangling the book in front of his face to give him something to pay attention to it. "It's not secret-agent man's riddle. It's **our** riddle, what would the answer be?"

Belltower twitches, light stubble from days without shaving and deep bags under his eyes making him *look* like Death beyond just his aura here. He spits out, "A *kiss*." Glaring at the Coquette.

She doesn't give him a kiss but hands him the book again, causing the feral Dangerous rotting Katherine to roar in anger. The book has the texture of a rotting wound, and when the cover is opened there's lines of gore like an infected pussy scab being peeled off a wound. White puss leaking from the bindings and the sickening miasma of rotting meat fills the room. The book has accounts of regrets, a very very long list of regrets. Some covered up in what looks like ballpoint pen, the words still almost legible but clearly *attempted* to be crossed out, other pages have been torn entirely incinerated with a lighter burning things around it, but the most recent entry is a very **detailed** account immediately from almost killing Belltower to this moment.

The fear at almost killing a loved one, the triumph at her successful ruse, the arrogance, the ignorance, the cutting and then the horrific revivification and panicked loops, all described in accurate detail. The Dangerous one is screaming now as Belltower pokes and prods the wound, trying to figure out a plan, but can't. Belltower looks over to see that the Coquette is kissing the rotting corpse, tearing a bit of its lip off in razor sharp teeth, using affection as a weapon. She winks at Belltower as she moves it into some horrific necrophilic embrace.

He stares at the book, jaw setting. A redaction pen pulls free from a velcro pouch, threatening everything with a black haze as it trails through the air. It nearly reaches the page, hovering above the first word. Not moving.

In the hushed stillness of the mind, the Bookish's mutters echoed with a desolate anger, directed at its own dilapidated state. As it attempted to stack another set of books on the decaying wooden shelves, a fierce frustration stirred within it. With a swift, enraged kick, one of the rotting bookcases crumbled into dust, a silent monument to the relentless decay. The Bookish, no longer able to organize the literary treasures in its care, knelt amidst the scattered remnants, its ethereal form trembling with a profound sense of helplessness. With trembling hands, it gathered the soft, mold-ridden wood, desperate to salvage something from the ruins and create a semblance of order in the midst of chaos.

Belltower pulls away the redaction pen, not arriving at the page, not erasing things from someone he cares about. There's a disapproving *feeling* about him, a vivid hallucinatory sensation as he feels like he's failing at his role, *again*. He puts the book back, thinking, trying to find another way, something lighter, less violating, less horrific. "*Think, damnit.*" He shouts at himself, pacing.

The Coquette grabs the Dangerous by the chin, as the bone cracks beneath her grip, "Oh look, *he's learning*. Isn't that **neat**." She says with a mouth full of rotting green meat that it had been peeling off the dangerous with its tongue. Her mouth smacks and sounds moist and wet, while her tongue is *covered* barbs like a cat rending flesh from bone easily, leaving tiny scrapes on the bones beneath The Dangerous One's flesh.

"Yeah. He is." A gritty voice comes from a corner of the mind. A short woman, covered in burns and sizzling cuts stares out with one remaining eye, the other sacrificed on the altar of wisdom. The remaining one isn't brown anymore, more like a swirling galaxy, or universe emplaced on a white background. Belltower draws on her, pointing a gun, growling, "*Why are you here, Deviant.*" A barked threat that makes the mental space ripple.

"To offer options. Better ones for her, and by proxy, you." Faith says, regarding a pistol with all the threat one regards a water gun.

"Kill it." The Dangerous one screams, "Kill **it**." Now fighting with all the power to get out of the Coquette's embrace actively tearing itself apart its ligaments turning to rotting mush as it struggles. "**KILL IT.**"

The Bookish one mutters angrily, giving up on sorting instead trying to collate books back together. Collecting pages and placing them back in their bindings with no glue or any tools able to hold the pages in place. The Coquette is now *there* at the short woman's side with a blue cigarette, pressing it into her shoulder with no ill effect on her, "She's our new friend, she's wormed her way in and now she gets to be with us forever." She *licks* Faith's face letting the barbs scrape over her. "She loves us so dearly."

She keeps staring at a wall, seeing *much*. "I'm not a Time Master. Or anything close." Faith speaks through a gruff and burnt throat, "Tore my soul out to follow her, lost my cool."

The Coquette places her hand on the woman's chin as she talks, the voice isn't affected by the manipulations as she tries to get a reaction out of Faith. "Sure you did. Did it work out for you?" It's cruel, and mocking. "Do you like us that much? Do you enjoy just sitting in the corner pouting instead of playing the games?"

Faith looks at the Coquette curiously, "You're so scared of losing an inch of control that you won't let someone care about you if they're too strong." She's even voiced, stating fact, "How can you sling barbs when you can't take an ounce of love?"

The Coquette grasps her by the throat and tears it out spilling blood everywhere, but the corpse she pulls away simply separates from Faith, only proving her point. The Dangerous wails, "Kill it. **Kill it.**" From the background as The Coquette *again* tries to Kill Faith, the shattered sword used to slice at her, but only a mirror image of Faith falling, the one *stuck* here completely unaffected.

"I'm hanging from the Great Tree." Faith turns back to Belltower, "Worthy fate, I guess. But you've got its roots here, and they're sick, scared and curling away." She doesn't have anything to occupy her, but a new injury is noted, a stab in her abdomen, like a broad spear tip punched through. "She needs something you can give. Whether that's wipes, alterations, breaking her down or building her up, it's all you, Jacob." She declares.

"She needs you to *kill this thing*." The Coquette screams as the Dangerous runs to her side, turning quickly to kick the shambling corpse into a smear, spraying viscera across the clock face floor. "Kill this dumb bitch." She growls a few stitches falling out, and petals of lavender spilling from *inside* Katherine somewhere, the room slowly filling with the stench of formaldehyde.

"You're a skilled manipulator, your mastery of Mind procedures is impressive. You can rebuild her any way you want, she let you in." Faith continues, seeming *dead* tired.

The Coquette looks at the the two of them now *scared* of Belltower as well, picking up the shattered sword. Looking at him now, "Kill her Jacob. Do it **now**. We trusted you, don't fuck this up." The sword trying to be pressed to his throat.

"You're after something." Belltower states coldly, "What is it?" The demand's ironclad, rippling through the mind space with mental *pressure*, catching her unprotected spirit and forcing it to honesty, the subtle arts beyond Faith, titan of power as she is.

"I just want to fix something. Create something." Faith answers without a worry, already being honest. "*I'm good at breaking things, but I've never fixed something.*" She whispers mostly to herself, looking at the floor.

"Jacob~" The Coquette throws the sword aside now, **wrapping** herself around the Director ignoring her, gently *nibbling* on her neck, "Think of how *strong* Katherine is and then this woman *wormed her way in*. Do you trust that? Come on..." She kisses his jaw line, whispering, "Come on... You torture together, kill together, you can't trust this woman."

His eyes drift to the Coquette, skin roiling in discomfort. "I never trusted anyone here. You aren't Katherine." Belltower answers with a chilly, ice-cold demeanour, starting to rip heat out of the air as he thinks logically. A few more unseen stitches around the Coquette's throat fall open, the smell of formaldehyde getting strong, and an entire branch of lavender falling from her throat.

Belltower pulls out a pen, its bright white, foreboding and controlling. "She doesn't need walls or complex barriers." He's talking to himself mostly, kneeling to write on a blank page on the ground as the Coquette follows. "All she needs is a reminder."

"Stop **that**." She says looking at the paper, trying to *snatch* it away. "**That is not what you're here for.**" Her hands sliding off the paper, as The Bookish sighs, having at some point sloughed to merely a skeleton in the background. An automated process with little thought or feeling. "Stop **that**." The Coquette tries to attack the Director, but leaps on another mirror image tearing Jacob's throat out with her teeth.

"I'm here to help someone I care about." Jacob growls out, looking at the page, pen starting to write.

"**You're here to give us back control.**" She demands again, "That's not what this is. Kill this thing, and get out."

His eyes snap to the Coquette with the first *ever* sign of real, pure anger anyone's ever seen out of Belltower. "I'm here to give *Katherine* control. Not *you*, not the *Deviant*, not *me*." It's almost a shout, shaking the room, his raised voice rough and violent. "*Katherine*."

There's now *clear* signs of stitching failing, the Coquette an autopsied corpse sealed up for display. Treated for a funeral now the room only smells of Formaldehyde no lavender anywhere to be found as branches and petals wet with rot and putrefaction splat against the ground. "It won't make her love you." She says angrily, trying to find a way in, "It won't make her *like you*. She just pities you. You're just a kicked puppy, you're nothing."

Belltower smirks, anger broken by the attempt at manipulation. "I don't have to be anything." He states calmly, starting to write encoded commands, piece by piece, slowly. Exhaustion slowing him down, injury making it a crawl of mental Conditioning. The entire time, the Coquette is trying to find something *cruel* enough to say some way to break down this piece she didn't account for. Not understanding what is *happening* but understanding that it wasn't what she wanted to happen, a far more terrifying and cruel fate. "She's the only one who could ever understand you." It tries now. "You're re-writing your only chance for love."

Then, "If you do this wrong she could just be scrambled and trap you in a loop for eternity as she tries to find a way to perish."

After that, "Director please, you're hurting her, stop. She'll die."

Without listening to a response, "You're dying, you're rotting, you need to leave or else **you'll** die."

The Director works, nearing the end of the page, complex lines of secret phrases and encoded controls intermixing to produce something of a switch. He stands up and puts it against a wall, pressing it into it, sticking it to the side of her mind, clearly displayed, easily found. "I've always been expendable." Belltower says as the paper is sealed to the wall.

She growls, the stitching now falling apart and the lavender sprinkling on the ground. Leaving an empty husk something deep being *broken*, shattered, not able to understand. Empty vivisected leather scraps lay scattered.

Belltower stares down at the scraps of what was once an image. "Feel like I should apologize." He mumbles, mostly to himself, hand going to the kiss marks on his jaw. Faith chuckles, a dry and scratchy sound as a rope starts to lower from the void above, nestling around her neck.

"Apologize to the woman, not the shards *idiot*." The Wizard laughs, before the rope tightens and she's *dragged* up and away, to suffer somewhere else. Vanishing from this space. Belltower's left alone in it, staring at the surrounding chaotic rot, sighing.

The clock hands reach midnight, and a loud *chime* rings out like a grandfather clock. All of the meat, and sludge, and flowers, and paper, all get stuffed into a little burlap sack. A poppet with long auburn hair slowly forms as the sack is pinched and stitched into shape. Button eyes sewn in with a muffled scream as it picks up a piece of the shattered sword and cuts a ragged gash so it can speak. Looking down and itself and then at him. "Do you need a hug?" It asks.

Once more, Belltower sighs, "*Yeah*." As the page is prominent on the wall, almost shiny, lacquered somehow.

The poppet grows, the burlap becomes flesh, and as it does its flesh becomes battered and scarred. Each bite now a permanent adornment, each gunshot, each car crash, each wrist slit,

bullet hole, cut, scrape or bruise that killed a permanent feature of this new Katherine. Naked, and very upset for some reason that she didn't quite understand. She was taller as well, far taller than Katherine was having to kneel to hug him. She's soft and warm, and radiates a gleaming gold with her touch. The rotting meat and formaldehyde are undetectable under lavender, pomegranate and hibiscus. "We love you."

"*You can wake up now.*" He whispers back, another offered way out.

"I will in a minute, when we're done." She says quietly, "We control time, we can do whatever whenever we want."

He's cold, not the chilling, calming cold of a vampire. It's an icy, hypothermic cold, the sort that burns skin on touch, drains life in minutes. It's a hungry void. A snowy grave. "I wish it was that easy." Jacob, finally, grumbles, dragging warmth out of Katherine.

"It is. Actually. Or it will be. Or it was." She says, feeling the heat being leached off. "You didn't... Redact anything? Won't she know?"

"*Yeah.*" Belltower answers, "*I don't think it's what she wanted.*" He mumbles, trying to straighten out his mind, adrenaline of a brutal fight mixing in with the complexities of a mental affliction and restructuring hitting his limits and far exceeding them.

"Why are you so good?" The Golden Katherine asks, not releasing the embrace just holding him gently, in the way that only Katherine can.

"*M'not.*" Jacob whispers. "*Just...want to be.*"

Not letting go, whispering quietly as she turns from gold, to a bit paler and grey, "That's the secret, that's all it really takes." The snow eating away at the warmth, trying to give as much strength to the director as she can before the space falls away forever. "She loves you, you know? She just only has one kind of love. It's the only way she knows."

The Director looks up at her, asking, "*Can you keep a secret?*" In a soft, fragile voice.

"I don't make it out of here," The Golden Katherine says quietly, "Nothing is leaving here besides fragments and a dream."

"*I think...I love her too.*" He admits with a wince.

"Oh honey," She says quietly, holding him a little tighter, "That's not a secret to anyone."

"*Was to me.*" Jacob mumbles again. The world starting to fade.

Her skin grows cold and clammy, like ice. "She prefers cold things, it's numbing. Her heart can only push out and latch on." She whispers, "Just be *you*. She already sees you beneath it all. Mask or not, it's the experience more than the person."

"*Thanks.*" Belltower chuckles, "*I'm out of practice, need the advice.*"

"I know, you should go, my death is far less dramatic." She says faintly into the hug. "Just a little switch going off, you don't need to see the lights go out."

He shakes his head, "*Not letting someone die alone.*"

The hug gets a little bit tighter, "I'm going to be a little selfish then." She gently gives him a peck on the forehead, letting go immediately, clearly holding on for his sake and slumps, rolling to the floor. The golden light now pale and blue, getting weaker, weaker, and dimmer before the final light in the room goes out.

A fading turns to reality as Katherine blinks. Seeing Belltower sitting against a wall, maybe a foot from her, eyes bloodshot and scent of blood omnipresent. He can't get words out, settling for looking concerned past the red coating.

"I think it worked, but what happened?" Katherine said very calm, and quiet suddenly. "I feel... Very warm. Less pleasant though, but not unpleasant. What did you do?"

He groans through the parched throat, "*Put a switch. Just...focus on it. It'll calm you, straighten you out.*" Belltower sounds like a dead man, limp against the wall, conscious for Katherine's sake alone. "*C-couldn't take anything out. Made me...*" He trails off.

Katherine focused on the switch for a moment, imagining flicking one in her head.

So it's like that now? Faith's voice chimes. She flicks it back, feeling the presence leave and then silence. It's in her control, that makes it safe. "I... I'm going to hug you now, and it's for both our benefits." She says very slowly marching forward grabbing him and pulling him to just lay on the carpet. "I... You're a good man." She says quietly, "I *think* I may be bi." She rests her head on his chest, but she notices he's so much *smaller* now. Her hands have scars on them as if she had lost a fight. She cradles him, pulls him in close, Katherine letting her warmth suffuse him.

Jacob sinks into it, breathing slowly, letting Katherine let *him* rest. "*I...might fall asleep.*" He warns. Katherine's already snoring in a deep *comforted* sleep. Jacob follows shortly, breathing in and closing his eyes, letting the night pass by.

Belltower getting up wakes Katherine. He turns on a sink and fills a glass, gulping it down to settle his parched throat, then getting a second one, and then a third. Putting the glass, now stained with blood on the counter, he breathes out and stares tiredly forwards at a wall, not noticing the woman on his floor is awake.

"Traditionalists fucking **suck ass.**" She says definitively.

Belltower nods, "Yeah, I told you." His voice is now far more normal, not shot through with exhaustion, just aches and pains. "They act like gods."

"Some of it was definitely arrogance on my part. Which makes them seem even scarier. I don't understand how you can see time and space and energy, while assuming you can master it." She looks at him standing up off the floor, scared. Also wanting to talk about anything but what happened last night. "Maybe Time stuff just gives you a better perspective on the forces at play." She says, huffing, taking her trench coat off and moving it to the table in his apartment.

"They're not taught it's...something to not break." Belltower answers her question, "It's an enemy to a lot of them. Christos's sect is more like us, but...others see the Backlash as something to beat. Something trying to hold them down. The universe as it is is the enemy and they want to make it *not* this." He pulls a cigarette out, smoking it slowly, astonishingly calm as it stands.

Then quietly, rubbing her chin the question burning but she doesn't want to bring it up. "Are there two Faiths in this timeline now? I saw her *do* something. I could feel it's... Paradoxical? Energy. Just intrinsically knew something very fucked up had happened."

"Check for her. You'll see." He says, looking at the air with that odd concentration of feeling *time*.

She focuses, closing her eyes reaching out for ebbs and pools following the whirling clocks and gears in her mind.

Bound in ropes of woven time, Faith is hanging from a branch of *something*. Power alone keeping her alive, having forced herself to exist when she shouldn't. Having met the universe head on and suffered for it. She looks with one hazy eye at the presences inspecting her, unable to speak past the knot of bright dark and dark brightness.

Katherine pushes, *Ok, this... Feels safer*. She admits in her head, *Why in god's name would you not just reset?*

Without her lips moving, Faith answers. *I'm master of my soul, Kat. Not a loop.*

She rolled her eyes, but left the channel open, not wanting to doom someone to silence. "Okay, okay." She sighs, touching her eyes. "I was doing very well until the kinky sex happened. Very convincing." She moves her fingers to her temples rubbing them gently. "I can't see a universe

where this goes off without a hitch a second time. I also yelled at Eleanora so bad she just let me leave without saying anything. Didn't even think that was an option."

Belltower sighs, "If you're gonna reloop, can you give me a week to relax?"

"I don't reloop without reason anymore," She says plainly, explaining something they never talked about, "Every time since the first one has been out of my control. I *refuse* to willingly put you through that. I'll deal with the consequences until next time."

Jacob looks at Katherine with that, thinking of something to say. "You...wanna get something to eat?" He settles on that.

"Yeah... I do. I also cussed out Olivia," She admits quietly rubbing her neck, "I don't remember the exact wording, but I believe I said I'd blow her brains out over the ping pong table."

"Huh, if she files a report I might have to write you up for that." Belltower frowns, eyebrows furrowing as he goes to his closet, before realizing he's covered in blood. "I'll need to shower first." He's altered course, moving to the bathroom after grabbing a shirt and pants from the closet.

"Probably should either way, I was... Very angry." Katherine admitted stretching letting her bones quietly crack and pop, feeling her muscles fill with invigorating lactic acid as she extended. Moving to the fridge to see if there was any food in there this time, but of course there wasn't. Director Belltower never allowed her to get a food delivery to the place before they arrived, or after really now that she thought about it.

*Literally, she thought as the Director walked away, All you had to do was not fuck with the loop. This is **the problem** you wanted to be the master, and were willing to walk over my shit to do it. She pours herself a cup of stale coffee.*

And now I'm swinging from Yggdrasil for it. Actions have consequences, I'm not gonna shy away because of that. Faith answers, giving a small gasp as she keeps her expression annoyed instead of pained.

Why? Good enough is just that, good enough. Katherine grits her teeth in annoyance, realizing she was one of the haves now lecturing the have-nots, trying to push the hypocrisy away. *Why was it so fucking necessary to control me?*

'Cause I thought it'd help. Faith admits, *'Cause I'm twenty nine and have more power than some people with four digits in their age. 'Cause I just wanted to have something that wasn't a crater for once. It's okay though, that was me reaching for the impossible.*

I liked you a lot. She admits as she sits down, rubbing her eyes, *A lot a lot. If you had just let it go after that first time, I'd probably have just come back and not put myself in that dangerous*

situation. Another deep breath, as she scratches her scalp, tiny flakes coming off into her hair. Time... Breaks, so if there's a next time, and you're aware, and I'm not, just let it go. Everyone in my life, lets me retain some control. They don't touch or talk about the loop without me bringing it up.

Just not made to be, I guess. Faith idly comments, swinging from the branch. Could you still pretend to like me?

She grits her teeth, I still like you. Feeling something almost crack, remembering she needs to get a cavity checked now before it becomes worse. You're... Sexy and scary and smart. Just... Frustrating that you needed to force things so hard so quickly.

Thanks Kat. Faith smiles in that space, I'll...start looking around, see if I can get out of this, or you can get me out. She cranes her head to inspect the infinite stars around.

You're just going to start fucking with my loop again. Katherine says with a sigh, taking a sip of coffee once it cools a tad, No-one can handle me having that little part of my life to myself. Her eyes now burning a hole into the table, something catching in her throat. Just let me have my little chunk of time.

Just keep hanging here then, I guess. Faith chuckles mentally, little pinpricks of dread in the connection almost audible.

Obviously not. There was an audible growl at the point, Obviously trapping you in my head is a fucking horror show. Just fucking... Pretend for a second that you'll not fuck with my stupid fucking bubble.

*Hey, Kat. Faith says, getting a tad more serious, I never wanted to break your loop. I just...wanted to keep you. When that didn't work I tried to follow you. I can't let go of things easy, and I **wanted** you.*

*Why?! Katherine moaned looking at her palms, Why do you, and Eleanora, and everyone seem to fucking **like** me so much!?*

*You're a six foot fuck me muscle chick with the cutest personality in the universe. Why do you **think**? Faith seems to be deep into the dry wit right now.*

*I think it's because of the loop. If I didn't have it then no-one would find me interesting, like the things I prepare. She admits quietly, it feeling nice to have someone trapped she can trauma dump on, You find a way out, or... A controlled way to swap places we can do that I guess. I don't **want** to trap people anywhere. Death is more... It's better.*

I relate. Faith grumbles, Shame you couldn't meet the Chantry. You'd have liked...god, what's her name?

I'm probably going to go back, Another grim sip of coffee, I like the work I do, and I think I'm stupid enough.

Christos will rip me out of your head. She warns, And he's not gentle on a good day.

Katherine bites her cheek, Then you get out, sounds like a plan.

And you end up lobotomized, alive.

Then you kill me and I loop. She quietly plans hating herself, I can't leave a woman trapped in my head.

Then I lose myself and you. Faith is pushing against this hard.

God I like you a lot. Another sip of coffee, the cup drained. I'll leave the switch on during sex I guess, I'm not sure if there's any way to make you more comfortable.

If the legend's being followed, the rope'll loosen in a hundred days and nights. Something to look forward to I guess. Faith shrugs mentally.

Loosens and you die, or loosens and we have a more... Balanced relationship. She stands up moving to put the coffee in the sink, considering rinsing, then wondering if that'd affect the shower.

Last guy this supposedly happened to was a Norse Overgod. I have no idea what'll happen to me. Faith admits, hating that she doesn't know. He started to see the future.

Oh good, I'll have my future visions I can't control, your future visions I can't stop you from telling me, on top of a time loop that started radically different, on top of... Her fist slams on the counter top. On top of... Jacob now it's... Arg.

You think he'll taste good? Faith wonders idly, Like, the cigarettes he smokes aren't just tobacco right?

I've given some to Eleanora, it's going to be— She shakes her head spinning from the sink, It's not going to happen. First of all, he's touch averse, second of all I think I'm gay, third of all... That's terrifying and I don't want to change things.

Suuuuuure. Faith teases, And if he were to come out of that bathroom with just a towel, your heart wouldn't ratchet its rate up. Glutting in the game, the distraction after a whole night alone.

She puts a cigarette in her mouth absent mindedly and lights it taking a deep breath. This is not an oral fixation thing. She thought suddenly staring at the cigarette, I smoke with coffee.

Did I just get ignored? Faith wonders as small bursts of steam slip out from underneath the bathroom door. Ceiling vent trying its hardest to keep most of them in.

No I heard you, I just... Don't like what you said. She admits, *The dream space I remember some things but not everything. I was... Awful. I think. I wanted to torture him so he'd kill you. Why do I keep fucking with him?*

I was there for it, Kat. And it's 'cause you love him. Like, for real. Faith prods.

Shut-up. She growled, but not touching the switch, seeing that as... Disrespectful, an emergency button. *I can see the top of his fridge, he doesn't dust up he—* Wait. She looked in the polished steel at her *chin*. *What the fuck?* She looks around for a mirror, remembering a full length one in his bedroom, very quickly moving *Oh what the fuck!?*

She was taller now, six foot three, covered in bites and scars, she recognized each one. A different lethal hit. Some bullet wounds, others cuts from knives, blades, one an explosion where a car ripped her body to pieces. Then bite wounds, not many though obviously slightly larger and overlapping. The one on her right neck almost looking *raw* and fresh, like it had just been made. Her face had taken little damage, but her **eyes**. Jacob hadn't mentioned her **fucking Eyes**.

"Oh what the fuck." She said out loud. They were heterochromatic, blue and hazel, just like his.

Wow, you're head over heels aren't you. Faith comments again.

Katherine shakes her head, pulling on the bottoms of her eye lids, *He's family, I love him like Family.* It's not an *excuse* or even dismissive, in fact it's an *admission* accepting something terrible, *I love him as much as Eleanora and Estelle. Nooooo. Nooooooooo. FUCK.*

The bathroom door opens as he comes out, dressed with still slightly messy hair he's combing into the acceptable form he's usually fine with. "Shower's free." He mumbles, "Dunno if anything I have'll fit."

"Were you going to mention the eyes?" Katherine says immediately, groaning from his bedroom. "The agency should have dropped off the care package. Though I've never really thought about how that might look professionalism wise that every loop I have them bring clothes here." She admits opening the door and pulling the twin on a paper bag, with clothing. "Normally pick it up as I leave, just a precautionary thing, I like to look neat for Eleanora."

The *neat* comment makes him brush his stubble and frown, "Yeah, lemme fix myself up too, just a minute." Turning to go back to the bathroom.

"Oh for fucks sake, you're worse than Eleanora," She said with a laugh.

"Huh?" He asks through the door, shaving just the stubble off, not bothering with cream or water.

She looks at him, "Oh, for some reason I thought. Right, I've never actually seen you clean shaven." There's a *prideful* part of her that wants to push ever so slightly, *I think I'm going to just walk into the shower. On a scale of one to ten how bold do you think that is?*

He's touch averse, not sexy woman averse, do it. Faith comments with an audible grin to her.

She takes her clothes and without saying anything walks into the bathroom seeing a luxurious shower with frosted glass. The bathroom is large, not just large for Los Angeles, but large for everywhere. It has black marble and a fairly large double sinked washbasin with a small closet, and shelves. There was walking space easy enough to get behind them and a full raised tub with jets. The walls were a beautiful dark purple alternating in vertical stripes one lighter and one darker. The fairly large mirror showed *most* of the room, and when she looked in the shower she saw that it had two shower heads, a large plate on the end of an adjustable pipe the size of a manhole cover, and then a smaller more powerful detachable one. She raised an eyebrow. *And he doesn't fuck?* She thinks shocked.

Looking around she places the small package of clothing on the shelf, next to an adorning door that leads to a water closet. Opening it to see the other amenities a bathroom would need. Without *asking* she undresses, not looking at Jacob knowing he *must* see her in the mirror, taking a second to wink at him, and step into the shower. Turning the main knob to a very *cool* temperature, not freezing, but chilling.

I think I saw his soul briefly leave his body. Faith laughs, greatly enjoying the game. *How long's it been for him? Like a year or something?*

Two hundred. She admits, as the water hits her rubbing off sweat and dirt and blood and grime. *I can't decide if I want to get my hair wet because it's gross, or just leave it another day until I have...* She looks around his shower, *Why does he have so much product?!*

I'm ninety percent sure he was like, a proper manwhore before the loop. The hanged woman grins, *Look at that, what sort of guy uses a herbal body soap.*

I was more impressed that the soap and shampoo weren't just the same thing with a nozzle, but this is like... A good brand, and sulfate free. Jesus christ he has like... Everything in here. This conditioner is better than the one I use. She admits, "It's going to be a minute, I'm cleaning my hair, like... Twenty, feel free to wait... Or whatever." She says with a small grin.

"I'll, uh, grab something for us. Swing back." Belltower says, putting a razor down.

"You can grab tissues and lotion if you want," Trying to be crass enjoying herself maybe a little too much as she teases using a gentle shampoo to start the laborious process of cleaning her long hair.

"Uh." Belltower makes a noise as he extricates himself from the bathroom, not deigning that with a real response whilst Faith thinks.

You sure he ain't a woman? Faith asks confusedly, intaking everything Katherine sees and is using.

She rolls her eyes, *He'd have been in here already.* Switching to the light conditioner in an opaque plastic bottle and a sticker with a font resembling hand writing. Afterwards, using the detachable shower and a wide tooth comb that was already in there to detangle knots with the leave-in conditioner. Moving to a gentle liquid soap, and then body scrub, taking almost a half hour. *Fuck.* She admitted, *I kind of thought he'd stay the entire time.* Opening the shower door and stepping out.

Jacob's got two bags of food unloaded onto the table, in a dress shirt and black pants, something that composes near his entire wardrobe. One is pancakes, eggs, bacon and sausage, the other is the same, but with hashbrowns as well, set aside for Katherine.

"You know, I only made hashbrowns because I misunderstood you saying you'd *lose it* as a like, positive thing." She laughs, very quickly devouring her meal without much manners used to eating alone, with Eleanora and Estelle, before looking down. "Uh. Fuck." She then *quickly dashes* back to the bathroom to throw on clothes. Wearing a button down tied above her abdomen, and a cute skirt with dress open toed platforms that thankfully still fit, but were now probably a tad... Intimidating.

"I have lived *alone* for fourteen years, then with vampires who don't eat food and are hornier than a bag of meese I forget..." She says scratching her hair as she sits back down, "We don't normally do breakfast." She admits. "Is it meese or mooses?"

"It's meese." Belltower answers, idly bouncing his leg with stress as he avoids his cigarettes while eating. "I think. I. Yeah."

It's moose you're both idiots. Faith however sounds very amused, *At least I get a seating to the trainwreck.*

"Too strong then?" Katherine admits with a half laugh, "Probably, way too strong."

"I haven't been hit on in a long while." Belltower sighs, looking at his carton.

"That was an *active* invitation to stand nearby at least," She now giggles, at least feeling better that he's not upset. "Sorry, I... Brain stuff was all mixed up, I think I may have misunderstood a bunch of things."

Belltower stares at the carton a while longer before caving and taking a cigarette out, lighting it with an almost instinctual flick of a zippo. As the smoke enters his lungs, he lets slip, "Didn't hate it, just froze." Sighing through the cloud.

With a relieved snort, Katherine took out her own cigarette, putting it in her mouth and striking her thumb against her finger produces a small flame, then panics at the motion. "My thumb is on fire." She says, staring at it lighting the cigarette.

"Is it, hurting?" Belltower tilts his head, looking at the flickering flame while Faith absolutely loses it in raucous laughter.

"Sort of. It tingles." She admits looking at it in fear, "What the fuck?" Shaking her hand trying to put it out. Only spreading it to another finger now.

*You're **drawing** on my Arete? Fucking **cool**.* She shouts, descending into more laughter.

"Faith how do I put it out?!" She says shaking her hand a little more frantically.

I use Terminus. Say it with your chest. Faith suggests.

"Termites. Terminal." She says in a panic before finally, "Terminus!" it does nothing, then a little deeper "**Terminus**," Her voice reverberating a bit making her throat feel scratchy and abraded. The flame flickers away, turning to motes of nothing.

You're learning magick, real magick. Not the little adjustments they teach you in the New World Order or whatever. Faith grins, letting some real joy through, *Welcome to the study of Forces.*

Aloud she groans, "*Nooooo*. The Union hates me so much already." Almost in a faux weep, "I don't wanna." Pulling on her eyelids again, letting the groan turn into an anguished pained growl. "Ugggggh."

"I'm gonna forget I saw that." Belltower comments, finishing his pancakes. Smoking another puff of the cigarette, he continues, "So...what do you remember from the...thing." Trying to get a feel for what he's working with.

"I tried to grab your... Junk at one point. Then you made a switch. Also I *desperately* wanted you to kill Faith, but you refused to take control away from me." That part put a *serious* grin on Katherine's face, and her eyes almost melted into him. The look one gives at an adorable puppy or a moist piece of cake, "I remember overwhelming relief when your solution was decided."

Clearly, some of Katherine that was *not* the Shards had been watching. "That's... It. I *thought* you were into the flirting, but I was clearly mistaken."

"That wasn't...*you*." He states, admitting something in the same breath.

Her brows furrow as she looks at him, a little crestfallen. "There was a feeling, when I woke up. I..." She decided to let it go for now, "I'll trust you." Not denying, just letting it... Simmer.

"I..." Jacob focuses on the table, and then, in a moment of realization, drags his vision over to Katherine. "We...feel the same way about each other." He arrives at a way to say *it* that he can manage. That he can *say* without stopping.

"**Oh.**" Katherine says, "That's... I'm proud of you!" She lands on an old tried and true standby, "I'm awesome, we're awesome I mean. I... Agree, I guess you saw more than I might have liked. The results are worth it though." She says as she starts taking her morning medications happily. "May I say it, even if you can't necessarily?" *Why am I torturing this man?*

Belltower twitches, "Yes." He squeezes out the words, shoulders tense.

"I love you," She says happily, taking a sip of coffee, the words coming very easy to her. The words having, for some reason *always* come extremely easy to her, even when they didn't to anyone else. Then she puts the mug down with a deep breath. "Hmm. That's going to be rather complicated then. Is there a form we need to fill out?"

"What?" Belltower looks confused, "We-what-No, there's no...*form*. Fraternization isn't a thing with us." He shakes his head, "Unless I make it a rule for the Construct."

"I mean I would probably avoid that at this point, it'd be a little hypocritical." She continues to tease. *No seriously, why are you like this.*

He narrows his eyes, "You're having *too* much fun with this." It's not quite growled, but definitely has some *volume* to it.

As the final set of pills is taken and logged, she admits, "Yes, I am. I wake up on this loop in an *extreme* manic episode. Everything is swingy and amplified to a thousand. I simultaneously want to chew up a pencil until it's splinters, grind on a pillow, scream, and kill something. By simultaneously I'm not just talking about the urges, I want to find a way to do all those things at once. For the next half week I'm bouncing from paranoia to emotional extremes then the company medication kicks in just as I plummet into a depressive episode."

"So we should get that *today*." Belltower extrapolates as the house begins to smell of smoke and menthol.

"That, or you will be the focus of an *extreme* Oral fixation." The twitch of Katherine's lip is the only betrayal of the *continued* teasing, though this one far more honest than the others, as she sucks down the third cigarette, "These psych cigs are *barely* enough to keep me level headed. Though level headed I am, thankfully. Just... Elevated."

Belltower stands up and goes to his bedroom suddenly, making Faith *hmm* in Katherine's head as he does. *What made that happen?*

I dunno, he's got... Stuff I tend to just roll with it. Honestly, he's lucky he's so short and has good skin care. She says watching him leave.

Isn't he like ten inches taller than me?

Katherine nods happily, *Yes, almost adult sized.* She smiles as she says this taking another sip of coffee.

Belltower returns with an unmarked pill bottle, pulling one pill out of it and holding it in front of him, "This is a...*really* high power anti-anxiety med." He explains. Getting a glass of water ready.

Katherine holds her hand out for it, "I don't normally take random pills, but alright."

"It's for me." He sighs.

She looks at him with an arched eyebrow, "I didn't know you *take* anti-anxiety medication. I thought it was just the cigarettes."

Staring at it a second longer, he says, "I'm supposed to. Weekly." The pill is *not small*, the sort of thing that needs water lest you choke. "Not been keeping up with them."

There's something here, she's clearly not getting. Looking at him, wondering why the display then realizing, "Okay, I get it. Do... Is this your first time taking them?"

"Second." He says calmly.

Putting her fork and knife down on the table, she says, "That's... Terrifying, I bet. I'm here if you want to talk about it. Did it work the first time? Or just freak you out a bit?"

"It works by using some...I don't remember exactly what. But it nestles a colony of chemicals in your brain that...modulate your mood to within norms." Belltower's staring at the pill, "You can't get too anxious, just stops at a wall. Makes me feel like I'm normal again. Then it stops." He tilts it in his hand, "Usually a day before you can take it again, can't have two of them in your system."

"I had a similar problem with Vyvanse actually," She says to him, "Though not as... Intense really. Zombified before the day was over. Are you comfortable taking it? Does it freak you out to do so?"

Jacob swallows the pill, drinking it down with water. It's a few seconds before he answers, "Haven't had a reason to take it. No-one to be calm for." He closes his eyes as the thing works, psychosomatic effects at this early stage, though all Union medications are fast acting.

He sighs out an odd relief as his eyes open, a little wider than usual. "You have *no* idea what that feels like." Belltower mumbles.

"Probably not," She admits with a smile, "Though to be fair, you don't know what schizo hallucinations look like either." She takes a deep breath as she slams her hand on the table frustrated with herself for giving into the urge. "I'm actually *terrified* of spiders, did you know that?"

"Didn't, no." He answers, shifting to face Katherine, putting his body in line with hers.

She looks at her hand which is of course empty, "Yeah, I see shadows, normally, and if the geometry or the lighting in the room is just right, then a spider will skitter somewhere through my line of sight. I can feel them, a lot of the time, or hear them. Normally pretty medium sized, like a widow or an october spider. Though never any color, just a black skittering mass that *I know* in the way only a delusional person can, that it will do me harm." She's rubbing her tongue against her teeth, "I don't... Tell anyone those parts really. Ever."

"I don't hallucinate much." Belltower admits, "When I do it's mostly...hallways. Long hallways, the concrete ones under hospitals or other buildings with lights here or there. I can smell blood and offal in them, gunpowders heavy. I can't stand them. Start seeing shapes that...Like you said, I know they're gonna try and hurt me." He's not bouncing his foot this time, still *reasonably* calm.

Katherine grimaces in a way of understanding, a half smile and pained look, "Blood and gunpowder... I feel bad those are bad smells to you. It's... It's one of my favorites."

"They're smells that make me get ready to fight." Jacob says, breathing out the stress.

She looks at him, "They're the smells that remind me of helping you. The entire ride here, it's all I can smell. It... Lashed back through time I think. I can't help but get warm fuzzies. Makes me think of Eleanora too, she had been shot, four or five times before every kiss."

"Good re-orienting of that, I guess." He chuckles at the description, "Must make getting punched interesting. What *happens* when your mouth starts bleeding." Belltower's getting talkative, more weight pulled off him every second.

"Literally, fire fights are... *Exhilarating*. It took me a while to figure it out, until we started doing War Games— That's when we shoot at each other in Miller's Falls — A gun just *kicks*, you can feel it in your chest. There's a spray, and then that smell of comfort and home and love." She sighs, quietly, "When I get punched it's far *less* fun, which is why I generally don't get in fist fights unless I have too. Almost any... 'play' I do I like to have blood involved. Normally my own." Again turning to sex unintentionally, not even really meaning to guide the conversation there, just... Not doing much else with her partners besides talking and netflix. "Cigarettes and Lavender are great too, Eleanora's home always smells like champagne Black and Milds, cloves, cigarettes, and Lavender. Like... A hookah lounge almost. Sweet, flowery, and heady." She reaches into her trench coat for the long pack of wood tipped cigarillos as she speaks, pulling one out and lighting it with a smile. Taking a deep inhale of the memories.

007 - Vanilla

Belltower and Katherine had been talking for a while at this point, learning a bit more about each other as the day waxed on, growing closer than either really thought possible. There was a quiet moment where the two just sat across from each other while Katherine smoked slowly, watching something on the wall, or maybe behind it far off where no-one could see.

"Let me know if I'm doing this wrong," Belltower says, pulling his own cigarette out, lighting the thing and taking a slow drag.

"How would I even begin to know?" She laughs softly, her gaze fixed on him as he lights his cigarette. Katherine almost listed off all her traumas again, but felt... Comfortable, realizing she didn't have to justify her weaknesses, nor use her trauma as a shield.

"I'm out of practice, you're not." He plucks the cigarette away from his mouth, leaning forwards to ash it in an ashtray on the table. It sits there as he thinks, trying to make everything come together. "You wanna go out somewhere? Probably been a minute since you've seen daylight." He glances out the window at the early afternoon sun.

That, she realized, might be the start of a very awkward conversation, "Oh... Are you fond of daylight?" A troubled smile plays on her lips as she avoids eye contact suddenly.

"You don't get my complexion by liking the sun." Jacob smirks, "Just fumbling for conversation." He *nearly* reaches out when she avoids eye contact, stopping himself.

A *gasp* of relief, at that, "So, being hot, at all. Warmth? Is an *active* discomfort, sensory wise." She gets up and walks to wear her trench coat hangs threatening to snap the coat hook off the wall. She lifts it, turning it inside out revealing *dozens* of pockets, with mesh netting over them. Each one a gel ice pack is stuffed inside creating creased ribbing that ensconces her when worn.

"You need to tell me things." Belltower states, narrowing his eyes. "Could have had a cooling vest made for you, keep you at forty degrees."

"That's a **thing?!**" She says suddenly, "Son of a *bitch*." Then reveals a bit quieter, looking at him, "We... People find me, standoffish. If they're not a vampire or... You now I guess, so I don't like to talk about 'Oh also, if you're human your body heat makes me uncomfortable,' even more so after the loops. I had... *Always* planned to come get you when I found out. So it felt like something that'd be harmful to bring up if... You needed me."

Jacob takes another puff, putting it back in the ashtray after, "I can...make you not notice it? Or notice it...opposite." He's speaking carefully, "It's one of my...tricks."

Her hands flex at that trying not to *attack* him with joy. "That, is a **very** important and neat trick. Opposite would be great, I'd find human interaction a lot more pleasant if everyone just felt... Colder. It's a side effect of the... Antipsychotics and stimulants, not only that but apparently it's a Somatoform disorder. It's... It sucks, one of the things I struggle with most, I want to **touch** people constantly but touching them feels like grasping a branding iron. Holding them feels like sitting in a fire."

Belltower stands up, brushing his pants off of crumbs, walking behind Katherine's seat, "Alright, you're gonna feel...*weird*. It's not like what Vampires do." He warns, "It's a lot more...deep. Rewiring psychology."

"My *bones* feel too hot for my blood." She says, never **ever** getting so deep into something so personal, almost feeling like she's bleeding out. Doctors had told her this was *unfixable*, something that only therapy could fix, because it wasn't *real*. "The reason I let Faith carve me up is because the knife was ice, and I could feel it finally scrape and chill my bones."

"I'm being careful." Belltower takes off the ever-present gloves, the leather creaking as he pulls them off, setting them to the right of Katherine, in her line of sight.

"I'm... Finally opening up to someone." Concern etches her face, and she looks away not wanting to make eye contact. "I use... You learn to talk about certain things in therapy, to psychiatrists. To a point where very *hard* conversations get very easy for people. So they stop digging. No-one digs, or cares, so I've never... Volunteered, just quietly moved things or beared them." The cigarillo returned and she took another drag.

To the other side of Katherine, a phone, with a ten minute timer is set down, ticking down. "I'm pretty good at digging." Belltower admits as his hands pull Katherine against the chair, flattening her out.

"Don't... Reverse it, just make everything cold please. Just... I can't stand heat any more." There's a weird... Weight lifted as she admits it, something very *deep* and personal but just in being an eccentricity. A core part of her that just felt slightly too off kilter to let someone notice.

"Like I said, I'm being careful. Taking each person separately. Altering perceptual experience on an individual basis." His hands chill in real time as something like barely audible static hits Katherine's senses, a soft blanket that you could just *sink* into, let it do anything it wants. "Me, coworkers, Eleanora, Estelle. Anyone else?" Belltower's whispering to not interrupt the static from the phone.

"I wish... It could be everyone, then I could just fight people, and not worried about how touching them grosses me out." She admits, then thinking harder, "Christos and Faith, we might fight them in the future. Especially if she gets out, it'll help."

Another burst of static, he says something that doesn't make enough sense to be understood.

"Oh god, and Zayn and Carla," She says suddenly, thinking about their missions, "We do that in a week, and... The cultists at that compound in Fresno." Then with *serious* distaste, "And if you can, those horrific weirdos in San Francisco, the ones that were kidnapping and eating goats?"

"Mhmm." Bursts of static as he modulates it somehow, a worming sensation as he invades the core of Katherine's perception, altering it conversationally. "Anything else you want?"

"You include yourself ri— Yeah you did. Do... I don't fuck anyone else I think, there's like a hundred people we kill between now and the undercover mission which might not happen. Faith says Christos is going to try to actually kill or kidnap me and rip her out." Trying to think hard, breathing calm, "The sun." She admits wondering if she could *truly* ask for anything, "Make it... Like, heat stroke should probably feel even a little warm as just a heads up, but otherwise just I can't handle any of it. Blankets too. Sheets." Then quieter, wondering if it could really be *anyone*, "Myself?"

"Anything you want." Belltower modulates the static in an almost overbearing volume, piercing in and taking more luxuries with Katherine's perceptions. The couch gets chilly, the cloth reversing its input, consciously heat, physically, *cold*. "I'm good at this, I don't like doing it to people, they never consent." Belltower speaks to himself.

She's suddenly, very *very* comfortable in her skin she realizes. With an intense manic phase. She tries to breathe but she feels *amazing* the unbearable uncomfortableness that had followed her entire life, that made clothes *awful* made life *awful* made the sun and environment and pavement, and sitting in her car all *disgusting and terrible*. Fixed, fixed in that instant. She *has* to wait and calm down, looking at him, touching her knees excited that her own touch is finally something comforting instead of something to be beared.

Belltower has a light almost *aura* of fading static around him, barely visible, a subtle magic that isn't magic. A subtle procedure. He looks confident, controlled. The situation is *his*, no one else's. Blue and green eyes meet Katherine's as he waits for her to speak, to comment, good or ill.

"You... Might want to be a little scared." She says biting her lip, "I have *never* been this comfortable in my own skin. All the... Aggressiveness before? Reserved." Her fingers are flexing into her legs just a tiny bit just... Feeling her knees enjoying the sensation. "Let me know when you're done entirely."

"I could change something else, if you want." The static buzzes around him again, his voice taking on something almost electronic. "You can do most anything with a willing mind, alter *any* sensation, *any* perception, *any* understanding." Belltower's talking, and Katherine realizes, *he might be flirting*.

The idea never occurred to her, but she's also just... Ready to pounce. The magic making her want to strike out and grab him. "I *might* want to think you're not me from the future or past, but... I also **really** want this to end so I can tackle you to the ground. Unless you say no of course."

"Could do that." He tilts his head, a dark amusement entering his eyes, "Could also just...wait here, for a while." A smirk forms on his face, "*Watch you squirm.*"

A predatory gleam sparked in Katherine's eyes, the now six foot four woman could barely restrain the tremble of her fingers as she resisted the urge to *tackle* him. "You're the only one who knows what happens when I move right now, I might be willing to take the risk."

"If you move, I won't be able to stop the effect." Belltower's smirk starts to try and tug wider, "You'll be under my...*spell*. Forever."

Faith, I think I'm really really stupid, I might still rush him. There's a very slight twitch as Katherine considers it, "I'm *considering* it. Careful, the last guy who mind controlled me got his testicles peeled for an eternity."

"Last guy didn't ask." He leans onto the back of the chair, tilting his head, "What'll it be, *Katherine*." Belltower lets his voice get rougher, braver, crushing apprehension in a wall of *want* and *will*.

"Does this feeling go away in ten minutes?" She asks carefully, now leaning back into his shirt with glee as it feels *right* finally. "Do you need forever control to keep this forever? You might just get it."

"I don't. Just seeing how much you'll crumble to me." Jacob's smirk finally grows into a smile, reaching over to the phone. Holding it while still looking at Katherine. "The feeling's permanent, I wouldn't hold that over you."

Now it was *her* turn for a game, "Ok Bixby!" She says, her phone *buzzing* and playing a chime, "Send Belltower a text message." It buzzes again, "Attach photos

Estelle-dash-courting-dot-png." A third buzz and chime. Seconds later, *Belltowers* phone rings with a confirm

Jacob looks at it, tilting his head. "Why'd you send me..this?"

"It's a photo of myself I send to Estelle, it makes the convincing part *much* easier on the loop. I had it for a bumble, but I didn't really get any matches." She admitted a little annoyed at the end, "I wanted to get the lighting perfect, it takes time to actually take like, a great photo. A good candid photo you can kind of get away with a few minutes of teasing and getting the lighting just right, but a *great* photo takes prep."

He tilts the phone to the side, getting the full image, "I think you'd look better in person." Belltower's eyes flick to Katherine keenly.

"Only one way to find out I suppose." That predatory gleam is back, her body tensing like elastic, potential kinetic energy begging for a release.

"You still haven't answered my question, Katherine." He looks at the phone one more time, "Are you going to stand up on your own?" Jacob's voice is teasing, low and excited, a sheen of something long missing entering him, exciting him.

"I'm going to wait out your Question." Katherine says grinning, "I'm going to wait until you can't *stand* waiting. Then, you'll be under *my* control. In a way that's *far* more devious."

Belltower shrugs, "Sure, but I could also tell you something like, maybe, air moving feels like kisses." A near burst of static makes every brush of air feel like lips for half a second. Making Belltower smirk again.

"Oh you could," She says turning bright red, "You'll just make it worse for yourself when you cave."

"I *am* an interrogator, Katherine." He chuckles, reddening somewhat himself, not quite a titan of this arena. "Maybe I should make your own touch electric." The static makes Katherine shiver as her fingertips shock her legs for half a second. No burns, no reality, all in her head, but so real.

"When was the last time an *interrogator* got pegged." As the shock sparked across her skin, she felt a tiny burst of surprise at the *sudden* start then stop. The unexpected delight making her jolt with energy.

That does make him blink, "Huh, never." Belltower admits.

"I thought you were Bi? Or... I guess guys don't call it that?" Now also pulled out of the game thinking on the lingua franca of intercourse.

"It's...well there's a lot of ways now. It used to be called catching." Belltower chuckles at the sudden turn of the conversation, nearly breaking into an actual laugh, "I've missed this." He admits, looking down and then back up at Katherine.

Katherine sees him look down, and then goes for a killing blow, "Oh wow, I didn't think it had been *that* bad of a dry spell." Wishing she could move her hand to make a jerking motion for extra effect.

A burst of static makes breathing feel like a kiss, every mote of oxygen tickling Katherine's mouth as Belltower tilts his head, letting it drag on for nearly two minutes before the noise stops. "Hmm, I'm getting a handle on you. I can make this a lot *worse*. *Unless* you get up." Its equal parts threat and promise.

He's a guy, but it's still kinda hot, she admits, breathing suddenly very quickly, *Oh god this might be so stupid. Though he's... Probably as tough as Estelle right?* She decided to choose a third option, quickly reaching for the hand and *whipping* the smaller man into her arms now holding him tight pushing him against the table. Though when she heard some *crunch* there was pure panic in her eyes.

Belltower chuckles, "You broke my table, Katherine." Holding himself steady with an arm around the woman, breathing accelerated, trying to keep him calm.

Her hand brushes against his cheek, just a featherlight graze, when suddenly his touch for a moment becomes a shock in her system, a spark snapping inside herself, and she scrunches up her face, "I'll buy you a new one."

"I make more than you do." He's shivering slightly, voice even, but only just.

Leaning in very close, her eyes bright with mischief she whispers, "I plan to break much more furniture than you will." *That* sounded threatening.

He almost gasps at that, quickly getting a hold of himself. "*Stop promising things*." Thinking on his feet, he leans into instinct, letting something that makes his eyes widen slip out.

Katherine pulls away just as she almost lets her kiss touch him, "Look at that, I **am** under your control," she whispers, "I guess you'll have to tell me when to continue then."

Belltower narrows his eyes, gritting his teeth as he gets it *out*. "Keep going." Breathing heavily, one hand gripping the broken table's edge.

The lean this time is *slow*, they both are trapped in time, acutely aware of how **long** a minute can be as she uses the passage to track her progress. Inching closer, and closer, and closer before finally letting her lips touch his, very gently, pushing against them as a static spark, a real one, zaps between their lips. She growls a bit happily as she kisses him again, deeper, and

again harder, letting the tiniest bit of her tongue out teasing for entrance, but not pushing. Letting herself *fall* into him, the back of her mind still *confused* about the development but touch finally being something pleasant and bearable and a sensation of joy giving her an intensity she previously lacked with anyone but Estelle and Eleanora.

Belltower's hands move to rest on Katherine's hips, rough and calloused in a way neither of her two other lovers are. As they separate for breath, he quickly gets out, "I don't know why I'm not scared." An admission with *needy* eyes as he lays back, scar on his neck prominent with the position, shirt messy and ruffled as the press of an iron is forced out of it.

"It's trust." She says quietly, "It's always trust." Very gently pulling on his shirt freeing it, kissing him on the neck as her hands undoes each button slowly, showing his chest, well toned and hard fought for. Her hands explore over chiseled abs before finding the buttons and belts on his waist, letting the moment just *rest* as she removes them as well. Her hands suddenly becoming very nervous, not having done something since she was *sixteen* and doing it very *inexpertly* by all accounts. Trying to force the thought out of her head and get into the moment she tosses him to the couch before slipping his pants off entirely.

She presses her hands against his bare legs, and he gasps as skin meets skin, a cool blossoming between them. The sensation makes her suck in a little breath when his hands slide up her back to try and undo her bra, the roughness making his hands slide down, moving to cup heavy breasts in them, thumbs gently brushing past the nipples as the bra slips down. With another hiss, Katherine lets out a growl of pleasure.

And then, a whimper, she had never been touched in a way that was so... Pleasant, without unease, without her skin quickly warming theirs and the entire thing being ruined in moments. She bites her lip, focusing on every little movement for once, every brush of the callous against herself. Feeling the erection press into her as she leans forward into his grasp. She pulls back for a second, and takes off her unbuttoned shirt and bra flinging them across the room, letting herself be fully revealed before him. Tight muscles, and heavy body on display, she presses her hands on his legs for one more kiss.

Then she moves down, sliding her body against his, enjoying the sparkling touch, enjoying not being repulsed by warmth as she finally reaches his waist. His hands thread into her hair on instinct as Katherine takes a deep nervous breath, feeling his grip tighten in anticipation. She suckles lightly on his length, licking along the veins and around the head, drawing a groan from his chest. Her hands move lower, massaging his thighs, learning him, his body language, how he responds, how his hips roll underneath her.

This pulls another loud groan as the suction intensifies, she takes more in her mouth, letting the taste fill her senses, as a sudden thrust upwards hits her hard enough that their bodies connect with an *electric* snap. She looks up at him with heavy, smoldering eyes, met with a gaze just as dark, taking him deeper, throat tensing as he plunges further and further. Belltower gasps, now tugging on her hair before releasing, realizing that he must for her to continue, to go *deeper*.

Finally, she pulls back, panting softly, looking up at him through her lashes. His face is flushed, chest heaving, and she grins. She stands up, slowly, watching the way his erection sways, the way he seems about to beg for more. With a little wink, she slides off her pants kicking them aside, before tugging the panties off as well. She spreads her legs wide as she straddles him, and taunts him, "Say please."

Belltower's heart is racing, hands tight on Katherine's waist as he catches up with the words. Eyes bright, *full of need*. Mouth working a few times before anything like a word comes out, "*Katherine, please.*" It's a brazen beg, a desperation that's rarely ever seen. He *needs* her touch, her presence, her *love*.

Her hips move, slowly at first, a teasing pace that makes him groan and barely fight the desire to pull her onto him, forearms like steel cords. She smiles wider, leaning down to kiss him softly, her breasts brushing against his chest. Her rhythm speeds up, faster, harder, *faster still*, until she can barely keep herself upright and Belltower is gasping, and bucking up toward her, the couch groaning as its springs are abused. She leans in until they're flush, his cock filling her, pushing against her inner walls. She slides herself letting her hips guide him, until finally she finds what she was aiming for in a *burst* of pleasure.

Each thrust inside now brings her orgasm closer, and she moans crying out, and she feels something intense, a familiar plunge, a deep radiating wave that echoed *far*, outwards waves rippling against her edges forcing her to tense and hug *tight* around Jacob's neck, pressing his head into her chest, squeezing him as the sensation overwhelms everything. She screams letting the sound out into the room, bouncing off the walls as stars dance in front of her eyes, wanting to let her body go lax. She doesn't stop however as her legs buckle and beg to cease when she hears him make a *choked* noise, a pleasant overwhelming growl as he releases.

Then a slow panic as she doesn't stop, looking at him with wild eyes. Eyes of a woman *used* to women, letting the lactic acid build and scream in her muscles as the sensation overwhelms Belltower going *further* and *further* past a release that already felt like too much before she had hit a second point she had been hoping for as his stamina gave out. A second, *louder* scream that's choked out by her body seeming to shut down far past its limits.

She leans into him, gasping, holding his head close hearing his breath, his heart, feeling its breeze against her with a tiny giggle as he sounds *beaten* in a way. Her heart is beating thudding like a war drum, mixing in with his own pulse and her gaze is soft as she regains feeling in her legs, and slowly stands feeling a wet puddle separate between them.

Katherine gives him a gentle kiss on the head before almost *fleeing* to the bathroom to clean up, saying, "You're welcome to join me this time."

Realizing the offer, and still somehow having reserves of strength, Belltower rolls off the couch, looking at the table for a second with a sigh of damaged property before following. As he does, Faith is in Katherine's head.

WOW, I could break him given a half chance. You saw how he just melted for you? She's excitedly chattering, *God, he's such a sub, wow.* The woman's voice can transmit excitement perfectly, *Do you think he'd let you carve into him? OH, maybe he'd do it to you.* Her comments are loud as Belltower comes into the bathroom, a smirk of joy, almost edging into a smile.

"You're pretty amazing Katherine." He breathes out, still settling from the *activities*. Getting into the shower with him

"I know, I'm pretty amazing." She smiles as she grabs the detachable shower head, looking back at him, "Jesus you're already starting to bruise." Katherine says suddenly, looking at grayish purple splotches from on his pelvis and legs. She grimaces slightly, rubbing the back of her neck.

He laughs, an unused volume of his, looking down at himself, "You weren't exactly gentle Katherine. Though, uh." Belltower looks down for a second, "Might...*like it better that way.*" His hand goes to his hair, scratching at it as a small anxiety returns past the drug.

"That's a relief," She says, realizing with glee the shower was *warm* but not to her. "Is the couch okay? And the table?" She steps aside to let him get under the larger plate as she continues to use the shower head.

"Couch's fine." He says, letting the water wash over him, "Table's got a *giant* crack through it." Belltower looks at his back where a bruise is forming.

"Hmmm... You are much more fragile than a vampire." She admits, looking at all the bruises, "I may need to consider that before I paralyze you by throwing you head first into something."

"I'd rather you didn't." Belltower says without a care in the world, riding the high of love as water falls across him.
