

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

Issue #51

DATE 24 February, 2013

AND NOW, a word from the publisher:

Hello folks, Jochannon here; first let me say thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy, and please feel free to share it with your friends, re-post it to your profile, spread it around; the more people who get to read it, the better!

If you are not subscribed, but you want to be, there's nothing easier: Just e-mail me at fanaticalweekly@gmail.com with 'subscribing' in the subject line.

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If you want to contribute, I'd love to see your work, send it to me at the aforementioned e-mail address with: 'category(prose, fanfic, poetry), story title, author's name' in the subject line: please include the text of your story in the body of the email, and please include a cover letter about you, your work, or whatever; include any links you want.

Do you have any questions or comments? If you do, I'd to hear them; write to me at the aforementioned e-mail address.

I'm bad at stopping these things, so I'll just say again: thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy!

Table of Contents

Original Prose

SPIRIT ENCHANTED,
CHAPTER 2, Jessica Harris
Page 5

MIST AMONGST THE
MISSING, Nate-Wallis
Page 9

IN DEATH I TRUST,
Desairelle (Darrell Luke
Valentine L.
Page 21

Fan fiction

ME₂ HELLDIVER SAGA
CHAPTER 18: to recruit a
quarian, Veyron722skyhook
Page 25

BROKEN WINGS CHAPTER
5, Tiffany Kennedy
Page 51

WEEK OF LOVE, CHAPTER
3: NUMB, Katara434
Page 58

A FUGITIVE, CHAPTER 1:
THE BAT, Avery Clark
Page 63

A TRICKSTER'S OLD
FRIEND, Amber Watkins
Page 69

Poetry

MAN MADE THE MONEY,
Kela Lewis-Morin
Page 79

DELAYED REALITY, David
McKinstry
Page 81

SMOKE, Andrew Chipchase
Page 82

FURIOUS ANGER, Vajavoda
Page 83

ALSKLING, Solilska
Page 84

RECESSION, Austin Malcolm
Page 85

TIME TO GO TO BED,
Emmett Facas
Page 86

ARTEMIS, Emma Rachael
McCabe
Page 87

CAMP, Aaron Jay
Page 88

AND NOW, another word from the publisher:

Hello, folks, you may not know this, but I'm a writer too. One of my more popular works is the Lurk series: It's a hodge-podge collection of bad jokes, stupid pop culture references, action, adventure, sex, a quest for true love, and an incredibly ugly hat:

Inigo FitzGibbons was a short, thin man with stringy black hair and a narrow pinched face. A barbarian hero from the western continent, he had come to the Romany Empire seeking his wife. Right now he wore a sword on his right hip, thrust through a red sash worn over a patched brown jerkin and britches. Everyone called him Lurk.

The tailor seemed not to want to touch Lurk's hat(which had made his job rather difficult) but he was eager to get it out of his shop, so quickly repaired Lurk's hat, and passed it over quickly.

Lurk paid him, then popped the hat onto his head and looked at himself in the mirror. "Well now," he said with satisfaction. "Doesn't that look good?"

"I agree with you Lurk," Abraham said.

"You do?"

"Yeah. That doesn't look good." Abraham van Helsing was a scholar-turned-wandering swordsman. A Hitton from the Desolation of Balilael, he was tall with gray hair and clear gray eyes. He wore a heavy tunic of black wool belted over brown canvas trousers and old boots.

Lurk sighed. "Y'know, I'm tired of you guys complaining about my hat all the time."

"Tell you what," Rushell offered. "If you stop wearing it, we'll stop complaining about it."

Lurk turned away and saw Heather standing in the doorway.

Heather was a werehuman, but she looked attractive for all that. She had pale white skin and a build that drew one's eye to all the right curves. Her silky, straight, neck-length hair was the color of coffee with cream, and was worn in a severe, simple style.

Right now she stared at Lurk with a very worried look in her wide orange eyes. "Heather!" he said cheerfully. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine," she said softly. "Lurk, there is something very important I need to tell you."

"Okay. . ." Lurk said, getting worried. "What's wrong?"

"Lurk," she said carefully. "Stay calm, don't panic. There is something eating your head."

Check it out!

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/search.ep?keyWords=lurk&contributorId=242500&sorter=publicationDate-desc>

SPIRIT ENCHANTED, CHAPTER 2

Jessica Harris
of whiteangelofdoom@msn.com

I pause in raising my fist to pummel Ash's face for wasting my time. Two unfamiliar presences linger in the bushes across the clearing. I drop Ash and summon the sword I let dissipate only five minutes ago.

"Come out demons." I growl. Female laughter drifts from the foliage. A sudden fierce gust of wind whips the sound away, both gone as quickly as they came.

"I think we should introduce ourselves, don't you?"

"Yea, why not. It's polite to let your victim know the name of their killer before they die." More laughter. I subtly relax into my familiar fighting stance, one foot slightly behind the other, right hand holding my sword tilted over my body, my left hand raised to re-enforce the blade for a block and my body angled to the right just a little bit. It's funny how someone can be tense and relaxed at the same time

The demon girls step out from the bushes, smirking. I give them a quick once over. Defiantly demons. The right hand girl had shoulder length white blonde hair with a sweeping fringe. Her glacial blue eyes bore into mine. She wears an all black outfit. A choker with a jade green stone attached, a boob tube showing her shoulders and well toned stomach. Skin tight leather pants covered up to mid calf by heavy looking heeled boots. The boots have a silver zip on the inside and a buckle strapped halfway down the calf. Finally, fingerless gloves stretch from knuckle to the crook of her elbow. Her nails are black too.

The other girl is no different in colour but total opposite in fashion sense. A dress starts at the top of her throat, just below her chin, and comes down past her collar bone, widening a little, but not enough to cover the sides of her breasts, before clinging to her every curve and ending abruptly just under her bottom. In stark contrast to the ebony, a starlight white belt sits on her hip bones, a magenta pink stone embedded in the centre, and knee high heeled boots cover her bare lower legs. She flicks her waist length chocolate brown hair over her shoulder with an impeccably well manicured hand and blinks a pair of hazel doe like eyes. The blonde speaks.

"We own this territory, trespassers. We are the scorn of every human and demon alike. We are the Black Ravens."

"We've been waiting for you to come back, boy." The brunette smirks, marring her perfect face. The blonde cracks her knuckles, a sound that makes me cringe inside.

"You shouldn't have come back. " She sniggers. My eyes narrow, waiting for an attack.

"Alex?" The brunette mutters. The blonde looks at her.

"What?"

"Do you not recognise the woman stood before us?"

"Do you not think, Amy, that I am intelligent enough not to be that stupid?" Alex hisses, flicking a strand of blonde hair from her face. Amy flushes a soft pink. "Let's just kill them and get on with whatever we were doing before hand?" Alex sighs. Both girls raise their hands to chest level, palms facing together. A small ball of energy begins to form, growing by the second. Once both have reached the size of melons, the girls laugh. I've not shifted from my offensive stance so I am ready for both attacks. The girls fling both energy balls in my direction and I change the angle of my sword just a touch, enough to reflect the attacks right back at them. As I'm about to swing, a shadow appears in my left side vision, distracting me. I'm shocked to find Ash leap in front of me and take the full force of the energy balls on his forearms, before flinging them aside with a vicious cry of defiance. My mouth hangs open as the blasts weave erratically before exposing loudly behind me. I glance at Ash, shock and surprise still evident on my face. He's rubbing his forearms, the skin slightly flushed, his eyes hard. I blink. 'Maybe... No!' I scold myself before turning my attention back to the demon girls. My surprise flares again when I notice the look on their faces. Hatred and horror. With a touch of fear. I slip back into my stance as my composure returns like a punch to the face. Alex's eyes narrow and she snarls incoherently at me, a very feral noise that makes me smirk. She's pissed.

"Amy!" She snaps. The brunette glances at her and swallows hard. "We're leaving." Amy blanches.

"But Alex-" She begins.

"Don't but me, Amy! You know how damn strong those blasts were!"

Alex hisses, obviously thinking I can't hear her. I smirk again and force my face to return to its impassive nature. "They were strong enough to take down a demon Mage! He batted them aside like they were mere insects! He's not human!" She continues hissing at Amy, whose shivering slightly, stealing glances at Ash. My eyes flicker to him. He's staring at the demon girls, eyes emotionless. Curious, I probe him again. Still nothing. Damn. 'I should have done it just as he blocked them.' I think, kicking myself for being so careless. Ash, feeling my penetrative stare, looks at me and smiles tentatively. I scowl and his face relaxes to slightly worried and hurt. My attention is drawn back to Amy and Alex as Alex cries out and throws her hands up in frustration. Then she turns and points a black nailed finger at me.

"This isn't over, Slayer!" She screams. Her gem flashes brightly as she bellows one word of magic;

"Dacaneran!" My pupils contract with the harsh green light and once it subsides, both girls have vanished. I relax, sensing they've actually gone. Putting a scowl back on my brow, I spin towards Ash.

"You," I growl, watching him shrink back. "Are not only a complete and utter moron! You are also..." He flinches and looks away, shame-faced. "Very strong." I finish, my voice softer. Ash's eyes widen as he brings them up to stare at me. A huge grin lights up his face and his posture relaxes considerably. I smile back, a rare, positive smile. I turn on my heel and begin to walk away again. I hear his sharp intake of breath and can mentally see his look of disappointment. I pause on the outskirts of the treeline, cock my head and smile again.

"Well? I'm going to leave you behind at this rate." I call. Ash almost jumps up and down like a small excitable child. Making his way to my side, we enter the dense woodland. "Names Jess by the way."

"Oh, I know."

(we never do find the remnants of Ash's camp.)

R.Kain Fantasy Stories has released a new novella, **Flux Zone**, and, in celebration, is giving the title away for free at Smashwords until 3-1-2013 when you enter the code below.

Summary:

In a world of super heroes and villains, having superpowers doesn't necessarily make you a hero or villain. Sometimes you might save a damsel-in-distress on a whim. Other times you might rob a drug dealer blind and fleece an unsuspecting mark for cash. In my case, I'm simply out for revenge against Doctor Andros, a death dealer to villains everywhere, after escaping being experimented on for three years and developing powers of my own.

But I'm not alone. Several others gained abilities of their own and working alongside a team, we have to try and collect the rest of our allies before Andros gets his hands on them first. And we have to do it all without drawing the eyes of the Hero Coalition or other villains who'd love to find out just what makes us special.

This exciting action-adventure novella is over [27,700 words] and serves as the first entry into the Chasing Andros series.

Smashwords Link

Promotional price: \$0.00

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Expires: March 1, 2013

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MIST AMONGST THE MISSING

Nate-Wallis
of <http://nate-walis.deviantart.com/>

Mike withdrew from the world all those years ago because he simply could not cope with the demands of modern life and the strain that relationships placed upon him. Making a living as a charcoal burner in the middle of the wilds seemed for a time to offer the simple and uncomplicated life that he desired.

But when Lisa, an old friend who pretty much personifies everything that he was trying to run away from contacts him out of the blue, his new life is torn apart by the baggage that she brings with her.

In trouble and running from something that she does not truly understand, Lisa turns his ordered little world upside down and drags him into the mire that she has created.

I think every writer has the idea of writing a story about the supernatural at some point, but I have to say that this story was begun long before either *Twilight* or *True Blood* became as popular as they are today.

The thing that fascinated me was the question of how someone becomes a hunter of such things. I wondered if there was really a way in which it could be chosen, or was it all the more likely that the creatures supposedly being hunted would themselves decide that a person was designated a hunter and take action themselves?

The city looms beyond this room
In the street, spectres roam wishing
I am mist amongst the missing
Fragile Life – Sarah Cameron

It might have been a chill evening as the summer was ending and what promised to be a cold autumn drew closer. It might have been chill at the foot of the hill where the copse began. But atop the hill where the kiln nestled itself into the centre of the small clearing it was anything but.

A round affair of rusted metal, the kiln was fully four feet wide and maybe a little taller in height and gave off a fierce heat even with the great lid firmly in place. Four slender chimneys emerged from the ground to carry the white smoke away from the kiln and into the

darkening sky. If they seemed to represent the four cardinal points of a compass it was simply a coincidence; the hands that had built them had paid their placing no more thought than to make sure they served their mundane purpose.

As it curled up to the growing darkness, the smoke was accompanied on its way by the occasional embers that twisted on the currents of the breeze like fireflies of an intense orange. They burned with the most fascinating intensity and beauty until after only seconds they faded to nothingness and were lost in the gloom.

The solitary figure standing just out of the heat of the kiln watched them turn and tumble in the air as he had countless times before. Despite the fact that he knew he should be watching the kiln itself, his face wore a distracted expression that turned to worry when he glanced over to the only rock of any great size in the clearing.

The rock was a place where he had sat to watch the charcoal kiln day after day, but tonight he had chosen to remain on his feet instead. What commanded his attention was the small and very compact mobile phone, which sat upon the rock in his place.

Sitting there on the rock, the phone looked out of place with the surrounding trees, the rough kiln and the worn clothes of the man whose attention it held so well. It occurred to the man that it might have been dropped into an alien world where such things were unknown and unwanted. He knew that part of him wanted to believe that was the truth of the matter.

He felt like a man watching the proverbial pot as he stood there and simply stared at the inanimate object. An inanimate object that had nevertheless taken on a worrying life of its own all of a sudden and started to make demands of him regardless of the fact that it was no more than a cunning arrangement of plastic and silicon.

Half of his mind wanted the damn thing to light up like a Christmas tree and start playing that awful loaded ringtone again; the other half wanted to see it packed into the very heart of the kiln and condemned to a fiery grave. He wasn't sure what kept him from doing the latter; that he'd miss the dreaded call or that he wasn't sure what it would do to the charcoal at the end of the burn.

At last he shook his head and forced himself to turn back to the kiln and pay attention to his livelihood. Normally there was no way that he would have been tending to the kiln at night with such a distraction, but there was nothing else apart from the mobile and the worrying.

Of course the very moment he took his eyes off the phone and laid them on the kiln was the moment that it happened. The low sound of the burn was interrupted by the opening chords of that old song, with all its memories.

Though he had been waiting so long, the sound seemed to

shock him back to reality and the man crossed the clearing in no more than three strides and had the phone to his ear before the singer had even managed to finish his first line.

"Lisa?"

The man's voice was strained and a distorted from a long silence and his emotions coloured his words.

"Mike," the woman's voice on the other end of the line was hardly less urgent than his own, "I'm at the turn off...I'll be there in two minutes."

The man stuffed the mobile into a pocket and began to run away down the hill.

Behind him the abandoned kiln smoked and burned.

Lisa Keel pulled the keys out of the ignition and felt a rush of relief as the lights died and returned the clearing to a state of darkness. She climbed out of the car and locked the door while glancing around at what little she could make out among the trees.

As her eyes got used to the darkness, she saw that the clearing was nothing out of the ordinary, just the end of a muddy track that left the isolated rural road about half a mile back and wound through a coppice wood to end here in maybe thirty square feet of more churned mud.

Apart from the track itself the only signs of habitation were a small and battered caravan lurking between the trees at the far end of the clearing and scruffy a Land Rover that was parked close by it.

So this is it, she thought, this is where you've been hiding from the world all these years.

While she was eager to push on and find the man she had come looking for, Lisa couldn't stop herself from staring at the scene for a moment. She had tried to picture this place more than once, but had never imagined that it could be this bleak, that it could feel so empty. It seemed so impossible that someone lived here alone; more so that someone had done so for such a long time.

A sudden sound of movement snapped her to attention and made her flinch back towards the car before she realised that the noise was coming from the other side of the clearing and away from the road behind her.

There emerging from the trees was a man who fitted the stark picture painted by the surroundings almost perfectly. Tall and thin, he wore clothes that had been chosen for protection from the elements and showed their exposure to them all too clearly with their patches and tears. His hair seemed to have been cut more to keep it under control than in any particular style and his face showed at least a days growth of beard. Around him there hung a smell that must have been the odour of months of smoke and numerous other pungent things.

But the eyes were the same, she realised as he came closer. The same mixture of intensity and insecurity that had always been was still there despite the drawn face in which they now sat.

Mike came to a halt no more than a few feet away from her and stood quite still, as if he were afraid to come any closer, as if she might simply vanish if he did so.

Lisa realised that she must have been the first person Mike had seen in the flesh for quite a while. He looked her over as if his self-imposed solitude had robbed him of the ability to believe what he saw with his own eyes.

And what was he seeing, she wondered. Did the suit she wore and the overcoat seem as strange to him as the clothes he wore seemed to her? Neither of them could have been mistaken for the same person they had been all those years ago on looks alone.

It was a sad realisation, but had they passed in the street she was almost certain she would have never recognised him.

"Mike," she broke the silence and he met her eye the second she did so, "it's too cold to stand out here all night."

She nodded towards the caravan and he nodded in turn.

Anticipation and anxiety had mixed together in Mike's mind until he had had no idea what to expect in that awkward moment when they were finally sitting across his small table and there was nothing between them save for a few inches of air.

But it was safe to say that he had assumed he would get a word in edgeways sooner or later.

Lisa had begun to talk almost the second after he placed the chipped mug of tea in front of her and sat down. It was as if she had been waiting with baited breath for the first opportunity to speak openly and when it came had taken it with a ferocious leap that took Mike by surprise.

That was something that time had allowed him to forget, the fact that she was an incurable talker, a teller of tall tales and sometime peddler of gossip as well. It made sense that she had drifted into her chosen profession, he thought. What better quality could you ask for in a journalist than a person prepared to dig for the dirt and then store it all ready to be disseminated in an easy to digest form?

"...Of course stuff for the tattle rags is just to pay the bills," Lisa paused for the first time in minutes to take a sip of tea and Mike realised that in spite of her constant stream of speech he hadn't been listening to a word she had said. He forced himself to take in what she was saying, hard as it was after so long without hearing another voice that belonged to such an old and familiar face.

"What I'm really devoting myself to is the research for the book," the mention of this new subject seemed to bring about a

change in her, a strangely haunted look of determination and passion. And now she had Mike's full attention as the deeper side to her personality threatened to enter into the conversation and he recalled the often hidden wells of curiosity and intellect that had drawn him to her in the beginning.

"The book" was a mixture of dogged research and spiritual journey from the way that Mikey had heard her talk about it. Lisa had been pursuing it like a woman on the brink of attaining some kind of nirvana.

"I finally found it," Lisa said, "the one piece of evidence that's going to blow the whole thing out of the water."

"You told me something about immigrants and trafficking?" Mike tried to scrape together the little pieces of the story that he had glimpsed in their snatched moments of conversation.

"Hmm," Lisa nodded, "you're always hearing about the immigrant problem and economic migration in the news, right?"

Mike looked at her blankly.

"Unless you live in the middle of nowhere and burn charcoal for a living, I suppose..." She took a deep breath. "Since we had all these laws passed that relaxed the border controls in the EU, people are free to move from one country to another as long as they're a citizen. But there are still all those places that haven't been let into the club yet, and if they can't walk across the borders then they'll try to find another way. And there are always dodgy characters ready to make a bit of money by helping them along the way."

"Smuggle them in?" Mike asked.

"That's about the size of it. The TV news is always showing crowds of them trying to get into the Channel Tunnel and the tabloids would have you think that we're being swamped by the a horde of them. It's not as bad as all that, but there are enough to make it an issue."

"And that's what your book's about?"

"Not the hysterical stuff about Johnny Foreigner coming over here to steal our jobs," she raised an eyebrow as if insulted by the very idea. "I'm more concerned with what happens to the people being smuggled when they get to wherever they're going. You have to understand that most of them are so desperate to get out that they'll do almost anything. We're talking about who are from the absolute bottom of the pile, so poor that they have nothing to buy their passage with but themselves. They buy their way across Europe by working to repay the debt at the other end."

She paused to sip tea.

"You can imagine what kind of work there is waiting for them at the other end? The people doing the smuggling are almost always into organised crime, drugs, brothels, prostitution and sometimes...worse."

This time she paused to let the point sink in.

"Worse?" that was the only reply he could come up with.

"Think about it," Lisa had never looked more impassioned, "back home they're too small and unimportant to even be reported missing when the smugglers got them out of the country. And when they get over here they don't even exist. No records of where they were born, who their parents were, where they went to school, nothing at all. Hundreds of people go missing without trace every year in this country even when they have all those things, so think how easy it is to make one of these small people disappear for good over here. If they never existed in the first place, who'd even know they were gone?"

"And that's what you've been doing, looking for the ones that disappear?"

Lisa nodded fiercely.

"Why?"

She stopped and stared at him as if the words had winded her.

Mike recalled all the times they had spoken in the past and all the times she had told him about her ideas and what had to be done to put things right. She had always been headstrong, wanting to get out into the world and fight the injustice that she saw all around her. While that hadn't changed, this was the first time that he had ever challenged her crusading zeal.

"If I don't, then who will?" Lisa looked incredulously at him.

"Someone like the police?"

"Don't be naïve," she shook her head, "these people aren't stupid. They make sure that it all goes on behind closed doors and the right bribes go to the right names. If you want to bring these bastards down you have to break the rules and get the evidence you need to pin it to them. You have to risk your neck if you want to get results."

"And you did, but they're on to you...so you came here, to me."

The look in Lisa's eyes showed pain and anger.

"I'm not a complete fool, Lisa. I might have been sitting on top of that hill for the best part of the last ten years, but I know when I'm being used. No one bothered to track me down in all that time, not even you. Then out of the blue you send me a mobile phone, next thing you turn up in the middle of the night spouting stories about bloody gangsters smuggling people into the country. Who are they? What are they going to do to you? Why do you think that I can protect you from them?"

"I didn't...I mean, I don't," she shook her head. "I just need a place to keep my head down for twenty four hours and then I'll be gone. There are people, friends who'll help me."

And there was the guilt rising up inside of him. She'd come all this way, driven into the middle of nowhere to find him in the hope that he could help her when her neck was in the noose and what had

he done? Stamped all over her like a sulking kid, still bitter underneath it all about all the years that had slipped away from him.

"I'll do what I can."

"They're serious, Mike," Lisa sipped the tea again as if to give her hands something to do. "If you'd seen what I've seen..."

"Tell me," he said, hoping that sharing might unburden her mind.

"It was outside of York...you know York?"

"Yeah; high walls, winding streets, noisy Yanks."

"No," she shook her head again, emphatically this time, "no you don't know this side of the place, believe me. This was outside the pretty bits in the centre, out where things start to get rough and rundown. A contact that I trusted gave me the place and the time, but he was really scant on the details. He just told me to get in, get out and make sure that I took plenty of photos when I did. I was expecting some kind of knocking-shop or halfway house, not a yard full of railway sidings and rolling stock."

Mike raised an eyebrow in confusion and she nodded.

"That's what I thought, that I was on a wild goose chase. But the guy had always seen me right in the past and I ended up breaking in the other night to see what was what."

"And no one saw you?"

"Are you kidding?" Lisa laughed, "There's normally nothing but an old codger asleep in a hut and a mangy dog as far as security goes. In fact there was a story in the news a few months back about a couple of kids who got into an engine and drove it about for ages, then just rode off on their bikes. They got caught on camera, but there was no sign of any at this place. At first I didn't have a clue what I was looking for, but then I saw that out of all the sidings and the coaches and stuff in the yard, there was only one that had stock coupled together. All the others just looked like coaches and wagons pushed out of the way, but this was an actual train of what looked like maybe six big wagons, the kind they use to move livestock around. I got closer to the wagons as quickly as I could and I might have been six or so feet from the one on the end nearest to me when I heard the voices coming from inside. It was a really weird moment, creeping around a bloody stockyard in the middle of the night and suddenly hearing all those voices muttering and crying. They had to be coming from inside the wagons because there was no one else on the outside but me and I could start to pick out more individual voices all the time. Some were sobbing incoherently while others might have been singing or even praying, but all of them were so quiet that I couldn't make out a single word. I made the final few feet to the side of the wagon and climbed up the side where the sliding door had a small barred window and shone my torch inside. Their faces were so full of fear," she shook her head as if

unable to fully believe the story she was telling, "they were packed in there like animals, huddled in the dark. There must have been dozens in that one wagon, girls mostly and a few older women, but not many. It was like they were scared of the light from the torch and were trying to hide from it in the shadows. I must have said something then, called in through the bars though I haven't a clue what it was. That was when one of them came up to the window and tried to get a look at me. She was older than most of the women in the wagon, though not by much and she hissed a few words in a language that sounded like Russian or something from Eastern Europe. I guessed later that she must have been taking a risk and talking to me as I was making as much sense to her as she was to me, whoever locked those wretches up in there would have spoken to them in their own language."

Lisa stopped for a moment to catch her breath.

Mike tried to make sense of the things she had described, but he found that he couldn't no matter how hard he tried. The whole thing sounded too much like a scene from a war film to be credible.

"What did she say to you?" he asked.

"Like I said, I didn't understand the language. But she kept repeating one word over and over all the time she was speaking. Morri...or Moroi...that was it. As though it were someone's name or a familiar place. I'll never forget her face. She looked so old and worn out. You know, old before her time. When I was sure that we weren't going to make any sense to one another I pulled out my camera and started taking pictures as best I could in the dark. The woman didn't like that one bit. She was wearing some kind of scarf or rag wrapped around her head and she started trying to cover her face with it and waving her hands as if she wanted me to leave her alone. All the time she was still using that word: Moroi. There was a huge padlock on the door and there was no way I could have hoped to get them out of there. So I just had to take all the photos I could and get the hell out of there. I got back to the car and just drove away as quick as I could, but they followed me."

"Who followed you?"

"I don't know," for the first time there was fear in her eyes, "two men in a black car. They just seemed to appear behind me, like one minute they weren't there and the next they were. It took forever to get away from them, they were on me for hours and then I lost sight of them in the mirror just as the sun was coming up yesterday. I didn't stop though and I've been driving pretty much ever since. Like I said I don't know who they were, but it's got to be someone connected to those women on the train, someone who wants to keep them hidden. I just need to get some sleep and then I'll be on my way south and out of your hair. There's nobody who'd think to look for me here."

The sound of the engine was little more than a quiet purr as the black car slid off the road and wound its way along the dirt track towards the clearing. Its headlights were turned off and there were no lights on inside, but nevertheless the driver negotiated the track easily as if the darkness was no problem at all. It pulled to a halt before the entrance to the clearing so that it was out of sight, but still blocked the track and the engine fell silent.

Stepping from the doors on either side, the figures that emerged might have been identical twins save for the colour of their skins. Despite the fact that one was as dark as to be almost lost in the gloom and the other so white that he seemed never to have seen the light of day, they were nevertheless cast from the same mould. Shaven heads, broad shoulders and suits that had been chosen by someone other than the men wearing them spoke of individuals who lived by the application of violence and as they surveyed their surroundings, nothing but a concern for where one could hide or attempt to run was evident in both pairs of eyes.

Neither said a word, as they moved across the clearing, but both inhaled from one moment to the next as if scenting the air for a hint of what they were seeking. Like animals converging on a single target, they closed on the solitary caravan where a single light shone in the window.

The white man reached the door first, pausing to make eye contact with his partner.

No words were exchanged, but a single nod from the black man was enough to convey all the intent needed.

Moving faster than either had done since stepping out of the car, the white man cannoned a foot into the door with a sudden crash that filled the clearing. Not simply flying open under his assault, the door was almost wrenched off its hinges as the panels split asunder.

Seconds later, both men were inside the caravan, the first almost knocked off his feet as the other crashed into his back. Neither was taken by the need to glance around as they found themselves alone inside, their attention instead fixed upon the open window and the curtain that blew gently in the breeze.

Lisa turned at the sound of the door being kicked in, forcing Mike to give her an exasperated shove from behind. To say that both were on edge after struggling through a window and stumbling blindly into the woods in no more than half a minute after their conversation had been brought to a stop by the sound of an engine would have been to fall well short of the manner in which hearts were pounding and breath was coming in ragged gasps.

There had been no time to plan, agree on a direction to run or even speculate as to who was outside. Nothing mattered more than

putting as much distance between themselves and anyone who was capable of finding such an obscure location in the middle of the night.

After all that had come out in the story of her arrival on the doorstep, who else could it have been but whoever was following Lisa?

He should have been the one in front, based on his knowledge of the woods and the fact that he was the fitter of the two thanks to his demanding lifestyle. But still he had urged her on ahead of him, unable to keep from falling into the role of protector and unwilling to let them get to her before they went through him first.

It was a blessing that Lisa seemed to have kept herself in some kind of shape and needed to wear more practical things as a journalist than he remembered she had when they were younger. Perhaps those things were erased or even outweighed though by the way in which he had to keep shouting directions as they ran and her evident terror began to take hold.

Even before they reached the top of the hill, Mike realised how futile and stupid his excuse for a plan was. In the rush to get away, he had been forced to fall back on the only place that he knew to run to, the only place other than the caravan they had left behind them. He had no clue as to what might happen when they reached his charcoal kiln, just that it was the one option open to him and somehow a place where he might at least make a short and futile last stand.

But as it was, they were into the clearing at the top of the hill no more than seconds before the men caught them.

Mike felt his hands close upon the only weapon that was to hand, the wooden handle of the old shule, the long-headed shovel used to tend the kiln. As he saw the black man bear Lisa to the ground not five feet from where he stood, he raised it above his shoulder and went to swing for the head.

He never saw what the white man did to stop him, just felt a blow the likes of which he had never experienced before lift him from his feet. The shule went spinning away in another direction, the aged metal of the head shattering on the rocks.

The world seemed to have suddenly had the sound turned down, the images becoming slow and blurred as he watched events unfolding from his position on the ground. There could be no doubt that from the way her lips moved, Lisa was screaming as loud as she could manage, but no hint of the noise she might have been making reached his ears. She tried to fight as best she could, though the man who held her down showed no sign of being hampered by her efforts or calling to his partner for help. Instead he pinned Lisa's head to the cold ground with one hand and her chest with the other while she struggled beneath him.

Mike was aware that there must have been something wrong with his own head as he lay there, finding himself curious as to just

what they would do to her next. Rape was a likely outcome, probably before they shot her and then him as well. Perhaps they wanted him to watch, which was supposedly a bad thing, though he was not sure as to why exactly. It was starting to bother him that no one had produced a gun yet, and there was always such a thing being waved in people's faces when this happened in films. Somehow the absence of a firearm made the whole experience feel less real and more disappointing at the same time.

The white man seemed to be saying something, or at least making a show of waving his arms for emphasis. But the black man had opened his own mouth too wide to be able to speak and Mike wondered if such a thing were even possible on account of the way in which his teeth jutted from his gums, ending in sharp points. They served their purpose though, as he sank them into the flesh of Lisa's exposed neck and tore at the skin like an animal.

A part of his brain was trying to tell him that what he was seeing could not be right.

But if that was the case, then he must have been dreaming.

And if he was truly dreaming and the rules that made the waking world work no longer applied, then what was to stop him from stopping the other man?

Mike made it to his feet on the third attempt as his vision swung and span, not even making the men turn from their victim. He moved like a stunned drunk, lurching from one foot to the other until he found where the shule had fallen. One moment the thing felt as though it weighed nothing at all, the next dragging at his arms like the weight of the world.

Again there was no plan in mind, no chance to think about what he was doing, and so without truly knowing where he was or what might come next, he simply swung the shule for a second time.

The world came back into focus by a degree, enough for the sound of a wet thud to accompany the jarring impact as the jagged head of the tool thudded into the side of the white man's throat. Momentum from the swing carried Mike forwards, dragging the rusted metal through the already gaping wound and widening it even more so that when the thing was finally wrenched from his hands, there was little to keep the man's head on his shoulders apart from an inch and a half of muscle and skin.

Even as the decapitated body slumped to the floor on top of him, Mike could see the look of surprise change into one of horror on the black man's face. Lisa's blood still dripped from his lips, but for some reason the sight of a terrible fate befalling his companion inspired uncertainty and perhaps even fear rather than the instant retribution that Mike's clearing thoughts had expected.

As if unable to take his eyes off the staring head of his fellow

killer, the black man took a series of stumbling steps away from the scene of his own crime. He stumbled at first, trying to make his way down the hill without tearing his gaze away from what lay behind him. But in the end he turned and began to flee back into the woods, going faster than could have been possible and making Mike think that perhaps his head had not cleared as well as he first thought.

Instantly forgetting the stranger and his bizarre behaviour, Mike crawled to where Lisa's body lay still amongst the grass. He lifted her as best he could, trying to ignore the mess that had been made of her throat and telling himself that he was unable to shed a tear because of the shock, or whatever else was still fogging his thoughts.

Having no idea as to what should happen next, he started to walk back down the hill towards the caravan.

The body of the white man lay still and silent until the first rays of the sun crept over the horizon, spreading over the corpse even smoke began to rise wherever they touched the now dead limbs. Within mere minutes, the smoke had been replaced by fire, burning with an almost unnatural intensity and speed so that the entire thing was consumed, clothes and all before the sun had even truly risen.

While there might have been something worth noting about a pile of grey ash in the vague shape of a man, the rising of a gentle breeze put paid to the last evidence of the white man's existence, scattering the remnants and mixing them with the remains of the fires that had been burned atop the hill so many times before.

IN DEATH I TRUST

Desairelle (Darrell Luke Valentine L.
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Cover Letter goes here: something about the work, the writer, or whatever else the writer wants to talk about.

My eyes were flung open to be greeted by the ominous darkness. The air was chilly, the silence was deafening and not a single creature was stirring. The clouds parted and the moonlight shone through my window. It cast an eerie pall on whatever its light touches. Beads of cold sweat streamed down my frightened expression, as I sat up panting heavily. It was an incomprehensible fear that I felt. I couldn't remember what I was so frightened about, only the fact that it penetrated my very soul. It seemed palpable whatever it was.

As if some demon were lurking in the shadows of my room, I closed my eyes and prayed to whatever higher being that exists in this universe. Time seemed to have decelerated. Slowly, I opened my eyes and looked around my room. All the furniture stood deadly still, as if royal guards in days of yore. Then I looked out the window and something caught my attention. Two globes of light were floating just behind the window that separated my room and the world outside. I strained my eyes to get a better vision of what it was. Little did I know that what I saw would rip the very essence of life from within me.

A pair of menacing eyes were gazing at me, looming precariously closed to the edge of the window.

"God save me", I muttered inaudibly as I fought to maintain consciousness.

My breath suddenly left me. The world seemed to have paused, the temperature plummeted. Not a sound could I produce, not a limb could I move. My whole body froze as if it was entangled by unseen restraints. Dark thoughts came rushing through my mind, seeking to overwhelm me. With every ounce of my will, I tried to shout, I tried to move. Yet nothing happened. My body disobeyed me; it was now enslaved by Fear.

The pair of floating globes slowly phased into the room. They began to gather shadows around them: contorting and shifting. The eyes took the form of a vast creature, cloaked in darkness. Neither head

nor limbs could be discerned. Only a pair of demonic eyes shone brightly, looming over me. The nightmarish entity emitted such negativity that my mind was swarmed by hellish images and thoughts. Hallways of brimstones and fire manifested in my mind, it felt as if the paintings of Beksiński sprang into life.

"God is not here! He cannot save you! You are mine! Embrace me; embrace what you were denied all these years. I've heard your call; I've seen your innermost desires. I can give you all these and so much more..."

With eyes wide in shocked, I was petrified at that diabolic voice within my head. Against my will, my right hand then reached out on its own. A knife formed within its palm. It brought it hauntingly close to my neck, the tip of the blade millimetres away from my jugular vein.

No! No! Stop this madness immediately! STOP!

The voice rose this time with more force and malice.

"That's it. Do it! Soon you will enjoy what your heart so desires!"

Who are you? What do you want? Let me go!

My mind screamed for an answer. Every ounce of my soul prayed for salvation, for a miracle. Terror took my heart and released the floodgates. Soon my face was soaked in tears, my mind struggled to maintain sanity and control. I tried to shout, only to realise that my lips would not move. Helpless. Terrified. Alone.

Why are you doing this to me? Who are you?

"Who am I? Hababa...foolish...foolish boy. I am Death! I have heard the cries from the very depths of your soul. I have felt your yearning for me. Now...come to me...join me! God has forsaken you! There is no such thing as hope! Only I am absolute! Only I can grant eternal peace! Only I am your friend! <i>

"Do you want to be accepted? Then join me. Do you want to be loved? Join me! I will make the masses cry for you. I will place love and regrets into the hearts of those you hold dear. I can make you the most popular person in this neighbourhood. Take my hand..."

Slowly, the dark visage morphed again. I was dumbfounded. It became me. Reeling from confusion, I tried to make sense of things. Visions of my past were summoned from the forgotten trenches of my

memory. I started to feel the horrors that were long suppressed and forgotten.

I see myself walking down dark alleys. The times when I would sit in on the park bench facing the lake all alone. I relieved the moments of agony and tears in the dead of the night in my room. My pathetic past was laid bare in my very mind. Then I heard it began to speak in my own voice.

"I am worthless. I will never amount to anything. Only Death can save me. I have no right to love. No right to have friends. I want to die...tonight...I will end it all..."

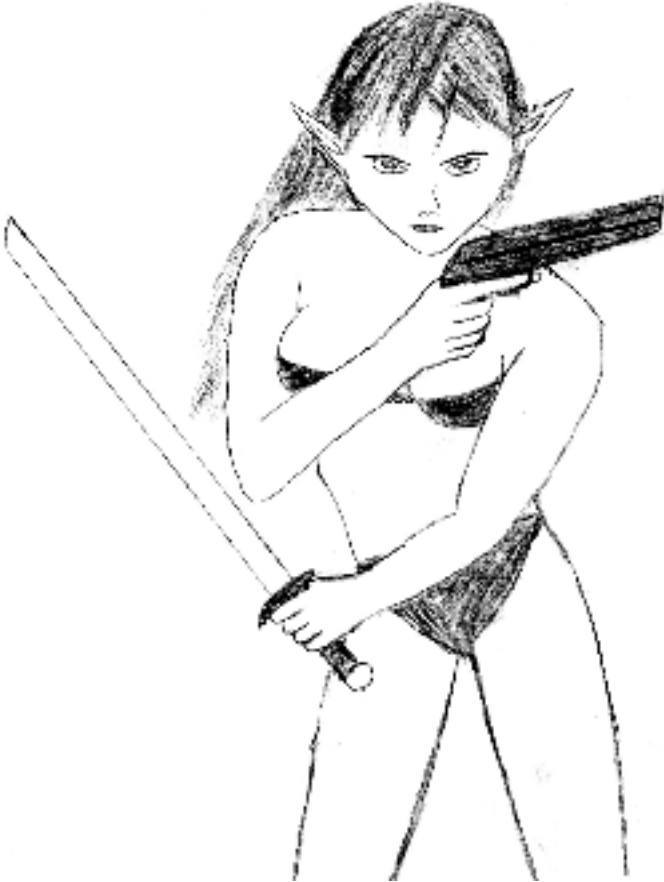
Those words struck a chord within me. It's true. Death has always been on my mind. I've contemplated Death many a time. In the things that I've wrote and said, Death has always been alluded. Everyone has left me. Somewhere along the line in the past, my world became a black empty wasteland. Slowly, I felt myself surrendering. The knife drew ever so near my throat. I winced a little when the knife's tip gave a slight prick. A tint of silver shimmered on the walls. Then nothing. Darkness crept over me.

"Yes...yes! Soon all your troubles will be gone! You will know peace. You will taste happiness!"

As my eyes started to closed, I smiled for the very first time. A genuine smile.

I am home...

FAN FICTION



or: Leanna's Return

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ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA CHAPTER 18: TO RECRUIT A QUARIAN

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It had been almost a week now since the incident on Krelldoor. Jacob's proposal had been that he and Miranda defected to Cerberus in exchange for what they knew. Miranda had completely resisted the idea at first, but Jacob had eventually convinced her that the Illusive Man had been keeping things from her since even she had not known about Experiment 13. Just after they had left, Austin had made sure that the base was destroyed.

Miranda and Jacob were currently in Helldiver custody where the Arkanes would interrogate them for all that they knew on Cerberus. After that, Austin had insisted that they be assigned to his command so that he could keep an eye on them both. Austin also had some doubts about leaving them on Arkadia ever since he had heard about the escape of the Batarian, Balak, about a year ago.

In the meantime though, the Major had plenty to keep him busy. He still had two more team members to recruit and there were also the two missions that Kasumi and Zaeed needed doing. At the moment, Austin planned to recruit Tali first, then get Kasumi's mission done, then recruit Thane Krios. That would hopefully allow them to make good progress while they waited for the ex-Cerberus agents to join them.

Sarah meanwhile had been given full permission from the Alliance to serve on the Normandy. Anderson himself had approved this and the Arkanes were also in full support of Austin's own sister joining the mission. Austin and Sarah's father, Matt, had also approved of this. In particular he was overjoyed to know that his son was alive. An earlier vidcom message with him had even said that he and his wife Hannah would look forward to seeing him in person again once Austin's mission was over.

While they were on their way to Haestrom, Austin decided to simply pass the time by once again chatting with his crew. He remembered that he hadn't yet chatted with Samara and that was something he'd been meaning to do.

Sure enough, he found her in the port observation deck where she'd been put. She was currently meditating as she looked out of the window and she was maintaining a biotic ball of energy as her eyes glowed. As the door closed behind him, Samara sensed Austin's presence.

"Shepard." She said.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Samara." Said Austin.

"Not at all. What do you wish of me?" the Justicar replied kindly.

One thing that Austin really liked about Samara was that she was always so polite. Mind you, Justicars usually where.

"I thought we could chat for a bit. How are you?" he asked.

"I've spent the much of the last 400 years on my own. It is nice to have a colleague to chat with." Samara replied. The Asari smiled as her biotics dispersed and her eyes returned to normal. Austin walked up to her and knelt down beside her. "I may be rusty at it, however. If you are patient, I would love to talk."

"You've settled in okay, I take it?" Austin asked.

"Quite well. Your ship is very comfortable and the view of space in this room is just what I needed." Samara replied. Her face then turned to curiosity. "I have something to ask you, Shepard." She said.

"Okay. Ask away." Austin replied, now curious as to what Samara would ask him.

"I have noticed that your Helldiver team does not seem very surprised by my presence. Most parties I have worked with have no experience with Justicars and have often been nervous around me. Your squad on the other hand is completely the opposite. I have to ask, have you worked with a Justicar before?" Samara asked.

"We have actually. It was around 5 years ago." Austin replied.

"Do tell. I am most curious." Said Samara.

Austin went on explaining about a mission he and Alpha Squad had undertaken around 5 years ago. They had recently been investigating

the disappearance of a Helldiver team on Thessia. Eventually, they had uncovered a few leads as to who was behind the disappearances. When they had snuck into an Eclipse base, they had soon found that they weren't the only ones investigating. A Justicar was also there. This one had been rather different to Samara. She'd been slightly younger at the time and her outfit had been more armour like compared to the Justicar sitting in front of him now.

The Justicar eventually suggested that she and Alpha Squad team up to help find their target together. The Squad had accepted, but had been nervous at first. They'd all been taught about Justicars during their Helldiver training on Asari cultures, but they hadn't been told much. Very little was actually known about them to the public. To Alpha's delight though, the Justicar they had worked with had been extremely polite to them all. She had even struck up a good friendship with them during her time working with them. She also hadn't hesitated to provide more information on Justicars and their order. This new knowledge had not only proved most helpful for the Helldivers but it had also allowed them to improve teaching by giving this knowledge to the Arkanes.

Eventually, they'd both had to go their separate ways, but the Justicar had said that she'd never worked with finer worriers and had even learned a few new things herself. Now das, Alpha Squad practically owed it all to her for their enlightenment.

Samara was quite impressed once Austin finished telling the story.

"That is most impressive, Shepard. Your squad certainly do live up to their legendary reputation." She said.

"Glad you think so. I'm honoured to be in command of such fine soldiers." Austin smiled.

"As am I. Your Asari second in command, Alaara came to talk with me a few days back as well. It was certainly interesting to hear her story. Especially when she mentioned that she was once an Eclipse merc." Said Samara.

For a moment, Austin's face turned to concern.

"That's not going to cause problems with you, is it? I don't want any trouble between you two." He asked.

"You need not worry, Shepard. Although my code compels me to kill

those who do wrong, the code does permit forgiveness and redemption. Alara told me of how much she regrets joining the Eclipse and how she always strives to redeem herself by serving as a Helldiver. Even after my oath to you ends, I will not attempt to kill her. The same applies to your other team mates as well, such as the ex-Blue Suns and ex-Blood Pack. Each one of them seeks to absolve themselves of their sins and wrong doings. That is a trait I find most admirable. It also helps me see other Helldivers in a new light." Samara replied gently.

"I'm glad to hear that." Said Austin. He then decided to ask Samara some questions. He did after all have a few things he wished to talk about with her. "So, how much do you know about our mission?" he asked.

"I know that I've sworn an oath to follow you, and that you seek to destroy the Collectors. That is enough for me." Samara replied.

"You don't want to know why the Collectors need to be fought?" Austin asked, surprised.

"When you live by a code that compels you to harsh action, you learn the dangers of curiosity. If I must kill a man because he has done wrong, do I really wish to know that he is a devoted father?" Samara replied.

Austin took a moment to consider this. He had to admit, Samara did have a point. How many times had he probably killed some wrong doers who had family? It was beginning to occur to him how the Justicar code and Helldiver code shared many similarities.

"I'd like to hear more about the criminal you were chasing on Nos Astra." He said.

Samara seemed to hesitate for a while. There was an uncomfortable look on her face before she finally spoke again.

"I hope you will understand if I wish to avoid the topic. It is a deeply tied to my code and beliefs. You might say it is personal." She said.

"I understand, Samara. So, what do you think of the Helldivers?" Austin asked as he changed the subject.

"I have heard many impressive stories, and many other rumours. But I learned long ago to form my own impressions. There is too much room

for interpretation in the opinions of others." Said Samara.

"Then why were you willing to work for the Helldivers when you didn't have first-hand knowledge?" Austin asked.

"I work for you, Shepard. Our methods may be different, but our goals are not." Samara smiled.

Austin smiled back. He eventually decided that he and Samara had talked long enough and that he should let her return to her meditations. There were a few of the other crew members he wanted to talk to and check up on anyway.

"Thank you for the talk, Samara. I should get back to work." He said as he stood up.

"It has been my pleasure, Major." Said Samara as her biotics resumed once again.

Before he headed down to chat with Grunt, Austin headed into the med bay. He hadn't chatted Dr. Chakwas since he'd had that drink with her that had eventually given him that sexual dream with Kelly.

"Major, I really enjoyed sharing that ice brandy with you, but I hope I wasn't too unprofessional. Brandy goes straight to my head." She said.

"It's nice to see you let your hair down, Karin." Austin smiled.

"Guess, I hadn't realized how much those feelings needed airing. But, I didn't give you much of a chance to vent. So tell me now – what do you think?" Chakwas asked.

"Everyone is depending on us. We won't let them down. Not many people get a second chance like I did. I intend to make the most of it." Said Austin.

"They just don't make them like you anymore in the Alliance, Shepard. Well, promise me we'll share a bottle every year. The next one's on me." Said Chakwas. As she finished talking, her chair swivelled back around and she went back to her work.

"Shepard." Said Grunt as he acknowledged Austin's presence.

"Just checking in, making sure you're acclimatizing." Said Austin.

"Heh... I was just... heh... just sitting here thinking. The picture, I'm finally starting to get it. There's a tank imprint - the battle at Canrum. A dead Turian. Stripped! You don't see them out of their armour much. A Krogan boot on his head. And a claw hammer. It's under the brow plate, pulling it back, right? Eyes have gone black, and you see tension in the muscle. You can feel it ready to snap. I get it." Said Grunt.

"Hmmm, Canrum isn't ringing a bell..." said Austin.

"Death of Shiagur, female warlord. Turians killed her, so they were hunted down and made examples. Even if they won the war. It was the last push before the rebellions ended." Grunt explained.

"Maybe I had to be there, but I don't get the joke." Said Austin as he crossed his arms.

"There's no joke - it's just great. It's a Turian and he's being torn apart for what they did. I felt nothing before, but now I get it - it was a good fight. The enemy was destroyed to punish them all and send a message. I get it. I hate Turian. I thought you'd be glad." Said Grunt, excitedly.

"Don't start anything with Garrus or Ventra! I won't have trouble among this team!" said Austin forcefully.

"I don't hate Garrus or Ventra. I hate the Turians. Garrus and Ventra re just two Turians, and they're your clan. No point in ripping off their faces off unless they turn on me. It's hate, it's mine. Okeer was blind, and he tried to make me the same. But I'm starting to feel what they did. To see why I should care. Anyway, I'm still figuring where I fit, but it made me laugh. Nothing else really on my mind, Shepard." Said Grunt.

Austin simply nodded and decided to leave the tank bred Krogan be. The Helldiver walked out of the room and headed down to Jack's pit. To his surprise, Jack had changed her attire. Instead of just her combat trousers and the straps over her chest, she had now added a small black vest with a biker like jacket over it. In addition to this, she'd also added a few black covers over her left arm and she also had a visor over her eyes. Her trousers were also now replaced by low-slung jeans, and steel-toe boots.

Austin was grateful at least that she'd covered up now. A lot of the

crew had been distracted by the fact she'd been almost completely topless.

"Hey, Shepard. Was beginning to wonder when you'd come down again." Said the convict as she noticed Austin.

"Hmmm, is there something different about you?" Austin asked in a joking manner.

"Decided to get some new attire. I know that the rest of the crew keeping staring at my tits, and I've had enough. Felt it best to cover up a bit more. You okay with that?" Jack replied.

"Yeah. You look very badass in that, I think. People are still gonna take you seriously I think." Austin approved.

"Good. Anyone who fucks with me is still gonna end up dead." Jack smiled smugly.

"So, what are you up to?" Austin asked.

"Still checking out your ship. Wouldn't mind putting her through her paces when you're not around." Jack replied as she got up from her makeshift bed.

"I doubt Joker or Alaara would appreciate that." Said Austin sternly. "At least not while we're working."

"Relax. Joy riding doesn't have the thrill it used to. Besides, if I wanted it, I'd take it." Said Jack.

"That so?" Austin replied.

"I've been around. Ran with gangs, wiped out some gangs, joined cult. Kept the haircut. I learned how to survive and not be a victim." Said Jack.

"It's hard to imagine you in a cult. That usually involves a lot of rules." Said Austin.

"I was looking for answers. Drugs and sex and going to a better place. A better place, right." Jack tutted. "It was all about money. They wanted to take a colony, shake the suckers down to the fund their spread, and guess who was their ace in the hole? They were just like the rest. Didn't give one shit about me!"

"What did you do when you found out?" Austin asked.

"What do you think?" Jack replied.

Austin immediately understood and didn't press the issue further.

"You must've met some good people too." He said.

"Everybody wants something. And because of that, everything is fair game. Murder, assault, kidnapping, drugs, dealing, arson, done 'em all. And that's just the boring shit. Piracy as you know, theft of military craft, destruction of a space station, and vandalism. That was a good one." Said Jack.

"You ever wonder if you could've done things differently?" Austin asked.

"No."

"Shouldn't you?"

"There's no reason I should be alive, but I am. You know why? Instinct. It's worked for em so far and I'm not gonna change." Said Jack.

Jack then stood back up from leaning against the pillar.

"Hey, Shepard. No one's asked me about this shit. It's strange to talk about. So don't make it a habit. Save that crap for Chambers." She said.

"You've been talking with Kelly?" Austin asked.

"We've had a few chats. She's trying to get to know me better." Said Jack.

As the Hellhound dropship prepared for dropping Austin and the ground team on Haestrom, the Major began thinking who he was going to take with him. His first choice was Leena obviously. He would need Leena's Quarian and tech expertise since they would most likely be dealing with the Geth. Next he eventually decided on Grunt, due to the Krogan's toughness and firepower, and finally he felt it best to top it off with Samara. Now he had a squad capable of handling any

situation.

With that now sorted out, the door's sealed themselves, the dropship dislodged from the ceiling of the cargo hold and slowly flew out of the Normandy and down into the atmosphere of Haestrom.

As the neared landing, EDI's avatar appeared in the centre of the crew area. Grunt, Leena and Samara where all seated, but Austin always preferred to stand when he could and held onto one the ceiling rails.

"Shepard, our data indicates that Tali is somewhere in those ruins. There is considerable Geth activity, and an environmental hazard. Solar output has overwhelmed Haestrom's protective magnetosphere. Exposure to direct sunlight will damage your shields." She said.

"Sounds like we'll have to stick to the shade then." Said Leena.

"But no hiding. That's a coward's tactic." Said Grunt.

The dropship doors opened and Austin hopped out first followed by Leena before the Hellhound touched down and Samara and Grunt then followed.

Sure enough, the sunlight was an absolute nightmare. The slightest second it touched them and their shields would overload. Even Leena's shields where suffering, despite the fact that she'd tinkered around with hers. Only Grunt wasn't having this issue since he didn't have shields and only relied on his armour.

Once they'd managed to get across an exposed bridge very quickly, they came across a locked door. The controls however seemed to be in a small room next to it. As the door to the room opened though, they found themselves in room with both Quarian and Geth bodies. There was a voice recording log playing in the background.

"Emergency log entry: The Geth are here. I've stayed to buy the others time. Anyone who gets this, find Tali Zorah! She and that date are all that matters. Keehlah Se'lai." It said.

Austin put his hand on Leena's shoulder as she bowed her head in honor of her fallen people. Samara activated the holographic interface for the large door and it opened.

Just as the group stepped through however, they heard a faint

humming in the distance.

"Geth dropship! Incoming!" Leena yelled.

Everyone immediately unholstered their preferred weapons and ran for cover. The Geth dropship deposited several Geth troopers which unfolded from the crouched positions as they landed. The whole place immediately became ablaze with thermal clips, laser fire and biotics. Samara stuck mostly to throwing the Geth soldiers around with her biotics enabling Leena the opportunity to shoot EMP grenades onto them with her shoulder cannon while they were down.

Austin and Grunt meanwhile stuck to cover and used their guns. Grunt in particular was putting his new Claymore shotgun to very good use. Austin simply fired using his Revenant and fired a few plasma shots as well while he was in cover from enemy fire.

The fight was fierce, but the Geth were ultimately no match for the group's combined strength and abilities.

Much later, the group found themselves stepping through a narrow corridor. The dead bodies of both Geth and Quarians littered the floor. Next to one of them was what looked like a radio. A voice could be heard speaking through it.

"Break-break-break, OP-1, this is Squad Leader Kal Reegar, do you copy? The Geth sent a dropship towards OP-2, Tali Zorah's secure, but we need backup. We're bunkered up here. Can you send support?" it said.

Austin walked up to the radio and knelt down to pick it up.

"OP-1, this is Squad Leader Kal Reegar, come in, over!" the radio said again.

"This is Major Shepard of the Helldivers. Can we provide assistance?" said Austin as he picked the radio up.

"Patch your radio into Channel 617 Theta." Kal Reegar replied.

Austin did so and set everyone's communication signal to the correct channel. Everyone nodded to acknowledge that they were connected.

"We were on a stealth mission. High risk. We found what we were

after, but the Geth found us. They've got us pinned down. Can't get to our ship, can't transmit data through the solar radiation." Reegar continued.

How are you holding up? We can be there in a few minutes." Austin asked.

"Take it slow and careful. Direct sunlight fries your shields all to hell. We're bunkered down at base camp across the valley. I left Tali Zorah at a secure shelter, then doubled back to hold the chokepoint. Getting Tali out safely is our top priority. If you can extract her, we'll keep them off you." said Reegar.

"You've got confirmation that the Geth haven't reached Tali yet?" Leena asked.

"Affirmative. Left my best men with her. When you get here, you can talk to her on the comm. Every marine on this rock is sworn to protect Tali Zorah. Long as one of us is still drawing air, she'll be safe." Reegar replied.

"Hold position. We'll hit their back ranks." said Austin.

"Wait! Watch your ass! We've got a dropship coming in!" Said Reegar urgently.

Sure enough, another dropship flew into view. The base camp was being guarded by several more Quarian soldiers. As the drop ship came in, it fired a massive shot at them. The explosion obliterated the Quarians and a massive stone slab fell onto their bodies and in front of the door, blocking the path.

"Crap! Doorway's blocked! Use some demolition charges to clear a path!" said Reegar.

"I wish now that I'd brought Griffin. This is his specialty." said Austin.

Austin took a few small detonators from his belt and placed them on the slab.

"Stand clear, everyone!" he said as they all retreated to a safe distance. The Major pressed the detonator button. The ground shook for a moment and there was a massive explosion behind them. When they looked round, the doorway was clear now.

As like last time, the base camp was littered with Quarian and Geth bodies. Leena was finding it hard to keep her composure now in the face of so much death.

"Quarian architecture. There's something I haven't heard since I was a little girl." she said as she examined some of the research material.

"Why would the Quarrians risk death by coming here?" Samara asked rhetorically.

Austin walked up to a nearby log. It appeared to be Tali's journal.

"Our ancestors walked these halls with uncovered heads. The sun must have been normal back then. So much space. Walls of stone... It's amazing. I wish my friends could see it. I wish Austin were here." it said in Tali's voice.

"She still thinks about you. Unexpected." said Leena.

At that moment, another console lit up and a holographic projection of Tali appeared over it.

"Tali Zorah to base camp. Come in base camp!" she said.

Austin immediately walked up to it and accessed the controls.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" Tali repeated.

"Tali, its Austin." said the Helldiver.

"Austin?! I'm not complaining, but you show up at the strangest times. What are you doing here in the middle of Geth space?" Tali asked, very surprised to be talking to her old friend again.

"We were in the neighbourhood. We thought you might need a hand." said Leena as she stood next to Austin so Tali could see her.

"Thanks for coming, Austin. It means a lot to hear your voice. Kal Reegar and what's left of the marines got em into the observatory. From where you are, it's through the door across the field. I got the data I needed and I'm safe for now, but I've got a lot of Geth outside." said Tali.

"What is this research you're after?" Austin asked.

"It's about this world's sun. It's aging faster than it should. I can tell you more about it once we've got fewer Geth shooting at us." Tali replied.

"It looks like somebody sealed the door against the Geth, and the console is damaged. Can you get it open on your end?" Austin asked as Leena tried in vain to get the door open. There was little she could do with the interface damaged.

"Let me see. Yes. I can do it. Here. Should be unlocked now. Be careful, Shepard. And please, do what you can to keep Reegar alive." said Tali.

Sure enough, the door was now unlocked and the group proceeded further through the ruins. There were more Geth in the tunnels, but it was nothing that they couldn't handle. Only the invisible drones proved to be a real nuisance. Like the Helldivers, they too had cloaking devices and were able to hide from site. Worse still, the area they had to go through was exposed to a lot of sunlight, so the group had to fight smart and be sure that they stuck to cover. Despite this though, the group finally managed to make it to the last bit. They found themselves in a room with a single door and some shutters. As Leena activated the controls for the door, the shutters opened with it. When they did however, Austin was starting to wish she hadn't done that.

Across the courtyard was a small army of Geth. They were gathered outside a massive bunker where they guessed Tali was. To be honest though, that wasn't the worst part. Accompanying the Geth was something that Austin hadn't seen since the battle on Virmire. A Geth Colossus! The massive four legged juggernaut turned around and spotted the group.

"HOLY HELL! GET DOWN!" Austin yelled as the Colossus charged up its main weapon and fired a massive beam from its eye.

The shot impacted on the control panel, barely missing the group. The rest of the Geth meanwhile were immediately alerted to this and some of them dispatched from the ones that were attempting to hack the door.

"This is why I follow you, Shepard. Big things." said Grunt as everyone quickly got back up and unholstered their weapons again. This would be a really tough fight.

"Definitely like old times." Leena muttered.

As the group quickly headed out of the area, they saw a lone Quarian soldier behind cover. His environmental suit was completely red and he had a rocket launcher in his hands.

"Over here! Get to cover!" he yelled to them.

The group didn't need to be told twice and they quickly took cover next to him.

"Squad leader Kal Reegar, Migrant Fleet Marines. We talked on the radio before the dropship arrived. Still got no idea why you're here, but this ain't the time to get picky. Tali's inside over there. The Geth killed the rest of my squad, and they're trying to get to her. Best I've been able to do is draw their attention." he said.

"Are you sure she's still alive?" Austin asked over all the noise of gunfire.

"The observatory is reinforced. Even the Geth will need time to get through it. And it's had to hack a door when someone's firing rockets at you." Reegar laughed slightly. "The Geth are near platoon strength, but the Colossus is the worst part. It's got a repair protocol. Huddles up and fixes itself. I can't get a clear shot while it's down like that. I tried to move in closer, but one of the bastards punched a shot clean through my suit."

"How bad is your suit damage?" Leena asked.

"Combat seals clamped down to isolate contamination, and I'm swimming in anti biotics. The Geth might get me, but I'm not gonna die from an infection in the middle of a battle. That's just insulting!" Reegar replied.

"We need to get to Tali. Got any ideas?!" Austin asked.

"Just one. I'm not moving so well, but I can still pull a trigger, and I've got a rocket launcher that the sun hasn't fried yet. You move in close. I'll keep the Colossus busy; maybe even drop its shields. With luck, you'll be able to finish it off." Reegar replied.

"You've done enough, Reegar. You don't need to throw your life away." said Austin persuasively.

"Wasn't asking your permission, even if you're a Major. My job is to keep Tali safe. This is our best shot." Reegar grunted as he went to pop out of cover to fire a rocket. Leena however quickly flung him out of the line of fire.

"We don't have enough people on our side for you to take one for the team! Stand down!" she ordered.

"I'm not gonna just stand there while you run into enemy fire! They killed my whole squad!" Reegar objected.

"And if you want to honor your squad, watch my back! I need you here in case they bring reinforcements!" said Austin.

"All right, Shepard. We'll do it your way. Hit 'em hard for me. Keelah Se'lai!" Reegar agreed reluctantly.

Dodging the Colossus' attacks was definitely not easy. With this, it was matter of sticking to cover and keeping your head down or you'd lose it. Luckily, the Geth weren't great shots from a far distance, so a lot of the laser fire missed its target. Other Geth troopers resorted to breaking formation and tried to move in closer to the group for a better shot. Though this made them easier to fire on, they too stuck to cover. Worse still, the Geth where starting to bring out the heavy artillery. Rocket troopers, Pyros, and even a few Geth primes had now joined the fray.

Overall, this was not going well. To make it even trickier, the Colossus now had the group pinned down and they couldn't advance any further.

"Fall back! There's no way we can get through that!" Austin ordered.

Grunt provided cover fire for the others while Samara threw up a small barrier to cover the group's retreat. They took cover once again next to Reegar.

"How's it going out there? You wanna try it my way?" he offered.

"On second thought, yes. If you're up for it, we could use some help." Austin replied, ducking his head down to avoid a near miss.

"Keelah Se'lai. Say hi to Tali for me!" said Reegar as he popped out of cover and fired a rocket at the Colossus. Though Austin knew this

would now make things easier by keeping the Colossus distracted, he still didn't want Reegar left here without some help.

"Samara, stay here. Use a barrier to block the Geth's fire. Keep Reegar safe!" he ordered.

"I'll do my best." the Justicar nodded.

Now with a bit more of a plan, Austin, Leena and Grunt tired another push. Thanks to Reegar keeping the Colossus occupied they were able to get much closer now. To make things even easier, the Geth where now coming at them. Though this had them under heavy fire, it would at least mean there'd be less to deal with once they got close enough. It would also make talking down the Colossus much easier.

"How's Reegar doing, Samara?" Austin asked into his comm as he managed to land a head shot on a Geth prime which went straight through its head and even managed to punch a hole in a pyro's gas tank.

"Barriers are holding, Shepard. But we won't last much longer!" he heard Samara reply back as the pyro's tank ignited, taking a large bunch of Geth soldiers with it as it exploded.

"Feel the blood rage!" Grunt yelled as he practically went mad and practically gunned down anything in sight.

This was a tremendous help as it allowed them to now progress close enough to get a clear shot of the Colossus. The massive Geth however quickly noticed them and it abandoned its fire on Reegar.

The Colossus shot another beam, but Austin was quick to returned fire with a charged plasma shot. It didn't destroy the Geth, but it did at least manage to weaken it.

"Eat this!" the Helldiver yelled as fired another shot.

Despite this though, the Colossus still stood.

"Leena, if you've got anything up your sleeves, now's the time!" Austin yelled as he ducked back behind cover.

"I might have something, but I haven't tested it yet." Said the Quarian as she took a modified M-920 Cain from her back. Austin knew immediately that that was a nuke launcher.

“Well, now’s as good a time as any!” said Austin as the Geth laid down suppressing fire on them.

“Your call, Major!” said Leena as she tossed the Cain to Austin.

The Helldiver charged it up and popped out of cover. Only too late did the Geth notice the nuke fully charged.

“Hasta La Vista, Baby!”

Austin pulled the trigger and the nuke sped right at the Colossus. Everyone’s vision was blinded as the whole of the Geth army was engulfed in a massive explosion. Leena even was flung right off her feet by the blasts force. When the brightness died down, all that was left was last bit of mushroom cloud and a few small pieces of Geth.

Austin was left speechless as he looked at the M-920 Cain.

“Bloody hell!” he panted in surprise.

“Ha! Where can I get one of those?!” Grunt laughed as Samara quickly re-joined the group and helped Leena back up.

“That was... a pretty successful test.” Leena panted and laughed at the same time.

“You, Leena, are genius. Not even Dells mad enough to make something like this.” Austin laughed as he handed the Cain back to Leena. He made sure to be gentle with it this time having seen how destructive it was. He then turned to Samara.

“Reegar?” he asked.

“He is fine. He’ll just be a minute.” Samara replied.

“Good. Now, let’s get what we came for.” Said Austin.

“Just a second. I locked the door to keep more Geth from getting inside.” Came Tali’s voice. There was a brief pause before the door that the Geth had been attempting to hack unlocked. “There, that should do it.”

The group proceeded through and saw Tali typing at a nearby console.

"Just let me finish this download..." she said. Once she'd finished, she turned to face her old friend. "Thank you, Austin. If not for you, I would never have made it out of this room. This whole mission has been a disaster. I wish I'd joined you back on Freedom's Progress, but I couldn't let anyone take my place on something this risky."

"A lot of our people lost their lives here, Tali. Was it worth it?" Leena asked.

"I don't know, Leena. It wasn't my call. The Admiralty Board believed the information here was worth sacrificing all our lives for. I have to believe that they know what's best." Tali replied.

"I didn't ask what some Admiral thought. I asked what you thought." Said Leena.

"A lot of people died here. Some of them were my friends. All of them were good at their jobs. That damn data better be worth it. The price was too high." Said Tali.

"Whatever the reason, I'm glad I could help. Once you deliver that data, I could use you on the Normandy." Said Austin.

"I promised to see this mission through, I did. I can leave with you and send the data to the fleet. And if the Admirals have a problem with it, they can go to hell! I just watched my whole team." Said Tali.

"Maybe not the whole rest of your team, ma'am." Said Reegar as he limped into the room.

"Reegar! You made it!" said Tali happily.

"Helldivers are as good as you said. Damn Colossus never stood a chance." Reegar smiled under his helmet.

"If need be, the Normandy can get you out of here, Reegar." Austin offered.

"The Geth didn't damage our ship. Long as we get out of here before reinforcements show up, we'll be fine." Said Reegar.

"Actually, I won't be going with you. I'm joining Captain Shepard." Tali quickly added.

"It's Major now." Austin correct.

"You're kidding! Keelah, are you going to keep getting promoted every time I see you?" Tali asked. But she sounded happy that Austin had been promoted again.

"Should've been calling him sir. Anyway, I'll pass the data to the Admiralty board and let them know what happened." Reegar said to Tali. He then turned to Austin. "She's all yours now, Shepard. Keep her safe."

Austin nodded in acknowledgement. Keeping Tali safe was something he could definitely do.

Tali was full of joy to back on the Normandy. In fact as soon as she stepped into the comm room, she practically hugged Austin tightly.

"Welcome back, Tali. It's so good to have you back." Alaara smiled.

"Good to see you too, Alaara. It's been a long time." Tali smiled. Her tone then suddenly went serious. "I refuse to believe that it's true, but I have to know. Austin, I've been hearing troubling rumours that you were working with Cerberus. Personally I wouldn't believe that even for a minute. And even if they were true, I would simply assume you were undercover. Maybe even planning to blow Cerberus up."

"I promise you, Tali. I'm not working for Cerberus. I wouldn't even be with my old team if I was. And if I was undercover, I definitely would've told you. I would rather die again than work for those terrorists."

"I knew that would probably be the case anyway. Still, I had to know. I will fight beside you whatever the cost. And if we do run into Cerberus, I'll lone you a grenade." Said Tali.

"Glad to hear that. Anyway, if it helps, check out the Normandy while you're here. We've gotten a few upgrades." Said Austin.

"I'll see to it that Tali is given security clearance to have full access to our systems. It's not like we have to worry about her trying to sabotage us." Said Alaara.

"Good. I can't be a true part of this team if I don't know how the ship works. If you need me, Austin, I'll be down in engineering." Said Tali as she went to leave the comm room.

"Don't forget to introduce yourself to EDI, the ship's new artificial intelligence." Said Austin.

Just as she was in the doorway, Tali stopped and looked at Austin. She didn't say anything for a minute before she finally waked off.

Alaara simply saluted and left as well afterwards.

As Austin entered the CIC, he noticed that Kelly seemed to be very happy.

"What's made you so happy, Kelly?" Austin asked kindly.

"I had a wonderful chat with your friend, Tali. She's not what I expected from her psych report, I like her." Kelly replied as she turned to face Austin.

The Helldiver was still coming to terms with the fact that'd he'd had a very sexual dream about her. In fact, he doubted he'd ever be able to look at her the same way. But that didn't mean the two still couldn't be friends.

"I do too. Tali's a good friend. We've been through a lot together." Austin smiled.

"Quarians are so fascinating to me, but they also make me a little sad." Said Kelly, her smiled dropping.

"Why do they make you sad?" Austin asked.

"Their environment suits are so beautiful, but with their immune systems, they're trapped inside. I wonder what they look like under those helmets, or what their skin feels like under those suits." Said Kelly.

"Hmm, I sometimes wonder the same thing. Anyway, is there anything I should know?" Austin asked.

"Yes, Kasumi recently told me to tell you that the she's recently received word of an important event coming up that'll be the perfect opportunity for that heist of hers. Apart from that, that's it I think." Kelly replied.

"Thanks for letting me know about that. I'd better go." Said Austin, quickly remembering that he'd promised Kasumi that they'd do her heist after Haestrom.

"It's always nice chatting with you." Kelly smiled as she went back to her work.

Just before he and Kasumi headed out, Austin decided to just quickly have a little chat with Tali and make sure she'd settled in alright. As he entered engineering, he overheard Gabby and Ken's conversation.

"So Gabby, what do you think of our new Quarian boss?" Ken asked.

"Hush. She's right over there." Gabby hissed as she indicated to Tali, who was working on a separate control panel to them.

"Ah, she can't hear us with her head in that bucket. Don't get me wrong: it's a beautiful bucket. The whole suit is lovely. Quite snug, in all the right places." Said Ken.

"You know I can hear you." Tali interrupted.

Ken fell silent with embarrassment while Gabby simply laughed. Even Austin couldn't help but chuckle a bit at this.

"Austin, what can I do for you?" Tali asked as she turned to face him.

"Have you got time to talk?" Austin asked.

Tali looked at Gabby and Ken and indicated for Austin to follow her. They headed into the massive drive core area to have a bit more privacy.

"We didn't really have time to chat whilst taking out Geth on Haestrom, did we? I can't believe so many people died. Thank you again for getting Reegar out alive. All for data about stars blowing up, I hope the admiralty board gets some use out of it." She said.

"Have you heard any word about Reegar? Did he survive his injuries?" Austin asked.

"He sent me a message. It looks like he'll make a full recovery. Any time you get a suit puncture it's a matter of luck. Reegar got out with a relatively minor infection." Tali replied with relief.

"Having any trouble settling back in on the Normandy?" Austin asked.

"I like the quiet. I miss the old faces though. Pressly, Engineer Adams, many of them. Still, his new Helldiver crew just as interesting. And it's nice to be working with most of the old team, especially Liara and Garrus. Speaking of which, I'm very happy that you two are still together. Your death tore her apart two years ago when then Normandy was destroyed." Tali smiled under her helmet.

"Yeah. Things where tense for a while before we finally had some time to chat. After that, well... let's just say the past is the past." Austin smiled.

"Let me know if there's ever going to be a wedding. I want a chance to get a nice dress for my suit." Tali joked. "Anyway, I should get back to work. Thanks for coming by."

Tali went back to her work and Austin decided now was the time to tell Kasumi he was ready. Just as he was leaving though, Ken and Gabby called him.

"Excuse me, Major. Do you have a quick minute? There's something we want to ask you." Said Gabby.

"Sure. What's the problem?" Austin asked.

"We can't complain. I just wish it didn't take so long to calibrate the FBA arrays..." said Ken, but before he could continue, Gabby interrupted him.

"Kenneth! You're complaining!" she said.

"Just tell me what the problem is? This could be very important." Said Austin.

"Don't get me wrong, the Arkanes did a brilliant job designing and building the Normandy. It incorporates their best technology." Said Ken. "However, they did get a bit sloppy with some minor bits. The FBA couplings in particular aren't top of the lien anymore. I won't bore you with the details, but there's an array of attenuators in the primary power transfer systems that channels the feed blee..."

"Kenneth! You're boring the Major with tech." Gabby interrupted again. She then turned to Austin. "In short, if we had T-6 FBA

couplings installed, it'd save us a lot maintenance time each day.”

“I see. If that’s the case though, why haven’t you placed a requisition order for them?” Austin asked.

“Nothing really would be able to done about it. The T-6 model is difficult to find. Nation Stellar Dynamics discontinued them.” Ken explained.

“We could probably find used ones in the Omega markets, but we have no time for shore leave.” Said Gabby.

“Even so, thank you for letting em know about this. Next time we’re on Omega I’ll keep an eye out for some.” Said Austin.

“Really? You’d do that? Surely you’ve got more important things to do, sir.” Said Gabby, surprised.

“The team and mission are important, yes. But to me, the welfare of the crew is just as important. We’ll need everyone at their best, and I mean everyone.” Said Austin.

“Well... thanks, Shepard. Thanks a lot.” Said Ken gratefully.

“Carry on.” Austin smiled.

"Kasumi, if you're ready, we can get this heist of yours done now." Said Austin as he entered the starboard observation room where Kasumi had set up her quarters. The thief herself was sat on the couches. She smiled under her hood as she saw Austin enter.

"Good. I've made all the necessary arrangements. Here's your formal wear." She said as she held up a neatly folded suit.

"Why is there a dress as well? Is that for you?" Austin asked as he noticed that Kasumi was holding a dress as well.

"No. This is for your sister." Kasumi replied.

"Sarah? When did this happen?" Austin asked in surprise as he took the suit from Kasumi.

"Trust me, Shepard. If we bring her, this will be way easier. I promise you now that she won't be in any danger. If this all goes to plan, we'll

be able to pull this heist off without firing a single shot." Kasumi explained.

At that moment, the door opened and Sarah walked in. She was currently wearing her Alliance uniform and was also wearing an N7 hoodie over the top portion.

"Brother." She said as she nodded to her brother. She then noticed the dress in Kasumi's hands "Ah, good. That one's mine I take it?"

Kasumi nodded and handed the dress to Sarah who examined it for a bit.

Deciding that he shouldn't argue with Kasumi and his sister, Austin simply shrugged.

"Okay. Joker, plot a course for Bekenstein." He said to Joker.

"You two better get dressed. I'll get all the last minute preparations sorted. Said Kasumi as the two siblings walked out of the room and made for the restrooms in order to get changed.

About a minute or so later, Austin came back in. Kasumi smiled as she saw him dressed in the suit. It seemed to fit him just fine and he looked really smart in it.

"How's it fit?" she asked.

"Feels alright. Seems a bit tight around the neck, but other than that, fits fine. How'd you know my size?" Austin asked.

"I sized you up when we met." Kasumi winked at him.

"So where's your formal wear?" Austin asked.

"Oh, I won't be wearing any. My current attire will do fine." Kasumi replied.

At that moment, the door opened again and Sarah stepped in. She did not look happy. It was only now that Austin saw how short the dress was. While Sarah looked very pretty in it, it exposed a lot of her legs and only just stopped at her knees.

"Kasumi, is this a joke?! Have you seen how bloody short this thing is?!"

I know I have nice legs, but this is ridiculous!" the N7 marine complained.

The dress also hugged her body rather tightly. Austin was particularly embarrassed to see his sister cleavage on display.

Oh bloody hell." He groaned in his head. Even he had to admit that this dress was not the most appropriate. Especially for his own sister.

"We need you to get the admiring looks. Hock needs to take you just as seriously as your brother." said Kasumi, trying her best not to laugh.

"Fine. But if I catch one person staring at my legs and my tits, or trying to look up my dress, I'll kill them!" Sarah groaned.

BROKEN WINGS CHAPTER 5

by Tiffany Kennedy
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NARUTO (-???)-Masashi Kishimoto & Shueisha.
Original Characters & plot belongs to me.
Broken Wings -Re-Write-
A modern day Naruto Fanfiction.

When Aoi woke she noticed that the familiar red head wasn't next to her. It was Friday morning. She hated the fact that Gaara never slept, she noticed that he did maybe once or twice but he barely ever slept. She used to be like that too but now she felt a sort of sweetness come over her as she went into slumber. But that was back when she played with people, they were like dolls. It wasn't like she knew what she was doing half the time. She sat up and rubbed her eyes. She smelt like Gaara, it made her laugh a little. She liked the way he smelt. She had fallen asleep wearing her jeans but usually when she went to bed she just wore a top and her underwear. It made Gaara blush. Temari had gone out to buy her more underwear which Aoi thanked her for even though she felt embarrassed by it.

She pulled the covers over her and snuggled into the warmth. It was Friday today. She was supposed to take Gaara out two Fridays ago but that never happened and it wasn't like she had any money now. Gaara opened the door slowly and saw that Aoi was awake. He came in with her order from Starbucks. She smiled at him when he passed her the dark mocha. Sometimes if he had time he would go get her coffee.

"You plan on coming to school today?" he asked giving her a slightly worried look. She hadn't been to school in two weeks.

"No, I'm sorry. You must hate it at school, people must be asking you questions. And you're so alone at school. I'm sorry that I'm still here actually and that I haven't gone yet."

"I've had some questions, from Itachi mainly. Sasuke just stares and well, Naruto is bugging me like usual. It's not the same as before..."

"What do you mean?"

"Everyone kind of gathers around me now, like I'm...their friend," Aoi could tell he was slightly happy about it though he would never admit it.

"I'm starting to lose my rep as a killer."

"You haven't...actually killed someone...right?"

He chuckled a little, "No, just battered up a few people, sometimes I go away for long periods of time, they think I've been to juvie or

something. There just rumours.”

Aoi smiled steadily as she drank her mocha. He gave a small smile and then left to go to school. As soon as he left the door burst open. Aoi was kind of wishing for a break. Temari burst in.

“I heard a little something,” Temari smirked, “You going on a date with Gaara tonight!”

She was extremely happy.

“Oh uh no, not really. I was supposed to go with him two weeks ago because I owed him and well it doesn’t matter now...”

“Yes it does! You have to go! Tonight the two of you are going to go on a date alright. Which means you’re coming with me missy!” Temari dragged Aoi out of bed and into the car. They drove off to the closest store. Girls will be girls. They flicked through look books and tried on dress. They bought a few dresses and tried on some shoes. They bought so much stuff but couldn't decide what Aoi would wear that night. Aoi sighed at least she'll having something for Saturday's party as well. They drove back to Temari's house and put all of the clothes in Temari's room. Aoi wasn't allowed to come out until she figured out what dress she was wearing.

Gaara came back from school and Kunkaro told him to go get changed in the clothes that were laid out in his room. He went upstairs and shook his head before changing into them Aoi just sat in Temari’s room staring at all the clothes. She didn’t know what to wear. Aoi finally gave up and grabbed the first black dress she could find. She pulled it on and grabbed some platform heels that she actually picked out. She brushed her hair and Temari did her make up. She opened the door and stepped down the stairs.

Gaara was sitting down watching tv in the living room. He turned around noticing she was there. He got up and got a good look at her. Her shining blue hair was as wavy as usual and stood out against her black dress that finished just above her knees. There was lace down the sides of the pitch black dress. She wore dark thigh high stockings which had little red bows on the top as well. She wore platform heels that were black with red rims around them. She looked perfect, even Gaara could see that. He almost drooled at the sight of her. He didn’t know what had come over her. He didn’t even know how to admit that she was just amazing.

He on the other hand wore black dress pants and a black top along with a black suit jacket. His tie was red and his shoes were shiny. Aoi knew he was attractive but most men in monkey suits is just odd but Gaara, Gaara was just right. She smiled nervously.

“Shall we go?” his voice was squeaky. It made her giggle.

“I can’t pay though, so it isn’t my treat.”

Temari and Kunkaro nudged him and he stared at them annoyed.

“Well it is already, planned...”

“Yeah, you’re right, why not,” she smiled. They walked to his car and blasted the stereo as they drove to the restaurant. Aoi danced a little in the car making Gaara smile. He finally admitted her beauty to himself. He found it insane that he could feel this way, he shouldn’t be able to feel this way but he just did. His cheeks went a little pink as he thought about her and he moved his eyes away, focusing on the road.

Aoi and Gaara sat in the very back corner, in a small circular booth so they sat right next to each other but were able to face each other and talk. They ordered their food and Aoi ate it very fast. They talked a little, she laughed a lot and they both ate. It was a perfect, simple dinner. She smiled at him and held his hand lightly under the table. He looked at her before his face went as red as his hair. She realised that she just acted upon it not even knowing what she was doing. Her face quickly went redder than his and she pulled away.

“I-I’m sorry,” Aoi looked down at her empty plate.

“N-no, it’s uh, it’s o-okay,” he tried to smile, awkwardly. It made her giggle a bit. They paid for their dinner and walked out. Aoi leapt towards Gaara in the cold night. His face warmed up a bit, noticing that Aoi was clinging to him. He put his arm around her. She was freezing and he was warm. He never knew why boys were always warm, she thought it had something to do with them having more body heat. They walked down the street towards the cinema to go see the new Batman. Something Aoi had been aching to see. They bought their tickets and carried on inside. They sat right up the back where Aoi’s favourite cinema spot was. She gobbled on the popcorn quickly, there was just something amazing about cinema popcorn. Aoi put her legs up on Gaara’s lap as she leaned back. He stared down at her legs. Her thighs stuck together but her legs were beautiful. They were small and reminded Gaara of a fairy, and her stockings were just cute. He shook his head. He wanted to tell her to fuck off and get her legs down but when he looked at her, she gave him a smile. For some reason he felt himself let go and he just felt okay with her doing that. Once the movie had finished Gaara noticed that Aoi had dozed off. He shook his head and chuckled a little. He poked her in hopes of waking her up but she didn’t budge. Sighing he picked her up and put her on his back. As if he was giving her a piggy back ride. He walked back to the car and put her in her seat. He then buckled up her seatbelt. He smiled at her, a genuine smile at the sleeping girl. She looked so fragile, so beautiful. He closed the door and got into the driver’s seat and drove them home.

After parking the car he got out and carried her on his back to his room. He took her shoes off and thought it was best not to change her into pyjamas. It might’ve gotten awkward. Instead he grabbed a shirt and put it over her beautiful dress. He pulled the covers over her on

the bed and tucked her in before he made his way downstairs.

“Gaara!” Temari called as she saw him descend from the staircase, “How was the date?”

He noticed that Shikamaru was sitting next to her watching the tv.

“It wasn’t a date,” he answered. He was trying to avoid the question because he didn’t know what to say. It wasn’t actually a date anyway but it was the best experience he could remember. Just being with her, the both of them. She kind of took him away from his own pain, his own suffering, his own harming thoughts. It was like she was a cure for him. He grabbed a bottle of water and went back upstairs. He took a few sips before changing out of his clothes into some boxers which he usually wore as pyjamas. The first few times Aoi saw him like that she blushed like a tomato and even after two weeks she still blushed just not as much. Gaara thought that maybe he could try sleeping again, it worked before, why not again. He moved under the covers and felt Aoi lean into him slightly. His face flushed pink.

The morning arose with the sound of birds chirping. It was such a cliché. Gaara’s eyes fluttered open, he felt rested. He slept well, surprisingly. He looked around and frowned for a moment trying to remember what happened before he went to sleep. Aoi woke up as Gaara’s eyes were looking around. Her face went red. She felt the warmth of Gaara’s pale chest. Her head resting on his torso and his arm around her. She was holding onto him tightly. She looked up at him to see him looking at the roof slightly confused. She wondered what often troubled him.

“Morning,” she sparked. Gaara looked down at her and blushed, he realised that his arm was around her. He moved his arm then sat up on the bed. Aoi sat next to him. He moved off the bed and went downstairs to get breakfast. She got up and realised she was still wearing her dress from last night. She pulled it off so she was wearing Gaara’s shirt, her stockings and underwear. She sighed, his shirt smelt good. She followed him downstairs. Her nose smelt the bacon and eggs. Temari said good morning and Kunkaro winked and Gaara before checking Aoi out. She blushed and Gaara pulled her to sit next to him. They all sat down and ate breakfast.

For hours Gaara and Aoi just played tekken and street fighter on xbox, she was obviously beating him but she had no idea that he was letting her win. When they got bored they ate, watched tv, played different games and so on. It was just a lazy day but the party was coming up in a few hours. Aoi could’ve sworn that party was supposed to be two weeks ago but apparently the date was changed because of something that Aoi had forgotten.

Aoi sighed and went upstairs to Temari’s room to grab something to wear for today. She grabbed a dress that finished at her knees but dragged on in the back. She wore a different pair of shoes this time.

Platform stilettos. She loved platforms and at least this way she reached Gaara's shoulders. Gaara and Aoi both left for the party.

The address was easy to find and everything went smoothly. Naruto was at the front door inviting everyone in. It was easy to assume that he was doing so because either Hinata wasn't here yet or his best friend Sasuke wasn't here yet. Aoi shivered at the simple thought of Sasuke. Gaara touched her shoulder and asked if she was going to be alright, she only nodded. They walked inside being greeted by Naruto and he tried to ask Aoi a few questions about why she hasn't been around lately but she sadly ignored and walked on by. She said hello to Tenten and Sakura, she noticed that Ino was making out with Kiba in a not so distant corner. Aoi thought that was weird but it was probably just a party thing. Gaara went off to get some punch, he was overwhelmed by the amount of people. Aoi froze. She felt Sasuke's breath on her neck. She knew it was him. He tapped her on the shoulder. She glared at him but he grabbed her wrist and pulled her into a hallway to talk.

"I'm sorry, but you deserved it," he said.

"Are you kidding me!? You already punched me in the face! Then you tried to rape me!"

"You left me out there to die because it was fun!"

"Have you ever considered that I have a mental illness or something? Toying with people gave me pleasure, I didn't know how to stop it! I was blanking out! I barely even knew what I was doing half the time but boy did it feel good. Sometimes I would blank out and when I came back I would be fucking someone. I started taking medication because of it! I finally got better and I finally realised what I had been doing and everyone was ready to fuck me again like a fucking doll then never talk to me, that's what I was known for right? That's why I fucking came here!"

Sasuke paused, "Sorry."

"Yeah, you should be."

"Itachi's worried about you."

"I know he is and you know what, maybe I should tell him what happened."

"If you tell him, I'll tell every single person out here every single thing you've done to the people where you used to live. All those things that gave you pleasure. I'll tell your scummy little boyfriend too, I'm sure he'll be glad," Sasuke glared.

"What do you want?"

"Don't tell."

"Only if you don't."

Aoi walked off and joined the crowd. She looked around and found some vodka. She didn't bother getting a glass, she wasn't a lady, she just grabbed the whole bottle and started drinking. She stumbled

outside. She found a porch and sat out there drinking. She drink half the bottle making her way out there. Aoi turned around to see everyone crowding around the door now. Itachi and a few other band members from Akatsuki had arrived. She snarled and took another sip. She looked back out at the yard before feeling the weight of someone else on the seat. She turned to see two girls. Oh no it was actually one. Her vision was fuzzy. She soon realised it was Sakura who sat down.

“Can I have some?” Sakura asked kindly. Aoi burped and passed her the bottle.

“What’s troubling you me’ matey,” she giggled and swung back and forth.

“I’m not sure how to well put it exactly.”

“O’ course you do!”

“It’s just, well Sasuke. Why doesn’t he make a move Aoi? I know you know him pretty well, he told me you were staying at his house. He loves me, well I think he does, in his won way.”

“Oh der, is a lot you don’t know ‘bout Sasuke! But ‘im not makin’ the first move, that’s something I’m surprised ‘bought. He’ll come ‘round, he always does,” Aoi smiled. Sakura gave her back the bottle.

“I hope so, take care, don’t party too hard Aoi,” Sakura smiled at her before going back inside. The terrible sounds of pop music was playing, she knew even Itachi would be screeching at it. Aoi got up and started to walk off. Who knew where she was going? She didn’t even know, she just walked.

Inside the house Gaara was walking around, he couldn’t see Aoi anywhere, he hoped she was okay. He then got trapped into a conversation with Tenten for a bit. He asked her when Neji was coming back. He even spoke to Kiba that night. Gaara moved around looking for Aoi, when he spotted Sakura who looked a bit dazed. He frowned and trudged over to her. He asked if she knew where Aoi was and she pointed outside. Gaara frowned and we made his way outside. Aoi was nowhere to be found. He looked over to the seat and noticed a thread from her dress. He sighed knowing that she walked off. He walked around, further away from the house, desperately searching for her. He started asking himself questions wondering about what might’ve happened. What if she got hit by a car? What if she was hurt? What if she was dying somewhere? He picked up the pace. He was becoming really worried. If he wasn’t trying to find her so badly he would’ve been shocked by his sudden feelings but he had to find her.

He moved past at least for streets now but he still couldn’t find her. He kept going, five streets, sex streets, seven streets. He was freaking out now. He found her. He walked down the street and saw Aoi dancing in the middle of the road. He quickly grabbed her hand and pulled her off the road and onto the foot path. A car drove past. He

looked directly at her as she dazed off.

“What’s wrong with you?” he yelled, “You could’ve been hurt!”

“I’m sorry daddy,” she hiccupped, a cute hiccup, “you can let go of my hand now.”

Gaara blushed immensely, “I’m taking you back.”

“No, you’re not,” a voice came from down the foot path. Gaara turned to see Itachi. Aoi gave a little ‘eep’.

“I don’t want leave Mr Panda!” Aoi cried as she clung to Gaara.

“Aoi we have to go!” Itachi yelled moving closer.

“Never! I’m staying with Mr Panda!” she jumped onto his back.

His facial expression read are you kidding me.

“I think Gaara’s had enough of you, he’s been taking care of you for two weeks.”

“Mr Panda! Mr Panda! Mr Panda!” she hiccupped.

“You’ll see him on Monday anyway.”

“My Panda,” she hiccupped, “Did you know alcohol is bad! Bad! Bad!”

She continued to ignore Itachi.

“Aoi!”

“MR Panda, do you have any cookies left? Can Temari buy me some?”

“Aoi!”

“I WANT TO GO ON A BOUNCY CASTLE!”

“Aoi.”

“MR BANDA! MR PANDA! WE GO BOUNCE BOUNCE ON A BOUNCY CASTLE!”

Gaara sighed as she continued yelling. He could smell of alcohol on her breath.

“Aoi...” Itachi’s voice was draining; he was starting to give up.

“Mr Panda! Do you get any...sexual urges?”

Gaara blushed bright red.

“I need a drink...” Itachi sighed.

“NO ‘TACHI ALCOHOL IS BAD! BAD! BAD!” she yelled finally listening to him.

“I think it would be best for her to stay at mine tonight, I’ll bring her to yours in the morning,” Gaara stated wanting to fix the problem. He could deal with Aoi when she was sober, maybe even too much sober, when she didn’t talk to people and she thought deeply about things. He could even handle her when she was with friends and when she is with big groups of people she changes personalities, she’s really bubbly, not really thinking but he wasn’t sure about handling her in a hyperactive drunk state but he wasn’t fit to argue.

“Fine, bring her home tomorrow,” he wondered off.

“YAY IT’S ME AND MR PANDA!” Aoi yelled.

“Yay...” Gaara dragged on, “you know the whole neighbourhood

can hear you?”

Aoi blushed and gripped on tighter to Gaara. He made sure she was secure on his back. He walked back over to the car carrying her. He hoped this wasn't something that he would have to do all the time.

WEEK OF LOVE CHAPTER 3: NUMB

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Aang and Katara had been in the Earth Kingdom for a week, and they hadn't seen each other in all that time. They had been given separate rooms because some of the Council men thought it was inappropriate for the Avatar to be in the same room with a peasant, despite her being a war hero. The Council never said as much, but from the way they look at her with contempt, it was obvious what they thought about her. She was nothing more than a woman, who should be doing house chores and siring children; not fighting a war that was none of her business.

Aang saw how they were acting towards his girlfriend and he wanted so badly to give it to these stuffy old men that nothing would change his feelings for her. Aang knew how remarkable Katara was, and he had tried to apologize for the behavior of the council, but Katara had said that she didn't mind. But Aang knew her long enough to know that it was bothering her.

It had been another long day, it was night now, and the young lovers wanted to spend some time together. The separation had left them feeling numb, unsure. It was like they couldn't feel anything without the other person there beside them. Katara was sitting on her bed, the green silk bringing little comfort to the numb Waterbender. She was gazing out the window, looking at the city but not seeing it. Then a knock sounded on the door and she jumped, coming out of her daze to answer it. When she opened the door, she was surprised to see Aang standing there. For a moment she felt a surge of happiness; but then she looked at him closely and her heart dropped. He looked terrible. There were bags under his eyes, his skin was paler than usual, and he looked like he has lost some weight. But what really struck out were his eyes. They were dark gray with fury; it seemed like storm clouds were raging over a gray ocean.

He asked, "Can I come in?" His voice sounded strained, like he was holding the weight of the sky. Katara, very worried, opened the door a little wider and gestured him in, closing the door softly behind him as he sat down heavily on the bed, placing his head in his hands. She sat down next to him and started massaging his back with her hand. He was tense, like he was waiting for battle. Katara wondered what had

happened. Earlier she had felt a tremor shake the palace. At first she wasn't what it was; she had been in her own little world. Now she wondered.

She softly asked, "What happened, Aang? Did the Council get to you?"

Aang sighed deeply, head still in his hands and muscles tensed. He wasn't sure what to say to her. What had happened with the Council was not something he wanted to remember; but the conversation stuck in his mind like a pentapus. How was he going to explain it to her? She might feel awkward and uncomfortable. And he might lose her. That thought nearly did him in. Katara didn't push him, and for that he was grateful. If he wanted to talk, she would wait patiently.

They stayed there until Aang took a deep breath and finally lifted his head. Instead of anger, there was a deep sadness there, like soul deep. Whatever had happened it could not have been good. Then he began. "It was something that made me lose control. What they said to me, what they said about you, and what they had suggested, I was ready to blow the place sky high." The anger came back. "I wanted to Bend them somewhere where they would understand how life works. They can't just declare what they want without someone going against them." Feeling agitated, he stood up and started pacing like a caged animal. That was exactly how he felt. He could go only so far; his calm demeanor was gone for now. He felt numb though, too, like his mind couldn't process what had been said.

Katara sat on the bed watching him. She wanted to know what had happened. Almost afraid of his answer, she asked, "What did they say?"

Aang looked at her, rage boiling in his blood. Despite knowing that this anger wasn't directed at her, Katara flinched. Aang softened and sat down again, taking her hand in his. He can feel her pulse against his. It was oddly reassuring. Then he took a breath and said, "They told me to break up with you." The numb feeling came back, a creeping coldness overtaking him. "They told me it would be better off if I was with someone else, a noblewoman. They also said that..." He swallowed hard, and Katara knew where this was going and felt numb again. "They wanted me to...to...to impregnate other women." He buried his head again and groaned into his hands. That was when the tears came. He couldn't help it. He was to a breaking point, and it finally broke. Now he would lose her forever because of what the Council had demanded.

But she wasn't going anywhere because she knew why they would suggest something like this. The fate of the Air Nomads. After Aang, the life of the Airbenders would end. The Avatar Cycle would be over. There would be no one to protect the people of the world in the future after Aang passes on into the Spirit World.

Aang was surprised when he felt Katara wrap her arms around him to hug him. He instinctively hugged her back and cried onto her shoulder. She rubbed his back, feeling the salty tears through the fabric of her kimono.

She waited until his tears had slowed and stopped before she spoke. "I can understand why they would suggest that. You're the last hope of the Air Nomads, Aang." She felt sadness creep into her heart. But she continued on. "I would understand if you went with what they said." She swallowed back a sob. "You have to keep your people alive, Aang. No matter what you choose, I'll stay by you. No matter what."

Aang was still. He wasn't sure, but it felt like his heart had stopped beating for a minute before he looked at her in disbelief. Was she actually agreeing with the men that had ridiculed her because she was female? He shook his head and said, "I'm not going with what they want me to do." Katara looked at him and he continued. "No one can replace you. They can't tell my heart how to feel if someone already has a hold on it." He caressed her cheek lightly. "I wouldn't want children with just some stranger. I know I'm young, barely fourteen. My birthday is two weeks away." It's Fall right now, season of Air. "But I couldn't spend it the way they want me to. I can't be with a noblewoman."

He grabbed her hand and brought it to his chest, letting her feel his heart beat beneath her fingers. Katara started crying. "Feel that?" he asked her. She nodded. "It beats for only one person," Aang said. He looked directly into her eyes. "And that person is sitting right in front of me."

Katara wasn't sure how to respond to that. Instead she buried her head in his robes and cried silently. Aang continued talking. "If you want to, not now but in the future, we could have kids together. One day I want to marry you. That's what I told the Council. I'm not breaking up with you and I'm not going to be with other women just to satisfy those old men. In their eyes, you're nothing but a female. But to me." He lifted her head and kissed her forehead. "You are the most amazing, kind, and strong person that I have ever known. And I love

you. No one can tell me otherwise. You mean everything to me; you're my entire world. I'm not giving you up."

Katara cried harder and hugged him tightly, never wanting to let this man go. He was her heart, her soul, the very air she breathed. She couldn't live without him and knew he couldn't live without her. His declaration made her feel tingly. He wanted to marry her; he wanted to have kids with her; he was never going to let her go. That made her feel happy, no; *euphoric* to know that she had someone like Aang on her side. She loved him with every fiber of her being.

She said, "I'm not sure what to say. I guess I could start with that you mean everything to me too. I can't live without you. My life was nothing but work until me and Sokka found you. You brought fun and adventure into a small tribe. You made us feel young again. You have a way with people that surprises me; it still does. It's like you can read them just by looking at their faces. You're smart and strong and caring. You would whatever it took to keep people safe, even if they were your enemies. Not a lot of people can do that. I'm so proud of you and I love you very much. And I would be honored to be your wife one day, and to have kids with you."

They were both blushing yet there was a huge smile on their faces. Aang looked like a great weight had been taken off his shoulders, making him seem younger again. They kissed softly and decided to sleep together after a long week of separation. They cuddled together and slept peacefully for the first time in a long time.

They left the city the next afternoon after Aang told them that he declined their demands. The Council became a little angry, but some of them had the look of fear in their eyes and none of them said anything when Aang glared at them. Katara had been there when Aang gave his announcement. She saw the Council's reaction, and decided, now that they were in the air, to broach the subject.

"What exactly happened yesterday before you left the room?" She was sitting on Appa's head next to the Airbender as they flew through the clouds. Aang looked a lot better today, his skin glowing peach and the bags under his eyes had dimmed, leaving very light shadows.

He rubbed the back of his neck and said, "It wasn't pretty. Did you feel the palace shake while we were there?" She nodded. "I lost my temper. I went into the Avatar State and Earthbended the whole

room." He raised his hand as she was about to interrupt. "I got a hold of it though. The room was very large. After that, I got out of it and told them the things I told you yesterday. Now they'll leave us alone about the ridiculous suggestions." He grinned. "They had quite a of a mess to clean up. I wasn't in the mood to help them."

Katara hugged him again and said, "One of these days that temper of yours is going to get you in a lot of trouble."

Aang chuckled and pulled her closer. "Maybe. But I would do anything to make sure that you and I are never apart." They flew in silence the rest of the to the Southern Air temple, making occasional stops along the way. Without one another, they were numb; but together, the world felt right.

A FUGITIVE, CHAPTER I: THE BAT

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Adventure Time Fanfiction

Cake and I were hanging around the Candy Kingdom, hanging around with Gumball. He was having some kind of winter ball, like he always did. A lot of Aaa's royalty was there, even Ice Queen came, she was the one who provided the snow. If she stepped out of line she had to leave, though, and she never dreamed of wanting to leave. This was her paradise, princes around her, even if she was ignored all night, they were all in one place. The only thing that could have made that night better for her was if her fictional characters from the land of Ooo were there. It was kind of sweet how much she admired her characters, but kind of creepy.

Cake had fixed the gown I had gone to one of Gumball's previous balls in, it was ripped by ice, but Cake was able to mend it. It was back to its' former glory. She was amazing at sewing, like Gumball was. He always makes new and improved tuxes for himself every year. They were pretty cool, and always pink. Always. Not that there was anything wrong with pink, it suited him. The only thing was I really wasn't one for formal occasions, I'd rather be off fighting monsters than having tea with a whole bunch of princes while in a ball gown, but it was what it was.

However, it turned out to be a nice night, I even go to dance with Gumball a few times, not that I could dance very well, I could science dance, but all he wanted to do is slow dance, given that's what most of the songs were for. I rarely saw Cake, she was somewhere with Lord Monochromicorn. I didn't want to bother her, it was one of those few nights she could be with him and not worry about the fate of princes or something. I felt the same way about being able to spend some time with Gumball. Usually I'm forced to see him because I'm always saving him, not that I minded, it was my job as a hero to save the inhabitants of Aaa, royalty especially.

When everyone had to leave Cake and I stayed a little while longer to help Gumball clean up, there wasn't much of a mess, royalty was fairly clean, with the exception of Lumpy Space Prince. It didn't take long to pick up garbage on the floor thanks to Cake's stretching abilities.

“Thanks for inviting us, Gumball, it was pretty fun,” I said, sitting on one of the chairs. Gumball smiles, bringing a chair to sit next to me.

“Any time, Fionna, your Aaa’s hero,” he said smiling. “Glad I could let you have a night off from adventuring and constantly saving people, to have a little fun.” I blush, I could tell my face was bright red, I had no idea why. I was always blushing and giggling when I was around Gumball, I was always acting like such a girl. Technically I was a girl, but I mean giggling and fan-girling. I can’t even have him smile at me without laughing nervously. I start rambling on about stupid things, once I was even talking about butts. Butts! I was so terrible at talking to guys, but Cake said I would get the hang of it. I seriously doubted it.

“Well, adventuring is my fun,” I said laughing. “Just going around Aaa doing hero work, you know? Just making people happy. Beating up villains and junk! It’s math!” Gumball laughs, and Cake joins us.

“It’s getting pretty late, Fi. Real dark,” she said. I knew she didn’t want to mention her fear of vampires in front of Gumball, he’d call it irrational, like I think it is, but I wanted to stay. I wanted to stay and hang out with Gumball some more, alone. Although, it was too dark out, and Cake’s irrational fear of vampires made it so we had to go back home. It made it so I had to walk her home. I never got why she was so afraid of vampires, we could fight them off easily. However, she never liked to stay out at night for too long without the proper equipment to fight of a vampire with. She almost always carried things like garlic and wooden steaks. The sun wasn’t exactly something we could carry with us, so I had to work with Cake’s fear.

“Don’t forget your purse,” said Gumball handing the small bag to me. I hated this thing, it was so girly, but Cake said it wasn’t proper to take my hero pack to a ball, and I guess she was right. I take it, and he kisses my cheek goodbye, wishing us a goodnight. I blush even more, I bet my face was redder than strawberries. Cake says goodbye waving, as we leave the quiet Candy Kingdom. The Kingdom never had any activity at night, the Candy people were quiet people. They usually liked to stay out of drama and mind their own business, it even got the Banana guards in some trouble a few times, but there are a few criminals among the Candy folk. The Pup Gang was just one of the crime groups in the Candy Kingdom. They were only teenagers now, but they got into some serious trouble sometimes, they’ve been put in jail once, but they couldn’t stay since they weren’t old enough. It was a shame. Those punks deserved it.

Cake and I walk out the pretzel gates, to the grass lands, it was cold.

Cake had to wrap around me like a sweater, I loved it when she did that. Her fur was so soft and warm against the cold mid-winter air. Especially at the tree house, it was right near the Ice Kingdom, so that didn't help us any. It was pretty nice in the other seasons, though. It almost never got unbearably hot, but it did get really cold sometimes. Although, Cake had made me enough sweaters to have me last the next hundred years. It was just heading to the ball we didn't think to wear sweaters; we didn't think we'd be out that late.

When we get home Cake stretches off me, and goes to fetch us some hot chocolate from a mix Gumball had given us. The small purse of mine is thrown on the floor and I sit on the couch, waiting for her to come back. It didn't take long for her to get the hot chocolate ready, and she came and sat on the couch with me.

"Thank glob we got home when we did," sighed Cake. "It was getting pretty late."

"Why the sudden fear of vampires anyways?" I asked.

"A reliable source told me that their friend's cousin was killed lately, man, that's scary!" said Cake worriedly. "What if it comes after me next? Or even you? Baby, vampires are dangerous!" I laugh, vampires are not dangerous if you got a wooden sword at hand, which we do. Either way, she seemed pretty spooked about the whole vampire thing.

"Well, I'm going to bed, okay?" I asked. I wasn't sure if she wanted me to stay up alone with her sudden fear of vampires over the past few days, she's been falling asleep first lately, so I didn't know how she'd react to being up alone at night.

"Yeah, we're home now," said Cake smiling. "We'll be fine, here." I laugh, taking my stupid little purse upstairs with me. I set it down on my bed, before taking the dress off and going into some red footie pajamas, it was too cold for anything else. They were soft, too, but not as close as Cake's fur, that's what the furs on my bed were for.

I heard some squealing from my bed, and spin around, trying to button the pajamas correctly. Had a rat gotten in the house? It sounded like something smaller, but I couldn't lay my finger on it. When I had finished buttoning my footie pajamas I carefully look around my bed, but I couldn't find anything. Everything seemed to be clear of life, the squeaking had almost gone away, but it came back once I thought I was done looking. Sadly, it took me a while to realize the squeaking

was coming from my purse. Had Science the rat gotten in my purse? Oh glob, I rat-napped Science! Maybe, I don't know what it was.

Slowly, I open the purse, and a small bat head comes out. How did a bat get in my purse? One thing was for sure, he or she was there, and it was pretty cute. He's just staring at me, what was I going to do? With Cake's sudden fear of vampires she'll flip if she realizes there's a bat in the house! I pick it up, and try to get it to fly away, but it looked injured, and it would leave my hand, the thing clung to it as if its life depended on it. This bat was actually starting to grow on me. I smile, and pet its' head softly, and if I wasn't mistaken I saw a small smile form on its' face. He squeals, what I think was happily, hugging my hand tighter.

"Shh, you need to be quiet," I whispered, putting a finger to my mouth. The bat seemed to understand, and didn't make a sound. I was tired, but I didn't know what to do with this little guy. Cake would come up soon no doubt, and if she saw me with this bat she'd kill it, the poor thing was hurt enough. I was pretty sure it had something to do with its' right wing, the bat wouldn't move it at all. I go into our bathroom, grabbing some medical wrap. Oddly, the bat doesn't object when I wrap the wing up, and seemed to understand the wrap's use. I was going crazy now, it was a bat, it couldn't have understood.

I go back into the bedroom, where was I going to hide this thing? I couldn't just open a window and have him fly out, he couldn't fly, or he probably would have flown out of my purse as soon as I opened it. With no other option I bring the bat into bed with me, keeping it close and hidden under my covers so Cake didn't see him when she came back.

The small animal nuzzled in the blankets nicely, closing its eyes. He was so cute, maybe Cake would let me keep him. We kept a lot of stray animals in the tree house, mostly because of Beemo wanting some friends while Cake and I were away on adventures, but she wouldn't mind a bat, right? This thing seemed to be well behaved. He hadn't seemed to want to bite me once, he looked well groomed, too. Maybe he was someone's pet, but the only person I could think of who would have a pet bat was Lumpy Space Prince, and the thing wandered into my purse. So, animal abuse I think. Either way, this thing was adorable in every way.

Good thing I hid the bat, because Cake came up soon, saying she was tired as well. She made sure there was a candle lit by her bed, probably the vampire thing. What if the bat woke up while I was sleeping and

got to Cake? No, I wasn't going to let that happen! Besides, he was hurt, so there wasn't like there was any way he could fly over to Cake anyways. Good thinking, Fionna.

"So, Fi, Gumball kissed you huh?" asked Cake excitedly. She was getting gossipy again, she always got gossipy when it got to Aaa's relationships, me especially. Everyone was. "What was it like? Did you like it? Do you think he likes you? Like likes you?"

"What? I don't know, I don't know any of the answers to those questions," I said nervously. "Sure, he kissed me, but he does that a lot, he's always kissing me on the cheek goodbye, Cake. You know this. It's nothing new."

"Baby, he likes you! Open those eyes of yours!" laughed Cake. It had always been Cake who tried to pair me up with Gumball. She's always been dropping hints to Gumball about how he should ask me out. It's been the same way since I was thirteen. It was sweet at first, her trying to help me have a relationship with Gumball, but now it was just annoying. It seemed every time Cake was around Gumball she was trying to set me up with him, in her own twisted way that is. Not that I didn't appreciate it, she was trying for me.

"I don't know Cake, but he sees me as his guy friend," I laughed. "He's turned me down so many times in the past. So why would he have a sudden change in interest? I don't know anything about these things, Cake! You know I'm not good with boys! I've never been good with boys unless they're monsters looking for a good fight." This makes Cake laugh, she knows it's true, sadly. She knew it better than I did, actually. Either way, I was terrible at talking to guys.

"Baby, he doesn't see you as his guy friend," laughed Cake. "We'll talk about this in the morning." She spins over, giving me the sign to shut up so she could sleep. When it came down to it Cake was very serious about her sleep. Sometimes I think she slept a little too much, but she was a cat and I was a human, so our needs for sleep were supposed to be different, according to Gumball that is.

Tiredly and carefully, I look to the small bat that had nuzzled itself on top of me and in my arms, sleeping peacefully. I couldn't hide this bat forever, I knew that. She was going to find out eventually. I have never been able to hide anything from Cake for long. She could read me like a book, an open book. But, so could a lot of people, so it wouldn't a very hard thing to do with me. So what was I going to do with the bat when I, or it, woke up? I have gotten pretty far in life by winging it, but

was that such a good idea to do with something as fragile as this little guy's life on the line? My tired body said yes, I'd think of something in the morning.

Although, when I woke up, strangest thing, there wasn't a small bat on me anymore, there was a living, breathing person laying across me. Shit, I had let a vampire into the house.

A TRICKSTER'S OLD FRIEND

Amber Watkins

For more of my works visit me on Fanfiction.net or on Deviant art both under Drade666

For comments please email me at Shadowraider666@yahoo.ca please be kind! Thanks

Over the past couple of months Drade and the Winchester boys had begun hunting more and more together none of them new why it just started happening. Before too long Drade found her self liking the two dumb asses more then ever like to younger brothers she had to constantly keep an eye on plus with the whole hell rising issue she figured that it effected her as much as it did them so why not. Everything was going fine until Dean made a deal for Sam's soul behind Drade's back after she warned him not too, that she would be able to help soon enough but Dean still did it anyway pissing Drade off to no end plus now he was dying. During a hunt the boys picked up Drade agreed to meet them in a small town where a man had vanished into thin air supposedly after visiting the local Mystery spot.

Drade pulled up to the run down little motel where Dean and Sam were staying on her sporty little pocket motorcycle in flaming orange red. Drade put a foot down on one side while she pulled her helmet off, her red hair flowing down her back like a river of blood. Suddenly something caught her attention about the little town, something she at first couldn't place but after a few moments analyzing it she realized it was the air of the town it was charged with a very familiar energy. Soon after the boys came out of the hotel Drade was still perched atop her bike as they walked over to greet her.

"WOW! Is this really yours?" Sam asked enthusiastically he'd always been one for the more modern day vehicles not the old muscle cars like his father and Dean.

"Yes isn't she gorgeous?" Drade flaunted placing the black helmet with silver lining under her arm while she caressed the gas tank with her other hand.

"Absolutely!" Sam said running his eyes all over the machine while efficiently drooling

Drade gave a chortle while Dean rolled his eyes not getting what the big deal was. After a brief talk Drade told the boys she had something to take care of before this hunt got started but promised she'd return as soon as possible to assist them with that she took off seeking the source of that energy she was feeling. The search took her to the other side of the town (about 20 minutes away) to a very elegant looking hotel and all Drade could think about was "Of course he'd pick here".

She knocked on the door to an apartment labelled #122 without even asking the front desk if who she was looking for was even there the energies around the room spoke for them selves. Sure enough after Drade knocked her favourite little trickster answered the door promptly with a huge smile swiftly spreading from his lips.

"Drade! It's so good to see you" Gabe greeted grabbing her extended hand shaking it then pulling her into a hug with a slap on the back. Something you wouldn't expect from a man hugging a woman but would rather expect to see with two guys greeting each other.

"It's good to see you too" Drade assured him breaking the greeting first

"You know you really shouldn't be here. If the Winchesters find out..." Drade trailed off

"Ah those mutton heads will never know and actually I could use your help" Gabe said raising an eyebrow with that mischievous glint in his eyes that usually back when Drade new him got people saran rapped into their cots over night.

"Oh no now what?" Drade asked with a giggle and a smile as she eyed Gabe with a knowing look.

Gabe offered Drade into the apartment so he could tell her about his grand scheme for the brothers.

"Look I know all about Dean's little deal and how his little brother is in complete denial over it all it's time he learnt to let go" Gabe explained

"Agreed plus I'm still pissed at Dean so a little revenge will simply be the icing on the cake" Drade agreed sitting in a plush armchair Gabe had obviously dreamt up.

“He should have let you do your job! Cause now you can’t do anything!” Gabe said in an angry, frustrated voice as he furrowed his brow.

“Yeah well you can’t train stupid out of some people” Drade pointed out obviously not as worried about it as Gabe seemed to be

Soon enough Gabe was explaining his plan to Drade then even sooner they were both executing it. Dean was to die over and over again until Sam was able to put 2 and 2 together about just letting his brother go of course Dean and Sam still had no idea that Drade new the trickster or that she would rather help him then them but for her it was more a fact of revenge against Dean for ignoring her warnings to simply wait. One Tuesday after another went by as Dean died while Sam racked his brain trying to figure it out, Drade would sit as a very attractive business women waiting for the bus and Gabe posed as an older business man eating pancakes in the diner where Dean and Sam always ended up at.

Gabe however got so caught up in his little game that one day he made a fatal error. All of the other Tuesday’s Gabe made sure to order maple syrup for his pancakes but his sweet tooth got the better of him forcing him to order strawberry something Sam noticed immediately. Gabe left the diner like usual walking past Drade as a signal to prepare for the next death but this day as he over heard Sam in the diner noticing his mistake he stopped in front of her.

“DAMN” Gabe cursed as he suddenly clicked his fingers before the satisfying death could occur.

Only now Sam was all too suspicious of the man in the grey suit eating pancakes. The next morning Sam watched, waiting for the man to up and leave as he always did having finally put 2 and 2 together as to what was happening. When Gabe got up Sam followed closely with a brown paper bag under his arm while Dean followed Sam very confused having not remembered anything from the previous Tuesdays. Drade could sense something was up when Gabe didn’t come past her this time but instead ducked into an ally with the brothers hot on his heels she got up and followed suit.

“Alright that’s enough!” Sam snarled at the man in the grey suit having finally caught up to him pressing the stake into his neck. Gabe didn’t want to give in right away so he played it a little further.

“What? What do you want?” He asked in a frightened voice that was not his own

“Stop playing around I know who you are! Or should I say what” Sam said pressing the stake harder into the man’s throat

“Okay! Okay look I don’t have anything! Please” Gabe played

“Sam! I think we should just talk about this” Dean told Sam a little sceptical as to what his brother was thinking

“NO! Bending time, sticking people in time loops you’d have to be a god...no you’d have to be a trickster!” Sam concluded finally as Dean suddenly also had an epiphany looking at the man with new hate.

“Look pal whatever! I’ve got a wife and two kids at home!” Gabe played again

“Don’t lie I know what you are! We’ve killed one of your kind before!” Sam spat in frustration when suddenly the figure before him transformed in to Gabe his real look.

“Actually bucko! You didn’t” Gabe said smiling coyly

“Why are you doing this?” Sam questioned with anger and surprise in his voice

“Your joking right? You two tried to kill me last time so why not do this” Gabe pointed out

“So this is fun for you killing Dean over and over again?” Sam questioned again

“First off Yes it is fun and second this is so not about killing Dean” Gabe said smugly practically singing the words out

“What?” Sam asked confused

“This joke is on YOU!” Gabe told Sam pointing his head in Sam’s direction who simply gave him a further confused look.

“Dean is going to die and you can’t stop it EVER!” Gabe pointed out

“Not necessarily I kill you now and this all ends,” Sam corrected as he pressed even harder with the stake to Gabe’s throat

“WHAO, whoa, okay, OKAY! You can’t take a joke fine your out of it,

you'll go home wake up and it'll be Wednesday. I swear" Gabe assured looking into Sam's eyes though told him it wasn't going to happen

"Nah easier to just kill you now" Sam declared as he prepared to shove the stake into Gabe's throat that is until a familiar female voice rose from behind them

"Well, Well Gabe way to get your self caught, idiot!" Drade scoffed still in her disguise from earlier.

"Hey who said I was the one who messed it up?" Gabe protested in a huff

"Because I know that I played my part perfectly," Drade pointed out moving closer to the boys now

"WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? Another trickster!" Sam shouted spinning around still holding onto Gabe firmly

"What you don't recognize me boys? Oh right one moment" Then with a flick of her fingers and a burst of purple energy that seemed to coil up Drade from her feet to her head before bursting she was back to her normal look.

"That better?" Drade asked coyly

"DRADE!" both brothers shouted in shock

"Yep now would you kindly unhand my friend?" Drade inquired looking at Gabe

"What this SOB is your friend! Why didn't you tell us you knew the trickster?" Sam demanded still pressing the stake firmly to Gabe's throat

"Because I didn't want you to know, me and Gabe go way back though before he was a trickster so if you don't mind..." Drade trailed off hoping Sam would get the clue

"No! Not until we have the whole story and why'd you call him Gabe?" Dean finally spoke up after remaining silent for pretty much the whole thing

"Huh, look I served in the wars okay...you know WW1 and 2 Gabe here served along side me until I went MIA at the very end of WW2.

That's why when you were at that collage I knew it was a trickster cause that's what Gabe always said he'd do after the wars. I hadn't seen him since our time spent in the war until that week. Oh and cause that's his name" Drade finally explained as Gabe suddenly shot her a disapproving look as if to say don't tell them. Drade gave a look back that simply said relax I won't say anymore then necessary something she was very good at.

"And you didn't think to let us know because?" Dean pushed further

"Because if you remember we weren't exactly on the best of terms back then plus I'm pretty private about my life so simply blurting out everything about it tends to defeat that purpose" Drade stated starting to sound a little annoyed at the innate prodding

"Still you sided with HIM!" Sam spat angrily

"Yes because he's been my friend longer then you boys have even been alive!" Drade finally snapped standing only a few inches from Sam's face

"So you weren't kidding when you said you served with him?" Dean asked

"No I wasn't" Drade answered rolling her eyes as she backed off a little from Sam

"How old are you?" Dean finally asked after looking a little baffled for a while

"Very" Was all Drade said still staring intently at Sam ready to move if he did

"Okay as fascinating and enlightening as all this has been I'm afraid I can't let you kill me Sam" Gabe said then just as Sam turned to look at the trickster he was awake in the hotel room on a Wednesday.

"Are you alright?" Drade asked as Gabe now stood next to her on the roof of the hotel wearing his usual garb

"Of course you think those kids could put a scratch on me" Gabe scoffed watching as Dean came out to pack the impala

"They sure did come close" Drade pointed out

“Nah! I only let them get that close” Gabe insisted as the second scene played out at their feet. Dean had been shot by a mugger dying in the parking lot suddenly Sam appears clutching him in his arms expecting to wake up any minute back in the hotel but he doesn’t.

“Is this really necessary?” Drade asks finally watching Sam as he tries to come to grips with what’s just happened

“Sam needs to get it” Gabe insisted with a new more persistent look in his eyes now

“If you say so it’s just...” Drade cuts herself off knowing that Gabe won’t like what she’s about to say

“It’s just what?” Gabe insists

“I could swear you were trying to push the PLAN ahead when you swore you wanted nothing to do with it” Drade continued finally

“Of course not” Gabe said knowing exactly what she was talking about

“Whatever you go ahead and play your little game we’ll see where it goes,” Drade said walking away shortly followed by Gabe

Six months later Gabe has kept up his little rouse with Sam following it like a little puppy with a bone. Finally he decides to end the game having gotten bored of it that and he hadn’t seen Drade in months because of it. Sam has become a top hunter but also obsessed with hunting the trickster in particular when Bobby calls him up to meet him at the mystery spot. When confronted with the fact they’d have to drain a person dry of their blood for a ritual to summon the trickster Sam doesn’t hesitate to do it. Bobby protests completely before offering himself to the blade instead that’s when Sam realizes it’s not him. Sam stabs Bobby with a stake from his pocket hopping he hasn’t made a mistake until finally the body disappears with the stake being wrenched away by an invisible string right into the tricksters hand.

“Your right that’s not him I was just screwing with you” Gabe smugly said twirling the stake in his hand

“You know whom ever said Dean was the dysfunctional one has never seen you with a sharp object in your hands” Gabe spouted casually still twirling the stake around

“Please...bring him back” Sam suddenly pleaded

“What? Who? Dean” Gabe questioned as his face was confused Sam simply nodded

“Didn’t my girl send you the flowers? Dean’s dead and he’s not coming back,” Gabe said sternly

“Please...Just take us back to that Tuesday no Wednesday and I swear we won’t come after you” Sam pleaded desperately

“And what makes you think I can...” Gabe trailed

“You can!” Sam spat annoyed

“True but that doesn’t mean I should” Gabe pointed out then just as Sam was about to speak they both heard the soft click of heels along the fake hardwood of the mystery spot.

“My, My can’t you boys play nice for 3 minutes?” Questioned a very low sultry voice of familiarity

“Drade” Sam said softly almost relieved to see her like maybe she could talk some sense into the trickster

“Gabe! What did I tell you about playing with others?” Drade said mockingly to Gabe

“To share” Gabe played to Drade a smile across his face

“That and to be nice. So come on the jokes over bring him back,” Drade stated as she walked to Gabe’s side looking over at Sam.

“Well that is true but do you get the lesson I’ve tried to drill into that abnormally thick skull of yours?” Gabe asked pointing at Sam with the wooden stake

“What lesson?” Sam asked still focused on getting his brother back

“Your brother is dying and no matter what you do it can’t be stopped,” Gabe said flatly

“Maybe but I have to try” Sam said desperately turning to Drade looking for support

“Don’t look at me kiddo, I agree with Gabe on this one. Your brother

had a chance to avoid all of this mess with my offer but instead of being patient he got drunk and disobeyed my direct orders so sorry but I can't forgive that so easy." Drade stated plainly with a hand on her hip

"You see it's not just me, you have to just let him GO!" Gabe said slowly twirling the wooden stake again now pacing slowly back and forth. Sam's hands clenched into fists as he realized that neither Drade nor the trickster were going to help him.

"Sam if you really want to be mad at someone let it be your brother. I told him I could save your life when you were stabbed but that he would need to be patient until I returned, he didn't instead he went off and made a deal with a demon behind my back!" Drade practically spat the sentence at Sam finally making him realize just how stupid his brother had been.

"Well hot Damn I think he gets it" Drade said under her breath still staring at Sam

"Please then just give me what little time we have left...please," Sam begged again

"UGH! I swear it's like talking to a brick wall!" Gabe stated frustrated

"Gabe He gets it the best he ever will so send him back," Drade pointed out shifting to a new position her hand falling to her side now.

"Huh! Fine luckily this stopped being fun months ago take the hint or not I don't care. I'm over it!" Gabe's voice was softer now; lighter as Sam watched him snap his fingers then it was back to that Wednesday again.

POETRY

is published here thanks to
John Mahler's Quotes of the Day

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/john-mahler/john-mahlers-quotes-of-the-day/ebook/product-20105057.html>

Some people, at least, have enjoyed my Quotes of the Day, so here they are, for your amusement and bemusement: one entire year's worth of quotes. My quotes by the way; nobody else's. These are my thoughts and observations on the world around us: funny, sad, uplifting, evocative, inspiring, silly, and occasionally just plain stupid, they are all here for your perusal: enjoy!

MAN MADE THE MONEY

Kela Lewis-Morin
of kelathewriter@hotmail.co.uk

Man Made the Money.

We think that if we had more money everything would be different.
That we would suddenly be able do all the things we always desired.
Because the lives we lead right now have become predictable and
consistent.

And should we choose to, we could be the ones that are rejoiced and
admired.

We could be the ones on the front cover of every magazine.
We could be the ones appearing on everyone's television screen.
We could be the ones that the paparazzi haunt and terrorise.
We could be the ones that have our every move televised.
With the aid of money we could have unlimited vacations
And have access to an infinite amount of beneficial relations.
We could be the ones flocking and flaunting the finest fabrics
And every trivial experience we encounter will cause a global panic.
We could give back to charity and help to make the world a better
place
We could cosmetically alter our bodies and readjust the features on
our face.

We can become anyone we choose and crave.
With no need to struggle, hustle and save.
We could achieve true euphoria and pleasure.
And convince ourselves that we have changed from we once were.
But tell me is the accumulation of money is how we measure.
The difference between the lives we had, to the one we now prefer.

Does the money really change who we are?
Or does it allow us to reach our full potential?

It may help to obscure the slurs and the scars
And boost our social and financial credentials.

But the person we have become always existed.
It lay hidden beneath the stress and the woes.

The money only eased and assisted.

To our internal and external growth.

We are who are regardless of the paper.

The only difference is that,

The world now works in our favour.

DELAYED REALITY

David McKinstry
of davidm19@uw.edu

Your fantasy a reality
Is it anything like you dreamed?
Does my heart beat the same?
Or is it faster? Stronger?
Was it as peaceful as you thought?
Did you feel the warmth?
Are you comfortable being held?

Please do me this favor...
Look back...look back on that moment
When you were enveloped in fantasy
Could you feel it in your heart?
That feeling, deep down, that you knew
Knew it wasn't really fantasy
But reality that had yet to occur.

SMOKE

Andrew Chipchase
of andychip_1994@hotmail.com

Do you ever light a cigarette
just to watch the smoke dance and fade into the air?
Have the ash slowly turn and crumble away
like the memories that you once shared.
Just to watch it burn away;
the only thing in your hands?
Knowing that one small intake can make
you too weak to even stand,
and that once it gets to the end
your only option is to throw it away.
All I feel is sympathy for those
who go through this every day,
not realising the embers that burn
are the signs of hope, slowly fading,
burning, dying between your fingers.
She dreams of staying, I dream of escaping.

FURIOUS ANGER

Vajavoda
of <http://vajavoda.deviantart.com/>

Cover Letter goes here: something about the work, the writer, or whatever else the writer wants to talk about.

Once more I'm filled with hate
That bloody urge to kill
That thirst I must sate
If I want to be fulfilled

I warned you
Didn't I tell you that would happen
He broke through
And now I won't be held accountable for my actions

I'm going to break him
And make him scream
His fate will be grim
And death his dream

But I will not let it come
No I cannot do that
His fate will be undone
But I'll decide when his line goes flat

I am not nice
I told you in the beginning
When he touched you he rolled the dice
And I have found him guilty of sinning

He will stare into the eyes of the devil
And I will make him regret
For his death will be special
He must repay his blood debt.

ALSKLING

Solilska
of <http://solilska.deviantart.com/>

I was dressed entirely In black,
and you...In yourself,
Perfect...I never knew such a thing...
And there you was, staring right at me.

Your eyes always told me what you couldn't say,
That you were mine and wished you could stay,
Your lips taught me everything,
But how to live without you.

And every night I dream of you,
You approach me and say what you couldn't,
Your lips touch mine,
Making me yours.

And I wake up, dressed In darkness,
Think of you dressed in yourself,
A beauty so true,
Not one has compared to you.

Every night I dream of you,
I tell you what I couldn't,
I adore you,I want you to stay,
To be able to hold you and take you away.

And I wake up, dressed In darkness,
Think of you dressed In yourself,
A beauty so true,
Not one has compared to you.

And every night I dream of you,
Wake up In depression from the lack of you,
And wonder If I had said,what I never said,
That I wanted you too.
And maybe If I had said...what I never said...
Would there be beauty In my arms when I wake Instead?

RECESSION

Austin Malcolm
of jjeremy93@ymail.com

Austin Malcolm is a small-time poetical writer from the midwest United States of America. He began writing at the age of 13, and over the years has created over 200 different poems, though he believes his best works are his most recent. More of his works can be found on his account at <http://insubstantial.deviantart.com/>

Preach to me the words of a star-crossed story
sutured by a mistress
and drawn by a nomadic artist.
You are the canvas
and I shall paint.

I thought of you as a sickly shepherd shunned by his sheep.
And I noticed your clothes were not stitched of wool patterns,
yet your breath smelled of black coffee; your voice rough yet unheard.
You spoke intermittently, without warning or cause, as I smoked my
cigarette.
The words that slipped off your tongue, I had originally thought,
sounded arrogant and artificial, as if they were like a boat with no
anchor; you never settled on one subject. But who am I to proclaim
myself a critic.

Perhaps it was the choking of a seat-belt, putting their own motor-
lanes on my neck, or more likely I was too firmly spoken. Regardless, I
chose to listen. And you spoke.

The lackluster in your voice made me think of my father. He was a
harsh man. Nevertheless, his semblance in my life was dull, and
oppressive. Like a George Orwell novel, just without the infatuation of
power. An inexperienced biological root that was too naive to grow,
regardless of how much you watered it. But what you lacked in speech
you made up with in presence, unlike my father. You were more
gentle to the touch.

TIME TO GO TO BED

Emmett Facas
of sadistiskbastard@live.com

.i

ten minutes 'til 4:00 AM
blood is like a bucket full of delight
at this hour.

at first it is scarlet- no, not the dog;
color...bright, beautiful, delicious
it dries up and darkens.

.ii

dark greens stuck to the screen
like glue. lids fall, peepy...
i will pass out soon.

words make little sense
i'd like to dream-
flames, take me away.

.iii

three minutes- now two
the pace dies a little bit
i've lost inspiration.

i wait, i wait, i wait
as it brightens outside
one minute left.

ARTEMIS

Emma Rachael McCabe
of emmarachael94@hotmail.co.uk

Twin of my brethren youth,
This forest is thou own.
Sworn to the faces of the moon
And the silver, Divinity bestows.
Off the hunt, and above the hounds -
Life within the bow.
Fairest maiden of many calls,
This forest is thou own.
Archer of the gleaming dart,
My sister of the dualist two -
The nymphs have sworn their oath,
To the daughter who runs with wolves.
Favoured by Zeus and amongst all Gods,
Man played no part in this -
No part in the making of this maiden.
Thy fair Goddess, Artemis.

CAMP

Aaron Jay
of aaron.jay.w@hotmail.com

Barb wired in, like pigs to the slaughter.
One by one,
Group by socially awkward group,
Being lead down in a single file line.

Patchwork, to singlehandedly steal humanity:
The furnaces, to melt down the already dead.
“Ye all who enter, Abandon all hope.”
For hell is among us,
And even Satan cries.

The dogs rip the flesh of children,
Mangie remnants of life cling
To the piss and shit stained sheets.
Bones stick to flesh, pushing their way out
As the famished remain hungry,
Starved... Bare

Hypothermia dreams are welcomed with open arms.
Freezing gales graze doomed, decrepit skin,
The frost as numb as an injection.
The lucky ones fall right away,
As survival becomes impossible.