Draft Excerpts

Rough Development

01 Morgan is approached by Mann with an offer to work for someone else

Morgan declines the offer 4th

02 Morgan is ambushed by an assassin and confronted by Ash 5th

Morgan learns that he thought she was an assassin

03 Morgan is exposed to the truth about Lloyd and his organization and confronts Lloyd

Morgan learns why others assume she was an assassin

04 Morgan is detained by Lloyd, confronted by Ash again and kidnapped by Kail's enforcers

Morgan tells Ash she is an escort, explaining how she came to work for Lloyd

05 Morgan is confronted by Mann with an all or nothing offer

Morgan explains her true involvement in the death of Kevin Niall

06 Morgan is able to convince Mann she is not an assassin, but she already knows too much

Morgan had to be an assassin to accept Mann's offer

07 Morgan is forced to fight her way out of the trap Mann left her in 5th

Morgan is ambushed by Ash 6th

08 Morgan learns that Ash followed her abductors, witnessing her meeting and its aftermath

Morgan is told her options by Ash and advised not to return to her home

09 Morgan ignores Ash's advice and returns to her dorm to recover her ring

Morgan finds her roommate slain and gets caught with the girl's blood on her hands

10 Morgan is "rescued" on her way to prison by Ash, at the cost of the escorting guards' lives

Morgan is tested by Ash as punishment for defying instructions

11 Morgan is now a fugitive from the law and Lloyd's organization

Morgan is dropped off at a safe house by Ash 6th

12 Morgan is tracked down and confronted by Logan and Roark and explains herself 7th

Morgan is ambushed by an assassin who followed her friends to her

13 Morgan is saved when the intrusion of her friends drives off her assassin

Morgan warns her friends of the danger they are in

14 Morgan is attacked by Ash in retaliation for bringing in Logan and Roark

Morgan saves herself by convincing Ash, she did not expose him to her friends 7th

15 Morgan examines her options, remembering scenes where Mann had observed her 8th

Morgan decides to track Mann down and follow him to the man he worked for

16 Morgan is able to track Mann down to the wrong master

Morgan is confronted by Llewellyn, subdued and drained but allowed to live 8th

17 Morgan learns about Kail, recovering in earshot of Llewellyn's meeting with Mann 9th

Morgan races to warn Lloyd, arriving in time to intercept Kail's assassin

18 Morgan is attacked by Ash, in response to seeing her approach Lloyd over a corpse

Morgan is saved when Lloyd calls Ash off, then she is questioned by both

19 Morgan learns Logan and Roark cleared her name with the academy and the authorities

Morgan reunites with Logan and Roark; Ash gets the credit for saving Lloyd 9th

20 Morgan resumes classes, risking exposure rather than expulsion 10th

Morgan has a meeting with her academy mentor and an inquisitor 10th

21 Morgan is ambushed by Ash, to prove how vulnerable she really is 11th

Morgan is confronted by Logan and Roark, both of whom were put down by Ash 11th

22 Morgan is set off by a student, mistaking his actions for an attack 12th

Morgan realizes it would be smarter to go after Kail directly 12th

23 Morgan attempts once more to follow Mann to Kail 13th

Morgan witnesses a meeting between Mann and Ash, joined by Kail 14th

24 Morgan is caught and confronts Ash, only to be confronted with a desperate choice 15th

Morgan submits to Ash to protect Logan and Roark, in a demonstration for Kail 15th

25 Morgan is turned over to Kail by Ash, the leverage to control her firmly established 16th

Morgan learns how Ash was recruited, Kail still did not know the truth about her 16th

26 Morgan realizes that Ash put her in a position to kill Kail 17th

Morgan waits for her opportunity, killing in the heat of passion 18th

27 Morgan is approached by Mann; he repeats the offer she is now qualified for 19th

Morgan is introduced to Llewellyn, the "man" behind Kail's revolt01

Morgan was approached by Mann as a potential recruit for Kail's coup

Morgan completed her day at the academy

Morgan was confronted by a familiar stranger

*You again*

The man delivered an invitation to a meeting

*I have been watching you*

The man, Mann, invited her to dinner

Morgan joined Mann for dinner

Morgan brought up their past encounters

*Why were you following me?*

Mann confirmed without elaborating

*Just doing my job*

Morgan came to the point

*What do you want from me?*

Mann asked about her relationship with Lloyd

*I know you work for him*

Morgan explained her situation without incriminating herself

Mann questioned her about her work and asked if she would work for anyone else

Morgan gracefully declined, unaware of what was really going on

At the end of her fourth day of classes, Morgan received a message from Lloyd delivered by Mann. After establishing his association with Lloyd, Mann took her aside to confide that he had been following her, to discover what sort of work she did for Lloyd. Her curiosity forced her to accept his invitation to dinner. Mann politely inquired about her history and association with Lloyd. Because he professed to know what she did, Morgan responded, remaining careful to avoid incriminating herself. He asked how and why she came to work for Lloyd, how she felt about working for him, how she felt about the work she did and how she would respond, hypothetically, if given a contract that named him.

Morgan responded with an abbreviated version of events, careful to avoid incriminating herself. She concluded by telling him she had agreed to work exclusively through Lloyd and was satisfied with how he managed things. In spite of the demand for her services, Morgan was careful to maintain a low profile in fear of being expelled from the academy. Lloyd took great care handling her contracts, carefully screening her clients to ensure she was never in great danger of being abused, exploited or discovered by the authorities. As her agent, he was the one person she could not so much as lay a finger on. Mann ended the interview, leaving Morgan to wonder what it had all been about.

The one thing he could not protect Morgan from was a threat even he did not know about. An ambitious subordinate was scheming to take over Kearn's organization and elevate himself within the underworld. Kearn and Kail had both started out on the streets. As the two advanced in the organization Kail had gradually became resentful of Kearn's seniority. An opportunity to depose Kearn came when Kail gained a powerful patron, a vampire lord. The vampire had encouraged Kail to seize control and expand his territory as a cover for the expansion of his own territory in the city and a front for certain offensives against the local nobility.

Morgan was marked as a liability when she declined the invitation

Morgan returned to her dorm, took a bath to unwind and then crawled into bed. Morgan's roommate asked her about her relationships with Logan and Roark. Logan and Morgan met by chance. Morgan was not really sure how to explain her time with Logan. They had spent a lot of time alone together before they returned to Avon. They had both been lost "on a desert island" and managed to survive by working together. It had been inevitable that they would become an intimate couple. When they least expected it, they had escaped their exile and made their way back to civilization. Without any training history, they were required to undergo testing prior to enrolling in the academy.

While Logan and Morgan were being tested for admission to the academy, the examiners discovered that they were closely related by blood. That shock of cold water created a sudden obstacle in their relationship. Fortunately, Morgan had protected herself from becoming pregnant. The Collage of Healing warned the couple that it could take some time to determine if it was safe for them to interbreed. When Roark met them, he simply assumed Logan and Morgan were siblings. Logan and Morgan had agreed to wait until the healers had an answer for them, so they had been acting the part. Roark had been a student repeating a few courses over the summer and Logan ended up as his roommate.

Roark was the one who sorted them out, helped Logan and Morgan settle in and establish themselves. Naturally, Roark assumed Morgan was fair game and set out to win her heart. During this time, Logan found himself unable to restrain himself around Morgan, so he unintentionally began to shut her out and drive her away. Lonely, Morgan began to respond to Roark's generosity and charm. He had done so many things for them to help out, he had deserved some kind of reward. Thinking it was truly over between her and Logan, Morgan became intimate with Roark. When Logan caught them together, he lost it. He almost killed Roark and ended up telling him about his true relationship with Morgan.

Over the course of the next day, Morgan was distracted from further thoughts about her meeting with Mann by her classes and the concerns of her friends, Logan and Roark. As had become her habit, Morgan woke up early, worked out and had breakfast with Logan and Roark. In the course of their conversation, while musing over recent events and situations, Logan and Roark asked her if she planned to go back to work. Morgan mentioned that she had been summoned to a meeting with Lloyd and expected him to ask the same question but confessed that she had not made up her mind about how to respond. Morgan had been shaken by the tragic outcome of her last contract. She blamed herself for the death of Kevin Niall. She had made a fair amount of money prior to the Autumn Festival but not enough to quit.

Morgan took their advice and put everything out of her mind to focus on her classes. Her studies and workouts offered Roark a glimpse into her capabilities, while her conversations hinted at a few pieces of her past. In particular, the strong bond between Morgan and Logan stood revealed in his vocal concerns about her profession.

While Morgan had been trained in the basic arts of sword and sorcery, she had always had difficulty with magic as the result of her psychic sensitivity. Her psychic abilities, primarily regeneration, telepathy and telekinesis, had first manifested in response to the traumatic experiences she had as a child lost in the ruins of Aeslyn Tear. This was unfortunate, because psychic ability was far more difficult to train and develop than magic ability. In order for her to learn magic, it had been necessary to suppress her natural psychic talent. To teach her the mental discipline she needed to cope with her psychic gift, she was trained in several rigorous physical disciplines.

At her present age, Morgan finally had the opportunity to try and integrate her magic and psychic abilities. Psychic abilities on the order displayed by Morgan typically manifested as the result of studying magic for a decade or more. Thus, Morgan was qualified to join classes for senior academy initiates. She lacked the level of magical training and discipline they had, but she had enough natural talent and experience to fit into the most advanced classes. In addition, her training as a courtesan had included the study of certain aspects of healing magic, the college of magic that was the most compatible with psychic ability, allowing her to catch up and progress quickly in her chosen field of magic.

After classes, as she arrived at Lloyd's home to answer the summons Mann delivered, Morgan was ambushed by an assassin. Morgan's only warning was a sudden premonition of danger. Responding with trained but untested, combat reflexes, Morgan evaded the initial surprise attack.

02

Morgan was stunned by her own reflexes

*He's dead*

Morgan was rushed back into Lloyd's offices

*Dispose of that*

In a blur, it was all over. The assault, and Morgan's lethal response, was witnessed by Ash, one of the few associates of Lloyd she had become acquainted with. He had caught sight of Morgan approaching, spotted the assassin as he made his move and sounded an alarm. Morgan was stunned by her own reflexes. In spite of her disbelief, she knew she had killed her attacker and could not help staring at her hands and the man they had slain. With the help of several enforcers, Ash ushered Morgan and the body inside. The shock was so great, she did not notice her own injuries. As Morgan struggled to recover her wits, she heard Ash comment: *So, someone finally figured out it wasn't an accident.*

Morgan waited until they were alone and asked him what he meant. Ash seemed surprised by her confusion and confronted her with several shocking revelations. In an exchange of stunned and sarcastic words, Ash informed her the attack was probably in response to the assassination of Kevin, then accused her of stealing the contract from him and criticized Lloyd for offering it to both of them, effectively exposing the truth about Lloyd and his criminal organization to her for the first time. Morgan protested, insisting that Kevin's death had been an accident. Which, he "reminded" her, was what the contract had specified, prompting him to extend his complements for making it look so convincing.

03

Morgan was bewildered by what she overheard, then alarmed when it sank in. The suggestion that someone believed she had assassinated Kevin and had sent an assassin in retaliation shook Morgan severely. In many ways, that eclipsed the revelation that she had unwittingly become part of a criminal organization.

Morgan confronted Lloyd, debating with him while she tended to her wounds.

When Morgan recovered her wits, she stormed in to confront Lloyd, to reveal what she had learned and to hear confirmation of his criminal enterprises. When confronted with what Morgan had learned, Lloyd confirmed everything, while apologizing for allowing her to be drawn into the middle of everything. Morgan was disappointed. Nothing would change the situation she was in but it could have been avoided if she had known about the organization. Morgan asked why she was kept in the dark about Lloyd's organization. Under the circumstances, Lloyd had no option but to detain her. Lloyd locked her in a room and questioned Ash, to find out what the assassin revealed to her.

04

Morgan is detained by Lloyd, confronted by Ash again and kidnapped by Kail's enforcers

Morgan tells Ash she is an escort, explaining how she came to work for Lloyd

Alone in her room, Morgan struggled to come to terms with what she had learned. In spite of her protests, Lloyd defended his decision to keep her in the dark. Lloyd explained, stumbling onto an explanation of how she was mistaken for an assassin. The secrecy surrounding Morgan, as far as the organization was concerned, had been an accidental byproduct of trying to keep Morgan ignorant about the organization itself. She had dealt exclusively with Lloyd, with the exception of an occasional messenger. Lloyd's right-hand man knew about her but everyone else in the organization had simply been instructed to leave her alone and stay out of her way. Because of the work she did, Lloyd was concerned about his men trying to take advantage of her. He advised her to do as all his people had, taking measures to reduce their risk of assassination.

Morgan attempts to contact Logan for advice and assistance.

>> This is an ideal place for Ash to make his first "kill" on Morgan. Her surprise and refusal to believe, particularly when he commented on Lloyd’s involvement in the underworld and her professed ignorance about the organization he ran seemed genuine. Concluding that she was either the best liar he had ever met, or not at all what he had been led to believe.

That evening, Ash slipped in to see Morgan, his suspicions aroused by her reactions and Lloyd's questions. In an attempt to resolve these concerns, he ambushed her on her way out of the bath.

With his suspicions raised, he gently prompted her into revealing her knowledge of the situation, along with her true thoughts and feelings about the whole affair. He then carefully explained to her that she had fulfilled all the requirements of a contract to assassinate Kevin. Morgan protested her confusion; Lloyd had refused to answer her questions and locked her up. She asked Ash if he really had been paid to kill Kevin Niall as he had claimed earlier. Ash had already confessed to it, so instead, he asked her to deny that Lloyd had also hired her to kill Niall, reminding her of their first confrontation. Morgan tried to explain what she really was.

Unable to find a job sufficient to meet her tuition and expenses while leaving her enough time for classes and study, Morgan had considered exploiting her courtesan training, contracting her services as an escort and personal companion. Once she convinced him it was necessary, Roark introduced her to Lloyd. Roark had introduced him as a "friend of the family", so Morgan naturally assumed Lloyd was a minor or merchant noble. Morgan explained her situation and Lloyd agreed to give her chance. It did not take long for Morgan to prove herself and both were mildly surprised by the fee she was able to command.

Morgan had been the paid companion of Keith Ross, the son of a powerful merchant noble, the night she had met Ash. Morgan had been hired to turn the boy into a man and then turn him loose. It was one of the things she had been specifically trained for. To avoid arousing the boy's suspicions, Morgan had been careful to make the entire affair appear perfectly natural. That made the contract more difficult than most, but Morgan always found the work more satisfying. Keith's contract had been a textbook seduction. The first part involved studying her subject and devising a casual way to introduce herself into his life.

Morgan staged their first encounter, stumbling into him while overburdened by a hastily assembled travel kit and bedroll. Their collision spilled everything on the road, signaling the start of tears of frustration and hopelessness from Morgan. As he helped her, she sobbed out a story of being kicked out of her home by her wicked step-mother and he eagerly swallowed the bait. Once he had been lured to her rescue, it was easy to prompt him into taking her home with him. Morgan continued to lead him on with her pose of defenseless innocence, silently inviting his advances and encouraging him with her responses.

The most difficult part of the contract was becoming his lover without becoming his love. Fortunately, Keith already had a love interest and Morgan had quietly encouraged him to pursue that interest over her. Morgan had been looking for a way to break things off when he brought her to the party. Morgan had been worried until she noticed that the girl Keith liked was present. One look at Keith, with Morgan on his arm, and the girl became jealous. With such a perfect opportunity, Morgan began looking for a man bold enough to pry her away from her date, freeing Morgan and Keith from each other.

Before Morgan could explain how she became involved with Kevin, she was interrupted by the sound of men approaching her door. Ash immediately slipped out the way he came in. His exit was followed by a commotion as several cloaked and hooded men stormed the room and kidnapped her.

05

Morgan was delivered, disarmed, disrobed and unconscious, to Mann. When Morgan woke up, Mann confronted her with a brief recap of their last meeting. Mann explained that the questions he had asked her the last time had been intended to determine the strength of her loyalty to Lloyd. The answers she had given, previously, had convinced him that she was too loyal to betray Lloyd. This in turn prompted the order to have her eliminated, before she could tell anyone about her conversation with Mann. The first assassin was waiting for her the next day, when she answered the summons Mann delivered to her. Lloyd's response had changed things. It suggested that he had reason to believe Morgan could not trusted and that suggested that Morgan deliberately deceived Mann.

Morgan asked for an explanation, why the offer, why the attempt on her life

He gave her a list of reasons, her age, her talent, her assets, make her a powerful asset

Morgan was suspected of being an assassin, so a test was designed to prove it

Morgan was presumed to be the assassin when he died, accidentally, at her hand

In any case, Morgan could not be allowed to remain in Lloyd's hands, lest she reveal anything about her meeting with Mann. Since it had been necessary to extract her, Mann had decided to take the opportunity to try and recruit Morgan again. It went without saying that it was an all or nothing deal. Desperate, Morgan tried to explain that she was not an assassin, revealing that she was a mere escort. Morgan repeated the story of how she came to work for Lloyd, this time in detail and swore that she had been ignorant of Lloyd's involvement in the underworld and about his organization in general. Mann was skeptical, reminding her that he had watched her the whole time she was with Kevin. But he listened to her story about how she came to work for Lloyd and how she became involved in the death of Kevin Niall.

Morgan's mark, Keith Ross, took her to a party honoring the recent exploits of the young noble and adventurer, Kevin Niall. Morgan had been hired to turn the boy into a man and then turn him loose. Morgan had been with Keith for over a week and had completed every aspect of her contract short of bringing their relationship to a natural end. In order to turn him loose, Morgan had been encouraging Keith to pursue the girl he had always had a crush on. The party, she hoped, would provide a man willing to pry her away from her date, freeing Morgan and Keith from each other.

Morgan was surprised when the guest of honor abruptly cut into her conversation. Kevin had overheard Morgan telling Keith about the time she was trapped in the ruins as a child, and he wanted to know about everything she saw and experienced while she was in the ruins. Keith slipped quietly away, once Kevin had engaged Morgan's full attention. Unfortunately, her ordeal in the ruins was a very painful topic for Morgan. Her experiences in the ruins had been both terrifying and wonderful but the way people had responded to her accounts of the ordeal had left her traumatized. Of course, Kevin just thought she was being coy.

Unfortunately, the other guests had assumed she must be someone important if Kevin was so interested in her. If she tried to slip away, someone would corner her, trying to figure out who she was or what Kevin was talking with her about. Morgan allowed Kevin to occupy her attention until she caught Keith sneaking off with the girl he admired. Seeing that her mission was accomplished, she began looking for a way to excuse herself from Kevin's company. Ever wary of being exposed, she was extremely sensitive to being observed. Morgan picked up on the presence of someone studying her a little too intently and approached him.

In Morgan's experience, a man who stared that hard at a girl in another man's company simply had to be willing to take her off his hands. To her surprise, he had not been interested in her for any reason she might have expected. His attention had been fixed on her out of irritation. He revealed that he knew what she was, what sort of work she did and insisted on knowing what her intentions were concerning Kevin. Upset and angry at having been "made" she announced that she was going to take him out and warned him to stay out of her way, promising to make him pay if he warned anyone about her.

Morgan returned to Kevin, resolved to endure his probing in order to spite Ash. At the same time, the direction the conversation was going suggested that Kevin might be receptive to her tale in a way others had not been. He had been in the ruins and must have encountered some of the things she had. But while she had resolved to indulge in a little recreation, her conscience kept summoning up images of Logan and Roark. Reminded of the unresolved love triangle she was in, she found herself spurning Kevin's advances. Naturally, this only aroused his interest in her, apart from what he could learn from her.

Lloyd summoned Morgan to his home the next day to issue a warning. He had learned that Kevin had become infatuated with her and urged her, for several reasons, not to become involved with him. In the light of a new day, Morgan was more than willing to obey. Morgan tried to discourage the young lord's interest, in part to honor Lloyd's request but also because the situation was a painful reminder of her past. Growing up as the companion of a lord's son and being trained as a courtesan under the watchful eyes of another young lord, had taught her the danger of courting the attention of a noble.

Unfortunately, Kevin simply became more infatuated with Morgan the longer he pursued her for information about the ruins. Morgan had cursed herself for being stupid enough to get involved with Kevin in the first place, when she realized that the young lord had become completely obsessed with her. Her life was already complicated enough. Unfortunately, Kevin seemed determined to complicate it further. He had gone to the trouble of having her followed and began showing up to confront her at all the places she usually hung out. Morgan tried to drive him off but often that just was not possible.

06

In hindsight, it was obvious to her that Lloyd had been trying to keep her from becoming involved, warning her away from Niall and then paying her to drive him off. Niall's death was nothing more than a freak accident.

Kevin proved to be a genuinely nice guy. In spite of her resolve, his attention was hard to resist. When he managed to corner her, they talked about the ruins and the impulse to live a life of adventurer. Even Logan and Roark found themselves responding to his charm. Morgan found her own resistance crumbling. Time and again, he had managed to get past her defenses, luring her into animated discussions about the age of gods and related myths and legends. Nothing really seemed to deter him, not even rivals for her affections. Unfortunately, Lloyd would not have it.

He called Morgan aside once more and instructed her to stop flirting with Kevin and just put him out of his misery. Morgan understood what he meant, Lloyd was telling her to take Kevin out, to give him the ride of his life, then tell him what she had been paid to do it. To make it easier for her, he drew up a contract and paid her to get rid of him, for once and for all. Morgan thought that was too harsh but when Lloyd reminded her of her obligations, she relented. In her own mind, she decided it was probably best. If there was any hope of a real relationship with Kevin, he had to know the truth and still want to be with her.

Morgan prepared for her date with Kevin. As she bathed and dressed, she reflected on the events that led to her involvement with Kevin, in conversation with Logan. The date began with an elegant meal, followed by a show. At dinner, she noticed Ash and Mann, the former sparking a recollection, the latter simply arousing her curiosity--there was something familiar about him but nothing she could place her finger on. During the play, Morgan found herself brooding on the events leading to her date with Kevin, starting with his pursuit of her and her efforts to heed Lloyd's objections.

After the show, Kevin took her to a gathering of young nobility for an evening of dancing and again she spotted Ash and Mann in the crowd. In a brief exchange with Ash, she confided her plan to "put him out of his misery" at the end of their date and declared her work "very private". Morgan carefully allowed things to escalate. By the end of the evening, he felt comfortable taking her to his suite in the most expensive hotel in the city. Too soon, her date came to its harsh conclusion but things did not go as planned. After bedding down with him, Morgan discovered that she could not complete the contract.

Morgan gave Kevin an encore in the bath, to buy time to consider what to do. Her life was already too complicated, so she dropped the bomb. Morgan was surprised by his reaction to hearing what she did for a living. Instead of recoiling, he asked her if it was what she had wanted to do for a living. His sympathy and understanding caused Morgan to panic. She emphasized that she had accepted payment to be his companion and in specific, paid to end it by driving him away. She was professionally obligated to have nothing to do with him beyond that evening. She strained to convince him they had no future together.

Unfortunately, Kevin refused to let her go. He pressed her to explain why she did it and made a proposal. This was more than Morgan could cope with, stunned by his acceptance but frightened by what he demanded. So, she fled. Unable to explain herself, she simply put on her dress and left, chanting apologetic denials. This was too much for Kevin. He raced out after her, naked and wet, desperate to catch her and force her to explain. Racing out after her as she fled, skidding on wet, soapy feet, he crashed into her as he caught up to her at the stairwell landing.

The collision sent both of them over the edge of the balcony and she barely managed to catch the rail and grasp his hand. Unfortunately, with the film of soap covering his body, she could not keep her grip, and he fell seventeen stories to his death. There were hundreds of witnesses and not a single person, apart from those who had come to witness an assassination, would have suggested that the tragedy had been anything but an accident. As Morgan reeled from the tragic accident, she spotted Ash and Mann once more in the crowd. Ash, in particular, waited late into the night to approach her and deliver a parting remark, "So much for privacy."

A few days passed, occupied by investigations, interrogations and Morgan's exoneration, before she heard anything from Lloyd.

Mann told her that she had convinced him with her story but that only made the tragedy worse. First, because she had the perfect cover for an assassin, it would be almost impossible to convince anyone who believed she was an assassin that she was not. Second, because of the reputation she had gained, Mann had been asked to try and recruit her to work for someone else. That person had arranged to extract her from imprisonment by Lloyd, presuming that she had been compromised in his eyes and would be willing to reconsider Mann's offer. Morgan could not go back to Lloyd for several reasons. What she had learned about Lloyd and his organization, combined with her escape, made her a dangerous liability.

Lloyd could only let her live if she officially joined his organization. If he doubted her reliability at all, he would simply order her death to protect himself. Her abduction had certainly marked her as an agent of some rival or enemy and that made her and all of her known associates potential threats. Unfortunately, Morgan was already too great a threat to Mann and his superiors. Mann's offer applied only if she was an assassin. As soon as he walked out, her life was forfeit. Morgan asked him, if she agreed to the offer and became an assassin, would she be allowed to live. Mann studied her for a while before answering. If Morgan agreed to the offer, she would be forced to demonstrate her loyalty.

07

Morgan confessed that she would not kill someone important to her just to save herself. Mann confided that she was better off taking her chances with the men waiting to kill her now. If she managed to survive, he advised her to collect her friends and leave. Unfortunately, Morgan and her friends did not really have that option. Once Mann left, Morgan turned her attention to getting out of the trap he had set. Morgan considered trying to sneak out and avoid her assassin, but he would just ambush her somewhere else. Unfortunately, even if she dealt with the immediate threat, there would eventually be another assassin. She would never be safe as long as someone wanted her dead.

Morgan would have to kill, or she would be killed

Morgan decided to flush out her current assassin and face him while she was ready. The second assassin was already in position to kill Morgan when she awoke for her final invitation from Kail. She had disarmed, stripped and searched for her meeting with Mann and now faced up to half a dozen armed men. Morgan turned the trap against her assassin. The assassin did not expect her to deliberately start a fight with the gang of enforcers and underestimated the caliber of her unarmed fighting style. It was a style developed exclusively for elite courtesans known as the naked dance. By disarming her, they had freed her to make best use of her primary weapon.

Morgan chose to flush out her assassin and face him while she was ready

Morgan did her best to try and turn the trap against her assassin

Morgan killed in cold blood for the first time

Morgan walked away from the body half in shock

The assassin was disarmed and dead by his own weapon almost the moment he stepped in to attack. It all happened so fast, but it was still the first time Morgan had killed in cold blood. She walked away from the body half in shock but somehow had the presence of mind to snag a cloak from one of the enforcers to cover herself on her way out. Morgan was ambushed on her way home to warn her friends about the danger they were in. Cursing herself for not considering the possibility of another assassin waiting along her route home, Morgan caught the first strike on her arm. With the knife lodged in her forearm, she neatly disarmed her opponent. In spite of that, he quickly overwhelmed and subdued her. At the last minute, however, he arrested the killing blow.

08

For a moment, Morgan was transfixed by shock but then her mind focused on the confessed assassin. Ash surprised her further by explaining that he had followed her, overheard her argument with Mann and observed her escape from the trap. He confirmed that Lloyd had been turned against her and cautioned her to be more alert, to think more aggressively if she wanted to live. He then proceeded to offer clipped criticism on her relative performance against him and the men she had killed to escape, while casually returning her outfit. Ash lectured her casually as she slipped into her clothes. He noted casually that it was probably best for her to go into hiding, she was in enough danger already.

Under no circumstances, he instructed, should she return to her home or any place she was commonly associated with. There was, he assured her, no chance of going back to her life of escorts and school. Either was fine as cover for life as an escort or even an anonymous assassin but suicide for anyone marked as she was. Morgan objected, protesting the importance of her studies at the academy, refusing to throw away her future again. Even more importantly, her friends were also at risk, and she could not abandon them. She would rather face her enemies head on. Of course, Ash pointed out, the problem was that her enemies had no intention of offering her a head on fight.

The next time she stepped outside, he reminded her, a new assassin could be waiting to kill her. He would not announce himself. He would strike without warning, whenever and wherever he thought he had the best chance to kill her. If she failed to spot him, to stop him and kill him, he would kill her. There would be no hesitation, because, as far as her enemies were concerned, she was a cold-blooded killer, just like any of them. Morgan reminded him that she had already killed two assassins and a handful of others, proving that they were right to think so. Ash disagreed. In spite of the premeditation of her assault on the men she had killed, she had killed in self-defense.

Any soldier had what it took to kill the enemy before the enemy could hill him. An assassin not only had what it took to kill a man before he could become the enemy, he had what it took to kill a man who was not an enemy at all. There was a word for someone who chose to go head-to-head with assassins: Corpse. Granted, the more of them she managed to kill, the less of them there would be to try and kill her. But the only thing that killing an assassin accomplished was to temporarily disarm her true enemy. If her solution to the problem was to go on the offensive, she needed to find her target and strike at it with the best weapon she could get her hands on.

Unfortunately, the best Morgan had right now was herself and she was not an assassin, not by a long shot. Not yet. Ash paused to ask her if she was still refusing to heed his advice and go into hiding. Morgan assured him the cost was too high. With a shrug, he assured her that becoming an assassin would not diminish the immediate threat. In fact, it would just put her in greater peril. He explained to her what the life of an assassin entailed--the advantages and disadvantages, the costs and the risks--and asked her if she could embrace all of that in order to preserve the life she had. Did she really want to live up to the reputation that was spreading through the underground?

Before Morgan could protest, Ash vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving Morgan to wonder why he had not killed her.

*Morgan struggled with the question for a moment, before realizing that it made little difference if she became the assassin. If anything, it made more sense to be the one to strike first.*

*Morgan morosely points out that he had just told her that he was technically her enemy. He noticed at once as her demeanor shifted in readiness for desperate action.*

*Before she could do anything rash, he warned her that, if he had wanted to kill her, or if he considered her a threat, innocent or not, she would have already been dead.*

*Ash reminded her that she could become an assassin.,*

09

Morgan ignores Ash's advice and returns to her dorm to recover her ring

Morgan finds her roommate slain and gets caught with the girl's blood on her hands

10

Morgan's mentor at the academy confronted her. She revealed that she already knew about Morgan's moonlighting, but out of consideration of her situation she never reported her. Out of respect for that, Morgan explains that her roommate was killed by someone trying to kill her. Her mentor informed her that someone had been testing and straining the magical defenses of the campus in places where she tended to be. Morgan did not dare to confide any more, except that she could not say anything more. Her mentor informed her she cannot take official action in this situation on her behalf without Morgan's full confidence. Morgan informed him that, while she did not create the problem, she would have to resolve it on her own.

12

Morgan was tracked down and confronted by Logan and Roark. Once she had explained what was going, Morgan asked Logan and Roark if they had known Lloyd was a crime lord. Roark confirmed that he had known about Lloyd and explained that he had assumed Morgan did too.

Morgan was sought out by Logan and Roark

Morgan confirms that Logan had been correct, outlining the situation she was now in

Morgan delivered a shocking account of her evening, omitting the encounter with Ash

Roark confirms what Morgan has learned about Lloyd

Roark tries to explain the business to Morgan

*Who else would you ask…?*

Morgan concedes to his logic, fuming

Morgan confronts them with the conclusion she had reached

Morgan is saved from a strike by her friends

Morgan strips for a bath and pauses to relieve herself

Morgan is ambushed in the bath by a female assassin

Morgan curses herself for lowering her guard as she deflects the initial strike

Morgan manages to disarm her foe, but the assassin continues to press her

Morgan comes out of a clench with a garrote around her neck

Morgan diverts all her attention to focusing on a telekinetic defense against the garrote

Morgan realizes that her foe has the advantage and spares a thought to call for help

Morgan reaches out to Logan telepathically

Logan and Roark come rushing to the rescue, spooking the assassin

Morgan and her friends never got a clear look at the lady assassin

Morgan was expecting to be confronted by another assassin sooner or later. It had even occurred to her that an assassin might be dispatched against her friends, on the assumption that Logan and Roark might have had a hand in Morgan's escape. Unfortunately, she did not consider the possibility of facing a female assassin attempting to get at her through them. As a result, the third assassin came very close to killing Morgan, catching her off guard at a bath house. Disguised as a bath attendant, she struck in the wardrobe while Morgan was relieving herself prior to taking a bath. Her initial strike failed but she managed to get a garrote around Morgan's neck.

13

Morgan called upon her telekinetic powers against the weapon and sent a telepathic cry for help to Logan. The assassin was forced to make a break for it when Logan and Roark arrived. Morgan and her friends never got a clear enough look at her to identify her.

Morgan warned her friends of the danger they were in. Logan and Roark assured Morgan that they were safe as long as they remained on campus.

###

15

Morgan realized that Ash had not been the only shadow she had seen while dating Kevin

Morgan seeks out Roark and Logan between classes

Morgan continues to think about it during her afternoon classes

Morgan finds herself dwelling on her meeting with Mann

Morgan asks herself an important question, why was he interested in her?

Logan offers a hypothesis

*they think you're an assassin, right?*

Morgan realizes that she has seen Mann before

Morgan seeks out Mann, determined to find answers

Morgan returns to the place she noticed him at most often

Morgan inquires about him, who he is and where to find him

After dark, Morgan struggled to come to terms with everything that had happened. Part of her mind was reviewing what had occurred while another worked on her options. As she reflected on her meeting with Mann, she remembered that she had seen him in the background, now and then, starting from the night she met Kevin. The recollection of having seen him lurking around in previous weeks gnawed at the back of her mind through the rest of the evening.

The next day, after classes, Morgan impulsively set out to track down and confront Mann. During the day, she had concluded that the contract on Kevin had been a deliberate test. That meant Mann might know who had wanted Kevin dead and why. Her search consumed the afternoon and early evening, unwittingly leading to a meeting place for conducting business with Llewellyn.

16

Mann's trail led to an herbalist's shop that was a front for an opium den that was a front for a blood den. Unfortunately, Morgan was walking right into a trap. She arrived at the opium den she was directed to about an hour after sunset and encountered Llewellyn. Llewellyn was there to meet with his liaison Mann, a man he had assigned to be Kail's lieutenant. Llewellyn confronted Morgan, advising her to consider Mann's proposal.

Morgan tracked Mann down to an opium den

Morgan stumbled into a trap

Morgan was confronted by an imposing, magnetic stranger

The stranger advised her to reconsider the offer

Morgan confronted him, asking about the offer and his involvement

He repeated his advice, stating that everything would be explained

Morgan demanded an explanation

He casually subdued her

He left her to recover with a parting warning

17

Morgan set out to warn Lloyd, arriving in time to clash with his assassin

18

Morgan had to fight Ash for real when he walks in and assumes she is attacking Lloyd

20

Morgan attends her classes, risking exposure rather than expulsion

Morgan catches up with Logan and Roark at breakfast

Logan and Roark urge her to confide, Morgan insists she is fine

Morgan heads to class on full alert

Morgan reports to class

Morgan's classmates press her about her outburst the next day

Morgan defends her decision to attend classes

Morgan remains distracted from her lessons

Morgan is confronted by her academy mentor

Morgan is unable to confide anything, despite her mentor's uncanny perception of events

Morgan works off her frustration and nerves during her workout

Morgan arrived to find her room turned upside down and him in her chair

He comments on her belongings and the danger of illusions of security

Morgan demands an explanation for his invasion

21

Morgan is back to her normal self by the next morning

Few assassins would risk making a hit on the campus; Ash, however, proved more daring

Morgan notices her stalker trying to slip past her guard

Morgan considers the possibility of an assassin using him to distract her

Morgan pulls a reverse, catching her stalker off guard

He advises her not to draw a blade if she is not committed to using it

He breaks away, disarming her and sinking her knife into her abdomen

Morgan was only marginally safe on campus; Ash had showed her how vulnerable she was

He proceeds to comment on her studies and their potential benefit to an assassin

Morgan cannot shut out his words as she drops and tends to her wound

Morgan reels as he squats down to observe

Morgan is forced to use the ring of regeneration

Her foe taxes her with questions and comments

Morgan offers a limited explanation

Morgan is on edge until she is able to remove the ring and go to sleep

Ash confronts her at one point to ask why she has not alerted her friends to him

Morgan confesses that she believed it would only provoke him

Morgan has a few more close encounters with Ash over the next few days

Morgan notices that the backs of Logan and Roark's shirts have been cut

Morgan searches the area and spots her advocate staring at her from a distance

Morgan blinks and he is gone

Morgan nearly freaks out when Logan comments on her shadow the next day

Logan suggests that Ash is infatuated with her, reminding her of her last suitor

Morgan wonders if he is right but knows she won't ask her advocate

Morgan wonders if Logan is actually jealous

Morgan regrets that thought the instant her stalker slips his hands over her mouth

Morgan retaliates as his arm comes around her throat, fighting back for all she is worth

Morgan manages to break free, but he presses his attack, eventually pinning her to the wall

He asks her which would be worse, if he raped her or killed her

Morgan says rape, not because it was true but because she could kill him if he tried

Morgan is shocked when he disengages

*I like the way you think, Red.*

Morgan blinks, then lashes out with lethal intent

He dances her around, sending her sprawling and departs

*You're still no assassin.*

Morgan is with Logan the next time her stalker ambushes her

Logan moves instantly to defend her, engaging the assassin in a higher level of combat

Morgan watches in awe of their skill and ruthlessness

Morgan is horrified when the fight turns suddenly against Logan

Logan was surprised at the skill of his opponent and frustrated by his efforts to get at Morgan

Logan opened himself up to a series of incapacitating strikes trying to head his foe off

Morgan did not hesitate when she saw the assassin move to finish Logan off

Morgan jumped into the fight on overdrive, determined to finish it fast

Morgan was forced to let him escape, as her foe pointed out that Logan was dying

Morgan used the ring to save Logan and helped him back to his room

Logan confronted Morgan, the assassin had an ongoing dialogue with Morgan

Morgan confessed that he had been attacking her at random for days

Roark walked in on the middle of their argument

Logan demanded to know why she never told anyone

Logan argued with her, questioning her actions and decisions from the start

Morgan tried to explain herself and Roark cut in to demand an explanation from both of them

Morgan finds herself in the middle of a three-way inquisition

Morgan and Logan argue and Roark questions both of them

Roark reveals that Logan was freelancing as an enforcer and assassin for Lloyd for weeks

Logan reveals a bit of his past and defends his choices, while questioning Morgan's

Logan drops Morgan off at her room, making her promise to alert him if anything happened

Morgan concedes that her nemesis had provoked her to take action

Logan returns the ring to her, and she retires for the night

Morgan keeps anticipating an attack

Morgan is spooked by a casual touch, nearly attacking a classmate

24

Morgan had gained a reputation as one Lloyd's best assassins. In the opinion of his enemies, she was a true artist, an asset worth acquiring if at all possible. To that end, it struck Kail as worth the effort to convert or capture her if possible. Ash and Mann had kept the truth about her to themselves, but each had confided his opinion that it would be very difficult to secure her loyalty. Kail considered that point and reached a similar, more sinister conclusion. He proposed to gain control of Morgan by stripping her of all other resources and connections, to cut off all possible options of freedom except what he would allow. Ash disagreed and proceeded to demonstrate how her friends could be used as leverage against Morgan.

Morgan is dragged into a bedroom

Morgan demands an explanation

He asks her how much her friends were worth to her

He asks her how far she would go to protect them from him

Morgan declares that she would sacrifice anything to protect them

He asks her to prove it

He establishes the terms of the contract

Her life was in his hands until dawn

Morgan suddenly recognizes the opportunity she has been handed

Morgan could do more from the inside than she could where she was

Morgan considered the risks and limitations she faced

Morgan sets her sights on the main target

Morgan had to take the offer

Morgan wanted to meet with Kail before doing any contracts

Morgan presented them with her conditions and requirements

Morgan was informed that she would have to prove herself first

Morgan would not sacrifice her life at the academy

Morgan would take care of her friends herself

Morgan waits for the right moment and then strikes swiftly and ruthlessly

Morgan moves on, lost in thought, waiting for reality to settle back in

Ash was waiting for her outside Kail's office

Ash confirmed that it had all been a trick to get her close to her target

27

Morgan set out to find Mann only to be confronted by the man behind Kail--an immortal

Morgan was offered a job; the job Llewellyn and Mann had been grooming Kail for

Morgan contemplated her ordeal and the prospect of her first real assassination

Morgan was ambushed by her nemesis, Ash "kills" Morgan and renames her "Ember"

The vampire had encouraged Kail to pursue his ambitions as a cover for the pursuit of his own objectives in the city and a front for certain offensives against the local nobility. In both cases, this campaign was in response to threats from mortal agencies, specifically intrusions into the ruins deep beneath the city and surrounding countryside. There had long been an understanding between the mortals and immortals involved in the underworld but every few generations the mortals required a little reminding.

In recent generations, mortals involved in the criminal enterprises of Avon had come to view the immortals as an inconvenience. They refused to obey the ancient laws governing their coexistence, defiant as a matter of practice and a product of ignorance. While part of that defiance was understandable, as convention held that mortals who drifted into the sphere of the underworld were the legitimate prey of the immortals, the immortals were more concerned about the increasing invasions into the deep.

Members of the nobility were commissioning expeditions into the ruins’ depths in search of ancient treasures and artifacts. Instead of acting to disrupt and discourage such expeditions, the mortal lords of the underworld were promoting and profiting from them. In response, the immortals had decided to inflict chaos similar to what they had suffered upon those responsible. There were more than enough ambitious underlings willing to act as their agents, once support was offered.

In many ways, Kail was merely a front for Llewellyn. Where Lloyd had refused to be tempted, Kail had jumped eagerly at the opportunity to advance himself. He did not even question his new patron's motives. It was enough that he was offered the resources he needed to prove his superiority over his rival. Kail and his ambition, was used as a way to sort the wheat from the chaff. His efforts to recruit people to his side revealed the true nature of the men working for Lloyd, identifying those who could be bought and swayed from those who were utterly loyal to their superiors in the organization. It was Llewellyn who was particularly interested in acquiring Morgan. Kail considered her a potential but expendable asset, while Llewellyn saw both immediate and long-term possibilities in her. For the immediate, it was essential for her to be a weapon exploited through Kail. From among those who could be swayed, Llewellyn had sought an assassin willing and able to take out a high-level crime lord.

The man the vampire wanted dead was aware of the threat and had taken strenuous precautions against vampires and weres. A mortal assassin had been required but the target was very high in the organization all the best assassins belonged to. The morals and philosophy of war and assassination are raised and reduced--the point being, if someone was assassinated, they usually invited it, or it was the least expensive solution to a problem.

Input

Gear killed Morgan's roommate, Leslie

Gear was primarily an enforcer, skilled in espionage and assassination

Gear was loyal to Kail, acting on his orders to try and hunt down Morgan

Gear was ordered to kill Lloyd when the situation around Morgan went out of control

Ash staged an argument with Lloyd over the Niall contract.

Ash was approached by Mann and took the offer.

Ash demonstrated that a determined assassin could reach Morgan and her friends on campus.

Roark arranged a secret meeting between Morgan and Lloyd to clear things up.

Morgan informed Lloyd that he had enemies within his organization.

Morgan is approached by Mann

Morgan is ambushed by an assassin and detained by Lloyd

Morgan is abducted from a discussion with Ash to meet again with Mann

Morgan tells Mann how she became involved with Kevin

Morgan tells Mann about her attempt to ditch Kevin

Morgan learns that she already knows too much to be allowed to live

Morgan escapes from Mann's trap, killing in cold blood for the first time

Morgan is ambushed by Ash, he had followed her and heard her confession

Morgan is just in time to fight the assassin sent after her friends

Morgan is taught by Ash that the sanctuary of the academy can be violated

Morgan has help from Roark clearing things up with Lloyd

Morgan is ambushed on campus in retaliation for communicating with Lloyd

Morgan is asked to confide in her friends and accept their help and protection

Morgan was punished by Ash for talking and paid the price to protect them from him

Morgan set out to identify her enemies, from Lloyd she learned who turned him against her

Morgan stalked her first target, identifying his associates before eliminating him

Morgan stalked her second target, discovering the rebellious faction in Lloyd's organization

Morgan set out to warn Lloyd, arriving in time to clash with his assassin

Morgan has to fight Ash for real when he walks in and assumes she is attacking Lloyd

Morgan has to work with Ash, both were hired by Lloyd to put down Kail and his conspirators

Morgan stalks her third target in Ash's shadow but ends up facing Kail alone

Morgan set out to find Mann only to be confronted by the man behind Kail--an immortal

Morgan was offered a job; the job Llewellyn and Mann had been grooming Kail for

Morgan contemplated her ordeal and the prospect of her first real assassination

Morgan was ambushed by her nemesis, Ash "kills" Morgan and renames her "Ember"

Clipboard

Morgan is approached with an offer to work for someone else

Morgan is jumped by an assassin, first kill

Morgan was exposed to the reality of Lloyd's operations

Lloyd offers to escort Morgan back to campus

*The campus is safe*

Lloyd suggests protective measures, promising to investigate

Morgan flees, wondering what she had gotten involved in

Morgan returns to the sanctuary of the campus

Morgan was confronted by Logan and Roark the next day

Morgan tries to confront the messenger

The agent asks her more questions about her history with Lloyd

Morgan tries to answer, again without incriminating herself

Morgan asks why he helped her

Morgan finds the answers more confusing

He explains that he is her advocate, emphasizing the matter of loyalties

Morgan repeats her question, why is she a target in this war?

He says she can't possibly be that naïve and outlines the dynamics of the war

Morgan is told that she is believed to be an assassin

Morgan escapes from a trap, second kill

Morgan is discouraged from fighting, from becoming an assassin

Morgan was not entirely safe at the academy

Morgan would not sacrifice her education

Logan and Roark take her back to Lloyd to settle the issue

Morgan set out to identify her enemies, from Lloyd she learned who turned him against her

Morgan pays a visit to Lloyd

*I think I'm ready to go back to work*

Morgan discusses the matter with Lloyd, the topic drifts to the incident

Lloyd asks her when she is available to work

*Why? Do you need someone killed?*

Morgan stalked her first target, identifying his associates before eliminating him

Morgan was forced to confide in Logan and Roark when they saved her from an assassin

Morgan was also forced to accept their efforts to protect her and spy on her enemies

Morgan was punished by Ash for talking and paid the price to protect them from him

Morgan stalked her second target, discovering the rebellious faction in Lloyd's organization

Morgan had to work with Ash, both were hired by Lloyd to put down Kail and his conspirators

Morgan stalked her third target in Ash's shadow but ended up facing Kail alone

Morgan returns to Lloyd's office with Roark and Logan after classes

Lloyd spared a moment to enlighten Morgan, describing the strategy and tactics of the war

Lloyd's offensive assets had been hit first, the business operations had been next

Lloyd had his hands full, protecting his operation and assessing his enemies

Lloyd was forced to suspend operations to reduce his people's exposure

Lloyd had limited funds to finance his side of the war

Lloyd had lost a number of fighting assets in ambushes and others were laying low

Lloyd had charged his best assets to probe the enemy and identify targets

Morgan insisted on contributing as well, citing her own training and experience

Morgan learns how few assets remain to Lloyd

Morgan volunteered to fight for him

Morgan was not willing to stand aside while a friend was under attack

Logan and Roark agree with her conclusions but endorse Lloyd's position

Morgan must choose, choosing to fight over taking flight

Morgan and Logan returned to the campus while Roark set off to begin his spying

Roark catches up to them and passes on a message from Lloyd

Roark had spent a few evenings patronizing Lloyd's establishments and collecting information

Morgan is surprised by and suspicious of the message to meet Lloyd

Morgan takes Logan with her, curious to hear what he wants

Lloyd reveals that he had checked up on the story used to set him against her

Morgan had done nothing she had been accused of and Lloyd wanted to get her working

Logan surprised Morgan and Lloyd with a proposal of his own

Morgan had forgotten what Logan had claimed to have been in his former life

Lloyd acknowledges the logic of her involvement, she was already involved

Lloyd points out that there was another way for her to help the war effort

Lloyd presents Morgan the job he meant to give her the day before

Roark points out his own value in the situation and Lloyd takes him up on his offer

Morgan and Logan are put to work, she once more as an escort, he as her bodyguard

Morgan would bring in funds and lure out potential assassins for Logan to dispose of

Lloyd gives them some final instructions and dismisses them

Morgan and Logan were supposed to remain on campus when not on a job

Morgan escorts her client with Logan watching from the shadows

Morgan is almost disappointed when nothing happens

Morgan reports to Lloyd the next day

Morgan learns that Lloyd has identified his adversary, Kail and several key targets

Lloyd learns that one of his spies was eliminated

Morgan realizes that Lloyd does not have anyone to send after his targets

Morgan argues with Lloyd, insisting that she can do the job

Morgan begs Lloyd not to bring Logan or Roark into the debate

Lloyd cannot afford to turn her down but questions her motives and capability

Lloyd becomes explicit about the nature of assassination

Morgan insists, citing the fact that her hands are already bloody

Morgan believes her best chance of survival is to take the fight to the enemy

Morgan assures Lloyd that she can handle the job and the risks

Lloyd decides to give her a test

Morgan pursues her first target, third kill--first assassination

Morgan studies the information on her target and scopes out her plan of attack

Her target is a mole in Lloyd's organization, exposed by the death of Lloyd's spy

Morgan had no qualms about killing him, he was the one who marked her as an assassin

Morgan had a secondary objective of learning who he reported to

Morgan shadows her target, waiting for him to meet his contact

Morgan studies the contact, then proceeds with her main objective

Morgan waits for the right moment and then strikes swiftly and ruthlessly

Morgan moves on, lost in thought, waiting for reality to settle back in

…

Roark reminds them that they have a meeting with Lloyd

They set their disagreements aside and proceed to Lloyd's office

Lloyd is informed of the way Morgan has been goaded into action

Morgan cannot explain his motive for playing with her and cannot afford to quit

Lloyd asks Logan if Morgan knows he works for him, Logan confirms that she knows

Lloyd announces that he has a couple of jobs for Morgan and Logan

Lloyd asks Logan and Morgan if they are capable of working together professionally

The first job would require them to work as a team against multiple targets

Lloyd gives them the details, then describes the second job, another escort

They go over all of the details for both jobs, then Morgan and Logan return to the campus

Morgan pursues her second target, conflicted

Morgan attempts to negotiate a truce, fourth kill--second assassination

Morgan is reprimanded and sent on an escort

Morgan is presented a stronger solicitation

Morgan pointed out that Logan and Roark would remain loyal to Lloyd

Morgan argued that eliminating her own friends should more than prove her loyalty

Morgan just hoped she could fake their deaths convincingly

Morgan faces her former advocate, fifth kill

Morgan asked him what he was going to do about it

Morgan confronts the man, sixth kill--third assassination

Morgan is confronted by the man behind the man--an immortal

Morgan is offered a job, a job the war had been started for

Morgan considers her first, real assassination (when undertaken, a story in and of itself)

Morgan returns, Lloyd visits to inform her the war is over, the killing over

Morgan thanks him, then prepares for her first professional hit

Morgan is ambushed by her nemesis

Morgan must decide between fighting and flight

Morgan must kill to escape

Kill or be killed? Why? Why not? If not now, when? If not here, where?

Morgan considers her assets and allies

Where to next? What have I done? What do I do?

Mann, what is he doing, what can he do, what do I want to do about this?

Logan and Roark, what can I do, what should I do, where can I go?

Her advocate, what does he know, what can I learn, where do I stand with him?

Morgan must kill to survive

Who to kill? Why? How?

Morgan considers what she is willing to fight for

Morgan must figure out who to fight for

How to get killed…

How to get even…

How to get in…

How to get out…

How to get away…

How to get back…

Rough Dialogue

01 4th

Morgan is approached by Mann with an offer to work for someone else

Morgan declines the offer

"Is Morgan in?"

"Morgan, it's for you."

"Yes? Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

"I have a message from Lloyd."

"You work for Lloyd?"

"I do. Maybe we'll see each other again sometime."

"Wait. I need to talk to you."

"Well, I was just about to get something to eat. Would you care to join me?"

"Sure, just give me a moment."

"Ready?"

"Let's go."

"I think you'll like this place. They have the most delicious, spiced meat pastries. So, what did you need to talk to me about?"

"To start with, who are you and why have you been following me around?"

"My name is Mann. Kitterik Mann but most people just call me Mann."

"Go on."

"Right. Let's see, how should I explain myself? You've drawn a lot of attention since you first showed up at Lloyd's house. There's been a lot of speculation among the men about what goes on in your meetings with the boss. The most popular opinion, at the moment, is that you're Lloyd's mistress."

"Are you kidding me?"

"No."

"Is that why you've been following me? Chasing a rumor?"

"No, I was following you to find out what sort of work you did for Lloyd."

"I'm afraid you are mistaken; I don't work for Lloyd…"

"No? Oh, I see. So, you're completely freelance then. In that case, it's more like he works for you, right?"

"Excuse me?"

"I know what you are, Morgan."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"He's your contact, isn't he? Lloyd finds work for you, so technically he works for you, and you work for the client."

"I'm afraid I don't have any idea what you're talking about."

"No? Well, it's an easy theory to test. I only have to send someone to Lloyd with a contract and then hang around the mark to see who comes along and takes care of him."

"You set me up. Why?"

"Because I needed to be sure about you before I could approach you."

"Approach me about what?"

"I'll get to that in just a moment. First, I need to ask you a few more questions."

"What do you want to know?"

"Well, to start with, just how close are you and Lloyd? I don't recall ever seeing you before this summer."

"We're not that close. A friend of mine introduced us a couple of months ago."

"Do you mind if I ask what sort of relationship the two of you have."

"You already know he's my contact."

"Of course. I just need to know how intimate your relationship is."

"Well, we're not lovers, if that's what you're asking!"

"No. Lloyd doesn't mix business with pleasure."

"That's one of the reasons I like him."

"So, what are you two?"

"Friends, I guess. Well, more of a friend of a friend type of thing. I didn't have any family in the city when I arrived here, so as a favor to a friend of mine, Lloyd sponsored me for my debut. Since then, he has introduced me to some important people and social circles. Occasionally, he'll call in a favor and set me up on a date with someone to win a favor from them or else pay one off."

"So, he's sort of a patron then?"

"I suppose so. I'd prefer to be independent, but I needed someone who knew people here in the city. Someone to find and screen clients for me. I was having no luck and taking far too many risks finding work on my own, until I was introduced to Lloyd. Things were a little dicey at first, but we were able to reach an agreement that satisfied both our needs."

"An exclusive agreement?"

"Sure. Why risk additional exposure and conflicts of interest? I mean, the whole point was to avoid situations like this. But the thing I can't figure out is, unless you're planning to blackmail me, why bother confronting me? I mean, I've obviously already done a job for you. You already know I can be approached through Lloyd."

"Let me assure you, I am not here to blackmail you. I have a friend who was very impressed with your work. There is an important job that he needs done and he asked for you, specifically. Unfortunately, I'm afraid Lloyd has already turned him down."

"He asked for me, specifically? You mean, he knows about me too?"

"He put up the contract to test you, so, yes, he knows what you do."

"Great. Anyone else?"

"As I told you, there are rumors going around about you. I can't tell you who believes what. You didn't really expect to work for this long and not develop a reputation, did you? Ah, the foibles of youth. Don't worry, we all have to learn some things the hard way. Now, if you don’t mind, I have a few more questions."

"What else do you need to know?"

"I just need to know if you are willing to hear my friend's offer?"

"Do you know why Lloyd turned him down?"

"Yes."

"Well? Can you tell me why?"

"Actually, no. At least not without you hearing the proposal. I hope you understand."

"Well, if Lloyd turned you down without consulting me, I have to assume that it is not in my best interest to hear it. His judgment has proven pretty sound in that respect, and I've already given him my assurances that I would not go around his back."

"I see. My friend will be very disappointed to hear that you're not interested. Oh, one last thing. I would appreciate it if you didn't mention this meeting to Lloyd. As you said, he doesn't like to have people going around his back. Unfortunately, there was no other way to approach you."

"Tell you what, I'll stay quiet as long as you and your friends do the same. That means, no telling what you know about me or how you exposed me to anyone else."

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"I appreciate that. Well, thanks for dinner."

"My pleasure."

-----

"Your friends came by looking for you."

"When?"

"Shortly after you left. I told them you went out to dinner."

"You did? Did you tell them…?"

"No. I didn't mention you were with another guy."

"Thanks."

"No problem. So, how was dinner?"

"It was okay."

"And the guy? What did he want?"

"I think he was trying to hook me up with someone. I told him I wasn't interested."

"I would hope not. You'd think they'd show a little more tact, considering what you've just been through."

"Please, don't bring that up."

"No problem. But still…"

"What?"

"I don't mean to pry but…"

"Come on. Might at well get it out of your system."

"I just wondered. Why do you do it? I mean, what happened with Kevin was one thing but why even go out on all those dates when you've got Logan and Roark both panting after you?"

"It's complicated, Leslie."

"Look, I don't mean to criticize but how can you do that to your friends? I can't believe that you're just cruel, but I swear, I'm starting to think I'll never understand you."

"Well, you've only known me for two weeks. What do you expect?"

"I'm sorry. It's just, I don't really know that much about you. It's like you go out of your way to avoid talking about yourself. When you do, you leave out all the details. Why do you have to be so mysterious?"

"I'm not trying to be mysterious. It's just, the details aren't that important anymore. I'm trying to let go of my past. If there's something you really want to know, just ask."

"In that case, there's something I've been dying to ask you about."

"Right now? All right, what do you want to know?"

"How did you get involved with those two in the first place?"

"Logan and Roark? Talk about a couple of long stories."

"I like long stories."

"Fine. But that's it for tonight. I've got to get some sleep. I'm not really sure how to explain my history with Logan. When we met, we were both sort of lost on a deserted island, and we only managed to survive by working together. It was inevitable that we would become intimate. We spent a lot of time alone together, before we escaped from that exile and made our way back to civilization. We returned to Avon and enrolled in the academy, with the hope of starting a new life together."

"It sounds like you and Logan were pretty serious about each other. What happened?"

"Without any training history, Logan and I were required to undergo testing prior to enrolling in the academy. While we were being tested for admission to the academy, the examiners discovered that we were closely related by blood. I always took precautions when we were intimate, so fortunately I wasn't pregnant. Unfortunately, even the best precautions sometimes fail, so we were forced to abstain from sex until The Collage of Healing could determine if it would be safe for us to have children."

"That's terrible. What do the two of you plan to do?"

"I don't know. The incest doesn't really matter. It turns out there's been line breeding in my family for a hundred generations. That should have culled out any lethal traits. We just need to be sure. We would both like to know what sort of damage may have been done to us before we worry about what might happen to our kids. I mean, if worse comes to worse, we can be sterilized and remain together. But it would be foolish to rush into that now, only to learn later that we're both fine and it was always safe for us to have kids."

"I had no idea. So, that explains why you're not with Logan. How did Roark become so infatuated with you?"

"Well, you already know how we met. Roark was here at the academy repeating a few courses over the summer and Logan ended up as his roommate. When Roark met us, he simply assumed Logan and I were siblings. Logan and I had agreed to hold off on our relationship until the healers had an answer for us, so we were kind of acting the part. Roark was the one who really sorted us out, helped us settle in and establish ourselves. Naturally, Roark assumed I was fair game and set out to win my heart."

"Ah, I think I see where this is going."

"I didn't see it coming. At the time, he was just a friend and for a while he was the only person I could turn to."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I didn't know it at the time, because the dope wouldn't talk to me but Logan was having a real hard time playing it safe. I guess he found it impossible to restrain himself around me, so he would avoid me, or shut me out, slowly driving me away so I couldn’t tempt him. I couldn't take the rejection, so I turned to the one person who was there for me. I couldn't help responding to Roark's generosity and charm. He did so many things to us help out, I thought he deserved some kind of reward. Believing it was truly over between me and Logan, I finally slept with Roark. Of course, once I had gotten Logan out of my system, I really warmed up to Roark and things started to become serious. One night, Logan caught us in bed together and lost it. He almost killed Roark and ended up telling him about his true relationship with me."

"And all of a sudden, you're strung out between them."

"Pretty much. Both of them loved me and I loved both of them. When Roark heard why Logan and I could not be together, he backed off. He claimed it would not be fair to expect me to choose between them when I could only be intimate with one of them."

"What an idiot."

"But at the same time, what a gentleman."

"So, you're off limits to both of them. Now I finally understand. Well, almost. I still don't get it, why all the other guys?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"But there is a reason, right?"

"There is and if you absolutely must know, you'll let me tell you when I'm ready."

"I guess I can live with that."

----- 5th

"Hey. We missed you last night."

"How are you doing today? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Thanks."

"So, where did you go last night?"

"I was just sorting some things out."

"What's that?"

"Hmm? Oh, it's a message from Lloyd. I received it last night."

"Are you planning to go back to work?"

"I don't know. But that's probably what he wants to talk to me about."

"Knowing him, he has your whole weekend planned out."

"So, what are you going to tell him?"

"I don't know. I’m still pretty messed up over the whole thing with Kevin. I keep expecting him to show up and corner me, then I see him falling. It all comes flooding back. I don't think I'll ever be able to take a bath again without thinking of that night."

"I just can't believe he reacted like that. I had no idea he was that gone over you."

"That whole obsession of his didn't tip you off?"

"Like either of you are any better. I just can't believe I misread him so badly. I should have known it wasn't going to work. Instead of chasing him off, I made it impossible for him to let go of me."

"Morgan, you can't blame yourself for how he felt."

"Roark, I killed him."

"No. It was an accident, Morgan. You have to stop blaming yourself for his death."

"No. It's my fault. I took that stupid contract, I convinced myself that Lloyd was right about him. Logan could see it. Why couldn't I?"

"I know I said it would only encourage him, but I didn't know he'd react like that, Morgan."

"Besides, he says the same thing about all your dates. He hates seeing you with other men."

"That's not it. I hate watching her go out, because I know that she hates doing it."

"Don’t start, you two."

"I'm not going to argue with you. I just wish both of you would believe me when I tell you I'm not just being jealous. Especially you."

"Oh, no. You've never been jealous over Morgan."

"Logan! Roark! I mean it."

"Sorry."

"We'll talk about this later, Roark. Didn't you originally say you were going to stop when classes began?"

"I thought I'd make more money by now. I mean, I made a fair amount of money prior to the Autumn Festival but it's not really enough to quit."

"Why not worry about that next summer, though?"

"He has a point. You have enough to get through the year."

"I know. But I don't know if I can go back to doing this next summer."

"Who said you have to. There's got to be another way for us to make money, Morgan. We have other skills and talents."

"Hired swords just don't make the kind of money an escort can. Honestly, sometimes I think I should have taken Kevin up on his offer."

"What, become his personal courtesan? I’m glad he died before he managed to convince you to do that."

"Logan!"

"I'm sorry. I liked him but I also know how much you'd end up hating yourself if you were forced to do that. You paid a high enough price to escape that fate the first time."

"Like I had a choice."

"Maybe now isn't the best time to think about this."

"What?"

"Why don't you just focus on your studies for now. For all you know Lloyd is just checking up on you. Why fret over a question that might not come up. If it does, at least you'll be able to think about it with a fresh mind."

02 5th

Morgan took Roark's advice and put everything out of her mind to focus on her classes

Morgan is ambushed by an assassin and confronted by Ash

Morgan learns that he thought she was an assassin

"Good morning, Class and welcome to your first practical applications course in psychic abilities. On this day, each week, we will work on mastering the aspects of psychic ability that we will have covered in our structure and theory courses. I'd like to remind the second sphere initiates that you are studying with natural psychics, so there is to be no use of magic at any of these sessions. Our objective this morning is to pair you all up with compatible partners. Everyone please rise, get a blindfold from the basket and assemble on the field in a circle."

"Oh, wonderful, it's going to be a grope session."

"What's that?"

"You'll see."

"That will do, everyone. Please, settle down. Now, please put on your blindfolds. My assistants will be checking on each of you, to make sure that your vision is completely obscured. Is everyone ready, then? Good. Now, I want you to reach out with your minds and try to make contact with another student. Remember, you are seeking the strongest connection you are able to forge."

"Master Crane?"

"Yes, Morgan? Oh, I understand. Well, there are an odd number of students, so the three of you might as well sit out on the sidelines for now."

"Thank you, Master Crane."

"Thanks, Morgan."

"No problem. Now, watch this."

"You'd think the master would instruct them to try and avoid collisions."

"Ah, there we go. Oh, that had to hurt."

"Poor girl, she's absolutely mortified."

"Both of them, it looks like."

…

"Would the three of you please follow me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Morgan, you're the only true natural in your group. So, in effect, you will be the odd one out in most of the paired exercises. Will you be okay with that?"

"I know. I understand. Logan and Roark are going to need the exercises more than I will, so that's fine."

"Very well then. The good news is, Master Crane will generally call on you for demonstrations and will work with you personally when time allows."

"Now, on occasion teams will be partnered up but your team, being the odd one out, will simply have to proceed one soul short. Do any of you have a problem with that?"

"I think we'll be fine."

"Excellent. Let's get the three of you to work then. The three of you all showed some natural ability in two or three areas of psychic ability. Would you care to guess what those abilities are?"

"Um. I'm going to have to say, setting things on fire."

"Pyrokinesis, Roark. Don't worry, we'll help you get control of that as quickly as we can. In addition to that, you also seem possess a very strong natural empathy. Paired together with a telepath, you are able to establish a highly communicative rapport. Anyone else?"

"Logan and I both seem to be good at projecting and perceiving thoughts."

"That is correct. You are both natural telepaths and I suspect that you have developed those abilities in tandem. In addition, you both seem to possess some natural telekinetic ability. Logan is noticeably stronger than you are, Morgan but you seem to possess better focus and control."

"There's something else."

"Yes, Logan?"

"I've noticed, on occasion, I will find myself arriving at some place I wanted to go with no memory of how I got there and time to spare when I expected to be late."

"Yes, you do seem to have a knack for teleportation, but it has not evolved into a conscious ability. That reminds me, both you and Morgan seem to also possess some regenerative ability. In you, it seems to function unconsciously, while Morgan showed the ability to heal herself very rapidly through conscious effort."

"That's one of the first things I learned to do. I've gotten much better at it lately."

"You also seem to be particularly sensitive to psychic and spiritual phenomena."

"You mean, I see ghosts and freak out when someone casts a spell while my mind is open. I'm glad Master Crane laid down that rule at the beginning of class."

"Perceiving what is really happening when magic is performed can be a traumatic experience, especially for the young or the intuitive. In your case, intuition seems to be the root of your psychic ability, so you might have been scarred as a child and that has developed into a phobic reaction to magic. Hopefully, that is something you will be able to overcome as you learn healing magic."

"That would be a relief."

…

"I have that meeting with Lloyd. I'll see you two later tonight."

"Have you decided what you're going to tell him?"

"No. I'll probably make up my mind once I've heard him out."

"Just remember, we have time to find an alternative. There's no real hurry."

"I know. I know."

"Catch you later, Morgan."

"Come and see us when you get back, okay?"

"No problem. Later, guys.

-----

"Hey! Watch where you're--"

"Damn it."

"Are you trying to kill me?"

"I’m working on it."

"Wait!"

"Nice moves. Nice everything, really. It's too bad you have to die."

"Why? Why are you doing this?"

"Nothing personal, Red. Not… possible…"

"No. What have I done?"

"Just… a girl…"

"Who are you?"

"Damn…"

"Hey, are you alright?"

"He's dead."

"I saw. Here. Let me see. I guess someone figured out that it wasn't an accident, eh?"

"That guy was trying to kill me."

"Do you got her?"

"I got her. Come on, let's get you inside."

"Give me a hand here. We've got to get this guy out of sight."

"What's going on here?"

"Some guy just jumped the boss's girl out front."

"A hit?"

"Yeah. Girl's got some fast reflexes. Can't say the same for him."

"Witnesses?"

"Just myself and a couple of enforcers."

"All right. She okay?"

"She's in shock, no serious wounds though."

"Okay, you better stay with her. Come on, let's dispose of that."

"What's the commotion down here?"

"Someone just tried to kill the boss's girlfriend."

"Yeah. Right."

"Seriously, she's over there bleeding on Ash."

"He got there in time to save her?"

"No, man. She ran the guy through with his own sword. Never seen anything like it."

"Unbelievable. What's the damage?"

"Some minor cuts and scratches. Nothing serious."

"Morgan? Hey, are you alright?"

"She'll be fine. She just needs to sort herself out."

"Fine. I hear you saw the whole thing. Did you recognize the assassin?"

"Yes. Name's Garth, he started as an enforcer for Duncannon. He developed a taste for killing and went freelance a couple of years ago. There's no question he was after Morgan."

"Did he say why?"

"No but it was probably in retaliation for the kid she killed."

"That was an accident."

"I know, I know but obviously someone doesn't believe that. Why else would they send someone to kill her? It's the only logical explanation."

"Right. I'll let Lloyd know."

-----

Morgan had been the paid companion of Keith Ross, the son of a powerful merchant noble, the night she had met Ash. At that point, Morgan had already been with Keith for over a week and had completed every aspect of her contract short of bringing their relationship to a natural end. Keith's father had hired Morgan to turn the boy into a man and then turn him loose. The problem with a contract like that was finding a way to slip unnoticed out of the customer's life after insinuating herself into the most intimate part of it. Morgan had been looking for a way break things off when he brought her to a party honoring the recent exploits of the young noble, and adventurer, Kevin Niall.

The young man Ash had been paid to kill.

The young man Morgan had turned to in order to escape from Keith Ross. The opportunity she had been waiting for came when she noticed that the girl Keith liked was present at the party. The sight of Keith with Morgan on his arm was enough to provoke the girl's interest. The stage was set, and all Morgan had needed to close her contract was a man bold enough to pry her away from her date.

Morgan had been surprised when the guest of honor abruptly cut into her conversation. He had overheard Morgan telling Keith about the time she was trapped in the ruins as a child and insisted on knowing about everything she saw and experienced while she was in the ruins. Keith slipped quietly away, once Kevin had engaged Morgan's full attention. Unfortunately, that ordeal in the ruins was a very painful topic for her. Her experiences in the ruins had been both terrifying and wonderful but the way people had responded to her accounts of the ordeal had left her traumatized. Her attempts to discourage his questions only seemed to encourage him. The harder she tried to avoid him, the more Kevin thought she was being coy.

It truly had not helped that the other guests had assumed she must be someone important if Kevin was so interested in her. Whenever she tried to slip away, someone would corner her, trying to figure out who she was or what Kevin was talking with her about. So, Morgan was forced to suffer Kevin's attention until she caught Keith sneaking off with the girl he admired. Content that her mission was finally accomplished, she began looking for a way to excuse herself from Kevin's company.

When Morgan noticed a man who stared at her so intently he set of her internal alarms, she hoped he might be able to rescue her from Kevin. After all, a man who stared that hard at a girl in another man's company simply had to be willing to take her off his hands. If she had known at that time that he was an assassin and the reason he had been staring at her so furiously was because he thought she was competition moving in on his target, she would have turned and run the other way as fast as she could. Instead, she had boldly walked up to him and done her unwitting best to confirm his suspicions.

"If you stare any harder, you might set my dress on fire. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Morgan Roan. Would you care to dance?"

"I know who you are. What do you think you're doing here?"

"What?"

"Don't play games. I know what you are. Does Lloyd know you're here?"

"You know Lloyd?"

"You're not the only one he fronts. Now, answer the question. What are *you* doing here? What are your intentions concerning Kevin Niall?"

"Well, since you know everything, isn't it obvious that I'm working? I've almost got this contract wrapped up. Kevin has already made up his mind to escort me to bed--and, if I am lucky, I'll be able to find a convenient place to dump him along the way. If I am not lucky, he'll drag me off to some private nook nearby and I'll have to do him quick and dirty before I can finally go home, take a nice relaxing bath and get some well-deserved rest."

"And Lloyd knows you're here?"

"I doubt it. I've been on the job for a week. The job brought me here, so here I am. Unless Lloyd's started spying on me while I work, how is he supposed to know?"

"You've had the contract for a week? Any messages telling you to hurry?"

"I had planned to be done sooner but no, Lloyd hasn't jogged my elbow."

"Fine. I'll take it up with Lloyd. Can you keep your hands off Kevin until you hear back from Lloyd?"

"That depends on him. Why does it matter?"

"I don't know that it does. It's your call."

It was kind of ironic. Morgan had returned to Kevin, resolved to endure his probing, mostly to spite Ash. As a result, she had encouraged Kevin to chase her, and his pursuit had led inevitably to his death.

03

Morgan is exposed to the truth about Lloyd and his organization and confronts Lloyd

Morgan learns why others assume she was an assassin

"It was an accident."

"What was that?"

"You said that he was trying to kill me for what happened to Kevin."

"Starting to sort it all out, then?"

"But… It was an accident."

"Of course it was supposed to be an accident. Not that I thought you'd be able to pull it off. I was pretty sure you'd already botched it if Lloyd was willing to bring me in on top of you. Neither of us realized how subtle you were, though. I'm impressed with what you were able to accomplish with the two of us jogging your elbow."

"Supposed to be…? What are you talking about? The whole thing was a disaster!"

"Don't be so hard on yourself. You still managed to pull off your objective."

"Oh, sure. Kevin Niall won't be a problem for anyone ever again. Of course, dropping him to his death, stark naked, from the seventh story landing of the Imperial Hotel might, just might mind you, have been overkill. But hey, Mission accomplished. I don't know why I didn't think of trying that from the beginning."

"Oh, I agree, that's just a bit over the top. On the other hand, there wasn't a doubt in anyone's mind that it was anything other than an accident."

"That's because it was an accident!"

"What? Are you serious?"

"What did you think I meant when I said the whole thing was a complete and utter disaster? What the hell are you laughing at!?"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I couldn't help it. You mean, you didn't plan that?"

"You've got to be kidding! If you start laughing again, I'll kick you!"

"I’m can't help it. It's just… well, as one professional to another, I can appreciate how embarrassing that must have been for you."

"Try mortifying!"

"That too. So, fine, it was a disaster."

"In spite of that, I still can't believe anyone would think I killed him on purpose. Where the hell would someone even get that idea?"

"Now that is just bad luck. All I can think of is that someone in his family or circle of friends was tipped off. It would take a while to find out who, or by whom. His friends and family have more than enough wealth and influence to arrange a simple assassination."

"What?"

"I know. I don't like that idea either. I trust Lloyd but it suggests that he has a leak or a traitor somewhere in his organization. Either that, or the client tipped the family off, either to rub someone's nose in his death, or to set them or the authorities against Lloyd. But in the last case I don't think we would have seen an assassination attempt on you."

"Okay, now you're back to not making sense again."

"Fine. You're young. I'll humor you. Things like this are always happening in the underworld. A job is rarely ever just a job. It's usually a tiny thrust or counterthrust in a larger conflict. So, sometimes the job turns out to be a feint designed to provoke one organization to attack another, believing that they are simply retaliating for an unprovoked attack. In the meantime, while those two organizations are distracted by war, the person behind the job is able to make an unopposed move on one or both of the warring factions."

"Still not making sense, I don't think."

"I know you're new to this but surely Lloyd's explained the basics to you, right?"

"The basics of what?"

"His organization. How it operates, how it fits into the rest of the underworld, things like that."

"Wait. Lloyd's some sort of organized crime boss?"

"You've got to be kidding me. Oh, I get it. You're being sarcastic. No. Not at all. Perish the thought. Lloyd's just a guy who knows people and how to get things done."

"So, you think I was hired to kill--to assassinate--Kevin Niall…"

"…With instructions to make it look like--"

"--An accident. Which you did, ironically, by accident."

"And you think this because you were hired 'over' me…"

"…To do the same job. Exactly."

"And someone told this to friends or family of Kevin and that's why an assassin just tried to take my head off?"

"Correct."

"I'm just going to lie down here for a moment and let that sink in."

"You do that."

-----

"We need to talk."

"Morgan? You're bleeding!"

"What? Oh, don't worry about it."

"Don't be stupid. Come over here and sit down. I'll have a healer in here in just a moment."

"Don't bother. I can take care of a few cuts and scratches myself."

"If you insist. Now, what do you need to talk to me about so badly you didn't even notice you were wounded."

"You mean no one mentioned that I was ambushed by an assassin at your front door? I don't know about you but that bothers me a whole lot more than a few scrapes!"

"Morgan. I realize you're upset but please don't take that tone with me."

"Lloyd! I just killed a man! A man who was paid to kill me! And if that was not enough, he was probably sent by someone who believes that I was paid to kill Kevin Niall! I'm not upset, Lloyd. I'm about to lose my freaking mind!"

"Morgan, Morgan, you need to calm down. This isn't going to help anything."

"Calm down!? I just had a nice chat with a cold-blooded, contract killer about the trials and tribulations of 'our' profession!"

"Morgan! Stop! Sit! Good. Now, I know what's going on. I'm taking care of it. Barging in here and shouting at me is not going to help you or me sort this mess out."

"I can't help it. Why didn't you tell me you were a crime boss? Why didn't you tell me I was getting myself involved in organized crime?"

"Well, you can stop that line of crap right there. As I recall, you never asked about any of that. I'm surprised you can claim to be ignorant of who and what I am. Just what sort of person do you think blithely agrees to front an unlicensed courtesan in this city? Huh?"

"Before Kevin, I didn't care. It didn't matter. I'm just… I can't believe you kept me in the dark after what happened with him. How could you not warn me when you knew people were going to think I killed him on purpose? How could you do that to me?"

"How was I supposed to explain it to you, Morgan? For that matter, why couldn't you have listened to me, huh?"

"What?"

"How many times did I tell you to stop associating with Kevin? How many reasons did I give you to convince you to slam the door in his face?"

"I tried, damn it!"

"Morgan, I didn't ask you to try. If you hadn't let your own feelings get in the way, you could have sent that boy screaming for his mother."

"You don't understand--"

"Morgan. We're not having this conversation. I'm sorry you got dragged into the middle of this, but you are as much to blame as I. Now, as for keeping you in the dark after the fact, I was hoping no one would ever question Niall's death."

"Obviously, that didn't pan out."

"No. So, now we face the issue I was hoping we would never have to face."

"What do you mean?"

"Morgan, it is not a common practice in the underworld to disclose critical information to outsiders. The only outsiders we tolerate are clients and customers--people who come to us and in the process implicate themselves. Running girls is a pretty light trade, as far as shady businesses go. A girl like you is more a commodity than a conspirator and we do our best to keep you from learning anything that could make you a liability."

"A liability?"

"Yes. Believe it or not, no one enjoys having to snuff out a pretty, young girl because she knows things that could threaten the security or integrity of an asset or establishment within the underworld. At the same time, no one hesitates to do it the instant she becomes a liability."

"Is that it then? You're going to snuff me out?"

"Cool it. There's no need to get your back up. To be honest, I haven't decided what to do with you yet, Morgan."

"What can you do?"

"I've really only got two options, Morgan and I haven't decided which one is liable to work with you. Right now, all I can really do is sit on you for a while."

"What does that mean?"

"That means you're going to be my guest for a while."

"Wait, you want me to stay here tonight."

"I need you to stay here indefinitely."

"Lloyd! I can't do that. I'm supposed to be meeting some people tonight. I've got plans for the weekend."

"I’m sorry, Morgan. This is something you can't afford to say no to. I'm not going to force you but if you leave this house, I will have no choice but to consider you a dangerous liability and combined with the fact that someone else wants you dead, I don't think you'd want to risk it. I know you don't like it but it is for your own protection."

"Do you really think I am a threat to you?"

"Is that what's got your nose out of joint? Morgan, I do not question your loyalty. I have to consider what happens if you turn up dead and someone decided to look into how you got that way. I have to consider what happens if you end up in the hands of my rivals or the authorities under interrogation. You have no idea how dangerous you can be to me. Yes, you know too much but at the same time you don't know enough."

"Great. So once again I end up in limbo."

"What was that?"

"Nothing. Just talking to myself."

"Try not to give me a hard time about this, Morgan. Now, wait here for a moment."

-----

"You look much better."

"Thanks, Craig."

"Morgan, Craig will take you to your room. I want you to stay there, understand?"

"Do you really have to lock me up, Lloyd?"

"I'd prefer not to have you chatting with my men. But I'll tell you what, you give me your word to keep your lips buttoned and not leave the grounds, I'll give you the run of the house. Does that sound fair?"

"I can't even talk to anyone?"

"You're in enough trouble, girl. Craig, make sure everyone knows she's off limits, will you? There'll be a guard at her door. He already knows what to do. I'll come by when I have a chance, Morgan."

"Come on, Red. Let's go."

"Logan's going to wonder what's happened to me, Lloyd."

"I can take care of Logan. You just mind yourself, hear?"

"Wait. What did you mean by that? You wouldn't--"

"Morgan, Logan always struck me as a reasonable sort. I am sure I won't have to resort to drastic measures to convince him that there's nothing for him to be alarmed about."

"Don’t be so sure. You don't know him like I do."

"I will explain the situation to him so that he'll understand that this is for your own good. Now, if you don't mind, I have a lot of work to do."

"Let's go."

"Can I ask you something?"

"You really shouldn't be talking to me."

"And you probably shouldn't have been listening in on our conversation."

"Ah, I can explain that…"

"Can you explain this? You didn't believe that I was an assassin."

"Well, no."

"And you certainly didn't believe that I was Lloyd's mistress."

"Not likely."

"So, what makes you so special?"

"I'm not."

"I believe you are. Lloyd trusts you, doesn't he?"

"Like, for example, trusting me to escort you to your room and make sure you don't chat with any of his men?"

"He didn't say you couldn't talk to me."

"It's sort of a given, since I'm one of his men."

"Well, since you've already bent the rules there, why not answer a question for me?"

"Fine, get it out of your system."

"I assume, if he trusts you, you know him pretty well. I just… I need to know if he's serious. Would he have me killed for trying to leave?"

"At this point, he'd have to."

"Why?"

"Because at this point, if you left, it would be an intolerable act of defiance."

"Intolerable?"

"There's too much you don't understand. You're like a little kid, right now, asking why, why, why, why. For now, you just have to trust that he's got your best interests at heart and be patient. The answers will come if you give it time, Red."

"What answers?"

"Now, you see, this is why no one can talk to you. I have more important things to do than answer your questions right now. Like, for instance, finding answers to those questions myself. All right?"

"How can I have faith in someone who would kill me over something I don't even understand?"

"That's something you'll have to figure out for yourself. Just, try to understand this, your ignorance is a danger to you and to us. This is necessary to protect everyone from that danger. Is that so much to ask?"

"I could tell you if I had been asked."

04

Morgan is detained by Lloyd, confronted by Ash again and kidnapped by Kail's enforcers

Morgan tells Ash she is an escort, explaining how she came to work for Lloyd

"How are you doing, Morgan? Feel any better?"

"It's a nice room. I think I'd love it if it wasn't a prison."

"There's no lock on the door, princess. If you'd just give me your word you won't try to leave, you could have the run of the house. There's no need to make this an unpleasant ordeal."

"I'm usually paid to play make-believe. I can't just bask in the lap of luxury and enjoy myself when I know you're off somewhere trying to decide if you can afford to let me go on living."

"I'm sure we can dispense with the melodramatics, Morgan. As you pointed out, no one's picking up the tab. I know you're angry with me. I came here to talk with you about your situation but if you're too busy feeling sorry for yourself, I can come back later."

"No, please. Talk to me. I want to know what's going on. I need to know what I'm supposed to do to make my life go back to normal."

"Well, I don't know if that will be possible. It's going to take me some time to find a way to sort all of this out. I'm sorry to say, people who are forced to become involved in criminal enterprises almost always turn out to be liabilities. But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about."

"It isn't?"

"No. I was thinking about what you said earlier, and I realized that I might have made a mistake."

"Ah. I don't remember falling asleep, but I like this dream so far."

"Funny. All I am saying is, you might have been able to avoid this if you had known about the organization."

"Go on."

"Well, here's the problem. I had always assumed that you knew. In fact, that sort of thing is the root of the whole problem. In the underworld, it's not really common to come right out and say what you mean. Business is conducted with a lot of double talk. You've picked up that habit too."

"I'm with you so far."

"So, I'm going to wager you've had a few conversations with my associates that didn't quite click."

"I know. I didn't get it until today but… Yeah, it's obvious that some of the conversations I've had with people were not the conversations they had with me."

"Right. It didn't help that I kept our association somewhat obscure. Since you said you only wanted to work for a few months and then quit, I didn't want you to become involved in the organization. It's only possible to get out of the underworld if you are never fully in, understand?"

"I think so."

"So, I kept you in the dark about my other endeavors and I told all my men that you were off limits. Unless someone had specific orders, like to deliver a message, they were to stay out of your way and leave you alone. Now, I admit, part of the reason for that is because I didn't want any of these thugs trying to take advantage of you and telling them you were a call girl would have had them all lining up to try you out. It was simpler all around to let them believe you were my mistress."

"Heh. Well, that rumor only just made its way around to me."

"I figured you wouldn't mind if it did."

"No, not really. It's funny though."

"What's not funny is that the way we conducted business, combined with the secrecy and rumors that surrounded you, suggested that you might be working as an assassin. It just happened that within a few days of some of your visits, someone or other suffered from a sudden or suspicious death in your general vicinity."

"You're kidding."

"No. I’m sorry to say, two of them were not mere coincidences. Do you remember Earl Merlinden, the poor bastard who died of a heart attack in bed with you?"

"Oh, that wasn't my fault! He lied to me about his condition. I tried to revive him!"

"What about that old woman who walked in on you and the junior finance minister"

"How could I forget, she flung a pot of boiling water over us. I didn't stick around to get acquainted, though."

"As I recall, you jumped out the window, sprinted for the pond and never looked back."

"What would you have done if your back was scalded from head to heels?"

"About the same. However, the junior finance minister's wife died that afternoon of a stroke."

"I never knew."

"Well, maybe you're just cursed. Who knows. The point is, there was enough to support the rumors. Niall's death was just one coincidence too many, I suppose."

"There's more to it, though."

"Yes. I've talked to Ash. You seem to have convinced him that you were competition the night you met Niall. Once he was convinced you were in the trade, he had no qualms about confiding the details of contract he believed he had inherited from you."

"Better you heard that from him, I guess."

"Yes. And, on that note, I wanted to explain the primary reason for your incarceration."

"Oh?"

"Yes. As a general rule, when an asset has completed a job, I always recommend that they disappear for a while. When an asset is targeted for retaliation, I insist on it and recommend additional security measures. If I had allowed you to return to your dorm tonight, I would have been placing you and everyone around you in danger. Because you were attacked on my doorstep, that suggests that my connection to the affair is also known or suspect, so both of us are targets. The security I have here at home is quite formidable and having us both in the same location makes the guards' jobs easier."

"But I am still under house arrest, aren't I?"

"You are. Rather than dwell on that, however, maybe you should be thinking about the real issue."

"What issue?"

"Because you have become involved in all of this, your only real option is to become more involved in all of this. You should try to figure out how you really feel about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, it's time you asked yourself how you feel about the prospect of contract killing."

"Are you serious? The only way you'll let me live is if I become an assassin?"

"Morgan. You're missing the point. As far as the underworld is concerned, you already are an assassin. That's something you're going to have to be able to live with."

-----

"*Logan… Come on. I··know··you··can··feel··me."*

*"Morgan…? Is there something wrong?"*

*"Finally! I need help! No!··You··can't··come··here.··It's··dangerous! I'm in serious trouble, Logan! I was attacked… I··have··to··warn··you,··you··could··be··in··danger!"*

*"Ah! Tone it down a bit. What is it? What's going on?"*

*"Major disaster. Someone··almost··killed··me. There's a rumor that I'm an assassin. I··think··I··was··set··up··to··kill··Kevin. I mean, someone thinks··I··was··paid··to··kill··Kevin but I··think··I··was··set··up. The contract was a test. When Kevin died, it made them think I was an assassin. Lloyd thinks they'll be waiting for me if I come home. They··could··be··coming··after··you!"*

*"Whoa! Stop. Your thoughts are running together. Did you say someone tried to kill you?"*

*"Yes! When··I··arrived··at··Lloyd's··house. He stepped out of a doorway as I was walking by and tried to stab me in the back. I··can't··believe··I··killed··him! I didn't know I could move that fast!"*

*"Morgan, please try and focus. Where are you?"*

*"Lloyd has me locked up at his house. What··am··I··supposed··to··do? You can't come here! You might be in danger. You··have··to··warn··Roark."*

*"I'm coming to get you. Stay where you are."*

*"Wait! No, Logan. You can't. Or maybe… You can say you were supposed to meet me here. That's good. They must not suspect why you came. Tell Roark… Why··didn't··he··tell··me··Lloyd··was··a··crime··boss? You both could be in danger!"*

*"Roark is with me, Morgan. We're both fine. We're coming to get you. Please wait there."*

*"Be careful, Logan."*

*"*You're dead."

05

Morgan is confronted by Mann with an all or nothing offer

Morgan explains her true involvement in the death of Kevin Niall

"I wonder, can you heal fast enough to survive a slit throat? I'm going to remove my hand and if I hear anything louder than a whisper, we're going to find out."

"Why…?"

"What's that?"

"Why… why am I still alive?"

"Simple. I didn't come in here to kill you."

"Then what…?"

"Ah, ah. Softly, now. You still have a razor at your throat."

"Why? Why are you doing this? Why attack me?"

"Ah, right. Just a reminder that you can be killed. I didn't want you to be too sure of yourself after your performance this afternoon."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite. You only proved my point. You cheated death today and here you are not even five hours later with your guard completely down."

"Excuse me? Then what do you call a guarded fortress?"

"An illusion of safety. Personally, I don't trust anything that makes me feel safe. If you want to live, you're going to have to shed a few illusions, starting with that one."

"Yeah, well, definitely not feeling safe here at the moment."

"Good. Keep that in mind. Now, I believe you and I need to talk."

"I'm not so sure that's a good idea."

"Then I'll talk. You can chime in at any time. Now, let me see. Where did I want to begin. Oh, yeah.

Put something on. Someone's coming."

"What? Wait!"

"Here she is!"

"Morgan? Please come with us."

"Who are you?"

"We don't have time for this. Just grab her and go!"

"What do you think--"

"Should we take her like that?"

"Probably a good idea. At least she'll be easier to search."

"Wha… dyou… do… tha' foah?"

"She's still awake? Hit her again."

"Wait…"

06

Morgan is able to convince Mann she is not an assassin, but she already knows too much

Morgan had to be an assassin to accept Mann's offer

07

Morgan is forced to fight her way out of the trap Mann left her in 5th

Morgan is ambushed by Ash 6th

08

Morgan learns that Ash followed her abductors, witnessing her meeting and its aftermath

Morgan is told her options by Ash and advised not to return to her home

You are not an assassin, are you? I'll take that as a yes."

"When did you…?"

"When did I begin to suspect? I started out suspicious of you. But let me ask, if you're not an assassin, then what, exactly, are you?"

"I'm an escort."

"I don't buy it. You don't move like a call-girl."

"What?"

"You move like a trained fighter. No mere escort's got that kind of background."

"Oh. No, I’m not some simple call girl. I'm a courtesan. Well, I was trained to be a courtesan. I'm not actually licensed."

"You mean you're a muse."

"A… what?"

"I thought so. Yes, I know what a muse is. So, you're a pure-breed?"

"How do you know about that?"

"That's not important. You must be only, what, eighteen?"

"Seventeen, actually."

"Seventeen, then. Why sell yourself as an escort?"

"I needed the money and it's basically what I was trained to do."

"Don't you mean 'Born to do'?"

"Yes. It's something I've been specifically bred and trained for. My grandmother called it our family legacy, passed down from mother to daughter since the fall of Arden. Except in my case, she took over my training when I was eleven. As I grew up and realized what I was supposed to become, I tried to rebel. Once my training was complete, I turned down the contract she had arranged for me and returned to my home."

"I'm surprised she would have allowed that."

"As it turned out, she didn't. She followed, broke up an engagement between me and a boy I grew up with, destroyed my parents’ lives for trying to help me and forced me to accept the contract and return to the city."

"I see. Then what happened?"

"I got into an accident on my way here. I was out of it for a little while and when I made it back to the city, I discovered that I was presumed dead."

"Presumed dead? What sort of accident would lead them to think that, exactly?"

"It's a long story. Basically, I just got lost at sea for a while."

"So, you realized you were free of your grandmother and her plans for you and set out to make a new life for yourself?"

"More or less. I didn't come back alone. I saw the academy as the key to making a fresh start and he agreed. Unfortunately, we didn't have much money when we arrived in Avon. We both tried to find sponsors to the academy but neither of us could provide any sort of academic background. None of the jobs we could qualify for would have allowed us time to attend classes. Practicing the family trade was sort of my last resort."

"I see. Well, that explains…

09

Morgan ignores Ash's advice and returns to her dorm to recover her ring

Morgan finds her roommate slain and gets caught with the girl's blood on her hands

10

Morgan is "rescued" on her way to prison by Ash, at the cost of the escorting guards' lives

Morgan is tested by Ash as punishment for defying instructions

11

Morgan is now a fugitive from the law and Lloyd's organization

Morgan is dropped off at a safe house by Ash 6th

12

Morgan is tracked down and confronted by Logan and Roark and explains herself 7th

Morgan is ambushed by an assassin who followed her friends to her

13

Morgan is saved when the intrusion of her friends drives off her assassin

Morgan warns her friends of the danger they are in

14

Morgan is attacked by Ash in retaliation for bringing in Logan and Roark

Morgan saves herself by convincing Ash, she did not expose him to her friends 7th

15

Morgan examines her options, remembering scenes where Mann had observed her 8th

Morgan decides to track Mann down and follow him to the man he worked for

16

Morgan is able to track Mann down to the wrong master

Morgan is confronted by Llewellyn, subdued and drained but allowed to live 8th

17

Morgan learns about Kail, recovering in earshot of Llewellyn's meeting with Mann 9th

Morgan races to warn Lloyd, arriving in time to intercept Kail's assassin

18

Morgan is attacked by Ash, in response to seeing her approach Lloyd over a corpse

Morgan is saved when Lloyd calls Ash off, then she is questioned by both

19

Morgan learns Logan and Roark cleared her name with the academy and the authorities

Morgan reunites with Logan and Roark; Ash gets the credit for saving Lloyd 9th

20

Morgan resumes classes, risking exposure rather than expulsion 10th

Morgan has a meeting with her academy mentor and an inquisitor 10th

21

Morgan is ambushed by Ash, to prove how vulnerable she really is 11th

Morgan is confronted by Logan and Roark, both of whom were put down by Ash 11th

22

Morgan is set off by a student, mistaking his actions for an attack 12th

Morgan realizes it would be smarter to go after Kail directly 12th

23

Morgan attempts once more to follow Mann to Kail 13th

Morgan witnesses a meeting between Mann and Ash, joined by Kail 14th

24

Morgan is caught and confronts Ash, only to be confronted with a desperate choice 15th

Morgan submits to Ash to protect Logan and Roark, in a demonstration for Kail 15th

25

Morgan is turned over to Kail by Ash, the leverage to control her firmly established 16th

Morgan learns how Ash was recruited, Kail still did not know the truth about her 16th

26

Morgan realizes that Ash put her in a position to kill Kail 17th

Morgan waits for her opportunity, killing in the heat of passion 18th

27

Morgan is approached by Mann; he repeats the offer she is now qualified for 19th

Morgan is introduced to Llewellyn, the "man" behind Kail's revolt

Clips

Dialogue Excerpts

"Morgan! I need to talk to you."

"Ah, hello, Kevin."

"Logan, Roark, a pleasure to see you again."

"Kevin."

"Hey, Enny."

"I'd better talk to him."

"Morgan…"

"Logan. Not now. Yes, Kevin? What did you want?"

"It's the last night of the Autumn Festival, Morgan. Initiations are over and you've been dodging me for the last three days. Please say you will spend this last night with me.”

"You just don't give up, do you?"

"Why would I want to give up? Come on, Morgan.”

"Now, hold on. I didn't say no.”

"You didn't say yes, either.”

"Well. Yes. Tonight, I can say yes.”

"Well. Not quite the emphatic response I'd hoped for.”

"Kevin…"

"Relax, Morgan. I understand. I just… Whatever it is you have going with those two, it's not going anywhere, is it?”

"It's complicated, Kevin.”

"Make it uncomplicated, Morgan. Give me a chance.”

"You just don't understand.”

"What?"

"Nothing. What time should I be ready?"

"For tonight? Well, I have a special night planned. You'll want to look your best, I think, so how about three of dusk?"

"That's fine. Until then.”

"Excellent. I'll see you then, Morgan.”

"What was that about?"

"A Date."

"A date? Morgan, why are you encouraging him? I thought…"

"Aren't you supposed to be driving him away?"

"No, Logan. I mean, a Date. I am, Roark. I'm going to break it to him tonight.”

"Lloyd arranged for you to go out with him? Who set that up?"

"Lloyd did. He set it up himself.”

"Lloyd's the client? I thought that was not allowed.”

"What? No. He can be the client as long as he isn't the subject of the contract.”

"But he was the one who told you to stay away from Kevin.”

"I know. I know. But Kevin is so thickheaded; he won't stop chasing me until he gets me. Well, Lloyd figures it would be more effective to let him have me and then convince him he doesn't want to keep me.”

"You mean, tell him what you do for a living, and he'll drop you like a bad habit?"

"Actually, I'm hoping he'll drop me like a hot iron. I don't have time for him to kick the habit."

"I wish it hadn't come to this.”

"You say that every time Lloyd gives me a job.”

"You shouldn't have to do this kind of work.”

"Yes, well, it's the only way to make enough to get both of us through the academy.”

"You two have had this argument enough times already. Let's get you home so you can get ready.”

"You should never have gotten involved with him in the first place.”

"I thought you liked him.”

"I do like him. He's a nice guy. I respect what he's done.”

"You just don’t like him liking me.”

"Oh, I can't blame him for that. You have that effect on men.”

"Then what are you so angry about?"

"You wouldn't have met him if you weren't doing this kind of work.”

"Why can't you leave that alone? I don't like it either but it's what I was raised to do. If it wasn't for my father and you and that damned ring, it would be the only thing I could do. But now that you mention it, you are right. I was working when I met Kevin." Morgan had met Kevin Niall at a party honoring his recent exploits.

Kevin Niall, the adventurous son of a prominent noble family, had made a name for himself exploring the ruins of Aeslyn Tear--and a fortune bringing back valuable artifacts. She had come as the date of Keith Ross, the son of a powerful merchant noble. Of course, Keith had not known that their relationship was about to come to an end.

Morgan had been hired to turn the boy into a man and then turn him loose. It was one of the things she had been specifically trained for. To avoid arousing the boy's suspicions, Morgan had to be careful to make the entire affair appear perfectly natural. That made the contract more difficult than most, but Morgan always found the work more satisfying.

Keith's contract had been a textbook seduction. The first part involved studying her subject and devising a casual way to introduce herself into his life. Morgan staged their first encounter, stumbling into him while overburdened by a hastily assembled travel kit and bedroll. Their collision spilled everything on the road, signaling the start of tears of frustration and hopelessness from Morgan. As he helped her, she sobbed out a story of being kicked out of her home by her wicked stepmother and he eagerly swallowed the bait.

Once he had been lured to her rescue, it was easy to prompt him into taking her home with him. Morgan continued to lead him on with her pose of defenseless innocence, silently inviting his advances and encouraging him with her responses. The most difficult part of the contract was becoming his lover without becoming his love. Fortunately, Keith already had a love interest and Morgan had quietly encouraged him to pursue that interest over her.

Morgan had been looking for a way to break things off when he brought her to the party. Morgan had been worried until she noticed that the girl Keith liked was present. One look at Keith, with Morgan on his arm, and the girl became jealous. With such a perfect opportunity, Morgan began looking for a man bold enough to pry her away from her date, freeing Morgan and Keith from each other.

"Since I had to keep Keith from discovering I'd been paid for, I was looking for someone to split us up. Kevin took care of that for me.”

"Morgan! First of all, what good is a second chance if you start back down the same path you were running away from in the first place?”

"Same old world, same old problems. At least this time it was my choice. I can use it to my advantage, to become something I can be proud of."

"But how many times do I have to remind you? You are not on your own this time. I'm your partner. How could you forget to ask me for help?"

"I know. I should have had you or Roark help me. That's what I normally do but I didn't have a chance to arrange it. He dragged me to the party on the spur of the moment and when I saw that the girl he was pining over was there, I knew it would be easy to hand him off to her. When Kevin jumped in and split us up, I just went with it.”

"Why risk getting involved with him? Wouldn't it have been easier to just slip away and leave Keith to hook up with this other girl once he realized you were gone?"

"Do you think I'm an idiot? That's what I was trying to do when Kevin swooped down on me." Morgan allowed Kevin to occupy her attention until she caught Keith sneaking off with the girl he admired. Seeing that her mission was accomplished, she began looking for a way to excuse herself from Kevin's company. "Did I mention he was the guest of honor? Once he started paying attention to me, I had everyone's eyes on me. They assumed I must be someone important if Kevin was so interested in me. If I tried to slip away, someone would corner me, trying to figure out who I was or what Kevin was talking with me about."

"What was Kevin talking with you about?"

"Well, he caught me telling Keith about the time I was trapped in the ruins as a child, and he wanted to know about everything I saw and experienced while I was down there.”

"You were trapped in the ruins? How did that happen? How old were you?"

"I was seven. I was swimming in the Avon with some friends, and I was sucked into an underground channel. It's a really long story and I don't like to talk about it.”

"But Kevin insisted.”

"Yes." When Kevin overheard Morgan's claim, he introduced himself in the hopes of learning more about the ruins. Morgan was surprised when the guest of honor abruptly cut into her conversation. Keith slipped quietly away, once Kevin had engaged Morgan's full attention. Unfortunately, her ordeal in the ruins was a very painful topic for Morgan. She had been traumatized as a child when she became trapped in the ruins of Aeslyn Tear. Her experiences in the ruins had been both terrifying and wonderful but the way people had responded to her accounts of the ordeal had left her traumatized. "I was desperate to get away, but he kept after me.”

"So, you ran, and he chased you. Oldest story in the book.”

"Exactly." She had already shown reluctance to talk about the ruins in detail, without discouraging his interest. Her deliberate efforts to shake him off proved no more effective.

Apparently, Kevin had thought she was just being coy. "But by now I've told him what he wanted to know and once he hears what I have to say tonight, hopefully he'll go away for good.”

"I hope so. Just remember what I keep telling you. Keep it simple.”

"Well, how do I look?"

"Very nice. You look like a lady. How's this supposed to scare him off again?"

"Stop it. Tonight, I'll be everything he's ever dreamed of. And when the moment comes, I'll show him that's all I'll ever be to him."

"A dream."

"Exactly."

"You look fabulous! Well, are you ready for the night of your life, Morgan?"

"Are you sure you want to raise my expectations that high?"

"Why not? When I meet them… No, when I exceed them, you'll have no choice but to fall in love with me."

"Ah but what if it's a crushing disappointment?"

"Then I'll know you'll get on with my mother just fine."

"You know, blind optimism can be a sign of insanity."

"You know, witty skepticism can be a sign of insecurity. But don't worry. I'll be a perfect gentleman."

"Oh! But I wouldn't want you to strain yourself!"

"Funny. I see you're going to be in top form tonight."

"No. I pretty much keep the same form every night. I assure you; it's one of my most endearing qualities."

"Now that, I can't argue with."

"I suppose we should go then. Goodnight, guys. Don't wait up for me."

"Don't worry. I'll take good care of her."

"I'll hold you to that. Morgan, good luck. Call me if you need anything."

"Have fun you two. Just… not too much fun, eh?"

"Logan, Roark, you wound me!"

"Alright, boys. No fighting. I can take care of myself, and you both know it."

"Enough said. Go on. Get out of here. I'm sure you'll both have fun."

"Well. Wasn't that awkward?"

"Kevin!"

"I'm serious. How do you do it? How can you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Don't be coy, Morgan. It's obvious how they feel for you, and I think you feel something in return. Why is it that you go around dating the rich and famous and leave those two on the sidelines to pine after you?"

"What do you want me to say, Kevin? I've told you it's complicated."

"I want you to say, 'Don't worry about them, Kevin. They're just good friends and I haven't got the heart to tell them I'm looking for someone better than them.' Isn't that pretty much the truth?"

"Is that what you think?"

"I have a lot of friends, Morgan. At least half of them have seen you hanging on some rich or landed gentleman's arm. Too many of them have come up to me to say you're a real wild cat in bed. So, either you're a complete nymphomaniac, or you're shopping around for the best mate."

"That's pretty cold blooded, Kevin."

"You're pretty cold blooded, Morgan. However you look at it, you seem more than willing to play games with men's hearts. But I don't want to criticize. I just don't understand how you can do that to your friends. I'm only trying to understand you, Morgan."

"I thought you were trying to show me a good time."

"I am. I mean, I will. It would be so much easier to make you happy if I could just understand you, though."

"I'm a girl, Kevin. You're never going to understand me. I don’t understand me."

"Okay, you've got a point there."

"This is where we're eating? Wow."

"I am glad you approve."

"I'm going to need a second stomach."

"Then I guess it's a good thing I came along."

"I'm never going to be able to make up my mind."

"Here, let me. Trust me, you'll love it. Now, why don't you tell me a little more about yourself? Aside from your experiences in the ruins and your training to become a healer, I don't really know that much about you. For instance, how did you meet your friends?"

"Logan and Roark? Talk about a couple of long stories. I'm not really sure how to explain my time with Logan. We spent a lot of time wandering around together before we returned to Avon. Without any training history, we had to go through a lot of testing to enroll in the academy. Roark was there repeating a few courses and Logan ended up as his roommate. Roark basically sorted us out, helped us settle in and establish ourselves."

"What's the deal with the three of you? I mean, it sounds like you had a thing with Logan. How did Roark become to infatuated with you?"

"This is really kind of personal. I mean, it concerns others besides myself."

"I'm not going to tell anyone your secrets, Morgan. Trust me."

"Well, as I said, Logan and I met by chance. When we arrived here, when we were being tested, we discovered that we're closely related by blood. That was a shock of cold water. Suddenly there was this huge obstacle thrown up between us. I suppose we were lucky I never got pregnant. It could take some time for the Collage of Healing to determine if that would be safe."

"That's terrible. And complicated, as you said."

"As for Roark, well, when he met us, he simply assumed Logan and I were siblings. Logan and I had agreed to wait until the healers had an answer for us, so we were pretty much acting like it. Naturally, Roark assumed I was fair game and set out to win my heart. He did a lot of things for us, for me really, to help us out. I was so grateful, and I was so alone because Logan gradually shut me out. I know now that he just couldn't control himself around me, so he drove me away. Thinking it was truly over between us, I warmed up to Roark. When Logan caught us together, he lost it. He almost killed Roark and ended up telling him about what we had been through together and how he felt about me."

"And so, it became even more complicated. But why all the other guys?"

"I don't want to talk about it. I won't talk about that here."

"But there is a reason, right?"

"There is and if you absolutely have to know, you'll wait until I'm ready to tell you."

"I'll wait then. How's your dinner?"

"Mmm. This is amazing! The people who talk about this place weren't exaggerating!"

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself. What is it?"

"What?"

"You keep staring off, over my shoulder. What's going on?"

"Oh, nothing. I saw someone I recognized, and I was thinking about where I saw him before."

"Him?"

"Don't look! It's not what you think."

"Who is it?"

"Just some guy. I met him at your party. I didn't like him."

"Then stop looking at him."

"Sorry. Well. I don't know what you have planned after dinner but it's going to be hard to top this."

At dinner, she noticed Ash and Mann, the former sparking a recollection, the latter simply arousing her curiosity--there was something familiar about him but nothing she could place her finger on.

Morgan had thought that she had discovered another man who could save her from Kevin's attentions. In spite of her focus on the job, or perhaps because she was always wary of being exposed, she was extremely sensitive to being observed. Morgan picked up on the presence of someone studying her a little too intently and approached him. Anyone willing to stare so hotly at a girl with another man simply had to be willing to take her off his hands.

"Hi. I thought you were trying to set my dress on fire with your gaze. I'm Morgan."

"I know who you are. What do you think you're doing here?"

"What?"

"Don't play games. I know what you are. Does Lloyd know you're here?"

"You know Lloyd?"

"You're not the only one who works for him. Now, answer the question. What are *you* doing here? What are your intentions concerning Kevin Niall?"

"Well, since you know everything, isn't it obvious that I'm working? I've almost got this contract wrapped up. Kevin has already made up his mind to escort me out of here and, if I am lucky, I'll be able to find a convenient place to dump him along the way. If I am not lucky, he'll drag me off to some private nook nearby and I'll have to do him quick and dirty before I can go home, bathe and relax."

"And Lloyd knows you're here?"

"I doubt it. I've been on the job for a week. The guy brings me here, so here I am. Unless Lloyd's started spying on me while I work, how is he supposed to know?"

"You've had the contract for a week? Any messages telling you to hurry?"

"I had planned to be done sooner but no, Lloyd hasn't jogged my elbow."

"Fine. I'll take it up with Lloyd. Can you keep your hands off Kevin until you hear back from Lloyd?"

"That depends on him. Why does it matter?"

"I don't know that it does. It's your call."

Morgan returned to Kevin, resolved to endure his probing mostly to spite Ash. At the same time, the direction the conversation with Kevin had been going suggested that he might be receptive to her tale in a way others had not been. He had been in the ruins and must have encountered some of the things she had. But while she had resolved to indulge in a little recreation if Kevin pushed her, her conscience kept summoning up images of Logan and Roark. Reminded of the unresolved love triangle she was in, she found herself spurning Kevin's advances. Naturally, this only aroused his interest in her, apart from what he could learn from her.

"We'd better hurry, or we'll miss the start of the show."

"A show? What are we seeing?"

"Wait until we get there. I think you'll like it."

"I hope I haven't seen it already."

"Do you think that's likely?"

"At least half of my dates involve a trip to the theatre."

"Really?"

"It's one of the perks of being single and available. It ranks just behind free dinners and drinks and about even with dancing and parties."

"And what about bed sports?"

"That's an impertinent question."

"I think it's a perfectly valid question. I seriously doubt you'd bed so many men if you didn't enjoy it. I'm just curious where that ranks, in your list of perks."

"You've been listening to too many of your friends. I don't bed every man I date, though I am sure that every man I've dated probably wanted to bed me."

"Any man with a pulse would want to bed you."

"So, it's not really a perk. Fortunately, some men are content to be in good company."

"But you have warmed a few beds."

"Not as many as you have, I'll wager. You have a reputation yourself, Kevin Niall."

"That is true."

"So, given your own promiscuity, what gives you the right to interrogate me about my bedroom exploits?"

"I simply assumed, if you like doing it, you might like talking about it."

"Ah but you see, a lady doesn't talk about her conquests and neither should a gentleman."

"And you think those terms apply to either of us because…?"

"Well, because, in this dress, anything else would be out of character."

"Ah. Forgive me, I didn't realize you were putting on a performance for me."

"Then you have a lot to learn about dating."

"Well, I am certain you're the right person to teach me."

"Oh. I haven't been to this theatre yet!"

"I didn't think so."

"This is wonderful! I've heard so much about this company!"

"Morgan, I give you Magnusson's College of Illusion Theatre and Company's production of 'The Siege of Aeslyn Tear'!"

"You've got to be kidding!?"

"About the dramatization of one of the legendary final battles of the Fall of the Gods? Not on your life."

"This is one of my favorite legends!"

"That's true for just about anyone who has actually seen the lost city."

"Kevin, you may have actually done one better than dinner."

"I certainly hope so."

Morgan found herself brooding during the play, reflecting on how Kevin began to pursue her and how Lloyd's objections had resulted in their date.

Lloyd summoned Morgan to his home the next day to issue a warning. He had learned that Kevin had become infatuated with her and urged her, for several reasons, not to become involved with him.

In the light of a new day, Morgan was more than willing to obey. Morgan tried to discourage the young lord's interest, in part to honor Lloyd's request but also because the situation was a painful reminder of her past. Kevin became increasingly infatuated with Morgan as he pursued her for information about the ruins. Morgan cursed herself for being stupid enough to get involved with Kevin in the first place, when she realized that the young lord had become completely obsessed with her. Growing up as the companion of a lord's son and being trained as a courtesan under the watchful eyes of another young lord, had taught her the danger of courting the attention of a noble.

Her life was already complicated enough. Unfortunately, Kevin seemed determined to complicate it further. He had gone to the trouble of having her followed and began showing up to confront her at all the places she usually hung out. Morgan tried to drive him off but often that just was not possible.

Kevin proved to be a genuinely nice guy. In spite of her resolve, his attention was hard to resist. When he managed to corner her, they talked about the ruins and the impulse to live a life of adventurer. Even Logan and Roark found themselves responding to his charm. Morgan found her own resistance crumbling. Time and again, he had managed to get past her defenses, luring her into animated discussions about the age of gods and related myths and legends. Nothing really seemed to deter him, not even rivals for her affections.

Unfortunately, Lloyd would not have it.

He called Morgan aside once more and instructed her to stop flirting with Kevin and just put him out of his misery. Morgan understood what he meant, Lloyd was telling her to take Kevin out, to give him the ride of his life, then tell him what she had been paid to do it. To make it easier for her, he drew up a contract and paid her to get rid of him, for once and for all. Morgan thought that was too harsh but when Lloyd reminded her of her obligations, she relented. In her own mind, she decided it was probably best. If there was any hope of a real relationship with Kevin, he would have to be able to know the truth and still want to be with her.

After the show, she and Kevin went to a party for drinks and dancing and again she spots Ash and Mann in the crowd. In a brief exchange with Ash, she confides her plan to "put him out of his misery" at the end of their date and declares her work "very private".

"I can't believe he'd give the contract to a little girl like you."

"Hey! What's your problem?"

"You're the problem. Lloyd should know better than to send an amateur out on a job like this. You're just a kid, for crying out loud. You shouldn't be in this business."

"Well, thanks for the concern, all coated in insults and criticism. Not that I particularly care for this line of work, the fact is, the money is good and it's what I was bred and trained to do, all part of the family legacy. Hell, the first time I did it, I *was* a kid! I didn't hear anybody crying out loud then!"

"You turned pro as a kid?"

"Don't be stupid. It was part of my training. And just for the record my youth is the best asset I have in this business so don't knock it. Now, time for you to answer a question. If you already know about me, why are you even questioning me?"

"Is Morgan in?"

"Morgan, it's for you."

"Yes? It's you. What do you want?"

"I have a message from Lloyd."

"You have a message from Lloyd? Does this mean you work for him?"

"Yes. What's so strange about that?"

"So, he was having me followed. I don’t believe it."

"Oh, no. It was nothing like that."

"You mean you haven't been following me the past couple of weeks?"

"No. I was; just not under orders from Lloyd."

"Then, why have you been following me?"

"I've been watching you."

"Yeah, I kind of noticed. Why?"

"I'd prefer not to discuss this standing at your door. Would you mind joining me for something to eat. My treat. I promise I'll explain everything."

"Well, since you're buying."

"What would you like, Morgan?"

"To start with, why don't you introduce yourself?"

"Mann. Kitterik Mann but most people just call me Mann."

"So, Mann, why have you been watching me?"

"I wanted to see what sort of work you were doing for Lloyd."

"I don’t work for Lloyd. What gave you that idea?"

"I know that you work for him. I have been watching you at work."

"So you've said. But seriously, I don't work for him--"

"Please. I've seen you at work."

"Let me finish. I don't work for him. He works for me. You have it backward."

"What?"

"Lloyd finds work for me, so technically he works for me, and I work for the client. So, I don't work for Lloyd."

"I'm not really that interested in semantics. You wanted to know why I was watching you."

"Yes. I do."

"Well, there you go."

"So?"

"So, what?"

"So, why have you been following me?"

"I just told you."

"Are you fond of your teeth?"

"What? Why do you ask?"

"Because I am tempted to find out if pulling them is easier than getting an answer out of you."

"What?"

"Okay, enough with being polite. What do you want from me? You don't tell someone you know their secret and just leave it at that. You certainly don't put a lot of effort into discovering their secret if you aren't after something. So, why don't you tell me what it is, exactly, that you want from me?"

"Well, at the moment, I just want to ask you some questions."

"Questions?"

"If that's not too much to ask."

"Well, that depends on what you want to know."

"Well, for one thing, how did you come to work for Lloyd? Or rather, why are you selling your services through Lloyd?"

"The first one's easier to answer. How? A friend introduced me to Lloyd and after he tested me, he agreed to front for me. As for why? Well, I needed the money."

"How is that a more complicated answer?"

"Because it's not really that simple."

"Meaning, the money is just a means to an end?"

"Yes."

"That's fine, you don't have to go into detail. I guess my next question would be, how do you feel about working for him? With him, whatever."

"Fine, I suppose. He's been fair and honest. He's done a good job of finding and screening clients for me. There's enough demand for my services that he's been able to weed out the awkward and undesirable jobs without hurting my income. He's been careful enough to make sure I'm never at great risk of being abused, exploited or exposed on the job."

"Any complaints?"

"I'm not happy that the people who work for him are spying on me to figure out what I do."

"You can't blame a guy for wanting to know your secrets."

"A guy could get a lot further by respecting my privacy."

"Sometimes curiosity is more powerful than desire. Case in point, myself. I can't help wondering how you feel about the work you do. It has to be difficult for you."

"I’m not doing it because I want to. It's just something I’m good at."

"Yes. I've seen for myself just how good you are. Having seen you at work, I find myself wondering how you got so good in the first place. You must be only, what, eighteen?"

"Seventeen, actually. As for how I became good at it, you could say I was born to do it."

"Born to do it?"

"Yes. It's something I've been specifically bred and trained to do. My grandmother called it our family legacy, passed down from mother to daughter since the fall of Arden. Except in my case, she took over my training when I was eleven. As I grew up and realized what I was supposed to become, I decided to rebel. Once my training was complete, I turned down the contract she had arranged for me and returned to my home."

"I'm surprised she would have allowed that."

"As it turned out, she didn't. She followed, broke up an engagement between me and a boy I grew up with, destroyed my parents’ lives for trying to help me and forced me to accept the contract and return to the city."

"I see. Then what happened?"

"I got into an accident on my way here. I was out of it for a little while and when I made it back to the city, I discovered that I was presumed dead."

"Presumed dead? What sort of accident would lead them to think that, exactly?"

"It's a long story. Basically, I just got lost at sea for a while."

"So, you realized you were free of your grandmother and her plans for you and set out to make a new life for yourself?"

"More or less."

"Now we're back to my first question, how did you end up working for Lloyd?"

"Well, my partner and I both saw the academy as the key to making a fresh start. Unfortunately, we didn't have much money when we arrived in Avon. We both tried to find sponsors to the academy but neither of us could provide any sort of academic background. None of the jobs we could qualify for would have allowed us time to attend classes, so I was forced to consider selling my services."

"So, you started looking for a front man?"

"Yes. I needed someone who knew people here in the city. Someone to find and screen clients for me. I was introduced to Lloyd, and we reached an agreement."

"So, you work exclusively for Lloyd? You don't freelance?"

"Through Lloyd, so technically most of my work is freelance. I've only received work directly from Lloyd a couple of times."

"I'm sorry. Of course you don't deal with your clients directly. Let me rephrase the question. Have you ever taken a job through another agent? It sounds like Lloyd is the only person you've associated with professionally."

"That's correct."

"So, if I were to come to you with a job, you would not be interested?"

"No."

"Not even if the contract offered two or three times what you normally earned?"

"Not even then. Look, I admit I'm only in this for the money but at the same time I'm only interested in making enough to pay my expenses."

"But surely, you'd be interested if you could earn enough to quit after one big job, even if it came from an outsider, right?"

"No. For one thing, to be worth that kind of money, the job would have to be for a particularly nasty customer, involve an unreasonable amount of risk or require more sacrifices from me than I'm willing to make."

"That's reasonable. But what if something happened to Lloyd? What if he's in an accident or he's down with some illness and he's not able to find work for you? Or, worst case, he dies; how would you feel about working under someone else?"

"Okay, now I am starting to wonder why you're asking these questions."

"You mean, you've never asked yourself these questions?"

"Why would I?"

"Because things change. But I guess what I was looking for was a peek into your character. For example, how would you respond if you were offered a lucrative contract, but the mark was Lloyd?"

"Well, obviously, I normally wouldn't be open to an offer like that."

"Yes, but hypothetically, what would you do? Say, it's a few months from now, after you've been working under someone else for a while, or say the payoff was good enough that you could risk breaking your agreement with Lloyd."

"Okay, just assuming something could cause me to leave him for another front man, I really don't think I'd be able to touch him. Pretty much for the same reason I couldn't be bought out from under him. The moment I tried to put the moves on him; he would suspect foul play. So, he's pretty much off limits for me--unless, say, he tried to put the moves on me first."

"And then?"

"Well, in that case it would be an entirely personal matter."

"That sounds very practical. Now, let's go back to the previous question. Say something has happened to Lloyd, either he's sick, injured or dead and thus not available to find work for you. How would you feel about taking a job from whoever replaces him?"

"It's not like he owns me. Trust is not inherited. If something happens to Lloyd, I'll either stop working or I'll find a new front on my own. I'm not going to trust someone to manage my contracts just because they stepped into Lloyd's shoes."

"Even if they already know all about you?"

"Like you do?"

"Sure."

"If that made a difference, then I'd already be obligated to work for you. I'm not pleased that you know but if you think you can use that knowledge to blackmail me, think again."

"Are you making a threat?"

"No more than you are, Mann."

"That's good, because I was just sounding you out for a friend. I guess I'll just have to tell him that I still haven't found anyone who will take his contract."

"Wait, this was all just a job offer? Why don't you just send him to Lloyd?"

"Yes, but it doesn't sound like you'd be interested and Lloyd has already turned him down."

"Really? So, you were checking me out for this friend of yours?"

"Yes. He is very impressed with your work. He'll be disappointed you said no."

"Do you know why Lloyd turned him down?"

"Yes. I hope you will understand, I can't give you any details about the contract, under the circumstances. I'd also appreciate it if you didn't mention this meeting to Lloyd."

"Tell you what, I won't snitch on you as long as you promise not to expose me to anyone else."

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"I appreciate that."

"It's a deal then?"

"Deal. Well, thanks for dinner."

"My pleasure."

"Initially, I was just curious. I noticed you, coming and going, at Lloyd's house and after a few weeks I wondered why. I was not the only one. I am sure you can imagine the effect your presence has on a group of men. Or women, for that matter."

"Don't really need to."

"Right. I'm sure you've seen it enough times in your life. While others were speculating, I worked it out and concluded that you were working for him. In order to discover what kind of work you were doing for him, I started observing you. Now that I know what you are, it's sort of obvious why you kept such a low profile."

"Yes, but obviously, that's not enough to keep some people from finding me out."

"True, there are those who will deduce the truth and occasionally there will be someone who puts the effort into acquiring proof."

"Like you."

"And believe me, it wasn't easy."

"You planned for us to have this talk, didn't you?"

"I knew you would have questions for me, when Lloyd sent me to deliver his message, yes."

"No. It's not just that."

"I'm serious. How do you do it? How can you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Don't be coy, Morgan. It's obvious how they feel for you, and I think you feel something in return. Why is it that you go around dating the rich and famous and leave those two on the sidelines to pine after you?"

"What do you want me to say? I've told you it's complicated."

"I don't know. Tell me they're just good friends and you haven't got the heart to tell them you're looking for someone better than them. Isn't that pretty much the truth?"

"Is that what you think?"

"I have a lot of friends, Morgan. At least half of them have seen you hanging on some rich or entitled man's arm. Too many of them have come up to me to say you're a real wild cat in bed. So, either you're a complete nymphomaniac, or you're shopping around for the best mate."

"That's pretty cold blooded, Leslie."

"You're pretty cold blooded, Morgan. However you look at it, you seem more than willing to play games with men's hearts."