

Andromeda  
a novel  
by Joe Nobel

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## Second Movement

## Anna Released

1960. springtime (Three years later)

Three women sat at an outside table at the Cafe Gerbeaud, the famous confectionary in the heart of Budapest. It was unseasonably warm for this early in the spring. The opportunity to be in the sun was welcome after the dreary winter. They sat waiting for their coffees and delicately prepared pastries to arrive. They watched people pass through Vorosmarty Square. Young people strolled arm in arm, they too, happy to cast off their cold weather clothes. A government functionary, balding pate with a combover, scurried to whatever official dealing he had. Some passers by had time to dally and sit at the outdoor tables of the cafe for espresso and torta.

One man stood out in the square. He faced the cafe, planting his feet like a military man. He snapped a photograph of the building's ornate façade and the outdoor tables in front of it. He centered his camera directly on the three women.

"I do believe someone's taking pictures of us," Aida said.

Anna turned to him just as the man snapped another shot.

“Photographers give me a bad feeling,” Anna said, watching. Watching not only him, but for signs of her mysterious woman in black and her wizard-like companion. They hadn’t appeared since that day in June three years ago when her master first decided to let her out on her own. But in all this time she never let down her guard.

“Why?” Aida asked.

“They just do,” she said in an idle daydream-like voice. Yet she watched the man with the camera. Her sleepy eyes taking in more than she let on.

Two young boys, perhaps nine or ten, ran around the photographer with arms apart as if they were pigeons of the square.

“Hey mister, wanna’ take a picture of us?”

The man lined the two up in front of the fountain in the middle of the square and snapped an impatient shot. Then he turned and walked quickly away towards Vaci Road. Anna was relieved nothing earth shattering happened.

Two foreigners walked by, two businessmen. They spoke English as they passed. American English. No, neither of them was an unfocussed lookalike of her lover and mission handler. The only Americans now in Budapest were with the Embassy. Anna followed them with her eyes. Her body tensed. She almost sprang out of her chair.

“Don’t even dream of it,” Liudmila said, thinking Anna was contemplating escape. She never learned about the space/time anomaly Anna had experienced shortly after the last time someone snapped a photograph then spoke in English to her. Liudmila pointed with her chin to a man in a cheap suit leaning against the fountain in the middle of the square. “Uri trusts us,” Liudmila added. “But, he always sends someone to watch us.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not about to betray his trust. It took too long to earn it.” Anna said, snapping back to the present. “Still, don’t you girls miss having outside lives, careers, husbands, babies?”

Aida rolled her eyes and turned away from Anna. She pushed her chair away from the table and looked around. It seemed as if she couldn't decide to get up or not.

"Aida, what is it?" Anna asked.

"Stupid question you have," Aida mumbled.

"I see I struck a raw nerve somehow, I'm sorry. We don't have to talk about that."

"No, that's okay," Aida said, her voice was up an octave. She straightened out her dress and pushing her chair back in. "If I wasn't here, I'd be dead." Aida returned to her calm demeanor. "Uri found me in a sewer in Marseilles. I was strung out on heroin." She turned to see if the waitress was bringing their order yet. "I ran away from dear Mama and Papa after I had enough. For years, Papa groped me and made me rub myself against him until he," she hesitated, unable to speak frankly for the first time Anna had known her, "you know, finished. Then one day, he loaned me to my uncle, his brother, to pay off a debt. Uncle Hebert took me, wasting no time to get his thing inside of me — someplace Papa hadn't yet ventured. Hearing what he did, Papa became irate. He beat up Uncle Hebert so badly that they had to take him away in an ambulance. He didn't beat him up because of some tiny bit of love left for me. Oh no, it was because he had plans to auctioned me off as a virgin as soon as I got a little older. His plans were ruined, and from then on he didn't have any reason not to use me himself. Life became unbearable as he took me time after time when he was drunk. I couldn't turn to Mama; she just covered away and pretended nothing was happening. Before long, I ran away."

Aida fumbled with her napkin as she got ready to continue. She put on an exaggerated smile, but Anna knew she was on the verge of tears.

"Being the naive creature I was, I wound up in the arms of a pimp. And he used me like my father never did. From him and his brothel, there was no chance of escape. I'll gladly take whatever Uri thinks up for all three of us combined rather than go back to that life. At least Master does it with affection, and his pain is only of the erotic kind."

“I’m sorry,” Anna said. “I didn’t know. You don’t have to go on if it’s too painful.”

“I’ve never told anyone about this before, but I want to tell you now.” Aida cleared her throat and avoided eye contact as she spoke. “Uri was at the end of a mission. He was a Major back then. I guess he was in France as a spy, or maybe not. Anyway he completed his assignment early. He had a few days before he was expected back in Russia. So he stopped in at the brothel. I was presented to him when he asked for a young and skinny girl but he hadn’t expected someone as young as me. I was sixteen, but must have looked much younger with the costumes they made we wear. He took me up to the room but couldn’t fuck me. Believe it or not, that bum, Uri, he’s a man of honor. He asked me what I was doing there and if he could take me back to my parents.”

Aida wiped her eyes. She then continued her story with a detached, clinical tone. “I didn’t trust him, like I didn’t trust any man, so I ran out of the room. Uri burst out of after me and started looking for me up and down the halls of that cat house. But, I hid from him. It was an old house with many passages and easy to get him to run around in circles. He soon ran into my pimp. The pimp thought that I was acting up again, you know, refusing a client. When the pimp told him he’d beat me, Uri got even angrier and threw him down the stairs. Then he beat that guy up really bad for peddling children. When he asked for a young girl, Uri never thought he’d be getting an actual kid. He assumed he’d be presented with someone around eighteen or twenty.

“So after Uri stormed out, angry he couldn’t find me, the pimp beat me black and blue in return. Then he shot me full of heroin and kicked me out into the rain. He told me when I’m strung out I should beg him to take me back. What else could I do, I stumble around the alleys of the slums of Marseilles. I must have been too disgusting for even the winos. Or maybe they all lined up and had their way with me, I don’t remember.

“Sure enough, I find myself strung out, in need of a hit. So I found myself drawn back to the whorehouse. I had nowhere else to go. I suppose I could have gone anywhere and not have been worse

off, but that didn't occur to me. I felt small and alone and scared. And I had to get in from the cold and rain. I begged that pimp to take me back. I promised him anything. He opened the door and I thought he'd let me in, but I was going to be an object lesson for the other girls. He grabbed me, twisted me around, and kicked me off the steps. I rolled down, breaking an arm on the way and fell into the ditch beside the road .

“I don't know how long I lay there, but when I looked up I saw Uri standing over me. He shook his head in disgust. I don't know if he just happened by or if he was watching for me all along. He certainly couldn't have been attracted by my charm and beauty. I was a mess. I can't imagine any man reaching down into an open storm drain to pull me out. But he did, and by the time I realized that happened, I was in Moscow.”

“That's when I first saw you,” Liudmila said. “You were a bitch.”

“I was angry,” Aida said with her voice rising. “How dare he take me!” She slammed her fist on the table. “I didn't think of the part where he cleaned me up, fed me, and got me to a doctor. All I could think of was what right he had to take away my freedom. Freedom, ha! I only thought I had freedom. I was just mad at him for taking me to a strange country where I couldn't even speak the language. And how dare he bring me into his house when he already had a girl. Yeah, Liudmila was already his slave. I was to be his second.

“Then came his training of me. And I must say, as I watched him work with you, Anna, he's gotten much better at using psychology. With me, it was mostly the cat-o-nine and the whip, training me like he would an animal. I resisted for over a year, the whip he got me to go through the motions of serving him pretty quick.

“Whenever he made me do household chores, he stood over me with a flogger ready to smack me if I messed up or got insolent. That's the way I got trained. It's not to say I was locked away. He told me many times I could leave if I wanted to. That I could go back to my old life any time, he'd even

arrange transportation to Marseille. In fact, he used it as a threat. It was really a love-hate thing I had with him. I was angry, yeah, but I knew there was nothing better in store for me. Look, he even sent me to finish school. But it was Liudmila who finally tamed me.”

“I thought I’d better do it,” Liudmila said. “Master’s whip was wearing thin and I wasn’t getting too much of his attention because of his new French bitch. So I thought I’d charm her into obedience since the whip wasn’t working on her.”

“Actually it was just starting to work, but your ‘charm’, as you call it, cemented the whole thing,” Aida said. She rubbed Liudmila’s thigh.

“You must have missed Uri’s attention,” Anna said to Liudmila.

“He still had time for me, you know how potent he is,” Liudmila said. “But I had to be patient while Master had his fun with the new girl. We discussed it when I moved it, that he’d like to keep more than one girl.”

Liudmila took a deep breath ready to explain it all when their order arrived. Short strong espresso coffees, served black, with cubes of sugar on the side. Dobos torta, enticingly delicate cake made up of twenty or more thin layers of pastry, cream, glazing, jam, repeated over and over, ending in a glaze of hardened honey. Somlói galuska, a pastry swimming in pudding, drizzled with dark chocolate sauce. Cream filled crepes, set ablaze with cognac. And finally, sparkling mineral water to wash it all down. Along with their order, they bought a box of handmade bonbons filled with cherries in cognac to take home with them.

“You were about to say something,” Anna said to Liudmila when their waiter left.

“I was his before it all began,” Liudmila replied, staring off into the distance.

“Wait a minute, are you going to tell the whole story? Because even I haven’t heard it.” Aida said.

The delicacies sat untouched as all eyes focused on Liudmila.

“I ... I’m not really his slave.”



“Well you sure get spanked like one!” Aida laughed.

“Shhhh,” Anna said. “Let her continue. What do you mean, Liudmila?”

“I walked into this willingly,” Liudmila said. “Uri was married at one time. His bride was long dead by the time I met him. They both fought in the Great Patriotic War. Back then, he was a young army lieutenant. She was a pilot, a fighter pilot. He survived the German thrust. She was shot down by a Luftwaffe pilot who had a better fighter than her wood framed plane. All I know about her is her name, Julia. I have a photograph of the two of them: I rescued it after Uri had thrown in the rubbish. Don’t ever tell Master I found out about her. And, don’t ever mention her name. To this day, his heart is still scarred.

“When I met him in 1949, he was an angry, bitter man. I lived in Leningrad. That’s where he was stationed at the time. I met him at a wedding. A fellow officer, his good friend, was marrying my cousin. I really didn’t want to go. I went because my uncle made me. I lost my parents in the war.

“Anyway, I was bored at the reception. I went out behind the hall and walked among the wild flowers growing between the rusting abandoned farm machinery. Uri was there, too. He went out for some air. We started talking. He was fun to talk to. He came down to my level and we had a silly conversation that a school girl could enjoy. He enjoyed it too. I could tell he hadn’t smiled in years.

“I was a wild girl back then, yes, even wilder than now. I came on to him. I offered to go home with him. I thought that he, being a powerful officer in the Soviet army, would surly have a wife and children, so he would politely refuse my offer. Or, on the very outside he’d take me in the back seat of his car. But, he accepted the offer, and I found myself going home to his apartment. But, I still didn’t know what he expected of me. You see, I’d never actually done it before. I only acted like I’d been doing it for years. I think I convinced him, too. You see, I was just as tall back then as now. And I dressed like a sophisticated woman from the city. Anyway, I found myself in an interesting situation, someone finally called my bluff.”

“You sneak!” Anna said.

“So, we went back at his apartment. We had a toast of vodka. He asks me if I like to play with floggers. I didn’t know what a flogger was. So I said ‘Of course, doesn’t everyone?’ Imagine my surprise when he had me lie on the bed with my butt propped up under a pillow. I didn’t know it was going to hurt like that when the many leather tails found their mark on my bottom. I took it in stride thinking that everyone does this sort of thing. I found I actually enjoyed it when he got into the rhythm. I even told him not to stop. That night, we ended up not even having sex or anything like that, he just did all those crazy unspeakable things we all know and love him for.

“I moved in with him quickly — within the month, that is. My uncle didn’t mind. He just got rid of a daughter through marriage and now had the chance to get rid of niece, too. I became Uri Konstantine’s perfect little submissive. His only requirement was that my submission be total. I agreed, how could I not? The first time he called me his slave, I melted. In that way, like you, I am his slave. But, unlike the rest of you, I’m here because I want to be.

“Before he let me move in, he made it clear that he would want more than one woman to fill his needs, a threesome. I pouted, but secretly I was intrigued. Upon seeing my pout, he flogged me really hard. If he would put this much energy into it, I couldn’t wait for him to find that extra partner for us. But I had to wait almost two years for that, until one day when he came home from France with Aida. That’s when I knew this had stopped being a game and had turned into something very real. By then I was too wrapped up in the whole submissive thing to tell the difference between the game and reality. Besides, I was excited.”

“So you’re happy here?” Anna asked. “Don’t you want all those things that other women have?”

“Like what? Do you mean a husband, babies, an apartment, a job?” Liudmila repeated Anna’s list. “I would have ended up working in a factory. My husband would have been a drunken lout. I’ve seen what happened to the girls I grew up with. I watched them come and go from their decrepit apartment

buildings; each of them soon had a screaming baby in her arms. No thanks. This life is better than anything I could have imagined. In fact it's ideal."

"I love Uri too," Anna said, "and I've never experienced passion like I have over these last years with him, and all of you. But sometimes, I think of what my life would have been like if he didn't take me. I'd have a job, perhaps a husband with a house in the suburbs, and children. I'm sure I'd have a child by now."

"Go ahead and run," Liudmila said. "Go to the washroom. Leave through the kitchen. I know there's only one spy watching us. The British Consulate is just around the corner. You can probably dodge the guards and get in. Or you can find your way to the American Embassy, that's not too far off, either."

Anna sat there. At one time, she had all the intentions of escaping — someday. But today, she couldn't move. Yet, she had been dared to run. She found herself turning down the dare.

"I've grown to like it here. I love him. And, I love all of you. I think I'll stay."

"That's settled, let's eat," Aida said. "We have until three to do our shopping. We'll have to be at home by four to start dinner. You know we'll lose these hard-earned outdoor privileges if his meal is late."

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"You didn't bring me back cake?" Uri Konstantine asked that night when Liudmila told him where they'd gone.

"Oops, I forgot," was her cheeky response.

"I think that you, among all, should have known how much I like cake," he said.

Liudmila just giggled and shrugged, then turned her back on him and sashayed off.

Anna knew that Master Uri was going to give Liudmila a solid flogging for that. It could have been any of them, but it was Liudmila who provoked him first. She'd just preempted Anna's schedule

of who would get Master's attention that night. It was supposed to have been Anna's turn. She had been looking forward to the gentle give and take with him, as she would confess that she'd been very bad and how she deserved a naughty spanking. But now she'd have to wait another night, and she'd have to re-do their schedule.

"I could just kill her right now," she grumbled as she watched Liudmila disappear around the corner into the bathroom.

It was all a game, of course. The house ran like clockwork under her governance. All three were usually the perfectly obedient little slave girls who anticipated their Master's needs at all times. He could only punish them for contrived and trivial infractions, such as forgetting to bring him a slice of cake from the Gerbeaud.

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That spring marked the height of their sexual odyssey. But, as with achieving any peak, there could only be a fall, no matter what direction they took. There were only so many devious toys at their disposal. Only so many ways their Master could inflict his deliciously clever tortures. Only so many combinations of bodies on his bed. Only so many permutations of arms and legs. Somewhere along the way, life had turned from being an exploration of the dark side of the erotic into a tired and staid routine. Only so many ways to express total submission.

The girls' exploits had degenerated to seeing what they could get Uri to do with them. From then on, he stopped being their master and became their puppet, as they learned the subtle art of pulling his strings. But that too became stale, for Uri Konstantine was not suited for the life of a puppet. They each tried, in their own way, to put the edge back into their lives. They'd constantly make mistakes just to provoke his ire. They became forward and sassy with him. They dared his wrath and competed to see which of them could get him to provide the severest of canings. They even made it a contest to see who could take the most without flinching.

Liudmila went so far as to slap her Master after receiving a caning of fifty lashes when she accidentally on purpose spilled his drink over his papers. For the slap, he gave her another fifty lashes on the spot. She didn't move or betray any emotion as she received her punishment. As soon as the second set was over, she stood, looked Anna in the eye, daring her to top that, then staggered wordlessly off to lock herself in the bathroom for the afternoon.

Anna's musings often returned to that sunny spring day at the Gerbeaud. She'd thought since then about returning to her career, finding a sane circle of friends and maybe even a gentle lover; about finding more to life than being a sex slave. She realized she'd set a goal for herself, that is, to become Uri Konstantine's perfect submissive. Now that she'd achieved that, she was ready to see what life had in store for her next.

Neither Anna nor the other girls knew what had gone wrong. They woke up one morning to find they were miserable. In fact, they hated each other. They hated sex. And most of all, they hated their Master.

General Uri Konstantine couldn't understand what had gone wrong, either. He saw his slaves constantly bickering with each other and just going through the motions of serving him. Gone were the days when they gave themselves to him, heart and soul. He tried fixing the problem by giving them severe whippings. This technique had worked well years ago when he first acquired each of them. But now, it was having the opposite effect — driving them away from him all the more.

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June 10th, 1960

"Hey, we've got to talk," Anna said. Uri had just left for the day. Last night had been another orgy in which he called all three of his girls to his bed. Anna was sure he did it just to prove he was still more virile than all three of them together. Now, they sat at the kitchen table, relieved he was gone.

"Okay, so talk," Liudmila said.

“This isn’t what I stayed for. Who wants to end this and get out with me?” Anna asked.

“What are you talking about? Escape?” Liudmila asked.

Anna looked each of them in the eye. “If there is going to be an escape, it’ll have to be all of us or none. I don’t want anyone left behind to answer to his wrath.”

“How will we slip away?” Liudmila asked. “There’s always someone following us. We won’t get far.”

“And assuming we do get away,” Aida added, “where would we go? There’s no place in this country we can hide without eventually being caught. Remember, everyone has to carry their internal passports — something we don’t have.”

“You’re right,” Anna said. “If we’re going to find a way out, it’ll have to be a total break, out of the country. Back to America.”

“That’s fine for you,” Liudmila said. “But if we follow you, what could we do? Where would we live? We don’t exactly have job skills. The only thing I’m good at is,” she paused, “well, I don’t want to become a prostitute.”

“I’m not saying we do anything, not right now,” Anna said, “just that we think about it. I’m not even sure how we could get out of Hungary if we do get away from Uri. But, if we do, I won’t abandon any of you, we’ll stick together once we get away.”

“I don’t have to think about anything,” Liudmila said, “if we come up with a good plan, I’m in.”

“Me, too,” Aida added.

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June 12th

“Anna, did you come up with a plan?”

“No, Aida, not yet.”

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June 15th

“Anna, I was thinking, we could steal his staff car and drive to the border —”

“Liudmila, you know his driver drives the car away when he drops Master off. It never stays here. Assuming we do it, and manage to make it to the Austrian border before Uri notices, how do we cross without documents?”

“Sorry.”

“That’s okay, keep thinking.”

“Have you come up with anything, yourself?”

“No, I’ve been too busy cleaning the house this week.”

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June 21st, Summer Solstice

“What’cha readin’?” Anna stood in the doorway. Liudmila sat on her bed. She quickly slammed her book, got up, and sat on it.

“Nothing,” Liudmila said. “It’s just an old book.”

“Let me see.” Anna’s curiosity had gotten the better of her. Liudmila’s guiltier-than-sin motions were too much to resist. Anna pushed Liudmila back. She tumbled back onto the bed. Anna had no trouble lifting the twig-skinny girl off the book.

“It’s just an old Russian book.” Liudmila looked like the young girl whose mother just discovered a stash of pornography. “You can’t read it. It’s in an old style. Here, let me get you a newer book. I’ll read to you from that, okay?”

“No, this book is fine.” Anna leafed through the pages. “I can read it well enough. The Russian lessons are finally paying off. Hey! This is that old book of yours on witchcraft!”

“No, it’s not! You misunderstand the words.”

“I do not. I know what I’m reading.” Anna began leafing faster and faster. “Here it talks about the sabbats ... this page talks about summoning the elementals ... here are some spells ... a love spell, you’ve got a flower as a bookmark.”

“I used it on Uri many years ago,” Liudmila said with a huff.

“And?”

“It worked too well.” Liudmila told her. “Then I used it on Aida.”

“I hope you didn’t use it on me,” Anna mused.

“I tried,” Liudmila looked at her. “It didn’t work. You were madly in love with Uri the day he took you.”

“I was not!”

“Hfff!” Liudmila reached for the book. “Now you’ve seen it, give it back.”

“No way!” Anna turned away from her. “Hey, what’s at this bookmark?”

“No! Give!” Liudmila tried to grab for it again. “Never mind what’s on that page. I wasn’t going to try it.”

“Calling a god?” Anna looked up at her. “Who is Perun?”

“He’s the chief of the gods.” Liudmila sat down again, frustrated. “The god of thunder and lightning, and of war. And you don’t call a god, you summon him. Besides, I told you, I was just reading. You know, today is summer solstice.”

“I know. Pity we don’t have any virgins around here.” Then Anna saw the sheet of writing paper on the night stand. She grabbed for it, but Liudmila was quicker. “What’s on that?” Anna jumped on Liudmila, straddled her on the chest, and tried to snatch the sheet. Liudmila fought to keep hold of her notes.

“Never mind what that is.” Liudmila struggled against her, but Anna quickly pulled the page free.



When she unfurled the sheet, Anna saw a roughly drawn floor plan of the flat. Pentagrams were sketched in several rooms. The play room was circled.

“You’re going to summon a god!” Anna laughed.

“I am not, now get off me, you cunt!” Liudmila tried to push her off.

“Why did you keep it a secret?”

“Because you’d laugh at me!”

“I’m not laughing!” Anna laughed.

“You are, too.”

“Hey, what’s going on here?” Aida stood in the door. “Have we all stopped arguing?”

“Look at this.” Anna held up the diagram. “We’re doing witchcraft. Want to join us?”

“It looks more like foreplay to me.” Aida walked in and sat on the bed, sitting next to Anna on top of Liudmila. She started reading the old book at the page Anna opened it to. “Cool. Let’s try it. Maybe we’ll summon up a freaky old spirit and he’ll fuck us good.”

“You mean you haven’t been getting enough?” Anna said.

“Do we get to be naked?” Aida asked putting an arm around Anna. “I hate being mad at you. Anna, we have to make up. Hey, does someone get to be an offering to this god? You know, tied up in the middle of the circle. If so, I think we should make Anna be the one!”

“No!” Liudmila said, exasperated. “If you must know, I looked up this summoning spell because it appears that Anna, the famous spy that she is, can’t think of a plan of escape, so I was going to ask the god Perun to intercede for our release. Nobody gets to be tied up in the circle. We just stand around the pentagram chanting old Russian verses.”

“It says here that a token sacrifice should be made.” Aida studied the page. “So, we can tie Anna down in the circle.”

“It also says you have to burn the sacrifice!” Liudmila was getting impatient. “I think Master

Uri will have something to say if Anna gets turned into a well-done lamb chop.”

“We could drip wax from candles on her!” Aida said. “That would count as burning — symbolically.”

“But, that’s not how it’s supposed to be done! Who knows what gods will show up if we change things around!” Liudmila tried to squirm free again. With the two on top of her, it was impossible for her to move. “Let me up! Please!”

“If we can tie up Anna in the circle!” Aida insisted.

“Alright!” Liudmila grumbled. “Tie her up if you want to, but I won’t be responsible for what happens.”

“Just one thing,” Anna said, “you never asked if I wanted to be the one tied up in the circle.”

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Later that night, Summer Solstice

Anna sat in the corner with her knees against her chest, hands tied to her ankles. She watched Liudmila and Aida move the heavy furniture to the side. Uri’s play room became all the more menacing as it turned empty. She wondered why she let them talk her into this. Yet, the ceremony would certainly prove to be theatrical. Let them have their fun, she thought, the girls needed a release after all that bickering they’ve been doing. Besides, the brooding energy of the cavernous room with the ornately carved oak furniture piled against the walls was starting to give her dark sexual thoughts.

Liudmila drew a pentagram on the floor with chalk. They all hoped it would wash off when they were done or there would be a lot of explaining to do. It was a very convenient coincidence that Uri was off to Cuba for some secret conference for a few days, leaving the girls to themselves in the apartment.

Liudmila placed candles around the room and lit them one by one. Aida turned off the lights, letting the candles provide the only illumination. Liudmila then placed baskets of summer flowers as pagan

symbols in each of the room's four corners. Aida lit incense in the meantime.

They dragged Anna by her underarms to the middle of the circle, refusing to let her walk on her own. They then lowered her to her knees and untied the ropes binding her ankles and wrists. They bade her to lie on her back. When she did, the ropes were retied with the other ends attached to hooks screwed into the baseboards. They pulled the ropes taut and the ends were tied off.

Liudmila moved to the head of the pentagram. She pulled off her hooded robe and let it fall to the floor around her ankles. Her well-defined and perky nipples stood erect, dancing in the shadows of the candle light. She waited for Aida to get undressed. Liudmila then turned around to look out the one window in the room. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Then she spoke, "Oh, Guardians of the east —"

"Luidi," Aida called, "Liudmila! You're facing west."

"I am not!" she snapped. "Oh, Guardians of the east —"

"Actually, you're facing north by northwest," Anna said from the floor.

"You're both wrong! I'm facing east. If I wasn't, the circle would be misaligned, and we can't have that, can we?" Liudmila shot them both an angry look then began again. "Oh, Guardians of the east, I summon you to guard this circle." Then she turned around on her heel and spoke again, "Spirits of the south —"

"Since when is south opposite east?" Anna asked, breaking out in laughter.

"Very well," Liudmila hissed, "have it your way! East, south, west, north, and any directions I left out," she said turning one complete circle too fast to fix her words to any point of the compass. "Oh, Guardians, of your respective ... guardian places ... I summon you to guard our circle and our victim within — I mean, sacrifice — symbolic sacrifice, in case you get any cheeky ideas, but I'm sure you won't. You're not that kind of spirits. Um, that is, guard us, while we summon the god Perun, god of summer, god of thunder and lightning, and all sorts of other really cool stuff and powerful too, to

intercede on our behalf in releasing us from our miserable situation in which we find ourselves situated within, miserably.”

“Eloquently put,” Anna giggled.

“Shhhh,” Liudmila said. Then she took the dildo she got as a Christmas present and used it as a wand to cast a circle around their pentagram. “I cast now this circle.”

“Yep, sane friends,” Anna thought, as she watched the sex toy outlining a circle above her.

Liudmila started chanting in a hushed voice. Her words were in Russian, and Anna couldn’t follow them. Aida joined in on the second stanza having memorized the words by rote in the afternoon.

Anna felt the constant tension of the rope in her arms and legs. She dwelled on how her legs were forced open and exposed her for all to see. She tried to squirm, tried to close her legs, but even then she felt her loins turn hot. Her belly started to quake in anticipation of something without being sure of what that was going to be. She wondered if it would be orgasmic.

Liudmila and Aida lit candles in unison from one on the floor and waited for the molten wax to build up. As soon as a pool formed on the candle tops, Liudmila nodded and they both tipped them above Anna.

The first drops startled Anna as the rain of hot wax splattered, then quickly congealed on her belly. The next set of drops arrived on her left shoulder, just above her breasts. Liudmila’s chanting intensified. Then, she added a high-pitched screech to her voice. Aida followed her lead.

Anna looked up at Liudmila and Aida with their candles in hand. The girls seemed to have turned into primal spirits lurking in the twilight solstice forest. She didn’t know why burning, lusty thoughts filled her, but they did. She felt like she had become a beacon for someone or something trying to home in on her.

A splash of wax directly on her right nipple caused her body to tense. She took a deep breath and forced herself not to struggle. Another drop fell on her left nipple. Then one landed on the hairs just

above her pussy. The wax dripped down on her most delicate of places before it hardened. The next set of drops found the same targets. It became apparent they were purposely aiming for her erogenous zones.

Anna could hardly contain her lust. She struggled to get her hands free, not to escape, but to pleasure herself. Yet, try as she might, she couldn't move. Any possible release she might achieve lay much further into the night.

Mounds of molten, then hardened wax covered her nipples and streaked down her breasts. Her pussy was sealed in layer upon layer of wax that dripped off her mons and ran stalactite fashion to the floor. The heat from the wax and the sealed-in heat from her burning loins caused the fire storm within her to amplify with a fury. She cried out when she could no longer bear the immensity of her frustration. She tried to beg for sexual release, but only primal, throaty sounds of lust came out of her mouth.

To the girls it seemed as if Anna was possessed of a god or a spirit. Liudmila and Aida hesitated for a moment, but fell into their second chant when they surmised this was what they intended. Their next chant was also high pitched with the words perverted into screeches in the old Russian style. This chant was faster and wilder than the first. They walked around Anna in a counterclockwise circle all the while dripping wax over her. Burning drops fell everywhere, thighs, neck, ribs, loins, arms, and belly. They were only careful to avoid her face and eyes. Anna felt the sudden splashes of heat, then the lingering sting of each drop congealing upon her body. Each drop leaving a track, a route to be revisited as a holy a pilgrimage of the flesh.

Anna writhed and squirmed, she tried twist so she could rub her legs together so she may feel some release she needed, but the ropes were secured too firmly to allow any movement. The orgasm she felt building up within her had no way of fulfilling its promise. She desperately needed to be touched. Uri had tortured her before by not allowing her to come. He had teased her softly for hours with her hands

tied behind her back. And when he'd stop just before she came, he watched her stew in her own frustration. At one time he'd kept this game up for two days. But he had never brought on such intense passions as she felt at this moment, tied down in the middle of this pentagram.

Anna screamed in a voice that was not her own. She arched her hips as far off the ground as her bindings would allow. She was certain she was emitting some kind of psychic signal. Yes, she was a beacon to something that was looking for her, something that had been awakened.

Liudmila just pushed Anna's loins back down to the floor with her bare foot as she walked by.

That's when Anna noticed two meteors streak across the night sky. She saw the event for only for a moment through the open window. As they crossed paths, their trails left a momentary "X" in the sky. She knew — something psychic had just told her — that which had been summoned had stepped through a door into our world. She felt its enormous power in her soul the same way she sometimes feels the power of an approaching storm on the horizon.

Anna thought back to what she'd read about those Soviet psychic experiments. Yes, whatever those psychonauts had experienced — opening doors to other realms — had just been repeated with Liudmila's little ceremony. But her sexual tension was at a breaking point and she didn't have time to concern herself with whoever or whatever was coming.

The front door burst open with a thundering crash that echoed through the flat. The girls stopped their chant. Liudmila dropped her candle. Aida screamed, clutching hers.

"What's that!" "The door." "There's someone there!" "Go see." "No, you go." "Come with me." "No way!" The girls panicked while Anna watched from the floor with strange anticipation.

Liudmila went into the living room, being the older of the two. From the hallway, she could see the front door standing open. She started to walk towards it. Perhaps the guard stationed outside knew something. The wind slammed the door shut. But there was no wind that night. The room suddenly got pitch black. No light shone from street, nor the moon, nor the stars. Then, she felt a presence beside

her.

She was grabbed around the waist and flung across the room. She landed on a couch. She managed a muffled scream as a pillow smothered her face while a powerful grip held her down by the back of her neck.

The assault upon her ended as suddenly as it started. Liudmila tried to get up, but her legs would not cooperate even as she heard footsteps echoing down the hall and she knew Aida couldn't stand up to whatever this was and Anna was tied down and helpless. It took precious seconds before she could muster the power to stand. By that time the intruder had vanished through the cascading rooms of the house.

Aida saw the silhouette of a figure in the doorframe as she rummaged for a flashlight. She glanced at Anna struggling against her rope bonds. Then she turned back to the intruder in the doorway. She only a glimpse before the candles in the room snuffed themselves out. It turned pitch black as if hoods had been lowered over her head. Footsteps approached in the dark.

"Who's there?" Aida cried with hands feeling blindly ahead of her. "What do you want!" Powerful hands grabbed her around the waist and she was pulled against her assailant's body. Aida tried to kick and claw herself free but to no avail. She felt a rope deftly wrap around her wrists, tying them behind her back. Then she was thrown to the floor. Within seconds her arms and legs had been tied tightly together behind her back. She was then picked up like a package and placed out of the way, against the wall.

Liudmila felt her way into the room. She picked up the flashlight in the corner, having the sense to remember where they left it just in case. She got one glance before the light flew out of her hands. She was tied with her arms and legs behind her the same way as Aida. She, too, was picked up and placed her next to Aida as if they were a pair of suitcases on a platform awaiting a train trip. They yelled, they called to the guards stationed outside the door. Their intruder stooped down and calmly gagged them

both with loose ends of rope and a sock in each of their mouths. Their muffled cries could be heard no further than the room. There would be no guard coming to their rescue.

Anna moaned, too. But her need was different; it was to quench the burning within her loins. By now, it didn't matter from who or where. She knew this wasn't right; she knew this spirit was playing with her mind, but that didn't make any difference.

The intruder picked up the flashlight and shone it over Anna's spread-eagled body like a bombardier surveying his target from above. After looking her up and down, he knelt beside her then touched her belly gently. He ran his fingers over the wax covering pussy for but a moment. Then, with one quick stroke, he pulled off the solidified mass.

Anna yelped when more than a few of her hairs pulled out with it. But despite the sting of depilation, she still needed him, whoever, whatever he was. She could see his outline in the dark, from the faint light of the flashlight cast into the corner, turned the other way. He was definitely male. From the rustle of his clothes, she knew he had taken off his jacket and shirt; then, unbuttoned his trousers and pulled them down to his knees. She felt him as he positioned himself over her, then felt his cock lie against her belly. She wanted to cry out, but didn't know if it should be a cry of fear or longing. Then she felt his organ slide down and find her pussy. She felt him enter her and she lifted her hips off the floor to meet him, to help him find his way into her. She moaned in pleasure. Being savagely denied all evening, her orgasm began almost instantly. She wished she could wrap her legs around this man. Who was he? Her rapist? Her salvation? Another master? She didn't care. She wished she could give to him as he was giving to her. She longed to embrace him with her arms and her legs, wrapping her body around his. She wanted to kiss his chest. And then to kiss his lips. She wanted to give herself fully to him. Yet all she could do was take from him. And take she did; she took so greedily as she felt him in her, as she tightened around his cock as the first of many orgasms came upon her. He took her, bestowing his pleasures of the flesh upon her without any thought of a break. Could he give too much



of a good thing? she wondered. Could he overload the pleasure circuits of her brain? Just when she started to fear he'd actually go on forever, he took his own release. As he did, he gripped her arms tight, and ground himself against her. Once spent, he fell on top of her, relaxed, breathing deep, slow breathes.

Anna felt his body with her naked skin, felt his rough, chiseled chest resting on hers. She knew he was another warrior, like her master. And like him, he also had a sense of delicacy to his feel. She felt his face with her cheek as she brushed against him. He had a short, stubbly beard as if he'd forgotten to shave for some days, very unlike the impeccable Uri Konstantine.

"You are Anna?" he asked, confirming that he had indeed taken the correct woman.

She nodded.

"You were so delicate in your surrender." He spoke to her just above a whisper. "I hope your release was just as you expected."

"Who, who are you?" she managed to ask.

He got off her, looking down at her for but a moment, then he walked over to where her right hand was tied. Bending down, he grabbed the rope with his two hands and snapped it as if it were sewing thread. Then he freed her other arm in the same manner. Anna sat up and rubbed her sore wrists. Her limbs were numb when she reached to untie her own ankles.

"I am Odin," Odin said.

"Odin, you mean the ancient Norse god?" she said. "No really, who are you?" She fumbled with the knots in the dark.

"You summoned me, did you not?" he asked..

"Summoned you? Look, this was all Liudmila's doing. She was trying to summon the god Perun from her old Russian book of witchcraft."

"Perun, the god of war?" he asked. "To summon Perun, all you would have had to do is burn a

small token offering in the circle. To summon me, however, you have to take a sacrificial volunteer and splash her with hot wax while she squirms. If the sacrifice would have chanted along, then you would have summoned Thor. Chanting along, but no wax, would have summoned my wife Frigga. Likewise, chanting along with a gentle flogging would have called my other wife, Freya.”

“I didn’t think these variations would make a difference.”

“So, you’re a bunch of amateurs.” Odin laughed. “That explains why your circle was misaligned. I had to plant horny thoughts in your head so I could use you as a homing beacon. Do you have any idea of the power you have just unleashed? Did you ever consider the consequences?”

“Sorry, sir. We just went through this summoning to, I suppose, to give us strength to get our release.”

“Release,” he repeated her words. “And so you achieved it. I hope it was to your satisfaction.”

“No, no! Not sexual release. We didn’t call you all the way here to make us come. We’re having way too many orgasms as it is!”

“Let me get this straight, you don’t want to experience any more orgasms?”

“No, that’s not it at all, either. Don’t get me wrong, I love having sex. But we’re at a point where we want more.”

“So, you do want more orgasms.”

“No, we want more to life than orgasms!”

“Boy, did you summon the wrong god,” he stood up again. He looked down at her then held a hand out for her.

She instinctively took it and let Odin pull her to her feet.

As he stood her up, he pulled her to him, squeezing her against his chest. Anna tried to pull free but his hold was too firm.

“Anna,” he said.

“Yes?” She answered, trying to make out his features in the dark.

“Do you have anything to eat around here?”

“Um, yeah, in the kitchen. We have —”

“Lead the way,” he said, releasing her. He found her robe, long abandoned in the corner, and helped her into it. Then he put on his shirt and jacket. Stray light from the abandoned flashlight in the corner had to be enough for Anna as Odin ushered her out ahead of him. Anna knew he could see perfectly well in the dark, yet he made her feel her way out of the room and down the hall as he followed without a word. As she left, Liudmila and Aida moaned through their gags and looked out into the shadows with fearful eyes.

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“What would you like?” Anna asked as this god rummaged through her ice box.

“I don’t know. Let’s see what you have,” he said with his head buried deep inside. While he spoke, he snapped his fingers and the kitchen light came on. Anna shielded her eyes until she adjusted to the glare.

The god Odin wore a biker’s leather jacket with plain black slacks. That’s all she could see of him with his head in her ice box. It looked to Anna like he belonged to a pack of American motorcyclists, not the ancient gods. In fact, she started to wonder who this intruder really was.

“How old is this ham?” he asked, head still hidden away.

“We cooked it yesterday,” Anna answered, too stunned at the absurdity to say anything more. She took the ham shoulder when he handed it to her. Then she took the wedge of cheese that followed.

“I take it you’ve got bread.”

“Yeah,” Anna said coolly.

“Then, how ‘bout making me a sandwich,” Odin said as he emerged from the ice box.

That’s when Anna got a good look at his face. He had short hair, blond peppered with black;

weathered features; the distinct patch over one eye; and he wasn't menacing at all to look at with the lights on.

"I know you," Anna said. "Your beard is a lot shorter, and you had your wizard's robe the last time."

"Last time?"

"Oh, I've seen you looking. Since Uri first took me, you were there watching."

"I was?"

"Yes, you were," she said adamantly. "And there was someone with you, too. Who was she?" Anna grabbed a loaf of bread from the bread box and dropped it along with the leg of ham and the wedge cheese onto the counter.

"You saw me before? With someone?"

"Yes, a woman in a little black dress."

"That hasn't happened yet," he said, watching her quivering hands slice the bread. "I don't suppose you have beer to go with that? Listen, Anna, dear, I know nothing about a woman in a black dress, and I've never seen you before. You're talking about something from your past that is going to happen in my future. I do a lot of time traveling, you know."

"My past? Your future? It's so confusing."

"If it really was a future 'me' you saw, it would mean you have a very strong mind. Humans usually don't see us."

"We can't see you gods? Why? How many of you are there among us?" Anna handed him his sandwich on a plate. She looked in the pantry for something for him to drink. She knew they had no beer.

"No, it's not that you can't see us. You mortals refuse to see anything that is not a part of your neat and ordered reality. Unless, that is, we choose to expose ourselves to you. And your second question:

no, there are not many of us on Earth at any one time. Sometimes we take on human lives and live among you and feel your joys and sorrows, so that we may be reminded what it is to be human when we must judge you. And then there's Loki." Odin took the half bottle of vodka Anna found. It had been sitting in the pantry since before she'd been taken so many years ago. Odin pulled the bottle back and finished it in three gulps.

"Who's Loki?" Anna asked. Her eyes kept darting to his pants and she tried to hide her smile. Anna couldn't really fear any god whose fly was down.

"Loki, my offspring and my brother," Odin said in a serious voice, not realizing his slip with his mid-twentieth century wardrobe, "born of a union between gods and frost giants. We accepted him among us as a fellow god." Odin shook his head, as if contemplating a great regret. "Loki, the mischief maker. Loki, the doer of good and evil. But alas, it has dawned too slowly on us gods that as Loki walks the Earth, his mischievous pranks have an evil purpose. He is now known as Loki the Betrayer.

"But I did not intend to burden you with my worries." Odin took a bite of his sandwich. "Mmmm," he said with his mouth full. "Is that a jar of pickles I see on the shelf? Oh, and do you have any dessert: cake, pastries, or something? And, brew me some coffee to wash this down."

- 3 -

Andromeda dreamt she was floating in a warm tropical sea. And she was a part of that sea, one of so many drops of water intermingling with the others having no clear boundary or definition. The sea was a sea of body parts: arms, legs, torsos. Her head rested on a soft belly, and her hands each rested on soft flesh on either side. Waves undulated gently around her and she basked in a serene sun.

She remembered a storm somewhere in the distant recesses of her mind. A storm of grand magnitude. She, being a drop of the sea, was dashed and twisted and squeezed and formed only as shapeless water can be. Yet it was not an altogether unpleasant experience, that storm. Yes, he was there, too; looking down upon her, with his one eye. He was the one that stirred up her oceans. He

swam in her sea. He was the one that bade them to intertwine their bodies and writhe together and become his waves. And he commanded them to rise like crests and suck his —

Anna woke screaming when the thought became too focused to bear. She found herself lying between Aida and Liudmila in a tangle of arms and legs.

“Shit, what happened last night!” she cried as she sat up.

“Mmmm,” Liudmila said, still dreaming. “Do that again, Anna. You do me so well.”

“Wake up! Wake up!” Anna nudged both girls.

“Mon dieu, did that really happen or was that a dream?” Aida said as she woke. She sat up quickly and disentangled her arms and legs. “I mean, the circle, and that break-in, and —” She jumped out of bed and quickly put on her robe.

Liudmila yawned. As she sat up, she said casually, “I can’t believe it, I was actually fucked by a god. Not what I expected.”

“Not what you expected!” Anna growled. “I could slap you.”

“I think you did, in the middle of the orgy. My bottom, that is.” Liudmila sat and slowly swung her legs off the bed. “I’m sore all over. I think I’ve worked every muscle I didn’t even know I had.”

The three made their way out to the kitchen to put on coffee.

“What happened here!” Anna cried as she surveyed the mess. Plates, bowls, cups everywhere.

Along with the well-gnawed bone of the left-over ham from two days ago, the picked-clean carcass of the chicken from last night, and the empty pot that once contained their vegetable soup from who-know-how-many days ago. Discarded jars of pickles, sauerkraut, and three kinds of jams lay strewn about, all empty. The smoked sausages hanging in the pantry were gone, so was the bacon curing in the back corner.

“He ate everything!” Aida cried. “What is Uri going to say!”

“I only gave him the cold chicken left-overs,” Liudmila said, “along with a bottle of *palinka* I’ve

been hiding. Oh, and then he asked for some bacon, so I fried that up for him along with eight eggs.”

“Liudmila, what did happen last night?” Anna asked.

Liudmila told them a very different story of how the intruder subdued her in the hallway and carried her off on his shoulder. According to her, he locked Aida in the room where Anna was tied to the floor. Then Liudmila explained in detail how he’d used her for most of the night. Then, after taking her in every position imaginable and making her come more times than she could count, he got hungry and made her fix him a nighttime snack.

Once he had his fill, eating everything Liudmila put in front of him, he took her back to her bed again. This time he released Aida and Anna from the playroom and put them all together for his entertainment.

“That last part, I’m not sure if it was a dream or not,” Liudmila said, “we did some improbable positions together. And by the way, I don’t think that was the god Perun.”

“No,” Aida said. “He introduced himself to me and said his name was Odin. And that’s not how it happened. He selected me out from all of you, because, he said ‘I was the youngest and fairest,’ then he made me pleasure him with my mouth for hours while the two of you were tied up, watching. Then, he spanked me for not making him come, and then took me hard, in the pussy, that is. And, he made me come many times over before he took his own release. When he did, I must have passed out from too much pleasure. When I awoke, I found myself standing over the stove and warming the left-over soup for him then slicing up a cold plate of sausage and bread, like I was his maid.”

“Interesting,” Anna said. She started picking up the scattered plates and bowls and putting them into the sink. Liudmila and Aida followed her lead and began picking up, too. “I’ll tell you what happened from my point of view,” Anna said. She told them her version of last night’s events as she washed the dishes.

“But how could all three of us be right?” Aida asked. “It looks like the only things in common is

that he broke in at the beginning of the night, and put the three of us together for his amusement at the end — which may or may not have been a dream.”

“I don’t know,” Anna said. “It seems like this guy has enough power to play with reality: split it into three, one for each of us, and then bringing it all back in the morning. Maybe that’s why we’re not sure if that last part was a dream or not. We couldn’t comprehend him weaving the various realities together.”

“Anna, that’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard from you,” Liudmila said.

“Crazy?” Anna shot back. “As if summoning a god is sane!”

“Hey,” Aida said. “Stop fighting, Uri is due back this afternoon. He’ll come back to an empty pantry.”

“We’ll be in serious trouble if we don’t replace his food,” Liudmila said. “We have to go out shopping. How much money do we have?”

“Not much,” Anna said, putting the dish-washing aside. “The food money is almost gone. I was going to get more from Uri as soon as he got back.” Anna went to the living room and took her box of household cash off the top shelf and counted it. “This won’t get us very far.”

The three girls each dug into their hidden caches of “ice cream” money and found enough to replace most of the provisions Odin ate. Anna was surprised to see how much emergency money both Aida and Liudmila had each squirreled away. But then again, she had her own reserve of cash she put on the table. At one time she had called it her “escape” money. But lately, she’d reconciled herself to knowing it would only buy the occasional round confections or ice cream at the Gerbeaud.

They sent Liudmila out for groceries while Anna and Aida cleaned the apartment. Apparently, Odin had left his dirty dishes in almost every room and everywhere he sat. Once the plates and forks were herded into the kitchen sink, the two of them scrubbed the pentagram off the play room floor. The chalk came off easier than Anna thought, but the drops of candle wax, which were everywhere, took hours to



pick off with their finger nails.

By the time Liudmila returned with her bags of groceries, she found Anna and Aida sitting on the play room sofa, now back in place along with all everything else.

“What’s wrong?” Liudmila asked when she saw the grave looks on their faces.

“We found this,” Anna said, handing Liudmila the scribbled note.

“Dear girls,” it said. “It was an immeasurable pleasure to partake of the release you summoned me for. I will remember this night fondly for a long time. You were all so gracious in surrendering yourselves to me. Only, next time please don’t doze off. Many kisses, Odin.”

It took Liudmila a moment for the note to sink in. But when it did, her eyes widened and she gasped.

“Oh no, did you see what he wrote!” she cried. “It says ‘next time.’ There’s going to be a next time. He’s not done with us.”

“And Uri will be back in a few hours,” Anna said, “hornier than ever.”

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Anna, Liudmila, and Aida had just finished cleaning up when Uri arrived home. Naturally, he wanted his three slaves on their knees in front of him when he stepped into the living room. True to Anna’s prediction, he was hornier than ever. The girls said nothing of their supernatural encounter, for what could they say? They just made themselves available to their master to be used as he pleased, no matter how worn out they felt.

He took each one of them in turn that night. Uri Konstantine had thought he was giving them the pleasures denied during his absence, never suspecting they had much too much sex the night before.

As soon as Anna fell asleep that night, in the arms of General Uri Konstantine, Odin, Father of the gods, poked her in the ribs.

“Psst, wake up,” he said.

“Odin!” Anna screamed just above a whisper. “What are you doing here?”

“Can’t stay away,” he said.

“Well, you can’t be here! Uri’s sleeping.”

“So you better stay quiet or you’ll have a lot of explaining to do.”

“But, hey, mffffff!” Anna didn’t know how it happened, but she found herself with Odin’s cock in her mouth as she lay beside Uri Konstantine. She could do nothing but pleasure the god as he stood beside the bed with his hands on her head, directing her up and down his shaft.

Anna hoped he wouldn’t cry out and wake her master when he came.

Uri stirred more than once. Each time, Anna froze in terror. What would he think if he woke to find her with a stranger’s cock in her mouth as she lay next him? In the dark, Anna could still see the amusement over her predicament on Odin’s face. It took way too long for him to come. Anna was sure her master would have woken by then, but he slept on, exhausted from his long trip.

After Odin finally did orgasm, Anna thought he’d leave her alone, perhaps pester Aida or Liudmila. But, to her horror, he grabbed her around the waist and turned her over, landing her on all fours on the bed. Uri Konstantine mumbled something in his dreams but didn’t wake. By the time she realized what Odin was up to, he had entered her. Her pussy was hot and wet and more eager to accept him than she had thought; this was a condition that had surprised her before — but with Uri.

Anna let out a moan of pleasure as she felt him slide into her.

“What are you doing?” Uri asked, snapping out of his slumber. He propped himself up on his elbows to find Anna quivering on all-fours in front of him.

“Tell him you want to give him a blowjob,” Odin said. “He can’t see or hear me.”

“Um, let me pleasure you with my mouth,” Anna said. She glanced behind her nervously.

“You are eager, tonight,” Uri said.

“Tell him you missed him, and you want to make up for it,” Odin instructed.

“I missed you while you were gone. You must have been lonely. Let me make it up to you,” Anna whispered to Uri. She then pulled his bedsheet aside and kissed his still soft, but growing cock. As her lips touched him, she gasped in pleasure, for that moment, Odin pushed deep, finding Anna’s sweet spot.

“I guess you did miss me,” Uri said, stroking her head, thinking the sigh was somehow his doing.

Anna felt his member grow hard in her mouth. At the same time she was distracted by Odin’s firm hold on her hips, and his thrusting into her. She didn’t know how she’d be able to service her master under these conditions, but she matched Odin’s rhythm as she bobbed up and down on Uri’s cock. She thought she might even be able to get away with it, to satisfy her master without him catching on that there is more here than seems. That is, until she felt herself edging closer to orgasm from Odin’s relentless thrusts. She wondered how she’d be able to hide her cries and quivers when she came. Uri would surely notice. She wished Odin would just go away.

But he didn’t. If anything, Odin intensified his thrusts as she came closer to coming.

Soon, Anna was at the edge of orgasm. She knew she was going to gasp and scream when she came. She went deep down on her master’s head to muffle her moans of pleasure. She clutched the base of his shaft between her fingers to hide her quivering.

General Konstantine watched Anna as she quivered and moaned. He’d heard of this interesting phenomenon of women working themselves into an orgasmic state while giving oral sex. He stroked her head as he wondered if Anna was putting on a show or had really come. Whatever the answer, he found this new twist in Anna’s repertoire quite amusing.

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Scenes like this played themselves out night after night. Uri took his pleasure from his girls when he woke fresh in the morning, then again before retiring to bed at night. Odin would come to them just as they were falling asleep. Then he started making appearances during the day as well, while General

Konstantine was off running the military affairs of this subdued country.

Gone was the pretext that Odin was a creature the of shadowy dream times once they found him in full daylight sitting on a window sill of the living room looking out over People's Republic Road. From then on, he came whenever he chose. And he came whenever he chose. Both of which were far too often for the girls' wherewithal.

He used the strange power to be with each of them at the same time, somehow splitting reality or using some other god-like trick to create the effect. After a while, the girls didn't care what kind of magic or godly power he used to accomplish this otherwise notable miracle. To them, it was just another sign of his limitless stamina that was aimed directly at them.

They'd eat their breakfasts quickly, if they had a chance. They bathed quickly for they knew Odin could show up any time, without warning. They did their household chores quickly, or sometimes not at all; picking up in haste moments before Uri would make his entrance at night.

Once Odin found out that their master amused himself by spanking the girls on their pussies with a ruler he was beside himself with heated lust, eager to try this sport for himself. So the girls, already past sore, had to acquiesce to Odin's new amusement.

"What is it with men," Lidumila fumed on a rare moment when they were by themselves, "are they all into bondage?"

"I dunno," Anna answered, "it sure looks like it to me. I can't remember a time when guys didn't want to tie me up. Even my guy before Uri, he liked to tie me up and tease me."

Her thoughts went back to Andy Locket. She wondered why he hadn't tried to rescue her, surely he'd have found out where she was being held by now, with all his contacts and everything. But there hadn't been even a word from him. Then she wondered if he really did sell her out to Uri. Suspicions of his betrayal her had shifted the gamut in her years under General Konstantine's slavery. At times, in her mind, she defended him emphatically. At others, she brooded over how he could have been so

uncharacteristically sloppy and given her away when he knew the phones were being monitored? How could he have not done it on purpose? After all, there aren't that many phones in this backwards land for the authorities to keep track of.

"Anna, if your god comes back today for more, I don't know what I can do," Liudmila whined, bringing Anna out of her thoughts. "Can you talk to him, or something?"

"My god!" Anna snapped back. "It wasn't my doing that conjured him up. That was all you!"

"Me!" Liudmila yelled. "I wasn't the one who changed the ceremony. That was your doing!"

"Was not!" Anna hissed as she stamped her foot.

"Hey, cut it out, you two," Aida shouted from the other room.

"You know something. It was your fault, Aida!" Liudmila yelled.

"What! Don't blame me for your god, Liudmila," Aida said as she marched into the room. "And, you should be the one to talk to him, not poor Anna. And you should take him on all by yourself because it was your magic —"

"You changed the summoning all around!" Liudmila screamed at Aida.

"— and now he's your god! And, you know what, Liudmila? You're the biggest cum slut and pain slut that ever walked on all fours. To think, I used to admire you and wanted to be just like you."

"Oh, yeah! Well, you didn't say that for all those years when you couldn't wait to get into bed with me so I could show you how. Well guess what, I didn't need to show you how!"

"Stop it!" Anna yelled. She stepped between them when it looked like either one could start throwing punches. "Can't you see? He's doing this to us on purpose! He's enjoying every minute of it, watching us at the edge of our nerves. Liudmila, doesn't your mother's book have anything to ward off freaky old, horny gods?"

"I can try something, but I don't know if it will work. He's too powerful," Liudmila said quietly.

"I'm sorry I snapped at you Anna. And I'm sorry Aida. You really wanted to be like me?"

“Yeah,” Aida said. “And I’m sorry for what I said. You don’t walk on all fours.”

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The three performed a ceremony, with a circle, pentagram, candles, and flowers in the corners. It was a dismal failure. They knew it had failed when they saw Odin laughing at them, looking in from outside the window.

“It wouldn’t bother me so much,” Liudmila said, “if we weren’t on the third floor.”

“So, he can float on air,” Anna said, “big deal.” She walked over to the window and opened it.

“Well, what are you waiting for?”

Odin stepped in to land on the very solid wood parquet.

“Is this any way to show your respect?” Odin said with a frowning pout. “I see you’re having a ceremony to cast me away. After all the things I’ve done for you?”

“Odin, you’re killing us!” Anna said. “We’re sore from top to bottom. We haven’t had any sleep since you showed up. This is the second time you’re here today, and that’s not even counting last night. Leave us alone!”

“We’ll give you a blowjob,” Liudmila said. “But then leave us alone for the rest of today and tonight so we can sleep.”

“Alright,” he said after thinking for a moment, “but there will be rest for only two of you. The one who wins, she who catches it, I will take away and give unto her my full attention for the rest of the day.”

The girls looked at each other. They nodded in agreement.

Anna didn’t like the idea, for whichever two of them lucked out will still anguish over the girl getting Odin’s “attention”. Nonetheless, she found herself descending to her knees next to Aida and Liudmila. Then she watched as Odin pulled down his fly and released his cock. It sprang to life, staring her in the face. She decided she might as well go first and not delay the inevitable. She knew in the

back of her mind that that Odin prefers her and would rig the contest so she would “win”.

She took his organ in her hands, squeezed its base between her fingers and watched the blood well up in its tip, making it all the harder, and hotter, and redder than before. Then she took him in her mouth, felt his heat around her lips. Then she let him slide in deep. Felt him on her tongue and on the roof of her mouth.

His fingers curled into her hair. He guided her motions, rocking her slowly back and forth, up and down on his shaft. He counted out ten strokes, then pulled Anna's head back.

Anna gasped for a breath of air then watched Odin turn to Liudmila. Liudmila, too, took him in without a moment of hesitation. Like Anna, bobbing up and down on his shaft for ten long strokes before he pulled her off to move on to Aida.

He let them each their share of strokes in succession, guiding each of them with his hands on the back of their heads. Although General Uri Konstantine had his three slaves line up on their knees in front of him when he came home, he rarely followed through and used his slaves this way. That act was mostly symbolic for their master. But Odin, he wasn't one to rest on such subtleties as he took each of his girls by the head and guided their mouths onto his waiting pole. Then again, Odin was more used to smoting his enemies with a fireball or a bolt of lightning, no subtleties needed. Or, maybe, just maybe, Odin's methods were far too subtle for Anna to realize. She had just started playing these thoughts through when it had come to her turn again. As he curled his fingers into her hair and pushed himself deep into her mouth, Anna knew he was about to give her his load. So much for subtleties.

Anna fell into a state of delirium as Odin filled her up when he came. It was a state in which she was neither conscious nor unconscious. Without eyes or arms, or even legs or a body, she struggled to pull him away from her lest she choke. Then as fast as it came, the sensation was over. She became fully conscious again. Or, perhaps, hyper-conscious of everything around her. And she was no longer in her familiar flat.

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They were in a great hall. A fire burned in a pit at its center and smoke escaped through a hole in the arched roof. Torches, steadily burning, lit the perimeter. The hall was filled with people. Hundreds of people. Their clothes were hand-sewn, mostly of white, off-white, or gray linens. The women, for the most part, had wreaths of wild flowers in their hair.

A throne, carved of wood, sat along the opposite wall on a platform a step above the general floor. A group of men, off from the rest, stood around it. They toasted with their flagons then downed their mead as they planned quietly.

“That is Prince Vladimir of the Rus,” Odin said.

Until then, Anna hadn’t noticed him next to her. And she hadn’t noticed they were holding hands. When she looked over at him she saw that now he had a full white beard and long hair — just like from her visions. He was wearing that same threadbare blue robe.

Two men, nobles, based on their appearance, walked past. They nodded to Odin, who nodded back.

“Next time, bow,” he told Anna. “And do not gaze into their eyes. They have a right to whip you, and I don’t mean the way you’d enjoy.”

“Where are we?” Anna asked. Then she noticed that she too was dressed for the part: in a simple, ankle-length dress of silk, silver bracelets on her wrists, and sandals on her feet.

“Kiev,” Odin answered. Then before she could ask, he added, “in the year 988.” He let her survey the room before continuing. “Next to Prince Vladimir is Emperor Basil II of Byzantium. Over there in the corner with her handmaids is Basil’s sister, Anna. She and Vladimir are about to be wed. Over there, those three women are Vladimir’s current wives.”

“They don’t look too happy.”

“Vladimir is about to accept Christianity and put aside his pagan ways. That means only one wife, and that would be the new one. I’m not surprised the girls are none-too-happy. The wives plotting his



demise aren't even in attendance.”

“How many wives does he have?”

“Seven to twelve, depending on who he has in his good favors at any particular time.”

“That wife looks like Liudmila. And, hey, this Vladimir guy looks like Uri!”

“Don't read too much into looks. I assure you, there is no past-life trickery going on. All you are seeing is familiar Slavic features. I think the combined baptism and wedding is about to begin.”

They watched as Varangian knights lined up on one side of the hall and Orthodox priests on the other. Emperor Basil stood beside the throne while Vladimir stood next to him. A bishop, flanked by a dozen priests chanting and waving incense, marched slowly into the hall and up to the throne.

The ceremony took the better part of the day. Young slave girls continuously served food, wine, and ale. These slaves didn't see past the wedding to its significance other than a peace and trade treaty, if even that. But Anna saw what was happening; the old ways were over. And what of Odin? He was losing his worshipers to the new faith. Anna looked to him, but he betrayed no emotion at being brushed aside for political expedience.

“Why bring me here?” she whispered.

“It makes a better date than screwing in the bath.”

“They will no longer make sacrifices to you. Are you showing me that you are a faded god?”

“I need but only a few followers to keep my name alive.”

“You need me and the girls as your worshippers, is that it? I'm sorry, Odin, but I can't make up for your loss of the Viking world —”

“It was destined from the beginning. I don't need them any way.”

“Then what do you need?” Anna said. “Because whatever it is, I'm sure I can't feed it to you.”

“I'm not asking a lot from you. A smile, a nod, a kind word once in a while.”

“You've been asking much more than that.”

“And you’ve enjoyed every minute of it.”

“I have not! You’re too much! You are insatiable in your lust.”

“Have I ever left you unsatisfied?”

“No, not in the way you’re thinking.”

A golden-haired slave came by offering skewered meats, perhaps strategically sent over by the steward to hush them.

Anna and Odin watched the rest of the ceremony in silence as they chewed on sticks of venison. Then she got tipsy on the ever-flowing wine.

And the feast began when the ceremony ended.

Dancing girls, roast boar, smoked fish, musicians on the pipe and lute — both Byzantine and Varangian. She watched the free women and the slave girls, there wasn’t much difference in their demeanor. Such was the 10th century.

“Odin!” Prince Vladimir called. “You’ve come! And you’ve brought a lady with you.”

“Anna, on your knees before the prince, and don’t look him in the eye,” Odin said.

Anna did as she was told.

“She is but a traveling companion from a far off land. Strange customs, she has. You must forgive her.”

“But I do,” Vladimir said. “Rise, Anna.”

She rose to her feet to stand beside a young and very bearded Uri Konstantine.

“My prince,” she said, “congratulations on your wedding.”

“Odin,” the prince said, “perhaps you will allow me to bed with your Anna during these festive days.”

“But, dear prince,” Anna said, “you already have your own bride Anna. Another Anna in your bed will cause much confusion.”

Surprise crossed Vladimir's face. Surprise, that a female would speak out of turn, especially while he addressed Odin about her. But then his reaction turned to amusement. He let out a robust laugh.

"Odin, a spunky one you have for yourself. I dare say she will best even you in the end. But the Lady speaks the truth; I must placate my new wife and the list of existing ones all in one night. Plus my handmaids: they have been promised, too. Yes, all in one night. I do not need yet another to add to the mix."

"Be careful, sly fox, you have taken on a faith that allows you but one wife," Odin said.

"Odin, be assured it means nothing. The oaths are but to placate Basil and gain entry to Byzantium. Things will go on the way they always have. You'll have your tribute and sacrifices in your name —"

"But there you are wrong, Prince Vladimir," Odin said. "Embrace what you have been given. Use it as a tool for the good you have been wanting to do. Unite your tribes. Bring justice to the land. End starvation."

"Odin, surely you are not telling me to turn away from you?"

"It is the only way forward," Odin said.

With that, the smile faded from Prince Vladimir's face. Before he turned to leave he said, "be well, my old friend."

"Odin, what just happened?" Anna asked.

"I just changed history," he told her.

"To what? What's it going to be like when we get back to 1960?"

"Not to what, from what. I changed things so they will be as you know and love," he said. "Now come, we are no longer needed here."

"But —" she started to say. Even as she spoke, the hall faded and Anna found herself standing in an open plaza in the full light of day. By the dress of the people around her, she knew she wasn't home yet.

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“Odin?” Anna shouted. Shouted, for she was lost in a throng of people.

“Isn’t this exciting?” he called to her over the din.

“Where are we?” Anna yelled back. They had been separated and she was being shoved away from him by the crowd. She noticed her dress had changed to one of a much fancier silk with bright colors and intricate stitching. And she had an amulet of amber on a gold chain around her neck.

“Florence of Lorenzo de’ Medici,” Odin answered. “We’re in the middle of a flower festival. I think it’s around 1490.”

“Are you here to change history again?”

“No, I just thought you’d enjoy this. Watch out, they’re about the crown you queen of the festival. You’ll get paraded around!”

“What?” Anna yelled above the noise. As she was jostled further away from Odin, she backed into the side of a wagon.

“Signora,” said a jovial, balding man who took her by the arm. “You are the one I have been looking for.” He placed a wreath of flowers around her neck and rested another on her head. “Be our flower queen for the day, it is the highest honor.”

Anna was too stunned to answer as two young men lifted her onto the cart and placed her on a tall chair. And before she knew what was happening, her handlers started pulling the cart around the plaza.

The crowd parted for her. The people cheered and threw flowers. Anna didn’t know what she was supposed to do; she guessed she should smile and wave at them, so she did. Halfway around, she spotted Odin standing in the crowd. He was hard to miss with his patched eye. He was no longer the grey-bearded wizard in the tattered blue robe, but now a proper and clean-shaven 15th century Italian merchant. He had a smirk on his face that told her he was much amused to see Anna in the spotlight.

The cart circled the square twice, then stopped at the far end. The same two men lifted her to the

ground and bowed gallantly in front of her. She found herself beside two granite posts rising from the cobblestones. From the irons hanging three quarters of the way up, Anna knew these were whipping posts. She gasped.

“As the flower queen, you shall have the honor of taking part in the first flogging of the season,” the balding man said. He was there, next to her again. He must have been one of the men pulling her cart.

“No,” Anna backed away only to bump into one of the young assistants.

The old man smiled when he saw her discomfort. “Ah, you are not from our city. Let me explain. It is a high honor for the flower queen to stand in front of the first criminal to be flogged. When that rogue looks a lady in the eyes and takes hold of her hand, the flogging goes a lot easier. It is a great mercy.”

“Oh,” Anna smiled cautiously.

“Rest assured, no harm will come to you. Come now, they are about to bring out that first prisoner.” He led Anna to behind the posts from where they watched the wooden doors open in the wall behind them and the prisoner emerge, flanked by two guards.

“Aida!” Anna gasped as her sister slave, or someone who looked very much like her, was led to the posts. Anna looked for Odin, trying to pick him out in the crowd. “No past-life trickery, indeed!” she hissed under her breath.

The girl, grimy and in a tattered peasant’s dress, looked a lot like Aida. Anna didn’t understand who she really was. The girl’s handlers untied her dress and let it fall around her ankles. They then cuffed her to the manacles hanging from either post. But appearances can sometimes be deceiving — this girl wasn’t Aida. Anna could see that clearly as they stood face to face. There was defiance in her eyes and anger in her smirk. No, Aida could never be this tough. Yet this girl could have been an Aida who Uri didn’t rescue. Anna wondered if this is what Aida might have become if she would have had to

live on the street alone.

“Who are you?” Anna asked.

“No one you’d consort with, m’ lady,” the girl said with bravado. But Anna knew, behind her words, she was scared.

“What did she do?” Anna asked her guide, who was now stepping out of the way.

“Petty thief,” was the man’s answer. “But not to worry on her behalf; after her punishment she will be set free.” Then he whispered, “She’s popular, if you understand my meaning.”

“So, you’re popular,” Anna said to the girl. “Then it shouldn’t be a problem for you to lean on me.” The girl’s breathing was deep and long; Anna could tell she was preparing herself for the worst. “That’s right, put your head on my shoulders. Yes, rest your body against mine. I will hold your hands.” The girl complied as she let her body fall against hers. “I’ll be with you the whole time,” Anna added.

The girl did as she was told and put her head on Anna’s shoulder. Anna did the same for her. From where she stood, Anna would get a privileged view of the flogging. The flogging master wasn’t what she expected when he emerged from the parting crowd. She thought she’d see a hooded figure, executioner style, dour, and somber march up slowly. Instead, a colorful figure of a man with a harlequin-crossed shirt pranced into view.

The crowd, of course, cheered. He threw kisses in all directions and winked at the pretty girls. In each hand he had two bright floggers with red, orange, yellow, and blue tails. He twirled them around in the air over his head, tossing them high and catching them behind his back. Wild applause from the crowd.

The watching mob shouted in unison, “Flog her, flog her.”

The girl pulled herself closer to Anna.

“You’ll be okay,” Anna told her. “Just try to shut them out.”

“Shut up,” the girl whispered into Anna’s ear. That’s when Anna noticed the heat in the girl’s loins

as their bodies pressed against each other.

As the harlequin man took his position behind the girl's back, Anna wondered: how much is going to be for show and how much will be real punishment. Her question was answered a moment later, when he let the first stroke fly and splayed the girl's back with the flogger's tails. Each thong, there must have been thirty, found a mark on her tender skin. Anna felt the lash reverberate through the girl's body. Anna also felt, rather than heard, the girl gasp. And she sensed the almost undetectable motion of the girl pressing her loins against Anna's legs.

"Oh, yes," Anna thought to herself, "I understand."

The punisher made an impressive performance for the crowd. He used both floggers simultaneously on the girl's back and rump, throwing his blows in figure eights, one flogger crossing over and under the other, striking the girl from both sides in continuous and rapid succession. With his skill at the flogger, Anna couldn't follow his hand motions, and wondered how the tails didn't get hopelessly tangled. Every few minutes, he'd stop and toss his floggers into the air, twirl around, and catch them as they came down. He'd then continue his flogging without missing his tempo. The crowd cheered to his theatrics.

The entire scene didn't last long. Fifteen to twenty minutes, from Anna's estimate. But that could have been a lifetime for the poor girl being flogged. When it was over, the jovial man with a balding head released the girl from her manacles. She collapsed into Anna's arms. Anna could feel the heat in her body, but with a thousand people watching, there was nothing she could do to help out this girl. The assistants gently pulled the girl's dress up over her very red and welted back. Then they lead her away.

Once they had disappeared into the crowd, Anna noticed her amber amulet was no longer around her neck.

"Hey!" she shouted in the girl's general direction, but by then she had hopelessly melded away into the mix.

“Did you enjoy yourself?” Anna heard Odin say from beside her.

“Did you see that? She took that —”

“Never mind that trinket,” he said. “At least she’ll be able to feed herself for a while.”

“But —”

Before Anna could utter her protest she was transported yet again to a very foreign environment.

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Now, she found herself dressed in skins to protect her from the cold, for she was standing in a desolate valley with walls of ice rising on either side. The roar of the crowd had gone and was replaced with a deafening silence that blasted in her ears. They stood on the banks of a fjord with fingers of the sea reaching into the mountain ranges far beyond. Gulls cried as they circled above them. Off in the distance, Anna could see one lone figure by the rocky, desolate shore. That figure was stirring something in a caldron over a smoky fire.

Odin was long-bearded again, but this time he wore a cape of animal furs and pulled himself along with a wooden staff.

“Let’s see what she’s up to,” he said pointing with his nose to the woman stirring the caldron.

As they got closer, they could hear her shout and curse.

“You’ve shown me Uri, and Liudmila, and finally Aida,” Anna said. “Am I going to see myself next?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You can’t run into yourself while hopping around time. Imagine the ramifications. Just can’t happen.”

Anna wondered if he was leading her on again with his half-truths. “Who is that?” she asked, when the woman’s cursing became loud enough to hear.

“Some nerve you have showing up here!” that woman said when she looked up and saw Odin approaching. This was a scrawny woman, probably only a few years older than Anna; but this arctic



living, in what looked like primitive times, didn't age her well. "And what's this? You bring your latest lover with you? Watch out dearie, he'll use you up and cast you away when he's bored with you."

"Eija-Rita," Odin said, "if I recall, it was you who were bored with me and petitioned to be released."

"Gods, can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em," this Eija-Rita fumed. "I was his slave, you know. And he never had a more loyal and loving slave than me. Let me tell you. I lived with him in Asgard. Shared his bed every night while I was young and beautiful. Now look at me! Old and bent!"

"Odin," Anna said with hands on her hips. "What did you do to this poor woman?"

"I let her make her own choice," Odin said. "And she chose to leave me. She didn't think that she'd start aging again when I returned her to Earth."

"Or that the world stinks as much as it does," Eija-Rita said as she stirred her caldron. "You forget things like that up in Asgard."

"What are you making?" Anna asked.

"Something to get rid of the stink," Eija-Rita answered.

"I believe what she's attempting to make is called soap," Odin said matter-of-factly. "Anna, I've been filtering your sense of smell the same way I've filtered what you hear. You would have retched in that Viking hall if I'd have let you smell what it was really like in there: hundreds of people who've never bathed in their lives crammed together like that. Not what a modern girl like you is used to."

"You an' your tricks," Eija-Rita spat.

"I brought Eija-Rita up to live in Asgard in my hall, Valhalla, because she amused me," Odin continued. "You know, only a very few mortals ever get to see Asgard while they live. And in your time, Anna, hardly anyone is carried there any more, even after their deaths."

"I see," Anna said, not fully understanding.

"Eija-Rita got used to the niceties of Asgard living. Now that she's back on Earth, all she wants is

to be as clean as she was up there.”

“Bahh,” Eija-Rita spat, “you’re no help at all, Odin.”

“You’re very close,” Odin told her, “just add some seaweed ash to your mix of tallow.”

“Seaweed ash!” Eija-Rita hissed. “You’re sending me on a wild pig chase, you are.” She bent down and grabbed a fistful of pebbles and threw them at Odin. “You miserable, horny, no-good, useless god.” She then picked up a rock and threw it at him.

Odin turned away and took the hit on the shoulder. “Eija-Rita, stop!”

“Why don’t you take me back to Asgard?” She threw another rock. “Get out of here before I smack you with a broom.” She threw another rock. “Can’t you see, I still love you, you bastard. Take me back!” She threw another rock — this one hit Anna by mistake. “Odin, you’ve got some nerve showing up here. I don’t ever want to see you again.” Another rock. “Take me with you. I belong with you forever!”

She threw yet one more rock. But by now, Odin had grown tired of the pelting. He took Anna by the hand and took her away from this time.

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Anna found herself back in her familiar flat in Budapest. It was late afternoon and the sun was just setting. Aida and Liudmila were sleeping. True to his word, Odin had left those two alone while he was off through time with Anna.

He gave her a kiss on the cheek and turned to leave.

Anna turned him back to her and gave him a soft kiss on his lips.

“What’s that for?” he asked. He stroked her face.

“I don’t know,” Anna shrugged. “I guess it’s for the nice time out. I don’t travel much, lately.”

“Get some rest before your master comes home,” he said. “As I promised, I’ll leave you alone tonight, but I’ll be back to see you all tomorrow.”

“You're too much for us. Can't you give us more of a break?”

“That's not how it works. You don't just summon a god and then get to set the rules.”

Anna blinked and he was gone. She found herself alone in the flat. Uri would be home in less than an hour. She decided against taking a quick nap and started preparing dinner

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The summer continued. It was a sweltering July. Odin came to them in the hot nights, and just as often as not, during the languid days as well. Uri Konstantine did not understand what was wrong with his girls: always tired, no longer eager to please, reluctantly serving him without any sexual appetite of their own. If he didn't know better, he'd think they despised him.

- 4 -

It was the tail end of a scorching August afternoon. The three sat at an outside table at the Gerbeaud. The sun was just touching the city skyline. The ornate buildings of Vorosmarty Square glowed in the sun's orange light. The fountain at the center of the square had been restored to its past splendor; water now gurgled down over its baroque leaves of granite. Pigeons waddled in circles hunting for crumbs and taking flight when passersby startled them.

“Can we talk about escape again?” Liudmila asked, almost whispering, as if anyone at a neighboring table was a spy.

“You're right, Liudi,” Aida nodded. “It's over. The magic's gone.”

“It's easy to get out of the apartment for some treats,” Anna mused. “But where do we go from here?”

“A bus to Sopron.” Aida was thinking out loud. “And then we can wade to Austria across the Ferto Lake.”

“Where?” Liudmila asked.

“Call it what you want. Neusiedler See, by the Austrian name,” Aida went on. “The lake is shallow

and reed-filled. We would wade across at night — by the light of the moon.”

“A lot of men got caught after ‘56 crossing that way,” Anna said. “And it’s patrolled a lot better now. I was thinking of just showing up at the American Embassy.”

“What can we bring with us?” Liudmila asked.

“If we attempt to pack, Uri will be onto us right away,” Anna said. “If we were to leave one morning, it will have to look like we’ll be back in time for dinner. Even the guard at the door, he can’t see us leaving with heavy bags, never mind suitcases. We’ll have to leave everything.”

Just then their waiter walked up to their table.

“Have you decided?” he asked. The voice was familiar. They looked up. Odin. He stood in front of their table with his stubbly beard and one eye covered with a patch. The God of Sex wore a crisp white shirt with a black waiter’s vest and a little black bow tie. “Have you decided what you want?”

“Coffee,” Liudmila said weakly.

“Other than that?” He scribbled on his little waiter’s pad.

“You know what we want!” Anna said, slapping the table with her fist.

“Then do it,” he shrugged.

“We haven’t packed. We’re not ready,” Liudmila said.

“What’s to pack? That silly little book of magic?” Odin said as if he were advising a customer on an item on the menu.

“It’s caused us enough trouble,” Anna mumbled.

“Trouble?” Odin raised an eyebrow, then to Liudmila “You’re playing with fire with that thing. It’s a good thing you didn’t summon the god you had intended. He’s not as cheerful and as easy to please as I am.” He scribbled something on his waiter’s pad. “I put you down for four slices of cake with coffee.” Then he continued as if answering a question. “The bathroom is inside, down the hall, right next to the staff entrance. You know, staff entrance, as in: where the staff come and go unseen.” He

pointed inside. They sat frozen in their chairs. "See your guard standing by the fountain?"

"No," Anna said.

"Neither do I. He's off flirting. I've enlisted the Goddess Freya. She came down from Asgard just for you. Even as we speak, she is amusing your guard. He'll be mesmerized for hours by her charm." He turned and left to give their order to the kitchen. "Don't forget to leave a nice tip for your waiter before you go," he said over his shoulder as he walked away from their table.

They sat there, staring at each other.

"So, it's now or never." Anna said.

They gave each other the slightest of nods.

"Like Odin said, the ladies room is by the staff entrance," Anna continued. "We'll each casually walk out to powder our noses. You first, Aida. Liudmila will follow in a couple of minutes. Then I'll go two minutes after that. We'll wait there for each other, then casually stroll out the back door and make our way to the American Embassy."

Aida stood. She kicked her chair accidentally as she did. Then she bumped into the man sitting behind her.

"Walk, don't run," Anna said under her breath. "Remember, you're just off to pee. Be natural."

The wait was excruciating. Liudmila fidgeted, then pushed her chair back.

"Not yet. She's only gone a few seconds,"

"But —"

"I'm CIA trained, remember," she said. "It's all coming back to me. Do it my way and I'll get all of us out."

"So, why didn't you escape earlier if you had that CIA training?"

Anna didn't have a good answer. "I didn't want to," she finally admitted.

After that, they sat in silence as the seconds ticked away. Two blond little boys looked on from the

square. Simple clothing said they came from simple families. They knew they would never be able to step past the ropes dividing the outdoor seating from the rest of the plaza. Never to be able to sit down in a place as elegant as the Gerbeaud and sample its delicate confections. Anna tried to dismiss them from her mind: too much going on.

“Why don’t you go see if that silly girls need change for the washroom.” Anna said.

“Yes, I will do just that,” Liudmila said. Her voice choked. She managed to smile. She stood and walked into the restaurant.

Odin came out with their coffee and cakes just as Liudmila walked by.

“There, I believe I’ve gotten it right,” he said placing the food at each setting. “I hope you won’t be offended if I ask you to pay now.”

“Not at all, sir,” Anna answered blankly.

“Four coffees, four cakes, that will be one hundred Forints, please.”

Anna fished around in her purse. That was exactly how much she had. Odin rubbed the coins between his fingers. Then he tossed the money to the staring boys. They stooped and picked up the change like pigeons after crumbs. After watching the boys, Anna turned back to Odin. He had disappeared.

Anna stood. She turned and casually walked through the ornate doorway. The confection counter stood ahead of her with rows upon rows of delicate pastries decorated with colorful marzipan, glaze, or swirls of creamed frosting. Grand mirrors covered the wall behind the counter. Vaulted ceilings arched up, painted dark brown with baroque leaves of gold. This would be the last time she'd see this place. All-in-all, it wasn't a bad place to spend her few hours of freedom. She turned to the right and walked down three marble steps to the dining area. A quick turn right to the ladies' room, and she disappeared from sight.

---

“Why are you back?” Odin asked the Goddess Freya as he cleaned a table, still in his waiter’s uniform.

“Their guard is fuckin’ gay!” Freya rubbed her temples in disbelief.

“What!”

“He wasn’t interested in me. He went back to his post by the fountain. He saw the girls were gone and he went off to phone in an alert. Uri’s agents and the AVO are scrambling even as we speak.”

“I can’t believe how stupid I was not seeing this. I gave up an eye for knowledge, why don’t I use it?”

“If they get killed,” Freya warned, “they will be considered deaths in battle. They will be counted as your fallen worthy. The Valkyries will take them directly to Valhalla.”

“I know.”

“They’ll be your charges.”

“I know.”

“You’ll have to care for them, all three of them.” Although a head shorter, she stared him in the eye. “I just want to be sure the time you’re fucking them isn’t coming out of your time with me.”

“Then we’ll have to be sure they make it out alive. Come with me, Freya. We are going to be their guardian angels.”

---

The three strolled down Dorottya Road, still too close to Vorosmarty Square to dare break into a run. Just then a grey Lada flew past. Then another, ten seconds later.

“Did you notice that both those cars each had four men in grey suits?” Anna asked.

“Yeah, just like our guard,” Aida spoke.

“And they were heading towards the square,” Anna said, looking back.

“Oh shit,” Liudmila muttered.

“Odin, what have you done to us!” Anna cried out, looking up to the sky.

An old lady appeared out of nowhere, or perhaps she stepped out from one of the small doors along the narrow sidewalk.

“Oh, you girls startled me,” the woman said. “Would you mind helping me across the street? I’m going to the number two tram stop. The one by the Danube.”

Bug off, we don’t have time now, Anna wanted to say. But, her upbringing taught her to always be polite and, to her own surprise, she found herself saying, “Err, yes, we’ll be delighted.”

They found themselves, three beautiful women in short flowing summer dresses, crossing a street at a slow walk. Excruciatingly slow. Aida and Anna each held an arm of the woman. Liudmila carried the woman’s shopping bag.

“Don’t look around so much,” Anna said in a hush as they crossed the street.

“You girls are so nice to help an old woman across,” the old woman said, clutching her fingers into Anna’s arm. “With the way these cars fly past, I could have gotten killed. Would you be so kind as to help me the rest of the way to the trolley? It’s just down this road. You can almost see the stop from here.”

“Yes, certainly.” Anna couldn’t believe what she said. So, the three of them plus the old woman started a slow walk up the narrow street heading towards the Danube. The slowest getaway on record. They turned the corner just as Anna saw two men in grey suits walk by, coming from the direction they were heading. The girls would surely have bumped into them had they not been diverted.

It seemed like it took an eternity, but they helped the old woman to her tram stop. From the station they could see Buda Castle Hill across the Danube. There was the Matthias Church and Fisherman’s Bastion both sitting on the hill’s crest. Upstream, there was the Chain Bridge, with its mammoth blocks of granite and iron truss work, which first united the cities of Buda and Pest more than a century ago.

“You’re all such delightful young ladies to take time helping me,” the old woman said. “I can tell by



your fidgeting that you must be in a terrible rush.” The number two tram arrived just then, Anna found herself helping the woman step up onto the train. “Thank you, you are all very kind,” she said as the car’s door closed and the electric motors whirled in motion.

“Hey, you forgot your shopping bag,” Liudmila called as the tram pulled away from the stop.

The old woman stood looking out at them from the back window, unconcerned. She waved at the three of them. Then a change fell upon her as she turned into the most beautiful woman of golden hair as the tram shrank in the distance.

“A goddess!” Liudmila said.

“Odin mentioned Freya was helping him,” Anna said.

Freya, the goddess, put her fingers to her lips and blew them a kiss as the tram disappeared around the first curve, leaving the backdrop of the Parliament Building with its red star on the spire.

“Look in her bag!” Liudmila said staring inside. “Clothes, and what rags they are!”

“Odin’s toying with us,” Anna said peering into the bag “These clothes were left for us as disguises. He wants us to work for our escape. So be it. Let’s change.”

The underground toilets were hot and smelled of urine. That didn’t stop them from using them to change. Liudmila and Aida came out as young men, neither one having much for breasts. Anna dressed in the typical factory worker woman’s garb: grey dresses, aprons, and a dull scarf. Once on the street she walked hand in hand with Liudmila, like a couple. Aida skipped along on Anna’s other side like a teenage boy.

Within fifteen minutes the streets were full of police, Hungarian soldiers, and nondescript men in grey suits that looked suspiciously KGB. The three were pushed aside more than once by men in cheap suits running past. They made their way slowly, ever so slowly to their destination. Don’t look around. Don’t hurry.

“The American Embassy is just a little further,” Anna said. From the banks of the Danube they had

made their way past the Chain Bridge, past the Parliament Building and were soon on Szechenyi Road that led to Freedom Square; the American Embassy was just beyond.

“There’s the park!” Liudmila said as the road opened upon Freedom Square. But their destination was still four blocks away. “Let’s go.”

“Stop!” Anna said. “I have a funny feeling. There are no police rushing up and down these streets, or in the square.” She peeked around the block and saw two cars parked next to each other under a grand oak tree. As an attractive young woman passed by, a man jumped out from the first car and demanded to see her papers. “Turn around quick. They’re all over the place.”

“Where can we go?”

“I don’t know!”

“Think of something!”

“Can’t you see I’m trying!”

“Uri’s going to string us up by the nipples!”

“Don’t cry.”

“Yeah, don’t cry, you’ll give us away.”

“Let’s walk hand in hand, and smile.”

“But, where are we going?”

“I don’t know. Anywhere but here.”

- - -

Night fell upon Budapest. The three of them somehow evaded capture as they ran along a maze of cobblestoned streets lined with buildings of centuries past. They decided, under Anna's guidance to try the Brits. They made their way to the British Consulate at 6 Harmincad Road. It wasn't far off. Nothing was really far off. But they had to backtrack to Vorosmarty Square to where they started from at the Gerbeaud

On their way, they had to cross Jozsef Attila Road. They saw their apartment building not three blocks down on the left. Anna thought how easy it would be turn and go back home. She caught the glances of the girls and saw they all had the same thoughts.

But they were in too deep. All they could do was continue their trek. They walked past the tree lined Elizabeth Square, casually, ever so casually, until they came across the old bank building which now housed the British Consulate. Looking past Harmincad Road, they could see the back side of the Gerbeaud. Anna felt a knot in her stomach at the realization they'd come full circle and it had taken them six hours to do it.

"There are two soldiers out front." Anna said as they peered out from behind a parked Trabant looking at the Consulate's entrance. They were guards from the former ÁVO. Despite the name-change after the 1956 uprising, they were still the dreaded secret police. "I don't think they're looking for us in particular." They didn't see any mysterious men in monotonous business suits lingering at the corner. Anna double checked. She looked all up and down the street, peered into the cars parked on each side. "This is the last place they'll look for us: so close to where we started."

"We can make a dash for the door. You know, walk up casually, then make a run for it." Liudmila murmured, desperate for this suspense to end.

"It's late. The front door is locked. They'll scoop us up as we stand there banging to be let in." Anna said.

"What should we—"

"Around the corner," Anna said. "There's an open window. We can jump up on the sill, pull the window down and be inside in ten seconds."

"I know that type of window. It only opens half way," Liudmila said. "There's a reason they left it open. No one can reach that high!"

"We'll climb up the sill. From there, I'll give each of you a boost up to the opening," Anna said,

looking at the single pane window framed in a thin band of iron. It was over a two meters tall. And, the opening at the top was barely wide enough to squeeze through.

“And you?”

“I can climb up!”

“You can’t climb up that window! And don’t tell me about your CIA conditioning. The only toned muscles you have left are in your pelvic region, and your jaw.”

“Thanks Liudi, I’m sure those muscles in you are much better conditioned.” Anna surveyed the streets. The two guards standing in front of the main entrance were bored. They peered around the corner every few minutes then returned to the front entrance of the consulate to continue chain smoking. “If I don’t make it, tell them who I am: Anna Singer, code name Andromeda. Tell them everything; tell them how Uri kidnapped us. Tell them where I’m likely to be. But above all: tell them you seek political asylum. If you both confirm each other’s story, the Brits will listen and take you in.”

“No, we can’t do this if there’s a chance that you won’t make it.” Liudmila murmured. “That was your plan, sticking together. Remember?”

“You’re not leaving me!” Anna said. “I’m just saying by off chance — if.”

Just then a Lada came to a screeching stop in front of the main entrance. A man in a black silk suit stumbled out. He held a gold handled cane. A woman with long golden hair in a short silver evening dress got out of the passenger side. The woman helped the man straighten himself up.

“We’ve come to see the consul!” the man said, loud and drunk.

“Closed sir. Come back morning,” the guard said in broken English.

The two of them pushed past the guards and walked up to the door. The guards were around them trying to usher them back into their car.

“I am British and I demand to see the consul, now!” the man said, agitated. He had a patch over his right eye.

Anna looked at them from behind the car.

“That’s Odin and Freya!” she said.

“They’re distracting the guards for us,” Liudmila said. “We should get moving. Who goes first?”

“You,” Anna said.

“But!” Liudmila started to protest.

“Don’t argue!” Anna jumped up onto the ledge of the window sill and pulled Liudmila up to stand beside her. Then she gave her a boost up with interlaced fingers. Anna was surprised to see how light the girl actually was. She lifted her up, as high as she could. By the time Anna had her foot chest high, she felt her load lighten as Liudmila took hold of the window’s edge. Anna watched as the girl scrambled over. Secretly, she wondered if the iron frame would give out under her weight and send her to her death as the thick glass self-destructed into spiked shards. Liudmila pulled her torso, then one foot, then the other over the edge. Anna could hear a thud as the girl fell to the floor on the other side. She was relieved to see the frame was able to bear her weight.

“You next, Aida,” Anna said, taking the girls hand and hoisting her up to the sill also.

“But, but, Anna, who will boost you? There is no way you can make it up on your own.”

“No time to argue,” Anna said as she held out her hands for Aida to step into. Indeed, how would she make it up? she wondered. But Odin had forced their hand before she could think things through. Would he provide an escape for her? Or would he have her be left behind, to suffer General Konstantine’s wrath? Would he then come to her at nights to visit upon her his steady stream of perverse release? “Okay, Aida, up you go!” she said as the young girl stepped into the stirrup of Anna’s hands.

Aida missed the handhold of the top of the window and fell out towards the sidewalk. She fell, scraping her hand and stifled a cry.

“Come on, try again!” Anna said, hoping Odin was still distracting the guards.

Aida caught hold of the top on her second try. Anna had to push her up, almost losing her own balance as she lifted the girl over her head.

“Okay,” Aida panted, “I think I’m half over.” Anna watched as Aida, too, pulled herself up onto the sill. Again, she held her breath hoping the window would hold her weight. One foot then the other disappeared inside. Then came the thud as she landed on the floor on the other side.

Anna jumped for the window’s top. Her reach was more than a foot short. She, too, stumbled back and fell off the sill onto the sidewalk. She climbed back up onto the window ledge, that was the easy part. She jumped again, again her reach was far short of the top.

“What’s keeping her?” Anna heard their desperate voices from the other side

“Shh, be quiet.”

“Quick do something!”

“What do you want me to do!”

Anna jumped again. She fell back, this time losing her balance and falling to the sidewalk once more. She looked to the corner where the guards could come strolling by any second. From the sounds, they had just finished pressing Odin and Freya back into their car. Or, perhaps it wasn’t Odin and Freya, perhaps it was just an English drunk and his Hungarian prostitute. She heard the guards threatening them with arrest if they didn’t drive off.

Anna climbed back to the sill and jumped again. Again she fell back. One more try. Every time she fell off the ledge she scraped more of her hands and knees on the way down. She felt blood drip down her shins.

“Hey you! Stop!” The guard had noticed her.

She stood. Frozen like a deer in a headlight. She was up on the sill again, but still unable to jump high enough to grab the top of the window.

“What are you trying to do!” The guards started marching towards her.

Anna realized it was all over. Her heart sank. She imagined being taken back to Uri in handcuffs. Then she imagined that there would be an execution. She saw herself in her classic pose on her knees, him walking behind her. She would then here the gun's trigger pull back. Then a bang. That would be the last image of her life.

What she didn't know, Uri was sitting in the dark and crying. He had gotten word of the escape. He did nothing to coordinate or supervise the hunt for the girls. The effort to bring them back was orchestrated by the agent they'd slipped away from. Anna didn't realize how opposite Uri's reaction would have been were she to be returned home.

Flop. Anna heard something from above. A pair of pants tied to another pair made a rope. Thrown over the window top it dangled for her within reach.

"Grab on," the Liudmila on the other side screamed. "We'll pull you over." Anna pulled herself up to the top of the window.

She wondered if the two girls could hold the rope with her climbing up. But the rope didn't fall back. Anna pulled herself up with the last of her strength. Even then, she heard the sound of running footsteps. The guards were upon her.

Just in time, she managed to pull herself to the top of the window. She flopped onto the edge of the window frame. Her head and arms in Britain, rump and legs still in Hungary. She tried to pull herself over but felt a hand grab an ankle. Then she felt the firm grip pulling her back.

"Ahhhh," the girls screamed as their saw Anna being dragged back out. Anna grabbed the edge of the window with her arms. She heard a ting and a pop from the cast iron frame. She wondered when it would implode.

The girls jumped up and grabbed her wrists and pulled. Anna felt like she was being scraped over stone and pulled apart at the same time. She waited for the frame to give way. Then she'd be impaled on shards even before she fell to the street.

She managed to get her free foot over to the British side. Soon she felt the guard's grip slip away from her ankle. And, with that, she tumbled into the sovereign territory of The United Kingdom of Great Britain. She fell to the cold marble floor of the former bank building with a flopping thud that reverberated through the hall. As she looked up she found herself eye to eye with Liudmila.

“Anna, we made it,” her friend said with a smile.



Andromeda

Anna Released

To be continued ...

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