

Transcendent

Chapter 1 – Prey

The sound of crickets. A hooting owl. The cool breeze against his skin. Sore limbs from laying on a hard wood and metal park bench for too long. Sean awoke, slowly, to find himself yet again in the odd, but strangely familiar circumstance. His pale blue eyes opened and peered up at the shimmering kaleidoscope of stars in the night sky.

'No. Not again. Please, not this again...'

He righted himself on the bench, grunting as stiff muscles flexed. His sneakers hit the pavement as he shifted into a sitting position. Sean's trim body hunched forward as the grogginess wore off. He held up his hands and glided his palms over his face, rubbing his eyes before smoothing his fingers through his short, brown hair.

He took stock of himself. Black cargo pants. Plain white t-shirt. Blue jean jacket. No keys, no wallet, nothing in any of his pockets. No indication of how he got there or why he was in this place. Just a vague feeling, a pull, towards the town that existed just below the ridge he was sitting near. Just like last time. Just like every time it happened.

How many times had it been now? Three? Four? It was hard to remember. Each time had been the same, more or less. He felt drawn towards the town. Even if he hadn't felt the pull, going there was the rational thing to do. Anyone in this bizarre situation would immediately seek out help.

And yet, there was more than just the pull. There was also a great sense of foreboding. A feeling rooted deep within him that he didn't want to go there. His mind and his gut went to war each time. Reason against instinct. Instinct won every time, so far.

Sean looked over the back of the bench toward the road not far away. A solitary street light illuminated the "lookout point." It blinked in and out of existence periodically, casting the area in darkness before re-illuminating the lonely scene. The road led in two directions. One way towards the town below and another up into the forests and mountains. As far as he could remember, he'd always taken the latter path.

He couldn't recall ever seeing a single car. Not in the many times he'd walked up into the wildness to... what? Darkness? Isolation? Death? The memories grew blurry after the first few miles. Would he do it again? Was he really so afraid of the mysterious town? Why?

SQUAWK

Sean jumped, startled by the sudden visitation of a raven on a nearby tree branch. His gaze darted to the ominous creature. Its beady black eyes stared back at him. The raven's neck contorted in various angles as it studied him from its perch. He couldn't escape the feeling that it was mocking his indecision.

“Yeah, fuck you too” he spat at the mischievous bird.

He stood, lifting his arms in the air and letting the blood flow freely to his limbs. He sucked in cool air through his nostrils, breathing out loudly and steeling his resolve. No, he wasn't going to walk alone into the wilderness again. He would head for the town this time. Sean ignored the voice in the back of his head begging him to reconsider.

Below the ridge he could see a billboard in the distance. He couldn't read it from here, but its bright lights stood out clearly. Beyond that were just a few scattered lights in the town proper. It seemed odd there weren't more, but maybe it was a small town. At least it indicated there were others there. Perhaps he could get some information and at least begin to figure out what the hell was going on.

Sean left the slowly failing street light and the old park bench behind. His feathered critic cawed and took flight, leaving a gently swinging branch in its wake. He headed down the road and into the chirping blackness. His dark path was mitigated only by the subtle glow of the moon. Regardless of what happened, he hoped he never woke up in this place again.

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The closer he got to the town, the more the clouds seemed to roll in. It was overcast now and the faint light of the moon and stars was all but gone. Thankfully, Sean was coming up on the massive billboard and entering the outskirts. With any luck it wouldn't be too much farther to civilization.

The features of the giant, well-lit advert were clear to him now. It pictured an idyllic middle class nuclear family. A mother in a sun dress, a father in a vest and trousers and two plucky children enjoying a picnic in the park. There were sturdy green trees and a bright yellow sun in the background.

'WELCOME TO CHRYSALIS!' it said proudly in big letters above the family. Below the picnic scene it read: ***'The life of your dreams awaits!'***

'Chrysalis... Why is that familiar?'

Sean's walk slowed to a stop and he studied the billboard.

'That's right! This was Mom's home town, wasn't it? I grew up here!'

Perhaps 'growing up' was the wrong term. They'd lived here when he was a toddler, well before Sean was capable of retaining consistent memories. His recollections of the place were brief and scattered. He remembered a little of what his folks first apartment looked like. He was pretty sure they'd taken him to the park portrayed in the motif. He had loose memories of the place. Warm memories. Some of the only good memories of the family before his parents split.

Something about the billboard put him at ease. Sean wore a smile as he resumed his journey. The nagging voice in his mind quieted considerably while the picture of marital bliss and whimsical Americana remained in view. Even once it was behind him, it offered a slight comfort that his worries had been for nothing.

The next fifteen minutes passed without incident as he walked nearly a mile and the outline of buildings took shape on the horizon. The air warmed and a light fog began to roll in. The first building he encountered was the town hall, lying on the outer perimeter of the village. It was the only building in sight that had lights glowing by its door frame.

As he proceeded up the walkway to the sturdy municipal building, Sean was surprised to see garbage littered the sidewalk and lawn. There was graffiti spray painted all over the structure and many windows were boarded up. The sign above the archway read *'Town of Chrysalis'* but the seal above it was marred. One could read *'Founded in'* but not the year. The rest of the lettering had been destroyed; worn away by something other than time and weather.

Despite the odd state of the property, he was relieved to see the lights glowing inside and out. He hurried to the entrance, pulled open the cold, steel door and strode into the lobby. The inside wasn't much better. There was dirt and debris everywhere. Dust covered the frames of each picture that lined the hallway leading to reception. They were old photos of the town, many in black and white featuring residents who were long dead.

The main ceiling light flickered intermittently, not unlike the street light back at the lookout. Sean was pretty sure he could hear the sound of water trickling somewhere. A leak? Or just old pipes? He was briefly excited when he spotted a water fountain, but was immediately let down by the dirty "Out of Order" sign plastered on its front.

Sean proceeded in, growing closer to the reception area. The main hallway led to a T-junction that split into two other hallways to his left and right. The front of the reception office, where plexiglass would normally be was almost completely covered by plywood. Only a single hole at the bottom showed there was a light on inside. His footsteps echoed in the halls as he came to a stop at the counter.

"H-Hello?"

"Yeah?" a gruff male voice answered from the other side. He was clearly an older gentleman, and by the sounds of it, a smoker.

"Hi there" Sean said, bending down so his voice could travel through the brightly lit hole with more ease. "I just walked into town. Was hoping maybe you could help me get my bearings."

"Your bearings?" the man asked with a dry laugh. "What, you didn't see the signs on the way in?"

"I know this is the town hall, but I don't know my way around Chrysalis."

"Just walked in, huh? First time?"

"Yeah."

"You a vagrant? Homeless?"

"No. I just... I suppose I got lost."

The man snorted and laughed again. "You got no idea why you're here, do ya?"

Sean sighed. "That about sums it up."

"Listen, son. Since I'm guessin you aint got no money, let me give you some free advice. Turn around and walk back the way you came."

"What?!? But there's nothing out there!"

"Still better then what you're gonna find in this shithole."

"How far is the next town?"

"Ummm, I don't know. Like twenty miles?"

That was at least a six hour walk and most of it would be in the dark. Sean's frustration was growing. This guy wasn't being helpful at all. Sean lowered his face down further so he could look through the hole. "Is there a reason the front desk is all covered up? Why can't I see you?"

All he could perceive was the chest of a grown man sitting there in a dingy, white tank top. Then a chin lowered down to his eye level. A mouth appeared with a thick, black mustache just above it. The mouth opened and blew a thick, pungent stream of cigar smoke through the hole that blasted Sean in the face.

He gagged and coughed, recoiling and waving his hands in the air. Sean took a few steps back and waited for the filthy cloud to disperse. He leaned down and put his hands on his knees as he sucked in fresh air.

"Why don't you mind your own fuckin business?"

"Sorry..." he responded through another coughing fit. After a few moments he straightened himself and moved back to the front counter. "Any chance I could make a phone call?"

"There's a pay phone just over to your left."

Sean turned and looked. There it was, gleaming in the dim light of the hallway. He patted his hands over his pockets.

"I don't even have change."

"Then I guess you aint makin no phone calls."

Sean sighed again. "Can you at least direct me somewhere I can shelter for the night? Maybe get a bite to eat?"

"There's no halfway houses in Chrysalis, if that's what you mean. No soup kitchens neither."

The exasperated young man threw his hands in the air before letting them slap at his sides. He turned around and looked about, wondering what to do next. "Great..."

"Look" the older man started, the tone of his voice indicating the slightest hint of pity from behind the barrier. "Keep goin down the main drag about ten blocks and you'll find Rick's. Nice little diner, open

24/7, except for when they feel like closing. If you're lucky, they're open. It's Ruby that runs the place now. A real bleedin heart, that one. Bet she'll fix you up with somethin."

"Thanks" Sean began. "...I didn't catch your name?"

"Call me Jim. And don't thank me. You're still better off gettin out of here."

"Well, thanks anyway, Jim. I'm Sean."

The weird old man ignored his reply. "Always liked that name, *Jim*. Good, solid, old fashion name. Commands respect, ya know?"

"Yeah, good names are definitely how you get respect" Sean replied sarcastically. "Before I go, you got a bathroom I can use?"

"Over to your right" the deep, raspy voice huffed.

He turned and saw a sign hanging from the ceiling, pointing to the bathrooms. His bladder ready to burst, Sean started off toward the restrooms urgently.

"But the men's room is busted" the voice called behind him. "Plumbing's no good."

Sean stopped in his tracks, turning again. "Is it alright if I use the other one, then?"

"What?!? **NO!**" Jim blustered from behind the wall. "What are you, some kinda sicko?"

"There's no one else here, right?" Sean asked, his tone growing annoyed.

"It don't matter! Go piss in the bushes for all I care. You're not using the ladies room."

He wasn't about to give the crotchety old fuck the satisfaction of another sigh. "Whatever" he shot back before stalking toward the front entrance. His first few steps echoed off the floor before Jim replied.

"Have a pleasant stay!" His snarky farewell was punctuated by another chuckle before taking a drag on his cigar.

Sean didn't respond. He kept on marching till he got to the doorway, leaned into the metal bar-latch and pushed it open with a loud clank. He shot outside, hurried down the steps and turned, pulling up to the set of bushes closest to the walkway. Sean unzipped his fly, whipped out his dick and began peeing all over the shrubs.

"There you go, **Jim**. Just like you asked! Maybe I'll come back later and take a shit."

He shook himself below when he was done before zipping up and making a hasty exit from the desecrated grounds. Sean rounded the corner onto the sidewalk and resumed his journey into town. The fog had grown thicker, but he could still see a few blocks ahead of his position.

Half the street lights in the town didn't work. Of the ones that did, many were blinking or faded. It wasn't just the town hall, the streets were also littered with garbage and filth. Empty, overturned

shopping carts and old, rusty car parts littered the streets along with other junk. The doors and windows of many buildings were also boarded up or outright broken and hanging open. Sean was just starting to get a sense of how portentous his new surroundings were when...

SSSSCCCCRRRRRRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEECCCCCCCCCCHHHHHHHHHH

He stopped in his tracks, eyes open wide as a bone chilling shiver slid down his spine and spread panic to every cell in his body. The sound had been distant, but terrifying. He'd never heard a cry like that in his life. It didn't sound quite animal or human. Almost like some disturbing combination of the two.

ssssssssccccccrrrrrrreeeeeeeeeeeeccccccccccchhhhhh

It came again, echoing in the distance. It seemed even further away the second time. Less loud, but no less frightening. Sean resumed his march and quickened his pace. He wanted to be indoors again as fast as possible.

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Glowing neon in the distance confirmed that he was close. As he continued walking, the mist parted and his destination was revealed. A conventional one story diner. Larger than you would expect for a place like this, but then again, the town didn't seem to have many eateries. It was just as dirty and run-down as the rest of the buildings he'd seen thus far. The brightly lit "Rick's Place" was the only feature of the building that wasn't in disrepair.

As he drew closer, Sean noticed that most of the cars in the parking lot were rusting into the ground. What was left of their paint jobs was streaked with gristly brown and patches of faded white. It was obvious no one had driven them in a very long time. Collected around every car and strewn across the lot were patches of junk and pockets of refuse.

'It couldn't have been like this when we lived here. What happened to this place?'

He was relieved to see that not only was the diner still open, but there was at least one patron sitting inside. A dark haired woman was visible through the final window on the left. She looked like she was enjoying a nightcap; lost in thought between sips.

Sean hurried to the entrance, opened the door and let himself inside. The door closed behind him with a dull clank as he drank in the atmosphere. The building was lit better than the town hall, but it wasn't any cleaner. There was dirt and grime along the floors, corners and ridges of the counters and tables.

The upholstery for the scarlet red booths was ripped and deformed more often than not. The circular seats lining the front counter were no better. Rather than delicious food and drink, the only thing Sean smelled was a faint odor of mildew and a stronger scent coming from a garbage can that clearly needed to be emptied.

The woman at the left end of the diner looked up upon hearing his entrance. Sean's gaze found her and he watched her lips extend into a smile. It seemed like she was the only one in the diner at the moment. She set down her drink and waved, before gesturing him forward.

“Hey! Cmon in!”

Sean started in her direction, apprehensively at first, but her warm expression became clearer the closer he got. He walked down the left corridor, passing many tables before stopping at hers. She was a tough looking woman with a kind of severe beauty. A bit older than himself unless he missed his guess.

The left side of her head was shaved clean. Her jet black, shoulder length hair fell over the right side of her head, crashing in a luscious wave against her right shoulder. A small, silver ring was looped through the bottom of her nose and a single black teardrop was tattooed under her left eye. Her shoulders were bare, except for the two thick, black straps holding up her leather corset. The shiny garment housed an ample bosom and a curvy, medium build figure. Her upper arms were also tattooed, an upside down cross trailing down each of her sides.

He nodded to the grinning goth. “Hi there. You Ruby?”

“Me?” she chided. “Do I look a restaurant owner? No, Ruby's in the back somewhere. Not a lot of customers, especially this time of night, so who knows what she's up to.” Her gaze shifted to the side, scanning the kitchen for the woman in question. “**HEY RUBY! YOU GOT A CUSTOMER!!!**” There was no answer from the back. “Yeah, she's probably out back having a smoke. Or taking a nap.”

Sean held up his hands, defensively. “Oh, umm... I wish I was a customer, but... This is really embarrassing. I kinda got lost on the way here. I don't have my car, or even my wallet.”

The woman leaned back. “Don't worry about it. I've never seen Ruby turn someone away. Have a seat.” She gestured to the other half of her booth.

He smiled sheepishly and slid onto the aged pleather cushioning. The old seating was flat as a pancake and borderline uncomfortable, but Sean was just glad to give his weary legs a rest. The woman raised an eyebrow as she studied him up and down.

“I'm Delilah, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you. I'm Sean.”

“Sean? Hmmm... So, you're new in town? Just wandered in?”

“Yeah. You don't seem surprised?”

“That's how most people end up here. Chrysalis has an odd way of bringing people together. People who need each other, if you know what I mean.”

“I haven't the slightest idea what you mean.”

She laughed. “Stick around and you will.” She took another sip of her drink.

Sean looked around the establishment, a thought occurring to him. “Just out of curiosity, what happened to Rick?”

“Rick?”

He gestured outwardly. “It's called *Rick's Place*, right?”

“Oh...” she nodded. “Yeah, I don't know. I guess he disappeared years ago. Ruby's been running it ever since.”

“He left it to her?”

“I don't know the details. She'd already taken over when I got here.”

“And she never changed the sign?”

Delilah nodded at the darkened window to their side. “You saw what it was like out there, right? It's a depressed area. Run down as fuck. Fundamentally broken, but also kind of beautiful...” She added the last part wistfully as she gazed into the pitch black. “In any case, it's impossible to find help around here. There just aren't enough people. A lot of businesses and services have been abandoned.”

“I see” he replied with a nod.

A pair of swinging doors flew open in the kitchen and a plain looking red-head walked up to the front counter. She had the remnant of a nearly finished cigarette in her mouth and her bushel of auburn locks was constrained by a thin, white disposable hair net. She reached below the counter, extracted a container and began opening it.

“Hey, Ruby! We got someone new in town!” the dark-haired woman called out enthusiastically.

The proprietress stopped what she was doing and looked up briefly, scanning Sean. “Mmmhmm” she murmured before looking back down and returning to her work.

Delilah turned back to him. “Are you hungry?”

“You know, I thought I would be by now, because I can't remember the last time I ate, but I'm not. I'd love something to drink, though.”

“Ruby, bring Sean one of your night time specials! On me.”

The woman dropped what she was doing and nodded to her patron. She stalked off, her heels clacking against the tile kitchen floor with each step.

“She's not much of a talker.”

“So it seems. Thanks.”

“Don't mention it” she responded with a wide smile before taking another sip of her drink.

“Say, you don't happen to have a phone on you?”

“A mobile?”

“Yeah. I'd love to make a call.”

“Sorry. Nobody carries one in Chrysalis.”

“What?” he asked, puzzled. “Why???”

“Can't get a signal here. Never been able to. Unless you're gonna use it to take pictures you can't send to anyone, a cell phone's as useless as a cock in a cage.”

His eyes opened wide at her use of the unusual simile, but he didn't balk. Delilah seemed encouraged. She chuckled at his tense reaction. “Oh, do I have your attention now?”

“You've had it since I walked in.”

“I'm glad” she purred before reaching down into her pocket. Her hand reappeared and she slid a business card across the table. Sean picked it up, his astonishment growing.

It featured a darkened female figure in thigh high boots holding a whip. *'Mistress Delilah – Adult Entertainer'* it said across the top. Several services were listed with bullet points along the bottom. *'Erotic dance. Sensual Massage. Discipline. Slave training. Your wildest dreams come true.'*

“Wow” he said, looking up. His expression could only read as flabbergasted. “You certainly do offer a wide range of... options.”

“You have no idea” she retorted, her shining, jet black eyes piercing his very being.

CLANG

The appearance of Sean's drink and a whiff of cigarette smoke announced Ruby's arrival and departure. He turned to thank her, but she was already on her way back to the kitchen. He took hold of the steamy cup, the warmth filling his hands and enticing him. Sean brought it to his lips and took a long sip.

His eyes bulged and his throat shuddered. His reaction was visceral. Not to the heat, but the strength of the beverage. He coughed, setting the cup down as he tried to process what he'd just imbibed.

“Jesus, what the hell is that stuff?”

“Ovaltine and 130 proof bourbon” she answered with a smirk. “Everything you need to get ready for dreamland.”

Delilah flipped her head to the side and her wall of black hair followed, cascading over to the other side of her face. He realized, suddenly, that she was shaved on both sides. It was just down the center of her head that all that black hair was stemming from. Now her hair leaned the other way, which gave her a somewhat different look, obscuring her black teardrop from view.

He realized something else in that moment. It had been nagging him since he walked in. The idea that she somehow looked familiar. And now that he studied her closer, the pieces were falling into place.

'Melissa?!?'

Yes. It was unmistakable now. Delilah was fifteen years older, give or take. She had a completely different look, but her facial features were remarkably similar to the first steady girlfriend he'd had in high school. Melissa was his sweetheart for the entire junior year. It didn't last, of course, but he had many fond memories of her. Why hadn't he realized it sooner?

"Speaking of which" she interjected, snapping him from his musings. "Where are you staying tonight? You got no money, right? So that means a hotel is out."

"I don't know" he answered before taking a long swig of the warm beverage. The alcohol stung his throat and stomach, but it was followed by the warm embrace of the milky, malt flavored mixture. After he got used to the drink's initial bite, he couldn't deny, it was helping him to relax. "I was hoping I could catch some shut-eye here, if Ruby will let me."

"Pfffft, fuck that" Delilah shot back. "I mean, I'm sure she'd let you stay, but you're not going to have a pleasant night here. Not on these shitty old seats."

"Then what would you recommend?"

Her grin returned. "You can stay at my place until you find your own." She joined him in taking another swig. "Maybe we'll even have a little fun."

Sean was bewildered. "Are you sure? You don't even know me."

The dark-haired temptress leaned in. "I'll let you in on a little secret. I'm not usually out at this time of night. It's not safe, you know? This town can be rough. But something told me to go to the diner tonight. So I did. And now... here you are."

He nodded, finding that he was suddenly a little woozy. "Ok. That's an interesssttinng coinncciideennce, I abbmitt." His eyes fluttered.

"Hey? Are you okay?" Delilah looked concerned.

"Yeayah..." Sean exhaled, his body slumping forward. His left arm sprawled across the table and he set his head down in the crook of it. "Soorrry. I'm just... reeeaaallly tired." He got a last, sideways glimpse of Delilah as his vision began to swirl. His eyelids were anchors he could no longer deny the depths of sleep.

"Hey Ruby! What the hell did you put in that?!?"

Her words echoed in his mind as the abyss took him.

* * * * *

Tock Tock Tock Tock Tock

“Can you hear me, Sean?”

A new voice reverberated in the blackness. It slid around his mind, soothing him with gentle words. A soft but persistent striking sound could be heard in the background.

“You are in a deep sleep. Your body is relaxed. **Very relaxed.** It feels like you're floating on a cloud. Every bit of tension has now left your limbs. I'm going to ask you some questions, Sean. Answer me if you can...”

He jolted awake and the sound of clanking metal rattled outward. He blinked several times as his vision cleared. He was on a couch, staring up at the ceiling. Sean looked down the length of his body. His hands were cuffed and his feet were tightly shackled.

“Hmmm, naughty boy. I was just getting started.”

Sean's gaze leapt to his right. Sitting close by was a woman on a black leather barrel-arm chair. Her luscious brunette hair was tied back tightly into an elegant bun. Her angular face was framed by a pair of black rim glasses that shined in the pale light coming from the room's windows. She reached over and stopped the metronome ticking away on the end table beside her.

'Daylight... Have I been out that long?'

Her billowy, white dress-shirt and tight, navy blue skirt led down to brown, heeled knee-high leather boots. Her legs were crossed, one over the other. Deep red lips completed her professional, yet undeniably sexy look. She studied him, seemingly as puzzled as he was.

“Where am I? Why am I cuffed?!?”

“Take it easy, Sean. You're under my care.”

“Neat. Who the fuck are you?”

“My name is Lena. Dr. Lena Solomon.”

“Doctor of what?”

“Psychology.”

“Ok... Feel free to fill in the blanks, before I get pissed.”

The haughty brunette sighed. “You passed out. We don't know why. Ruby swears there was nothing but a bit of liquor in your drink. Delilah went and fetched the town doctor. She couldn't find anything wrong with you, physically. So you were brought to me.”

“And why would they bring me to a shrink?”

Lena reached over to the table again, this time grabbing up a black leather crop. She reached out and snapped it down on his midsection sharply.

SWAT

“**OWWW!!!**” He turned his body to the side, holding up his tightly bound hands as an ineffective shield.

She pointed the instrument of pain at him insistently. “First of all, I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm a psychoanalyst.”

“You're psycho, alright.”

SWAT

The business end of her leather wand slapped down on his right thigh, stinging him again.

“Second, it's very important you take this seriously. My time is valuable and we have so much to uncover.”

“What are you talking about?!?”

“There's a reason you came here, Sean. To Chrysalis, I mean. We all come here for a reason. Mine is to do... this.” She gestured outwardly, at her office. “But you don't know why you're here, do you?”

“No. And I doubt talking to you is gonna change that.”

Her eyes narrowed. Sean could tell she wanted to lash him again, but she restrained herself, setting the crop aside.

“Your conscious mind doesn't know, but your subconscious does. We can learn the truth together.”

“That still doesn't explain why I'm cuffed and shackled.”

Lena smiled broadly. “It's symbolic, but an important element to beginning your therapy. You must surrender to my treatments completely. You must **submit**.”

The silence was deafening as Sean eyed her suspiciously. Lena looked at her watch before her steely gray gaze shifted back to him.

“Do you want to learn the truth or not?”

He sucked in a deep breath through his nose and exhaled loudly from his mouth. “Fine” he grunted, shuffling his body back into a comfortable position on the sofa. His gaze returned to the ceiling. Like everything else in this town, it was cracked and dirty.

“Say it” she commanded.

“Say what?”

“I submit to you, Dr. Lena.”

His metal restraints rattled as he shifted slightly. His eyes darted around as he mulled over his nonexistent options. Even if he walked out now, he had no idea where to go or how to begin looking for exactly what she was offering. "I submit to you, Dr. Lena" he repeated, reluctantly.

"**And** I consent to your full range of treatments."

He craned his neck and locked eyes with her again. She was the proverbial cat that ate the canary. The domineering doctor wore a smug grin.

'I'm going to regret this, aren't I?'

"And I consent to your full range of treatments."

She clapped her hands together. "Very good! Let's get back to it then." Lena reached over and restarted the metronome.

Tock Tock Tock Tock

The constant metal knocking sound enveloped the room.

"Close your eyes, Sean, and focus on the metronome. Listen to it tap away steadily. That sound is your beacon. It will always be there, ready to guide you back at any time."

She was silent for a while. Lena watched his limbs begin to ease as Sean did what she instructed.

"And now, the sound of the metronome fades into the background. You are feeling very relaxed and you will focus **only** on the sound of my voice."

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SQUAWK

Sean's eyes opened. He was sitting upright, but leaning against something hard. The massive roots splitting out on either side of his legs clued him in that it was a giant oak tree. An eerie orange glow was cast on all things. It was dusk on the horizon.

SQUAWK

The feathered annoyance had returned. The raven strutted about just a dozen feet away. Its head bobbed and weaved, keeping its gleaming black eyes on Sean.

"Thanks for the wake-up call, I guess" he said gingerly, rubbing his head.

What had happened this time? He'd had his session with Dr. Lena and then... he'd been looking for something. He got tired again and had to rest. Yes, that was it. He'd wandered into this park and, though his back probably wouldn't thank him for it, he'd chosen the tree over the park ben--

His train of thought ground to an instant halt. On the bench in the distance, he saw several more ravens. They were perched on the seat, all looking in his direction. They weren't alone.

Sean looked around and started noticing them everywhere. On the old, junked cars lining the road. Sitting in tree branches. Dotting the grass of the park, surrounding him. The ringleader, his old acquaintance, hopped a little closer and took a more menacing pose.

SQUAWK

Sean shot upward from his sitting position, his back scraping against the tree as he grasped it behind him. He stared back at the temperamental black bird. Its eyes glowed in the waning light. His and a couple hundred of his friends.

"Hey. I don't want any trouble, alright..." He felt like a fucking moron talking to a bird, but you do silly things when you're scared shitless. "I'm just gonna go."

SQUAWK

The leader of the pack jumped closer. Sean could see the dark wings of dozens of birds extending in the distance, preparing to take flight.

'Shit!!!'

They call it fight or flight, but there was no doubt this time. He bolted for the exit to the park as countless ravens jumped into the sky and aimed their beaks and talons at him. Sean put up his arms to defend himself, though he knew it'd be futile. Several birds were already pecking and clawing at his back as he took off at top speed.

He fought his way through the waves of cawing, jabbing, scratching vermin, swatting them away whenever one got too close to his face. His jean jacket was decent protection for the top half of his body, but Sean's hands and legs were bleeding in no time. His adrenaline kicked into overdrive and he tore through the entrance and turned onto the sidewalk. He jetted through the black mass of swirling, squawking laceration as fast as he'd ever moved in his life.

The further he got away from the park, the fewer birds kept up. They continued diving, jumping and pecking at him, but their ranks diminished with every block that flew by. He eyed the buildings along the sidewalk as he ran, looking for a place he might take shelter. He found one entrance that didn't look too run down and ran up its short set of stairs. Sean grasped the handle and wrenched it with all his strength. Nothing. Locked tight.

SQUAWK SQUAWK SQUAWK

He swatted his pursuers away and took off with renewed haste. His lungs burned as he looked for anything that might help him in the distance. Finally, on the horizon, he saw one of the entrances was bathed in the soft glow of an outdoor light. One doorway among a series of rundown duplexes and apartment buildings indicated it might have a living occupant.

'Please don't be locked! Please don't be locked!'

The closer he grew to the door, the less he felt the pecking and scratching attacks of ravens around him. The birds broke off, flying back from where they came as he entered the housing unit's lot. That didn't slow Sean's pace one bit. He jetted up the short staircase to the illuminated porch.

He turned the handle. It was locked, of course.

POUND POUND POUND POUND

“HELLO?!? IS ANYONE IN THERE??? PLEASE!”

Sean turned and looked back the way he came. His new nemesis was sitting pretty, perched on the gate at the perimeter of the property. It squawked at him one final time and took off, gliding into the orange and red hue of the sunset.

He heard a set of locks unfasten and the door opened behind him. The battered and bleeding man turned and breathed an incredible sigh of relief when he saw Delilah in the doorway.

“Sean! **OH MY GOD!!!** What happened to you?!?”

He waved one bleeding hand at the air behind him. “Fuckin... birds... attacked me” he gasped through ragged breaths. His lungs struggled to catch up as Delilah waved him in.

“Cmon! Get in here!”

He stumbled in and bent over, bloody palms ruining what was left of his pants. The stunning goth re-secured each lock, then placed her hands on his shoulders and guided him in. There were candles glowing brightly all along the hallway leading into her dwelling. Either electricity was expensive in Chrysalis or she simply liked the mood and natural light.

“Those bastards are always picking on new people” Delilah shared as she led him to the bathroom. “I'm sorry you had to go through that.”

“Yeah, that makes two of us” he winced, trying not to touch anything while he was bleeding.

She reached in and flicked on the light, illuminating her extremely grungy and cluttered all-purpose bath. The sink and toilet had streaks of black running along the filth encrusted porcelain. There were stacks of hair products, baskets of cosmetics, accessories and other junk covering every available surface.

Delilah gave his ripped and torn form a quick appraisal before offering him a flirtatious smile. “In any case, I'm glad you came. You found my little note on the card, hmmm?”

“Card?” he asked in befuddlement.

“Yeah, the card I gave you. I wrote my address on the back. That's how you found me, right?”

Sean stared back for a few seconds, entranced by the contrast of her snow white skin and jet black hair. Her purple lips and shadowed eyes called out to him. Tearing his gaze away was an effort.

“Yeah, exactly” he nodded as he moved into the bathroom. “Thanks for that.”

“Don't mention it. There's bandages and antiseptic cream behind the mirror, but you should probably take a shower first. When you're done, my bedroom's just down the hall. I'll be waiting.”

Delilah offered an excited wink and closed the door.

Sean wiped his bloody hand off on the remnants of his pants and reached into his pocket gingerly. He fished out her business card and turned it over. There was a message on the back.

'168 Highwater St. See ya soon! XOXO'

* * * * *

Cool air nipped at Sean's body as he walked down the candle lit hall. When he exited the shower he'd found that his clothes were gone. Now he had nothing but a towel wrapped around his nude form. His hands and much of his legs were bandaged up. It had taken a while to clean up all the cuts and scrapes, but he felt surprisingly good in the aftermath.

They were difficult to make out in the dim light of the hallway, but Sean studied the various pictures lining the walls. There were shots of Delilah and pictures of the town, but no family members or even friends. The frames were dusty and the floor creaked as he made his way through her apartment.

“Delilah?”

“I'm in here!” she called from the furthest bedroom. The flickering glow from the doorway was an intense yellowish orange.

Sean made his way to the end of the hall and turned into the surprisingly large bedroom. The place looked like a cathedral during a night-time service. The entire room was ringed with lit candles. They lined fixtures on the walls and every piece of furniture. Delilah was waiting in her leather corset and fishnet stockings. Her thigh high boots gleamed in the firelight.

She took a drag from her blunt, held the potent cloud in her lungs for three seconds and then exhaled slowly. The entire room smelled of leather, marijuana and sex. Her hand rested on her hip and her wave of jet black hair tumbled down the right side of head.

“Welcome to my lair” she said with a grin before setting the fat cigar on an ashtray atop her dresser.

“Hey” Sean replied, unsure of how to respond to such odd, yet fortunate circumstances. He was simultaneously aroused and dumbfounded. Also somewhat concerned that he was about to get lucky in what looked like a giant fire hazard.

“Your jacket will be fine after a wash, but your pants are done for and the blood is never coming out of that t-shirt. I tossed them.”

Vague concern spread over his face. He hadn't exactly packed a suitcase.

“Don't worry” she continued. “I have some men's clothes you can borrow. I keep some on hand in case I get a little too wild with one of my clients. Accidents happen, you know.”

Sean swallowed. He didn't know, but he could imagine. “Thanks. Where am I sleeping tonight?”

“Right there” Delilah responded, nodding to the large bed taking up a quarter of the room. The shiny, black bedding was striking in the bright candle light. The bed frame had several metal anchor points embedded at each side and corner. Sex toys and bondage gear were strewn all about her private little fetish heaven.

To his own surprise, Sean's member was growing harder by the second. A tent pole was now pitched in the front of his towel. He'd never gone for any of this S&M stuff in his life. And now, in Delilah's presence...

“Are you sure? I don't mind taking the couch if-”

“Shut up” she cut him off. “Lose the towel and get on the bed, face down.”

She took a prodigious toke from her blunt as Sean followed her command. He unwrapped his towel, set it gently over the chair at her desk and moved to the bed. He slipped onto the surface and his naked form was met with the cool kiss of sensual rubber. Sean laid out flat, his rock hard erection now pressed down against the soft cling of the smooth latex bedding.

Delilah followed him directly, her own leather and lace clad body pressing down into the rubber mire. She straddled his back, parking her knees on either side of his chest. She took his arms one by one, wrapping his wrists in thick leather cuffs that were permanently chained to the bed frame. She pulled the belt-like restraint tight on each one, pushing through the metal pin until each cuff had a firm grip on his wrists.

She ducked her head down and spoke into his ear. “For my safety and your pleasure.”

Sean's first instinct was protest, but after an hour in Dr. Lena's office, he'd become somewhat used to the predicament. Besides, he couldn't deny Delilah was turning him on powerfully. He never would've guessed he'd react so favorably to a woman taking total control, but there he was.

Delilah scooted down his back and leaned over his body. Her skilled hands dug into his back and began kneading and smoothing his weary flesh. She reached up and gripped his shoulders with surprising strength. Her intense massage flowed up and down his back and sides. In minutes, Sean was emitting low moans, his face half buried in leathery black pillows.

She spoke into his ear again. “I **know** what you need...”

This time her words were followed by a hungry tongue. It dove into his left ear, wetly sliding around and exploring every crevice of his anatomy. Sean moaned considerably louder, overwhelmed by the sudden, unfamiliar sensation. His nerve endings danced and his body tingled as she held him down and pressed his body into the rubbery grip of the bed.

When his left ear was soaked in her saliva, she moved to his other side and began again. She bit down

on his right ear gently, then inserted her tongue for a second intense probing. Sean's legs moved up and down the bed involuntarily. His arms tugged on their restraints. His body sought an outlet for the massive stimulation she was providing.

When she'd had her fill, Delilah withdrew. She trailed her fingernails down his back, scraping him ever so gently. He couldn't help but think of the ravens as she did so, but this was different. A pleasant raking across his skin, announcing her full possession of him as she shimmied down to the end of the bed.

“Up on your knees” she instructed, patting his flanks. Sean rushed to obey her, propping his ass up as his knees sank into the sensual latex.

She reached below and took his cock in her hand. Sean felt her hot breath on his taint. Without another word, she dove her tongue into his crack and began masturbating him slowly up and down.

“AhhhhHHHHH!!!”

His chains rattled as pleasurable groans escaped his lips. Sean's pleasure was skyrocketing as control of his body was stolen away. Pre-cum oozed from his tip as she licked his ass up and down. She dove her tongue into his freshly washed pucker, murmuring pleasantly as she tasted his soft, fleshy walls.

Sean had never imagined a woman as dirty, demanding and sexually generous as Delilah. With nothing but a few commanding words and an adventurous tongue she had claimed full dominion over him within minutes. Her hand glided up and down his rock hard, increasingly slick penis.

“Cum for me” she ordered before plunging her tongue back into his silken flower. She thrust her wet, fleshy appendage in and out, slurping up and down his crack periodically.

“**Cum for me, Sean!**”

She kissed, licked, sucked and tongue fucked him for long minutes, all the while stroking him back and forth. Sean was brought to the edge of climax several times, but never could quite get there. He was kept in a delirious state of arousal, his ass now writhing with her ministrations.

Delilah withdrew her hungry, serpentine tongue and lambasted his cheeks with her open palm.

SMACK

“It seems I need to press that button of yours a little harder. Hold on, I have just the thing.”

She slipped off the bed and Sean was left in a daze of waning pleasure. He sighed contently as he heard Delilah rummaging in the background. He was vaguely aware of buckles and straps being applied as he waited for her to return.

The sound of her boot heels announced her approach as she walked around to the side of the bed. Sean looked to his right and there she was, a jet black dildo sprouting from her strapon harness. His eyes bulged as she posed for him, proud of her considerable phallus.

“Don't worry. We're starting off small.”

She stalked back to the end of the bed and Sean was left to contemplate her words.

'Small?!? That thing has to be seven or eight inches!'

The bed shifted again as she slid back onto the gripping rubber. Delilah spat on his already breached pucker and rubbed her thumb around his backdoor in comforting circles. She lined the tip of her cock with his quivering entrance and took a tight hold of his sides.

“AHHHHHHHHH!!! OH FUUUCKKKKK!!!!”

Her length slid into him, slow but sure. Sean's face turned a new shade of red as her insistent hips crammed more rubber schlong into his accommodating ass with each passing second. She laughed wickedly, pressing it deeper until her upper thighs were snug against his. She started gyrating her hips in small circles, stretching out his already packed anus and preparing him for a brutal fucking.

“You like this, don't you?”

“I... holy shit...”

“Admit it.”

“I... Y-yes.”

SMACK

“SAY IT! Tell me you love this cock!”

“I love this cock, Mistress Delilah!”

“That's more like it.”

With an iron grip on his sides, she pulled back her thick, rubber invader and pressed it back in. Her rhythm was slow at first, but it built steadily. Delilah's body glided back and forth smoothly, hilding her strapon in his depths and withdrawing it to the very tip each time.

It plunged through his warm, wet walls, overwhelming him with a sweet combination of stretching pain and unfathomable bliss. His nerve endings lit up as her pace increased. She released his hips only to add occasional dashes of burning ache to his perpetually pummeled ass.

SMACK SMACK SMACK

“Cum for me, Sean.”

His eyes watered and the candle lit danced on the edges of his vision as she fucked him powerfully. The sensation of thick cock plowing his pucker and strumming over his prostate was so intense, he thought he might pass out. His scrotum twitched with the need for release and his erection pulsed as she pounded him aggressively.

“CUM FOR ME YOU LITTLE BITCH! CUM FOR MISTRESS NOW!!!”

“AHHHHH!!!! OH GOD!!!! UUUUUUUNNNNGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!”

His cock shot an uncontrollable river of thick paste all over. It coated the bed and his own chest as Delilah pumped his asshole nonstop. His loudest moan yet went up, his eyes crossed as she forced his sweet release. His body convulsed until every strand of pungent seed was spewed all over the rubber duvet and decorated his defiled body. Sean collapsed into a cum strewn mess and muttered a few unintelligible nothings before the blackness claimed him once more.

* * * * *

His eyes opened slowly after what felt like the longest and most restful sleep of his life. Sean sat up. He was still in Delilah's bed, but she was nowhere to be seen. He wasn't chained up anymore. Daylight peered in from the window. A beautiful morning, by the looks of it.

Sean pulled his body from the morass of rubber and latex bedding. He slipped off the side and his naked form stepped gingerly out into the hallway.

“Delilah? **Hello?!?**”

There was no response. He strode up and down the hallway, inspecting each room. Most of what he found was piles of fetish clothing, S&M gear, bondage furniture and other personal belongings. Her living room and kitchen were empty, save for her furniture and possessions.

Sean took a hold of his sides, rubbing himself up and down for warmth. He was about to head back to the bedroom and start looking through her closets when something shiny drew his attention. On a small table near the front door lay a small pile of neatly folded clothes and an ornate looking box. Below the table, his shoes were waiting.

He moved closer and picked up the box. It featured a golden emblem resembling a cocoon on its front. He set the box aside and immediately took up the blue and white raglan shirt, gray boxers, black socks and khaki pair of dockers. It was clear she'd left them for him.

Sean dressed quickly and then returned his attention to the mysterious little chest. He undid the latch and the golden cocoon parted in the center, allowing the box to open. Inside was a leather neck collar. It featured metal studs all the way around and a strong D-ring at the front. On either side of the ring were shiny silver hearts embedded in the leather.

Below the strange adornment was a folded piece of paper. He took the collar from the box and the note with it. He unfolded it and scanned it eagerly.

'Go ahead, Sean. Put it on.

You'll feel better. I promise.

XOXO – Mistress Delilah'

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