

The Last Rainbow

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Borders

The smell of cappuccino filled his nose. The next thing to hit him was the burst of warm air. Then gradually as he moved about in the coffee shop other smells began to find their way into his sense of smell. Pastries of all sorts filled the coffee shop. They were baked in a shop right down the road.

Warren stopped quick as a small boy nearly ran into him as he navigated his way through the small shop. The sound of the bell on the door rang and he turned to look at the door absently as a woman walked in. She had long wavy blonde hair and it distracted him until she looked back at him with emerald green eyes. Then he noticed the plain brown coat that was attempting to swallow her whole. She smiled briefly, but not at him. She was watching the boy run circles around a man that may have been his father.

The line moved while the man tried to still the boy while he placed his order. He was staring up at the menu and mumbling. The teen girl behind him shifted on her feet while she looked away from the counter towards the corner of the room. In it was one of two tables in the shop. It was a small round glass table with two seemingly iron chairs, which were really made of plastic. In one of the chairs was a man in his twenties. The young girl was so focused on him she missed it when the girl behind the counter off to the right of the register asked for her order.

Warren turned back as the boy shot out of control of the man again and ran back towards the front window and began to trace his finger on the image of a steaming tea cup on the glass.

Warren became aware of the woman now standing behind him in line. He could hear her breathing, as if she had been running before coming through the door. He thought

that she might have run through the rain hoping not to get wet. He looked back out the window as traffic continuously rolled by in both directions. At this angle he could also see half of the woman behind him. She wasn't aware of his attention. He began to really look at her. Just beneath the surface of concealer make up was a bruise. He wasn't sure how he knew this, unless it had gotten worse and spread out past the concealer after she finished applying it.

The man grabbed a hold of the hand of the boy and opened the door to leave. The cold wet air outside wafted in and hit Warren. The woman behind him made a burr sound, which might have been involuntary. The door closed behind them as they left. At this point his focus on the woman seemed to have attracted her attention. She was now looking directly at him. She nodded. He was just starting to smile when he realized that she was signaling him of something.

"Your order Sir?" the girl behind the counter asked. The teenage girl who was waiting for her order looked at him coldly as he turned back around. He proceeded forward up to the counter.

"Mocha Latte, Tall." Warren ordered. He already had his wallet in his hand. The teenager was now staring at it while he went to open it to proceed to pay. At this point both the girl behind the counter quoted the amount of the sale and the woman behind him said something. He couldn't decipher either right away. But the price was being displayed on the register and he wouldn't have to ask for it. He did however turn around and look at the woman in the brown coat and said, "Excuse me?"

Just as the woman made eye contact with him Warren felt something tug at his hand. He turned to see what happened as the woman in the brown coat began to speak. "In defiance of his word." She whispered.

The teenage girl flew past both of them while the seemly polite nice girl behind the counter began to shout with a hearty voice, "Hey! You!" The other girl behind the

counter who had been making and severing the drinks stood stunned holding the teenage girl's order out.

While Warren began to decipher that the teenager had taken his wallet, the blonde woman with the brown coat ran after her.

The young man at the table began to jump up while they both proceeded out the front door. Warren watched as the teen flew out of his sight with the woman in the brown coat running after her.

"Dude she got your wallet." The young man said as tried to look out the window and down the street where she went.

"I knew she was going to go for it, punk kid. I hate that!" the girl behind the counter said. Warren turned back towards her and read her name off her nametag. It was Carrie Ann.

"Perhaps you could call the police?" Warren asked her.

"I'm so sorry, Sir. This place is just going to...well you know where."

The other girl put down the drink she was holding and retrieved the phone from under the counter. She punched in three numbers and put the phone to her ear.

"It was not your fault." Warren said smiling a little, "I should have been paying attention."

"Hey they are coming back!" the young man said. Warren looked back at the door. The blonde woman in the large brown coat was holding the teenage girl's arm and forcing her back into the shop.

"Yes, Ma'am, we just had someone get their wallet stolen here." The girl with the phone said. As the door opened they could then hear the teenage girl shouting.

"You bitch, let me go!" She shouted as the woman pushed her through the door. "This is nunya, Slut."

"Just you hush!" the woman commanded her. "The likes of you, you know where your going, don't you?"

"I was going south down 4th before your lame ass grabbed me." She retorted.

"Yes, ma'am, apparently another customer has the girl under her control." the girl with the phone said. The young man took up a guard position near the door. "Yes, a teenager."

"Oh man, I swear one of these days, I am just going to go nuts on someone like you!" Carrie Ann said. The teenager glared her way while she struggled to free her arm from the blonde woman.

The blonde woman didn't seem to be having any trouble controlling her. "I had one just like you. You know what happened to her?" the woman asked.

"I could give two shits!" the teenager snarled back.

"You're on the road to hell, young Lady. You better grow up soon, or you're going to be looking at life through vertical lines."

"Bite me, Slut!" she snapped back. Just then the blonde woman slapped the girl with her free hand hard enough to make a sound that echoed through the shop.

"Yes!" Carrie Ann exclaimed. Warren looked back at her. She shrugged.

"They are sending over a car." The girl with the phone said.

"I am so going to sue you, Lady!" the teenager screamed. At this point the young man decided to continue to guard the door from the outside. Warren watched him a moment as he lit up a cigarette while he pretty much stood in the way of the door opening at all.

"Just give the man his wallet, that was nothing compared to what is going to happen to you before you straighten up and fly right." The lady with the brown coat suggested.

"I already told you I tossed it. It's not my fault you didn't see where." She replied.

"Fine, we'll let the police search you for it. You think they will go any easier on you if you do have it and refused to give it back when you had the chance?"

The teenage girl saw some logic in that argument and proceeded to pull out the wallet from her jacket and handed it towards Warren. Warren stepped forward and retrieved it.

"You are so unbelievably stupid." Carrie Ann began, "Where did you grow up anyway? LA?"

"Oh give me a break you twit. What do you think you're about? Spending all day being nice to people taking orders for chump change. I bet that lamer dude has at least a hundred. That's like one hundred per five minutes. That's what four days work for you?"

Just then a police car pulled up. It only took a moment for the officer to be out of the car and through the door. The argument between the two young ladies ceased. The police officer was raven headed with crisp blue eyes. He looked to be in his thirties and fit into his uniform well. He proceeded through the door cautiously and relaxed only a moment after he assessed the situation.

"Hello Mindy." He said with a stern face.

"Oh my Gawd, are you like the *only* police officer in all of Seattle?" she complained.

"You're on my beat. How's your mother doing?" he asked.

"You would know, you perve." She said back. It was obvious that the girl's anger was being replaced with familiarity. She was no longer meaning it.

"You can let her go Ma'am." He said to the blonde woman. The woman reluctantly let go.

"About time, you freaking Harpy. What do you have, like steel claws?" She complained.

"Are you done running for today?" the officer asked her.

"Yea." Mindy answered.

"Good, because I would hate to have to add resisting to your list. Do you still have the stolen property?" he asked.

"No, she gave my wallet back." Warren said.

"Good, perhaps we can get this over with quite easily then." The officer said. "Mindy I am sure Alice will be so happy to see you again."

"What do you spy on me all the time?" She snapped.

"Just showing you that I care." He said sardonically.

"As if." She whined, "I want to press charges. This thing woman slapped me."

"That true, Ma'am?"

"Yes, sir. She had become quite hysterical. I was only meaning to calm her down. It seemed to have worked."

The police officer inspected Mindy's face. "No bruise, I'd hate to have to go through all that paper work, Mindy. It will take time away from getting you from lock-up back to the home. Are you sure?"

"I guess. I mean can anyone just come up and smack me across the face anytime they want to? It's bad enough she almost tore off my arm."

"Move your fingers for me." She wiggled all her fingers at him. "You seem okay, you want to go to the hospital first? Make sure."

"No, geez, what do you think I'm made of glass?" Mindy asked.

"Good, then we won't worry about pressing charges or going to the hospital, maybe you'll be back at the home before nightfall."

Mindy looked sideways at him.

"Come on, I will be back in in just a moment to take statements." He said as he escorted the teenage girl out to his car.

Warren heard himself sigh heavily. He hadn't realized it, but he was viewing all the events in a way that seemed to make them go faster than normal. At this point normal returned. It only took an instant for his wallet to be gone

from him and now it was back. It had all happened so quickly.

"What is your name?" Warren asked the blonde woman.

"Reba McGinnis and you?" she said.

"Warren Keith." He said shaking her hand, "Thank you Reba. You just reacted while I stood here in a daze. You must run pretty fast."

"That's not the first teenager to think they could get the best of me." She said smiling. "I reacted on instinct. If she had gotten away it would just make things worse for her. And I am glad you got your wallet back."

"So am I. May I buy you something? A coffee?"

"Espresso with cream." She replied.

"Very well." Warren said and turned around towards the counter again. "Add that to my sale."

"You know what," Carrie Ann said, "They are on the house. I am so sorry that your visit to our shop had to end up like this, I hope that doesn't stop you from coming back"

"Certainly not." He replied. The other girl, who seemed so stunned one moment, went right back to her machines and began to get their drinks ready. The police officer came back in and walked over to them. He handed out pieces of papers.

"This is just a quick form. If anything should come of it you may have to come down to the station to fill out a formal statement as it is she did return your property before I arrived. We can put that down as complete cooperation and should allow her to pass right through. I certainly hope this hasn't ruined your whole day." The officer said.

"No." Warren replied.

"Just another morning for me, Officer." Reba replied.

"Good, I'm Officer Pete Richards. You can reach me at Police Headquarters. Go ahead and fill those out and we can all go on with our day."

Carrie Ann handed Warren his drink, he went and sat down at the table and began to fill out the short form. He finished right away and handed it back to the officer who smiled at him warmly. "Thank you." He said. "Ma'am, good job. It is so nice to see it when everyone takes appropriate action against crime. It makes for a better world."

After collecting all the forms he went back outside.

"Bye now." Reba said as she followed him out the door. Warren, who normally took his coffee to go, stayed sat down at the table and drank it there.

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"Apparently she thinks that gives her the right to just come over and take anything she wants. Is that not the most ridiculous thing you ever heard?"

"Yes." Warren replied as he scanned the stocks on his paper. He had it full in front of him and couldn't see the man sitting across from him in the booth.

"She got her broom out last night, got on it and began flying around the house."

"Really?" Warren replied.

"No, not really. Hello, Warren, Yo man!" Warren dropped his paper and looked at the man across the table.

"Yes, Kit?" he asked.

"You are so out of it today. Did you skip your morning coffee or something?" Kit asked.

"No as a matter of fact I didn't skip coffee. I kind of wished I had." Warren explained. He looked at his friend with bronze skin and black eyes. He was wearing a cowboy hat, however not a 10 gallon one. It was actually sitting at such an angle that it might fall off at any moment. There were times when Warren contemplated whether or not it would for long periods of time.

"I am telling you, I am never going to get three feet next to a woman ever again." Kit promised.

"She wasn't the first and won't be the last."

"I can't afford another one. I got two on payroll as it is."

"I thought Sheryl was getting married, won't that take her out of the accounting department?" Warren asked.

"I wish. You know just living together is so common these days, especially when money is a concern, it's just not profitable to get married. Why give up the alimony when you can have your cake and eat it too?"

"Some might say for love." Warren replied. Kit started laughing. He laughed quite a bit and howled a few times. His outbursts were common and so unlike Warren that he just sat there reading more of his paper while Kit finished his laughing.

"You're not funny." Kit said at last and Warren smiled.

"Never claimed to be."

"Well I have got to get busy, you going to be here tomorrow?" Kit asked.

"And the next day." Warren replied.

"Oh yea, I have something for you."

"What?"

"A project."

"And this comes second after your personal life?" Warren asked sarcastically.

"Of course, what do you think I am, your business partner or something?"

"I have as yet to figure it out." Warren replied. He then looked up and around the bar to signal the waitperson. Today it was a man named Todd. He signaled him over.

"I think your going to like it." Kit said.

"I always get excited when you hand over a project." Warren replied.

"But it's not like any old project, it's for you."

"I don't understand the difference, if you have a project that you give me, it's for me."

"No, you do projects for me. That's the nature of the Biz. This one is for you. I won't have anything to do with it."

Now Warren began to get suspicious. "I can't finance a project right now." He explained.

"Don't worry about that, just go look at it, dammit."

"I'm serious." Warren insisted.

"So am I, just go check it out. You're expected." Kit said.

"Today?"

"Or any day this week. You don't have to call anybody, just go there." Warren locked eyes with Kit as he rubbed his chin. Todd came over with a drink and set it in front of Warren.

"Fine." He relented.

"I emailed the address to you." Kit said as he got up and started to walk away.

"Bye."

"See you." Kit replied. Then he left the bar. Warren finished reading the stocks and pulled out his PDA. He then pulled out his cell phone and plugged them together. He clicked on the little icon for mail and the PDA dialed out and began to retrieve his e-mail.

"Hmm." Warren muttered to himself as he saw an email from his sister, then there was another one, pretty soon there were almost ten emails from her. Then after that he got the one from Kit. The cell phone went off and he disconnected them and looked at the address on the screen. Since his day was so light he could have slept through it, he decided to go there. He then proceeded to pay for his drinks and headed out.

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The rain had slowed down but the streets were still wet. Traffic sounds were mixing in with the sound of splashing water. Warren headed across the street and hailed

a cab, which took him to the address. Warren paid the driver and proceeded to get out. The next thing he did was stand and stare. He double checked the address, but it was right. The building he had arrived at was a very old, very small church. In the very front were two stain glass windows, one with a cross in it, the other with some saint holding out a cup. Between the two tall front windows was an old iron double door. He couldn't believe it hadn't been replaced with something more modern.

The steps leading up numbered three and railings were there more for show than actual aide to climbing them. The white paint of the church was running gray from the weather and it had a slightly abandoned look to it. Unlike other churches, bars had not been placed over the windows yet. And they remained several feet above the ground. He decided it was kind of nice that no one had ever taken advantage of this unsecured building before.

When he actually reached for the door itself he suddenly got a queasy feeling in his stomach. He even stepped back and bent forward waiting for it to subside. It was overwhelming. He took another step back and the feeling abated. He stood there wondering why it happened. He looked over at the window with the saint in it again. And he couldn't help but think a moment before the cup he was holding had been in his other hand.

"Alright with you if I just take a look around?" he asked the guy in the window. He got no reply. He closed eyes and opened them again and suddenly felt astonishment. So much so he went all the way back to the sidewalk and began to walk back and fourth. The cup had changed hands again. Warren shook his head. "Maybe I had too many drinks and not enough food." He told himself. Then he looked at the window with the cross, nothing there seemed any different.

He refocused himself on reality and proceeded up the steps and reached for the door. This time he felt fine. When he pulled on the door it wasn't at all heavy like he imagined it

would be, it opened easily. That was when he realized it hadn't rusted anywhere. He went inside and closed the door. The vestibule had two benches on one side and a staircase on the other leading up into the steeple. The second set of doors to the small church were open wide inside the vestibule.

As he walked in the first thing he noticed was that all the pews were gone. The floor, made of hardwood had been polished recently. The two walls on either side contained three more large stained glass windows that had no breaks in them. At this point the only thing outside of them were two tight alleys between the church and the neighboring buildings.

The next thing he noticed was that closer to the altar there were several easels holding up canvases. Some of them were covered with cloth and one wasn't. The work being done was only half finished.

Although it was still overcast outside the lighting inside was bright. There were three large wheel racks hanging from the ceiling that would have contained candles at one point. They were now holding several large lights. The peak of the ceiling has all kinds of artwork in the beams. Even the space between had little depictions of either Christ himself, or other prophets of old.

The back wall however had a ghost image of a cross. He assumed that at some point someone had taken a statue of Christ off of it and the shadow was the part of the wall that hadn't been repainted. On either side of the dais were stairs that curved up five steps, beyond that was a door on either side of the back wall. One of them opened.

A woman came out of it. She had golden hair that was cut short to her head. She had blue eyes and had an almost, but not quite frumpy frame. She smiled immediately.

"Hello." She said, "You must be Warren."

"I am." He replied. "And you would be?"

She laughed, as she got closer to him. "That damn Kit, he didn't say anything about me, did he?"

"All he said was that I was expected."

"I knew he was up to no good." She said lightly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well he said you were coming over to look at the place. He said you were just a plain boring guy. Would miss you in a crowd, apparently that isn't so."

Warren looked baffled. She smiled again then she held out her hand.

"Dalinthia Barnes." She said, "You can call me Barnes, everyone I know does. It's sort of a sports thing you know how teammates always call each other by their last name?"

"Yes." He replied shaking her hand.

"You still don't get it, do you?"

"About your name?"

"No. Kit trying to set us up." She said. Warren's face went white. He suddenly felt an urge to turn away from her. "Well let's not let that get in the way of business. What Kit doesn't know won't hurt him."

"What do you mean?" Warren asked.

"I like women better than men. I've tried telling him that but he spends more time talking than listening anyway."

"How long have you known him?"

"Four years." She said.

"I think he's the one who doesn't get it." Warren said, "And I've know him a lot longer than that. This isn't the first time, but he got me good. I was focused on the job. I hope you don't mind that I didn't realize right away. Because if you weren't more interested in woman, then I might say something like you are very beautiful and it's my pleasure to meet you. Then I might even go so far as to kiss your hand."

Warren beamed a great smile at her and stood silently while her eyes moved back and fourth while looking at him. Then she burst out laughing, the sound of it ringing in the rafters.

"So you know Kit four years and we have never met, how did that happen?" Warren wondered.

"I have only just recently moved here from LA. Kit and I always got together when he was down that way on business. We talk sports mostly, but sometimes he wants to know why woman do this, why woman do that. And he just has never guessed as to why I might be so willing to tell him."

"How long have you been here?"

"Five weeks now. I have been hold up in a tiny little box that they call an apartment. When Kit found out I had no room to do my work he told me I could come here. And to tell you the truth, I have become very found of this place. I hate to have it go out on the market. I was considering getting it myself, but this is so close to downtown, I could never afford it."

"Well I must say. I can't see what he expects me to do with this place for the short span between the enclosing buildings and the lousy street access. Probably the sublevel is toast, that wouldn't hold up anything by code, they would have to dig down and reform the foundation. And then, if by some odd reason the building itself were to be kept intact, it would have to be raised. It's probably sunk two feet into the ground as we speak. From what I can tell at first glance the other buildings in the general area were built strictly around it, instead it being part of the street plan. It's amazing that they left it at all."

"Whoa, sounds complicated. And I thought Kit talked to much shop." She said and smiled again.

"Well this is what I do, I asses. Then I develop a marketable plan for new construction. Then Kit does the actual construction. If my plan is done well he can get outside financing and I get to eat."

"Well we do like to eat." She said, "And I think it would be a good idea sometime this week that the three of us got together and did just that."

"I'd be delighted." Warren replied. She burst out laughing again. "I think." Warren began to say as he spun

around, "I am going to have to get a look at the sublevel, is there a utility basement?"

"I hadn't honestly looked." She said, "The door on the left side has a small office and a restroom, I just assumed the one on the right was storage. The door is actually locked."

"Really?" he wondered. He walked up onto the dais and went over to the door. Indeed it was locked. Warren pulled out his cell phone while he inspected the woodwork around the door. He noticed that letters appeared around the frame itself. Then while he waited for an answer on the phone he inspected the door on the left, there were no markings on it. "Odd."

"No one home?" Barnes asked as she sat down at her stool and began to do more work on her painting.

"I have auto dial and anti-voicemail installed." He explained

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"That when it hits voice mail it hangs up and auto redials. I'm not even getting a ring yet." He explained.

"Well I don't envy you guys with your ears plastered to one of those damn things. If someone wants to talk to me, they have to either catch me at home with a regular phone or come looking for me. That was an issue before I left LA."

"Creditors?" Warren asked. She burst out laughing again.

"No the ex." She replied. The phone started ringing.

"Kit construction." The voice on the other end answered.

"Hey Jose, Warren, I'm at the church have you been here yet?"

"Nope, not me personally."

"Well it looks like the foundation has sunk several feet. I need to go below and check it out, but the door is locked, do you know of a key?"

"Yup. Shawn said it's in the top drawer of a really creepy looking desk in the office."

"Thanks Jose"

"Okes" He said before he hung up. Warren went through the door into a short hallway with one bathroom on the right and a small office on the left. He walked into the office. The only thing in it other than several shelves on the wall was a desk and a chair.

"Hey Barnes." Warren called out.

"Yea?"

"What the hell is this?" he asked. A moment later she stood in the doorway. He sat in the chair and looked at the thing made out of wood in front of him.

"A desk?"

"I get that, but look at this thing." He exclaimed, "It's like that saint in the front window."

"Oh so you met Howard then?"

"Howard?"

"Yea, I think that's appropriate. I mean if you have to walk past him everyday just to get in the door, you may as well call him by some name." Barnes explained. Warren squinted his eyes at her. "You had to have noticed him. You can't get past the door if you don't. And your in, so."

"I'm not sure what you mean." Warren said.

"You can't go through until he puts the cup in his right hand." She said dryly. "And I found that if say something to him then look away and back he does it then. Other wise I might just wait outside all day, my first day I wasted an hour just trying to figure it out."

"Are you saying I didn't imagine that? That the cup switches hands?"

"Seeing is believing." She assured him, "Did you not say something to him?"

"Actually I did." Warren admitted.

"Did you try to come in first?" She wondered.

"Yes. I couldn't open the door, my stomach hurt."

"Most effective." Barnes assured him. "Other than him, the doors only lock from the inside. And I leave my

work here in his care, haven't had a problem yet. I think most people leave churches alone in general, then specifically this one for that fact alone.”

Warren looked back at the desk. It may have been a roll top at one point, but the roll part was missing, in the center of the desk was a face of some kind of monster carved in it. On either side of the top of the desk were two Gargoyles that seemed to be made from the same piece of wood the desk was. They were facing towards the center so they appeared to be staring right at the person sat at the desk. "They don't move do they?" He asked.

"Not yet." She said and smiled.

Warren pulled open the right drawer. In it was a pile of dust that could have been paper at one point. "I wonder how long this place has been abandoned?" he said more to himself. Then he opened the left drawer. This one was perfectly clean except for the skeleton key lying in it. He pulled it out. "Well let's have a look see shall we?" he offered.

"If you say so." Barnes replied. They headed out of the office and went to the opposite side of the church. Warren pushed the key into the door and turned the key towards the right. Then he attempted to turn the doorknob. It refused to turn.

"Not as easy as it looks." He said.

"Want me to give it a try?" she asked.

"Be my guest." He said as he moved out of her way. She gave the knob a good wrench but it failed to move for her, as well.

"It's welded." She assured him.

"Well if they knew about the key they must have given the room an initial survey." Warren decided.

"I personally haven't seen anyone open it." She assured him.

"There wouldn't happen to be a crowbar around here?"

“Actually there is a toolbox in the vestibule, seems someone left it. Says Kit Construction on the side, I told Kit about it and he said he’d have someone pick it up, but no one has yet.”

“Very convenient.” Warren explained as he headed towards the front of the church, “Must belong to the original survey crew.”

“Ok.”

Warren found the toolbox under the bench on the left. He pulled it out and flipped it open. The best he could find was a hammer. He pulled it out and headed back towards the door.

With the key turned and Barnes holding the knob trying to turn it Warren tried to get the teeth of the hammer in between the door and its frame. Although he never prided himself on doing actual construction, this he thought he could manage.

“Welded comes to mind again.” Barnes said. “Want to trade?”

“I feel like I’m taking you away from your work.” Warren said as he offered her the hammer.

“Well it’s been great to have this place to myself this long. I think I can handle an interruption.” She said taking the hammer. “Ready for a loud noise?” she asked. Warren questioned her with his expression.

Barnes took the hammer and slammed the door near the door knob. Warren pulled his hand away in reaction to the sudden vibration and shook it.

“Too close.” She said, “Sorry about that.”

“Where you get an arm like that?” he asked. She smiled at him and turned the knob, she then pulled the door open.

“Lots of sports.” She said, “One of my favorite being baseball.”

“I thought girls played softball.” Warren asked as the stinging in his hand calmed down.

“Yes they do, I played Baseball.” She said and smiled. “You think they would have asked me to get off the team at some point, but they never did. If any one immediately knew I was a girl instead of a boy, they didn’t say anything, even when I became fully formed.”

Warren tried to remain looking casual when she pointed at her breasts, drawing his eyes to them. He failed and she laughed at him. “I’ll take that as a compliment.” She said.

“I’m sorry.” He offered as he pulled the door open fully.

“No need. I was pointing wasn’t I?” she asked.

“Yes.” He agreed no longer looking at her. He headed into the room, surveying it now that she was behind him.

“I think I’ll get back to work so you can too.” She explained, “Need any more help, just give a shout.”

“I will.” Warren said, “No stairs or any other doors.” He was more talking to himself at that point as he moved into the room. It was where some of the pews had ended up, but not all of them. He thought maybe they were just holding on to enough to keep the design, from which they could have new ones made. But he didn’t know who had done that, whether it was Kit Construction or someone before.

He moved around the room. It was square. The opposite side of the back end of the church would be the same amount of space broken up into the short hall, office and single rest room. Not much of a place for a rectory, he thought. He decided it was from older times, when the church was more of a community house and sometimes offered schooling to young children from days gone by even further. The separation of church and state took the kids out of God’s house so they could learn about evolution and other scientific wonders that uniquely conflicted with the Christian paradigm.

Warren studied the floor. If there was a way down, it had to be though the floor somehow. After scanning it he

began to see the lines of what would be where the floor came up to reveal a hole going down, a trap door. Most of it was covered with the stacks of pews. They would need to be moved. Warren went back to the door.

“Okay.” He said. Barnes looked back at him, paint brush suspended. “I think I may need your help again. Perhaps we can get you on payroll by the end of the week.”

“I’d laugh, but it’s really not a joke.” She said, “Kit’s extended me the offer of a job since I got here. I have yet to make money at what I am doing, so I may have to fall back on that sooner than later.”

“Really?” Warren asked. She set her brush down and headed back over towards him. “Just from what I can see, you could readily sell commercial art for good money.” He added.

“That would be my issue with it.” she explained as she followed him back into the room, “I refused to do art for sheer profit. I find it uninspiring and I’d rather be doing something physical for actual cash. You could call this a hobby at this point, except I’m unpleasantly possessed by it.

“This of course would be one of the reasons for my break up.” She finished explaining. She didn’t need directions on what Warren needed help with. She moved to the end of the first pew on the pile expecting him to get on the other. It was the only thing to do in the room.

They moved the pile into the center of the room and effectively unburied the whole of the trap door. Barnes walked over to it and looked at it.

“For some reason.” She said, “I just don’t see me wanting to go down there.”

“It could be flooded.” Warren offered.

“That wouldn’t be my first thought about what’s down there.” She said.

“I see.” Warren said. He flipped up the metal ring to get his hands on it. He then struggled to pull. He began making a noise against the struggle.

“You want help with that?” she asked.

“A crane would suffice, I think.” He said. She smiled at him again.

“I’ll get the hammer.” She offered. She went and got the hammer and came back. “Sometimes a nice thump loosens things up, like the door.”

Warren watched as she knelt and thumped the trap door all along its edges. She then grabbed the ring for herself and pulled on it. It failed to move for her either.

“Okay.” She said still struggling with it, “Maybe your assessment is valid, this does in fact require a crane.”

Warren moved next to her and they both got their hands on the ring pulling while the white of their skin shown threw. They eventually stopped.

“Its times like these.” Barnes said, “When I take myself a step back and say, it doesn’t want us down there and that’s probably best.”

“Whatever *it* is.” Warren said, “It doesn’t have my light bill.” Barnes laughed in response. This time Warren slammed along the edge with the hammer while she caught her breath. “If I have to.” He said, “I’ll just take up the wood itself.”

“I don’t think threatening it is such a good idea.” She said. Warren stopped and looked up at her from where he was knelt down.

“You’re starting to sound kind of New Age California just now.” He said.

“Well.” She replied giving him her arms out to the sides, “I’m already wearing that shoe. Its not like it’s my whole life, but little things sometimes mean more than they first appear. You want my minimalistic psychic impression?”

“*What?*” he asked. She laughed heartily enough.

“Well, New Ager or not, I’m not selling my skills to the highest bidder or anything. Just between you and me and the hunk of wood you’re trying to make move. It’s giving me a bad vibe.”

“And if I say I don’t believe?” he asked.

“To each his own.” She said back with a smile, “And I will help you if I can, but take it with the warning I’m giving you. In the end, you don’t want to go down there, flooded, full of rats, or just a massive sewer leak. There’s something bad about it.”

“Ok.” He said, “Back to the task at hand. I guess I’m going to have to tear up the wood itself.”

“Or you could just ask it to open for you, knowing it’s a bad idea.” She said.

“That might be more than I’m willing to swallow.” He said and smiled.

“And yet the stain glass guy in the window moving his arm around fails to spook you.” She said.

“It’s some kind of optical illusion, nothing more. I’m sure I could have it explained to me within reason at some point. It’s not really my concern right now.” Warren said.

“Hmm.” She said as she looked him over. Brown hair and light green eyes. She’d call him a looker in days gone by, but they were in fact gone by. “There could be a more mechanical solution, I’d just thought I’d give you fair warning.” She said as she held out her hand. Warren gave her the hammer. “Are you sure you want to do this?” she asked one more time.

“I fail to be swayed by a minimalist psychic on Tuesday.” He said and smiled at her.

“There’s a whole world of things unknown out there.” She said. She took the hammer and slid the handle through the ring. “This just might be a doorway to some of that. If I were you, I’d leave well enough alone.”

“It’s just a cellar.” Warren said and finally laughed loudly thinking she was going on about it as some form of a joke. She looked at him coolly with a serious expression. “I’m sorry.” He said, “I’m being insulting to your beliefs. That’s rude and I’ve only just met you. But please understand, despite any of that, I live in the real world, that’s just me.”

She finally did smile back at him, perhaps in acceptance of his apology, and then a moment later he found it hard to take it too seriously with what she said next. “Righty tighty lefty loosey.” She said.

Barnes wrenched the hammer counter clockwise and Warren watched as the metal fitting going across the circular indent moved at her insistence. Logic came back to him then. The ring locked the cellar closed. But the only conclusion to ever have a lock from the inside to the otherwise inaccessible downstairs was to lock something down there.

Barnes pulled the trap door open after a full half turn of the ring. “I’ll prefer this locked after you’ve left.” She said. He took her real concern, but he couldn’t imagine why. From the smell of the air coming out of the hole he surmised that the downstairs was air tight.

He stuck his head down to get his eyes adjusted to the light level to see that there was a staircase leading down. He held up his hand and without a word Barnes placed the hammer in it. Warren banged on the wooden staircase to sum up its stability. “Newer than most of this place.” He decided, “It should hold me.”

He set the hammer down and moved to get on the first step. The angle was more like a ladder, so he chose to go down it backwards and hold on where appropriate. He stomped each foot making sure the next riser didn’t happen to be the one rotted out against the rest.

Before to long he was standing on the ground. As his eyes adjusted to the lower light, from what of it that was coming through the hole, there was no actual floor. “Any light?” Barnes asked. Warren took a step away from the steps and felt something drag across his shoulder. For a moment he was spooked. Then he shook his head after flinching from it to realize it was a dangling cord for the light. He pulled on it and an old small light bulb shinned out light. It didn’t make it to the corners, but he could see well enough to recognize that the cellar there was just under the back

portion of the church, the rest moving forward, if there was anywhere to go, it was behind an old stone laid wall. In the middle of that, raised two feet from the dirt floor he was standing on was an old wood slat door. The only thing else down there was the boiler used to heat the place.

“You want me to hang out?” she asked, “Just incase you get too quiet and need help?”

“Yes, if you don’t mind.” He answered, “Its not that I’m clumsy or scared or anything, it’s just a good precautionary measure.”

“Sure, Warren.” she agreed. He looked back up at her and she looked kind of spooky with the brighter light around her head from above her with her face in the shadowy light of the cellar. “Find what you’re looking for?” she asked.

“Not much to look at.” He answered, “I’m seeing this part of the foundation is made of rock. That’s a big deal in being unviable for the next sale. In order to shore it up, they either need to coat it with a cement covering or simply replace it with a modern foundation. In either case the whole thing is sinking, even down here. The incline from front to back is severe. It looks like...” He paused to look at where the wooden structure rested on the back wall, also made of stone, but newer than the interior foundation, “That they raised it up some against the incline. Not bad, but not up to code. Even for forty years ago.”

“You’re not really speaking my language.” She said, “I’d accept yes or no.”

“Well, yes for this part of it, but no not everything, this is just the back of the foundation. It appears there may have been an original structure the church either incorporated as it was built, or covered over.”

“Huh?”

“An even older, original foundation than the one that marks the current boundary of the exterior building.” Warren added.

“Okay, you’re just going to have to show me, because you’re talking like...oh I don’t know.”

“Like a building assessor?” he offered.

“Yes.” She agreed as she came down a few of the steps slowly. She also came down them more like steps than a ladder, but she was sitting on the steps as she came down. She stopped halfway. “Okay what are we talking about?” she asked.

Warren pointed to the stone foundation between him and the rest of the building heading back towards the front. “That.” He answered, “That’s the original foundation of a building built much smaller than the whole of this church.”

“Is that common?” she asked.

“Nothing is common in construction, for anything even thirty years old. Some people built things by the seat of their pants it seems. Codes have become much more specific in the way things are to be built in being safer if not more economical to both the environment and consumption of resources, in heating, cooling and general lighting.” He answered.

“Did you go to school for this?” she asked.

“Not like your thinking.” He answered, “I started with a hammer in my hand like a lot of guys. The subs didn’t like me correcting their work after a while, it went from there. Now it’s in their best interest to listen to me at the company level, never mind the subs.”

“What’s a sub?” she asked. Warren turned to look at her and laughed.

“A sub contractor, either an electrician or sheet rocker or any other part of construction.” He answered.

“Ok.” She said, “I suppose I should know that if I’m actually going to work for the company.”

“I guess that depends on what Kit has you do.” Warren said.

“I’d imagine it would start with a hammer.” She said and smiled.

“I think you need something else.” He said as he studied the door.

“Like?” she asked.

“A patron of the arts. Someone who is willing to support your efforts while it’s not providing you with income, get you ready to go to a gallery. Then you’ll make sales. If you’re marketed right you can start with price tags into the thousands.” Warren explained.

“Now you’re talking my language.” She said.

“You’re getting some of that from Kit right now in having this place as your studio. I doubt he could afford to keep you here free and clear though.” Warren said, “At this point, you’d need to clear it with me anyway.”

“Why?” she asked.

“He just dumped this thing on me.” Warren explained, “His idea of a challenge I suppose considering how unmarketable this little hole in the wall is.”

“How much do you think it would go for?” she asked.

“There’s a lot more research needed to make a valid determination. But your instincts are right, this close to downtown makes the real property worth more than the building itself, even if you could get a grant against it to make it a historical land mark.”

“Is that possible?” she asked.

“The wooden structure is still very sound.” he said, “Depending on the right support, whether or not this particular church held a decent religious group worthy of noting past the current decade.”

“You mean like Catholics.” She said.

“They might pour money into it, but I doubt it was a Catholic church. Had I only to guess, I’d say protestant. It’s a minimalistic church.” He said and smiled at her.

“And me?” she asked.

“You can stay as far as I’m concerned.” He answered, “But I don’t know how quickly it will become a project of actual activity.”

“A month maybe?” she asked. Warren looked at her again.

“A many as six depending on what I come up with.” He answered.

“Six months here, free of charge?” she asked.

“There’ll be a deficit of funding against it going on unused for that length of time. I need to work it into my proposal and get a backer. Kit doesn’t think it’s a problem because my name is gold with all of his financing. He makes money hand over foot on my say so. But I have yet to go directly to them myself.”

“Why the change around?” she wondered.

“I’ll make more money this way and he can just be the main contractor instead of the spear head of the project. Essentially I’ll get the headaches along with the money plus it is small. He doesn’t want it on his desk. I understand that, he’s got bigger and better outside of downtown. Market East is growing so fast right now.”

“So that just leaves you to go through that door then?” she asked. Warren turned to look at the wooden door.

“That’ll answer the question of whether or not the exterior foundation wraps around to the front of this one or is also outside it.” Warren explained. He moved over to where the exterior foundation touched the interior one. “I really can’t tell from here, this might actually go out a bit more on the width than the way the newer stones have been laid against it, or it might be the corner.” He added.

“You know that door makes the one above me seem friendly by comparison.” Barnes said, “If I had to say what from, I’d say that was the real feeling there. Not from getting down here alone, but going beyond that as well.

“It’s gotten stronger since I came down here myself.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing more than an empty room.” Warren said, “Since the boiler is in this part. It looks too inaccessible for any kind of real storage either.”

“What about the fact that it’s higher?” she asked.

“They may have been trying to improve against a standard with the addition of the exterior foundation. Shallow foundations are definitely ones from older times, when it was nothing more than a crawl space.” He answered.

“You a gambling man?” she asked. Warren laughed.

“No.”

“I’ll bet you dinner that what’s beyond that door is more than just an empty space.” She said.

“Alright, dinner.” He said, “You changing your mind about me already?”

“Not that I had one to begin with, but no, not like your saying. Your cute, I’ll give you that, but your still only just a man.” She said. He smiled at her.

“Friends then?” he asked.

“Absolutely, especially since you’re already friends with Kit add that to you letting me stay here, too? Friends for life. Hope you can handle that.”

“I’m sure I’ll do just fine.” Warren said as he moved to the door.

“I don’t think it’s going to open for you.” She said.

“Why?” he asked hesitating wanting to hear what she would spin for a yarn next.

“First there’s a guy at the door, he doesn’t want to let you in here until you say something. Then an already locked door that doesn’t want to open even with the key, which just happens to be in one spooky looking desk.

“Warren, I got nosey with that thing already and couldn’t get the drawer to open for me, not even the right one which came open in your hand like it was nothing.”

“Your contradicting yourself.” He said.

“I know, but after that there’s a trap door which looks innocent enough, but it’s locked as well leaving you to rely on me to figure out how to unlock it over you just pulling it apart. There’s one more door, one more passage for you to go through. It may be the last one to oppose you. So, no I don’t

think it'll open easily for you." She said. Warren smiled at her. He moved forward and lifted the old cast iron lift lock easy enough. He then pulled the door away from the stone wall.

"Seems easy enough to me." He said and smiled even more at her. She folded her arms in front of her. He looked beyond. The wooden door was only covered an opening. The opening was torn into the wall and was not much more than a square hole for someone to crawl through. He stuck his head in and then pulled it back out. "A bit dark in there." He admitted, "I somehow doubt there's a light in there. I'll need a flashlight."

"A candle would be more appropriate I think." Barnes said. "At least an oil lamp."

"Your not suggesting that the flashlight wouldn't actually work in there are you?" he asked. This time she laughed heartily about it.

"No." she replied, "I think I know where there is one, stuffed in the bathroom of all places. Bad place to be if the lights went out at night I suppose."

She climbed easily enough back up through the hole. Warren looked around some more, studying the wood rafters holding up the floor above his head. The only thing he found odd about the place was the lack of life. No spider webs or bugs of any kind. The air was stale, which meant he was right, no air came in and out of the place at all. It was a good selling point, but unusual for a stone foundation that may or may not have been pieced together with some form of grout.

Barnes came back down the hole and he moved over towards her and accepted the foot long black flashlight. He smiled at her again and then went back to the opening. He clicked the flash light on and shinned it in the hole, swinging it from side to side.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked.

"I'm right?" she asked.

“You like Mexican?” he asked, “I need to take Kit out anyway, it could be the three of us, but it would put him in a good mood to have it be Mexican over anything else.”

“What’s in there Warren?” she asked ignoring the dinner plans.

Warren shined the light across the glossy floor. From each angle he shined the light on across it he could see etched lines in the floor beyond.

“It’s definitely not a wine cellar.” He replied.

“Is it weird?” she asked.

“Definitely weird.” He agreed as the light came across a bookcase against one wall. He climbed halfway into the hole to get a better angle.

“Details?” she asked.

“Why don’t you come look?” he asked.

“I think I explained that well enough.” She replied.

“I’m not one for knowing all the ins and outs of old Christian religions, but this doesn’t seem to be part of that.” He said.

“Well, if as you say they incorporated something older to put this church on, its possibly a more pagan religion you need to be familiar with.” She said.

“That would explain the mystical looking circle.” He agreed.

“Your serious?” she asked, “A magic circle?”

“Well, not to be totally dense.” He said, “My office assistant is always reading her horoscope out loud and I’m faintly familiar with most of the astrological signs.”

“Are they surrounding the circle?” she asked.

“Well, I think they are similar to that, but again, I’m no expert. They aren’t always drawn the same right?” he asked.

“Oh alright.” She said coming off the stairs, “You already broke the seal. I’m here anyway. I can look.” Warren pulled out of the hole and handed her the flashlight.

Barnes peeked in at first, holding the light with both hands like a weapon before she finally leaned in.

“Oh this isn’t good.” She advised. Warren laughed. She pulled out enough to look at him.

“I am not afraid of some old pagan ceremonial room or whatever it is.” He said.

“Right, no sense of the mystical.” She said, “But seeing how I was feeling it already before you opened the door, before you crossed the border, I’d have something more to be concerned about.”

“Like the mummy’s curse?” he asked.

“Not likely.” She said echoing his sarcastic tone, “But perhaps an older religion had more emphasis on things we like to shove to the side as nothing. Something that’s still powering this thing. The same energy that keeps animating Howard to guard the place.”

“Its sounds glamorous, but no.” Warren said. “I need to crawl in there now and see if I can get a good look at the front end, see if it aligns with the front end’s foundation.”

“Well, you don’t have to go in there to figure that out.” She said, “Even I can tell the front of the church is much further out than this room. I recommend you take my last warning. Do not cross the boundary of that circle.”

“There may be another opening on the other side then.” He explained. She moved out of the way and handed him the flashlight with a frown to go with it.

“Crossing borders like this is not to be taken lightly.” She said.

“I respect you to believe what you like.” Warren said, “But most of religion is based on that, belief. I don’t believe so therefore whatever curse is about to befall me will fail to do anything.”

“Ok.” She said as she backed away from the opening. She eventually moved to sit back on the steps. Warren gave her one last look and finally just crawled through the opening all the way.

There wasn't enough room to stand up. The idea might have been that anyone in the room was only ever allowed to sit in there. The tight space made him only slightly claustrophobic.

The thing that was getting him was that he was now going around the outside of the circle instead of taking the more direct route across the room to the other side. It couldn't hurt not to go inside the circle either.

He stopped to run his hand along the surface of the floor. When he lifted his hand and looked at his fingers under direct light he was sure of it, the floor had no dust. This once again implied no air flow in the place.

"How you doing?" Barnes asked sticking her head near the hole again. Warren jumped. He then looked back at her. "I kind of thought you might be smart, even for a disbeliever." She added.

"I'd rather not desecrate it for more practical reasons." He said, "I'm sure it would be of interest to my anthropological friend. I might mess it up by crawling across the symbols."

"Somehow I doubt that." She said, "But go with it anyway. Who knows what they were trying to accomplish with it."

"Looks like something you might see anywhere." He decided. He moved all the way to the back and realized the angle of the incline had affected the floor. He was now up from where she was. That made him look up above him. He slowly fell back against the dustless floor to get a look at the ceiling above him, below the rafters, enclosing the room.

He ran the flashlight along it and Barnes leaned in to look up as well. "Oh my God." She exclaimed. Warren had the same words on his lips, but they lacked breath to go with it.

The ceiling, equally glossy as the mystical circled floor was showing a scene of the universe with incredible artistic detail.

“And God made the Heavens.” Barnes added. Warren ran the light down along the wall surrounding where she was leaning in. The scene on the wall, again on an equally polished surface was broken from where the hole was made. Almost as the room was meant to be sealed, leaving the artist within to paint these scenes.

“This makes no sense.” He complained. “How could they have gotten in here to paint all of this and then gotten out?”

“I wouldn’t be too quick to look for a logical answer there.” She said, “If you ask me, it’s more like you were saying about the mummy’s curse. It’s a tomb. And they lay the body across the circle.”

“Do they always put bookcases in people’s tombs?” Warren asked as he scanned the flashlight over the small bookcase along the wall in the front, where he suspected would be another opening behind it.

“How about hiding the place under a church?” she asked, “Or building the church over it to hide it. Like they might have a reason to do that beyond what I know about it.”

“Which is what?” he asked for clarity as he began moving around the circle towards the front again.

“It was common for the encroaching Christian religions to take over pagan sites in the old countries, where they merged their two religions.” She explained, “It doesn’t surprise me that they might do the same all the way out here on the West coast.”

“What era are we talking about?” he asked.

“Outside this room, maybe the 1800s.” she offered, “The room itself? I have no idea. Old.”

“There’s no dust in here.” He said, “Almost as if someone had been in here and cleaned it recently.”

“In the past three weeks?” she asked.

“Uhm.” He said a she looked back at her.

“If it had been in the last three, I’m sure I would have noticed something about it. Unless they come in the middle

of the night. I like to be out of here by midnight at the latest and I'm here as early as six AM on some days." She said.

"Well other than that, the cellar appeared to be sealed shut tight." He said, "That might be some explanation. No air flow."

"The next question would be when exactly they had decided to break into this." Barnes said. She pulled out of the hole. "And then put a door on it to cover it. The door looks at least a hundred years old."

"I'd agree with you on that." Warren said as he crawled up close to the bookcase. That's where it became obvious that the ceiling was parallel to the floor and holding the same sagging angle as it. He was inside of a box, on the outside surrounded by old stone, on the inside something too modern to believe. Polished stone surface with sketched etchings and a full color scene flowing across the ceiling and spilling down the walls.

Warren saw behind the wooden shelf containing numerous books was nothing more than a continuation of the interior wall with more drawn space and stars beyond it. He wouldn't get his answer that way. There had to be access to the front part of the cellar in the front.

He moved to try and read one of the titles on the books. They were not written in English. They might not even be words to his untrained eye. They looked more like symbols lining the binding.

He moved his hand towards one and was about to touch one. "I wouldn't do that." Barnes warned, but she was sufficiently too late. Warren's errant finger just pressed slightly against the binding and the book turned to dust.

"Oh Shit." He complained. It set off an a domino effect as the other books supporting each other between the edges of the shelves fell inward hitting each other and wisping away to dust as well.

Then the entire bookcase collapsed as it might have been wanting to do for a few centuries already. The whole

thing collapsed, dust rolled away but quickly settled against the floor and didn't quite invade the circle on the center of the floor.

"Okay, I can feel bad about that." Warren said, "They might not have been able to get much more than an image of it, but still."

"Warren." Barnes said, sounding enthusiastic.

"What?" he asked shinning the light back at her.

"Go back, shine the light there again." She said. Warren shined the light on the pile of dust. "Look, there's one that did not crumble." She pointed out

Warren could just make out the surface of what she was referring to. He moved his hand slowly pushing against the dust to reveal it. A single book out of them that, like the floor, defied its age with its fellow books shelved at the same time now nothing more than swirls of dust in the air and this one looked new.

Warren lifted it up. It seemed to be bound in leather like the rest with it dyed black and it had silver lettering. None of it looked readable to him. He pulled it with him as he crawled back around the outside of the circle.

"Thank you." Barnes said as he got closer to the hole.

"For what?" he asked.

"For respecting the circle even if you don't believe." She said, "I'd have to start worrying about you only after just meeting you and becoming your friend if you did that. I don't think it was meant for us."

"Ok." He said as he moved the book closer towards her.

"I also recommend leaving that here." She said, "If its not a tomb for a person, seeing there are no bones, perhaps it was meant to keep those books locked in, more specifically that one. Once out of here it may no longer be protected."

"Alright." He said, "I officially own this. I can respect the circle for my own reasons. But the book is coming out of here with me."

She stepped back from the hole and refused to take it from his hand. Instead he moved about, getting himself out first and then reaching back in for the book.

When he turned back around she was shaking her head at him. "It'll be fine." He promised with a parental note and smile.

"Just the audacity of it." she said, "Nothing personal about it right now. Just the idea that that was in there with books so old they'd turned to dust and it didn't. What the hell is that?"

"I wouldn't know personally." He answered and then blew the bits of dust from the other books off it, "I'd need to get my friend to look at it and see what she thinks about it."

"And who is that?" Barnes asked.

"Athena Binsford." Warren answered, "She's mainly a chemist, but she's also got a degree in anthropology and studies that between her works in chemicals."

"I wish you'd put it back in there." Barnes said.

"Your being irrational." He said and laughed, "Let's get out of this hole. You go first."

She moved to the steps and climbed out. Warren climbed out after her. Once up on the first floor he set the book down so he could close the trap door and lock it for her.

"How's that?" he asked.

"It won't make a difference once you take that book out of here." She said, "Then whatever the purpose is will be gone."

"How about I go home and get cleaned up." Warren said, "Come back and pick you up in a few hours and the three of us will get dinner together. Me, you and Kit, Mexican?"

"Sure, get him first and he can lead you to my apartment." She answered, "I'd like to get cleaned up, too. And right now, I'm not too keen on being here at the moment."

Warren pulled out the chair for her. Dalinthia Barnes sat down graciously enough and let him push the chair in for her. Kit was smiling smugly at the both of them as they sat down at the wooden square table.

“You promise this is good?” Barnes asked.

“Sooner or later you are just going to have to trust me.” Kit said. He smiled again looking back and fourth between the two of them. Since the table was perfectly square they were each sat to a side, but Kit kept looking at them like they were sitting together.

“I could bring up the bar you took me to that one time...” She started to say.

“Okay, enough said.” Kit stopped her, “This is Seattle, not LA. I know my way around here a lot better than down there.”

“Alright.” She said, “I’ll give you your doubtful benefit.”

“That’s benefit of the doubt.” He said.

“Not with you it isn’t.” she said and laughed. Kit laughed with her and then looked at Warren.

“Why are you so quiet?” Kit asked.

“Just waiting for the two of you to be quiet before I riddle you with questions myself.” Warren answered.

“Well it is rare for you to get me at the dinner table. That’s why we have lunch and this.” Kit said as he waved his hands out expressively, “Is the only way to do that.”

A waitress came over and put nachos and picante sauce on the table.

“Give us the works.” Kit said, “We’ll pick at it.”

“Draft on Tap.” Barnes requested.

“Ice Tea will be fine.” Warren asked.

“My usual.” Kit said.

“Is that you’re Saturday night usual?” the waitress asked.

“No.” he answered, “We don’t even want to go there.”

“You got it.” she said and didn’t even bother dropping the menus she had brought over to the table. She headed off to get their drinks.

“What questions?” Kit asked.

“The church, where did you get it?” Warren began.

“A decimated estate. It hasn’t even belonged to a religion for at least forty years or more. It belonged to some old guy. He died, no heirs, the estate was auctioned off. Lamar got it for almost nothing and then signed it over to Foxworth. He asked me to look at it. So we went over it some. I thought it was more up your alley. Meanwhile the lovely and talented Miss Barnes shows up and I sent her to it, then I sent you to it and hey, what do you know the two of you met.”

“It’s in my name?” Warren asked.

“You are the current proprietor, had you purchased it yet to sell? No, Foxworth owns it outright at the moment. Once you get your backer he’ll sign it over to you, minimal profit for him, but you know how he is. If it’s not going to be a major market sale, he’s not going to sit on it. He’ll hand it over to you at a descent price and you’ll make a mint on it.”

“It’s worthless.” Warren said. Kit frowned. “You’re giving me something just because you don’t want it.”

“Okay.” Kit said, “So what? You throwing it back at me to stew on? Or should I just throw it back at Foxworth? Last thing I need is to not let him unload some junk on me from time to time. You remember that old strip mall. I couldn’t have done anything with that. Then you give me the plan with glittering revenue. That alone might just support my first wife’s alimony for the next year.”

“The foundation is sagging.” Warren said, “It’s old and useless in its current form. The real property dimensions are nothing anyone wants, let alone marketable. The best thing to do is donate it and turn it into a small park.”

“Oh come on.” Kit said, “You looked at it once. I know you can do better than that.”

Warren leaned back and rubbed at his chin making an expression of thought about it.

“I think you should leave it as a church.” Barnes said.

“There’s no money in that.” Kit said, “Warren’s right about that much. As nice and quaint as it is, you couldn’t resell it as is.”

“It’s going to be a hard sell, it doesn’t matter what you do with it.” Warren said, “It’s a frog that’s not going to accept a kiss.”

“I really need that beer now.” Kit said as he turned to look over his own shoulder for the waitress. He let out a smile as she approached with their drinks. She couldn’t even get his to the table. He took it from her hand and brought it right to his mouth. He drank half of it and then looked at her as she set down the other two drinks. “Keep them coming.” Kit said as he finally set his bottle down.

“What’s the real reason you sent me there?” Warren asked. Kit finally smiled again. He then shuffled his eyes over to Barnes and then back.

“Like I said, I thought it was up your alley.” Kit answered. Warren turned to Barnes and winked at her. She smiled back at him and took Warren’s hand into hers. She then smiled at Kit. “See.” Kit said, “I had a good reason.”

“There’s something we need to clear up now.” Barnes said.

“Oh?” Kit asked leaning forward some.

“Yes.” Barnes said as she pulled Warren’s hand over and acted like she owned it. She turned to look at Warren and kissed the back of his hand as if they had just met and she was the man about it. She then set it down. She turned towards Kit folding her arms and giving him a more masculine look evening out his broad smile with her own. “I’m gay, Kit.” She said, “I’ve been trying to tell you that since we met. You always put me off even when I get close to it. Rocky is a woman, she always has been. My allowing you to

keep thinking she was a man was just easier than trying to wrestle the point with you.”

“You are not gay.” Kit said.

“Okay we need to stop not hearing me.” She persisted, “Every time I approach the subject you get like this, like a wall. I said Rocky bought a new dress for a get together one time and you said, gee he’d look funny in a dress.”

“You were joking.” He said.

“I was bent over from surprise.” She explained, “I swore I’d never see the day for myself with her in one. It only reminded me of what a beautiful woman she is, despite how one person sees her over another. It was not a joke. She knocked everyone dead, came home and then put on loose fitting shorts and a t-shirt.”

Kit leaned back in his chair, looking at his own hands for a moment and then he looked up and smiled. “Stop messing with me.” He said.

“I don’t think she is.” Warren finally said. Kit looked at him. “And you need to stop trying to fix me up. I’m not like you. I’m not looking for a future ex Mrs. Keith.”

“I think there should be one, Warren.” Kit said seriously, “I know all I do is complain, but somewhere in the middle of all that is an experience you have yet to have. It’s a good experience.”

“I’m fine the way I am.” Warren said, “Should someone come along at the right time, then I’ll deal with it then. That’s not an open invitation for you to set me up let alone someone else. If we really are your friends, you’ll stop trying to do that to me and you’ll hear Barnes now. She’s telling you something. Get over yourself long enough to hear her.”

Kit looked back at her. She smiled again. “I said the wrong thing once in the beginning that got it stuck in your head.” She said, “To this day I should have never told you about it. You’re stuck on the idea that because I talked about

what it was liked for me as a woman to be with a man, that everything after that had to follow along the same lines.

“Back then I was still open to being with a man equally as open to being with a woman. After that I was no longer open to being intimate with a man. You, you Kit, are the only man I’ve been able to really talk to, which sounds so awful when I say it to know that you don’t even know that about me.”

“I’m not following.” Kit admitted and drank some more of his beer. Just as it became empty another bottle took its place in his right hand before the food even arrived.

“Do I really need to become descriptive with you?” Barnes asked. Kit smiled.

“You mean about what it’s like to be with a woman?” he asked.

“This is not the straight man’s fantasy about two women being intimate. Nothing could be further than the truth. I’d imagine you get that look from watching a bit of porn about it. Let me tell you I find that rather vulgar personally. You men, all you ever think about is sex. What does it feel like, etc.

“That’s why I don’t want anything to do with you anymore. Sure there’s a physical component to it, but it’s minor. The rest you skate over from one orgasmic experience to the next.”

Warren turned his head away looking at a family not to far away from where they were sitting. If they were lucky they didn’t understand English, which was a slight possibility even as far north as Seattle. He turned his head back when he heard Kit laughing.

“You never take anything seriously.” Barnes complained.

“If I’m such a hard ass why do we get along so well?” Kit asked.

“Who took the World Series in ’69?” she asked.

“The Mets of course.” He replied. She held her hands out palm facing up towards him. “Oh.” He said, “So it’s all about the sports? Those other little conversations, which I didn’t take as coming on to me, that has nothing to do with anything else?”

“Your questions seemed honest to me.” She admitted, “Not spilling out the side of your mouth like right now with another man present.” Kit’s face went flat and he picked up his bottle of brew slowly and drank some while he looked at Warren. He then set it down and looked at her again. “Ok.” He said.

“Good.” She said, “Now if you want to help me find an attractive woman, because I kind of think you have some taste even if your luck has been all bad, then we can talk. And I want a picture up front, none of this slipping me a name and saying, oh so you might have a visitor come by. Leaving me to grill you for details.”

“You could have said something then.” Kit defended. Both of her airborne hands hit the table.

“I did say something to you Kit. You skated over that, too. I said I just got here. Allow me some time to breathe before you start messing around in my personal life. That was the nice way to say don’t fucking set me up, ok?”

“Ok.” He replied, “Can we keep the choice words down? This is a family place and it’s early.”

Barnes looked around and saw a couple nearby staring at their table. She smiled apologetically and then turned back to Kit. “Sorry.”

“Seems to be catchy.” Kit said. The waitress came by with a tray full of different kinds of food. She set it up on a tray stand and began loading their free space up with everything the restaurant had going. “Thank you.” Kit said to her. She smiled at him.

“Need anything else, let me know. I’ll be right back with another beer for you.”

“Thanks.” He said. She left them to their meal. Warren started filling one of the empty plates with a variety of things. Barnes took her time choosing. Kit went ahead and grabbed a taco off the serving plate and ate it over his hand.

They spent a few minutes just eating some of the food. Eventually Kit set his next bite aside in favor of a drink from his beer and stuck with it. “Okay, so Warren where do we stand? Are you rejecting the project?”

“No, I’ll take it. We’re going to need a gap filler in the clause. I’m not going to magically produce the best market strategy over night. After that, finding a preferred buyer is going to take some time.”

“How much time?” Kit asked.

“I’d want six months in the wording to start.” Warren answered. Kit coughed on part of his beer and set the bottle down.

“Six months?” he asked. Warren smiled and tilted his head to get Barnes in his sight. Kit followed him, “Oh so we do like her?” Kit asked.

“The first woman you’ve sent my way that I’d be willing to have dinner with more than once.” Warren explained.

“Life is just so unfair.” Kit said, “I swore this was going to be the one who’d snap you out of this single phase.”

“It’s not a phase if it last more than a few years.” Barnes said and laughed.

“I don’t understand the desperate need to have someone else validate you from day to day.” Warren explained, “I like being alone. I like having my place to myself. And most of all I like going wherever I please whenever I want and not having to check it with anyone.”

“You say that and yet you have not had the experience opposite to it to compare it to.” Kit added.

“I don’t need to, ok?” Warren asked, “I’ll mention my girlfriend in High School. I can’t tell you how happy I was when she cried her eyes out saying she was going to a college

far away and thought it was best to break it off then. I could have thrown a party.”

“You are so cynical.” Kit said.

“What happened?” Barnes asked, “I’ve never seen anyone who just rather not have anyone around.”

“In my invested experience.” Warren answered, “She had way too many expectations. All of these things I had to keep in mind at all times to do. It seemed like everyday she added something to this list.

“And it wasn’t just my High School girlfriend. I had such relief when she left, I could just relax. A hundred and eighty degrees of my life seeming to be worth living as opposed to me thinking what chore I’d have to remember to do. I did date a woman for a year, the one Kit conveniently doesn’t remember.”

“What was her name?” Kit asked. Both Kit and Barnes laughed.

“It started out ok. I was actually looking forward to spending time with her in the beginning.” Warren explained, “A month maybe, one month later and we were comparing our date organizers to set things up to do together. Every single spare moment I had was to be joined with hers.

“I wasn’t even close to her then. I just thought she was nice, still. Apparently I run at a much slower speed when it comes to this, because she was running around my apartment one day looking at things and I asked her, ‘What are you doing?’ and she answered me by describing how she would like to change this or that. That some day soon we would have to sit down and decide how things should look that was mutually beneficial.

“This only got worse. Into our third month she was requesting a budget against *my* wardrobe. She had every intention of picking out all the clothes I would buy from then on out that would suit her, so she could arrange for outfits on the weekends so that we’d match.

“I thought I could live with this, but it was a repeat of my experience in High School. I may have actually been entertaining the idea that we were falling in love. Six months down the road and she moved in.

“Barnes I came home and she’d had all of her stuff moved into my apartment. It was never talked about. She assumed just because we were having sex at this point that we were already getting married. That it was only matter of time. And she said I love you four or five times a day and I never said it back to her.

“The first thing I did was change the locks. Then I had all of her belongings sent back to where they’d come from, her mother’s house.”

“Oh my god.” Barnes said. She tried to muffle a smile with her hand, but it escaped out the sides.

“She stepped back, but at this point she was still holding on and feeling like a dead weight that I was dragging around for the next six months.

“Then again the teary scene. Only she wasn’t going anywhere. She’d accidentally fallen in love with someone else. How you accidentally do anything like that I’ll never know. I smiled at her and said congratulations, good luck, good bye.”

“You’re making this up.” Barnes said.

“No he’s not.” Kit said, “And I don’t remember her on purpose, because after two weeks I’d met her and I told him to ditch her and he didn’t.”

“Aside from all that she was nice.” Warren said, “I have yet to meet a woman as gracious about life as her.”

“Too nice.” Kit said, “Too nice and kind of freaky.”

“And that’s it?” Barnes asked, “There will be no more adventures in dating?”

“I’d rather eat hot coals in Hell.” Warren said, “My life makes sense, its peaceful, I wear what I want to wear, I eat what I want to eat, I see my friends when I want to see them, and I don’t have to check anything with anyone.”

“I think the part Kit is talking about.” Barnes said, “The part I’m familiar with is the actual falling in love. It’s unmistakable when it’s happening. It doesn’t sound like that’s happened for you yet. High School girlfriend or otherwise.”

“I’m not interested.” Warren said, “Look at the both of you, sporting around talking about your last ex.”

“Maybe.” Barnes said, “But for two years I was in God’s honest Heaven right here on Earth. I don’t regret that and I look forward to having it again. Just as soon as I’m settled here.”

“Alright.” Kit said holding his palms up, “I get the message, let me know when you’re available again.”

“Soon.” She said, “I’m a little bit less upset with you for thinking to put the two of us together. However unlikely, he’s already earning a warm spot in my heart. Then of course just hearing him talk makes me see what you’re trying to do here.”

“Stop.” Warren said, “I don’t need two of you doing it now.”

“Respect.” Barnes said, “In knowing that it’s not in someone else’s best interest to pick someone out for you. But maybe we could help you look.”

“I’m not interested.” Warren said, “Please, this ends now.”

“Ok.” She said, but she was busy winking at Kit who was smiling.

“This would be a good time to call it a night.” Warren decided.

“We just got here.” Kit complained.

“Again with my philosophy, I can see my friends when I feel like it. I’ve see you both twice today, I’m sure you’ll do just fine the rest of the night without me.” Warren said as he got up.

“Alright, I’ll see you at lunch tomorrow.” Kit said.

“Per usual.” Warren agreed.

“And where does this take place?” Barnes asked.

“At the bar, where you’re welcome to join...now.” Kit said, “That’s if you don’t mind being considered one of the guys for the duration.”

“Is this a sports bar?” she asked.

“There are screens with sports on them.” Warren said, “The volume is usually turned way down and no one seems to pay them much attention.”

“I guess I’ll join you then.” She said, “Now that I’m not Kit’s big secret.”

“I was trying to time the excuse to actual work.” Kit explained.

“We’re past it now.” Barnes said.

“Alright, I’ll see you both tomorrow then.” Warren said, “Good night.”

“Wait, aren’t you paying for this?” She asked.

“Kit can grab this one, especially if you both want to stay for a while. I’ll shift expenses with him later.” Warren said, “So officially this one is on me.”

“Sounds good to me.” She said.

Warren gave them one more smile and headed out of the place.

Warren stopped, still wet from the shower to look at the book lying on his kitchen table. He ran the towel back through his hair as he did. He finally got around to pulling the cover back. The pages were just as ominous as the front cover, with symbols that didn’t mean anything to him. It might also be a case where if it did contain an actual language of words they could be going from right to left or top to bottom over the way English was written out. He closed the cover and headed back to his room, stopping briefly to sip some more coffee. He then finished dressing and headed to his office.

The steps to the office building were still broken. Warren wasted twenty seconds everyday to stop and look at that. It had been such a nice place when he'd rented the space to set up his business. He wasn't selling a company name nor was he sporting a fancy title. He worked on a project by project basis and sold himself on his name alone.

"Hello, Warren Keith's office, how may I help you?" Leigh answered the phone as Warren stepped into the front room. Leigh, his office assistant, had a very tight space to work in, she had her supplies in a metal cabinet next to her small desk where as Warren's actual office was pretty good sized. Leigh's space was just a waiting room he'd made into her space. "He'll be in shortly." She added, "Perhaps the wait won't be to long, would you like to hold for him?"

Warren smiled at her as he picked up the newspaper off the small stand opposite her desk with the door to his office between. She set the phone down.

"Garner Smith on hold." She said, "Should I take a message or are you officially in now?"

"Good morning." Warren said. She smiled beautifully. No loss for having the place well decorated, or at least that's what Kit had said word for word. Warren's idea was that she was always pleasant, even on the worst of days. She was also effective in keeping the incoming calls handled and well documented.

"Good morning, Warren." She greeted. No longer Mr. Keith, that lasted for the first month. After that she experimentally tried Warren on for size and when he failed to correct her she'd been using it ever since.

"I'll take it." he said. He passed by her and unlocked his door, letting himself in. It was inefficient for his part of the place to be locked against her having a key to the first door, but he just couldn't shake the habit of only allowing himself into his personal space. Experience was his teacher in this.

He moved to sit down and picked up the phone. "Warren." He answered.

"Keith, how about it?" Garner asked.

"That proposal should be at your office." Warren responded.

"Indeed. I'll be looking at it some point today." Garner agreed, "And should there be nothing seriously wrong with it, I'll send over a check to your office."

"That would be efficient." Warren said.

"So, Sunday, tee off time at 8:30, if the weather holds out, how about it?"

"I wouldn't look for me Garner." Warren said. The man on the other end of the line made a 'Tsk' sound.

"The invitation is always open, right until the weather gets too rough." He said, "So, also, I'm sending someone new over to you. You come highly recommended by my office. One Miss Clarkson. Now, she'll attempt to have you believe she likes Italian food, but trust me when I say she secretly likes Chinese. Why she doesn't just say that up front, I don't know. So if you get to that point with her, she might have something big for you, dinner or lunch, just take her to Wong's over Roberto's."

"I'll keep that in mind." Warren said.

"She won't call, either. She likes things hands on and face to face. She may show up before the end of the week, or you could specifically hang out on Monday if you haven't seen her by then. She's sure to be there by then, especially after all the words I gave her about you." Garner explained.

"It sounds good, Garner." Warren said, "I look forward to it."

"Great, Chum, I should have something new for you in the next few weeks. So make sure your all caught up by then, because you know me, I'm your priority." He said and laughed.

"Roger that." Warren said.

"Don't get caught in the rain." He finished.

“Good day to you, too.”

Warren hung up the phone knowing that was his unique way of saying good bye. He set the receiver down and hit intercom. It was almost unnecessary. Leigh could hear him for the most part through the door. She once recounted an entire conversation for him when he'd forgotten it due to a very long lunch and Kit loosing his mind over of his wife's announcement that she would be divorcing him, immediately. It required a lot of heavy drinking. On the following day Warren was standing there with a massive hang over trying to recollect the conversation prior to his departure to the bar to help Kit drink himself into unconsciousness, followed by a cab ride which cost Warren several bills to have the cabby shovel Kit through his own front door.

He claimed to have woken up on up the floor just inside his door the following evening. Warren had expressed to the cabby to at least get him to the couch. He'd have gone himself, but he was just as useless, hanging off the door slurring his words and desperately handing over money he probably could have seen better spent.

Regardless, Leigh had recollected what he needed to know, what exactly he'd promised over the phone the previous day and could not remember.

“Leigh can you get Athena on the phone for me?” he asked.

“Sure.” She replied. Warren booted up his laptop while he waited. Once it was up he set his PDA in the cradle and let the machine do its thing matching his notes, contacts and e-mails from one machine to the next.

Once it was up and done doing all that, Warren moved all of the e-mails from his sister into a separate folder on the laptop simply labeled, *later*. He then used the laptop to dial out to check for new e-mail. He got three more from his sister.

He made a move to open the most recent but was interrupted. "Athena on line one." Leigh announced over the intercom. Warren decided to shovel those e-mails off into the same folder as he picked up the phone with his other hand.

"Hello." Warren said as he leaned back in his chair.

"Warren, good to hear from you, what do you want?" Athena asked.

"Is that all the greeting I get for being the love of your life?" He asked.

"Although I needn't remind you, I'm very happily married with not one, not two, but three beautiful children." She said.

"It wounds me every time to hear you say that." He said.

"What's up sweetie?" she asked.

"Actually I may have something of interest to you." He said as he pulled forward. He reached down and pulled up his soft leather opened brief case and pulled the book out to look at it.

"Oh?" she queried.

"A very old looking book. What you might call a tome." He explained.

"How old?" she asked.

"That would be something you'd have to figure out, because to look it myself I'd say it was new, but it isn't."

"Sounds interesting." She said, "But I'm not really into manuscripts, Warren."

"Were it just that I'd send it over to my book dealer." Warren said and laughed, "I'm still waiting on the sale of the original *Treasure Island* I found." She laughed with him.

"Okay, your point of sale?" she asked.

"Well in order to hit you with the full impact, I really need to get my digital camera back from Kit and take some shots of where I found this thing."

"And how is Kit?" she asked.

“Still spinning from the divorce.” Warren answered, “I fail to see why they did that when she’s still over at his house three times a week at least with some excuse to be there.”

“As well as it was for her to go ahead with that in dealing with him,” Athena explained, “She hasn’t stopped loving him yet.”

“That’s definitely beyond me then.” Warren said.

“Your lessons in love are fourth coming. Just think of how you almost got me to go out with you even though I was busy.” She said and somehow managed to make him picture her smiling even though he couldn’t see it.

“Daily.” He assured her and she laughed, “But honestly. I’d like you to look at this. If it fails to interest you at first glance than I’ll come help you finish painting your house next weekend.”

“That’s this weekend, Warren. And you should do that anyway, the exorcise cannot hurt you.” Athena said.

“Something tells me I’d be not welcomed, with the way Ba’mosa is about family time and me hanging around just you.”

“I’m sure if you’re actually working with us, he’d fail to have a problem with it. Then we’d feed you.” She promised.

“So I was thinking I could package this around dinner, tonight.” Warren said.

“You should know by now, that there’s no asking me to do anything without advanced warning, Warren. Between Karate, laser tag and ballet I’m not even sure of what I’m doing after I leave work just for myself. And if you want to stay on Ba’mosa’s bad side, inviting just me out to dinner is the way to do it.”

“How about lunch?” he asked.

“I find it hard to believe you’d abandoned Kit like that.” She said.

“I do, when I need to do business. He’s usually okay for it, plus he wouldn’t be alone today anyway.” Warren explained.

“I can’t come to the city in the middle of my day, Warren.” She said. “Why don’t you just have it sent over?”

“No.” he replied, “This may be very valuable. I couldn’t express it over there. I need to have you see it in person to make a determination about it.”

“Well then you’ll just have to come out here.” She explained.

“You know how that is.” He groaned, “Getting into the fortress of darkness to see you on any given day is a chore. They practically take a DNA sample at the gate.”

“Well not yet, but you can probably look forward to that soon enough.” She said. He failed to miss any sarcasm in her statement about it.

“I know. How about you meet me at the gate?” he asked, “You can do that for me.”

“Is this even something I want at work, Warren?” she asked, “Maybe its best left outside of this place. You know how they are in tagging and bagging most everything around here.”

“I’ll let you determine that.” Warren said, “I’d feel it’s safer than anywhere in there. So just come see me and take a look for yourself. If you don’t want it there, at least you’ve seen it and can pick it up at my office if it’s of any further interest to you.”

“Alright, sweetie, call me when you get to the gate and I’ll come out.” She said.

“Well, I have about an hour to tidy up my office. After that its forty minutes in good traffic to get down there. Look for me around eleven.”

“Okay, I’ll try and tidy up my work load as well. I’m only six weeks behind here. Not a problem.” She said. Then she laughed, “Two weeks ago I was ten weeks behind, so I

think I'm catching up. And it's always good to hear from you. I miss you always and love you to death."

"I miss you more." He said smiling.

"Don't start, bye Warren."

"Bye." He said and hung up.

Reading the stocks in the newspaper swallowed up the hour. During which his laptop shut itself down. Warren closed that up when he was done with the newspaper. He then returned his PDA to its carrying case and slipped it back into his trench coat pocket. Getting up he put the book back in his briefcase and headed on out.

He closed and locked his door. "Should I expect you back today?" Leigh asked.

"Well." He said, "I have to go meet with Athena, after which will be lunch, if that doesn't turn into something elsewhere I should be back. I need to get started on researching the area around the church to see what can be marketed there."

"The church?" Leigh asked.

"Right, you don't have that yet, do you?" he asked.

"I sure don't Warren." She agreed. He moved to stand beside her and saw what was on the screen of her laptop. Some kind of comic strip thing she'd pulled up off the internet. He was distracted long enough to read it and smile while she looked at him hoping it wouldn't be an issue.

"How about you bring up a new contact." He said. She looked at his smile. She then moved her windows around to bring one up. Warren leaned in and quickly typed out the address into it and saved it. "Ok." He said, "Anything you can find out about it, great."

"I'm on it." she said.

"Alright, I'll be back if all goes well." He said as he headed towards the door to leave.

"You want any calls forwarded today?" she asked.

"Not until after two, take a message until then." He said.

“What about your sister?” she asked.

“Has she called recently?” he asked.

“The messages are on your desk.” She offered and shrugged. Warren hadn’t gotten to them yet.

“No, I’ll call her later just tell her I’ll return her call at some point. It’s not your problem, ok?”

“Okay.” She agreed. He turned and headed out of the office and back outside to look briefly at the broken brick step before hailing a cab.

The cab driver took him to the garage. He rarely got the car out for short trips, but driving out to see Athena definitely called for more than local transportation. As part of his garage service they kept it maintained, which meant he’d never leave anything of value or of personal interest in it. It was a few years old black Saab. He got into it and headed out of the garage. He relaxed once he finally got back into driving mode.

He got on interstate five and headed south, merging with the four oh five heading east even though it said it was going north. Before to long he’d be out of the clump of it all, cruising down a regular road to go pretty much into the wilderness to Athena’s work site, the mega building. He not only couldn’t see it from the gate that was how far away it was. It was another five minutes to get from the gate to the interior grounds where the building actually was. After that it was probably another hour just to get all the way in to where they kept her, sequestered away like one of the lab rats he was sure were in there some where.

He called her after taking the last road and let her know he was getting close. It took four minutes just to get her ear. After that he was already pulling up to the gate and pulling into the external parking lot, which consisted of four spots and one of them was specifically for the gate’s guard.

The longer he had to wait the more likely it was that the guard would become suspicious of him parked there. He

passed the time reading more of the paper and glancing out the window from time to time to see if she'd come out yet.

It took twenty minute for that to happen and it was now closer to twelve than eleven. Warren sighed. He hadn't planned on missing lunch with Kit and Barnes. He might just pass it over and grab something on the way back into town though. He just wasn't sure yet.

He pulled out of his car as Athena drove up to the gate in a golf cart. He'd ridden it once before with her as she showed him around the grounds. It was mostly right after she'd become their top employee and her brilliance was closer to being renowned. She was into pure research by then, no more testing vulgar products to the masses. Her research could and probably would gear the next generation where chemistry and the chemical industries were headed in what was possible.

She abandoned the cart and came out the human sized gate, greeting the guard with her amazing smile. Warren pulled the briefcase out of the car and moved it to the hood where he was ready to pull out the book on a moment's notice. She came right into his arms though, planting a kiss on his cheek and he returned the jester against her clear black skin. He leaned back still holding her by her arms.

"It's been to long, Warren." She complained. He could expect that, but with her living and working so far out from his everyday life, visits were further and far between. It also still stung him on certain days just to look at her. He'd come close to approaching her fully romantically while she flirted against his advances. And then she finally came to him with the announcement of her engagement. He'd stayed in bed two days following. But after that he couldn't imagine not knowing her at all and found a friendship with her no matter how much time passed between them not speaking to one another.

“Always a reminder of why my life goes on incomplete.” He said. She smiled at him.

“Now you behave. We could be on camera.” She advised.

“I’d like a copy of the tape then.” He said and smiled. She finally pulled to his side and glanced at the briefcase. “Right, let’s get to it, because you’ve six weeks to catch up from and I’m holding you up.” He said.

“I’d imagine you wouldn’t pull me out of my cage for nothing, so let’s see. What do you have sweetie?” she asked. Warren opened the edges of the brief and pulled out the book and handed it to her. She looked it over. While she was doing that she glanced back at him a few times. “Now you see.” She said sounding reprimanding as she ignored the book, “You have to stop looking at me like that.”

Warren turned to look at the book instead. She studied it some more herself, flipping through pages and running her fingers across the front and back.

“I didn’t mean you couldn’t look at me all.” She explained, “Just not like your hungry. And definitely no drooling.”

“Ok.” He agreed and smiled at her.

“It’s my hope that you’ll figure this out. Warren, sweetie, you need to if your ever going to evolve from just being my friend to a friend of my family.”

“I’m trying.” He promised.

“Six years of trying. How about you just do it?” she asked. “And definitely come over this weekend to show me you can.”

“With your concern over me, I’m getting the idea you’re not really interested in the book.” Warren said.

“Well, I’m sure you have a reason to bring it to me. The symbols appear to my eyes as rather unique. But honestly, the binding is not leather. Anything of interest to my anthropology explorations would entail a book of some age. And this book appears to be made of synthetics. The

pages as well, not a paper of any thing old. It's laminated, Warren."

"Is it?" he asked.

"From touch alone, yes there is very little texture to it, which means its smooth like lamination, it's just not a glossy lamination." She explained.

"So it's some kind of a fake old book?" he asked.

"The point is. It doesn't appear old." She explained.

"Well then I have to tell you about the way I found it." he said.

"I'm listening." She said as she continued to look through the pages.

"It looks new to me too." He began, "But it wasn't any place you'd expect to find a new book. It was on a bookshelf with other books. All lined up and stacked together. I would guess they were set there at the same time.

"Athena, I went to touch one and they all turned to dust. Even the shelving crumbled as a sign of age. I may not know much about books in general, but wood work that's cut to form and not pieced together with nails, is old. You need a rather large chunk of wood to carve out such a thing. And that fell apart and the books turned to dust where as they first appeared whole, by my contact, that implies age to me as well. So to me, despite its appearance, it is definitely an old book.

"Look at these symbols. Why?" he asked shrugging not knowing where to go after that. She studied his face in reaction to his words.

"People can make up anything they want these days. It could be a work of art." She answered.

"It's fine." Warren said, "I'll stop by to paint this weekend as promised. I'm sorry I brought you out of your busy work day. I just thought it was of some value and you'd find it interesting. We could split the proceeds if it was worth anything."

“Sweetie.” She said and smiled, “As much as I think you mean it, we both know I’m not looking for things for money. It’s not enough that I make too much money for one person. Ba’mosa makes enough to keep insisting I can stay home with the kids. Then I remind him that we are a family in the new millennium, both Mom and Dad can work and it doesn’t make me any less of a parent than it does him.”

“Well, that just makes me feel worse.” He said and smiled, “Because I had thought you’d find it interesting.”

“I do.” She said, “And my mind is already tinkering against this discovery to see what I can come up with. You haven’t wasted my time, because it’s good to see you. You still have just a little effect on me there.” She winked.

“Now how do you expect me to change my ways when you still insist on flirting with me?” he asked.

“You’ll just have to make due.” She said, “Because what I do is in very small doses, you, you never stop and it’s something Ba’mosa has seen one too many times to keep him calm about you and me. It’s very hard to say this is platonic when we go on the way we do. So maybe, maybe I can support some of the load for that. But you most certainly have to do better, too.”

“I will.” He said and reached to take the book and return the book to his briefcase.

“Now now.” She said pushing his hand away, “I think it will be fine for me to bring this into work with me. I highly doubt, since it’s not anything of an electronic nature they will think I’m pursuing corporate espionage with it. They also know well my pursuit in anthropology and would see it that way.”

“So it does interest you?” he asked.

“There are not many books that come to mind that have this kind of bulk and have each page laminated without having pictures. Although, it might have been required to get all the symbols done. Using images to print instead of them

using of typesetting.” She said, “However, there is something to this that doesn’t fit with modern binding techniques.”

“So you do know about books?” he asked.

“I know a little bit about everything when it comes to a point of interest to something I’m interested in. In which case an old book would need to be compared with what a modern book looks like. This one fails to fully be synchronous with a modern book.

“Look.” She offered and showed him the edge of the book where he could see the pages hitting the binding.

“I don’t see anything.”

“Older books were glued to cloth between the cover and the pages so that when you flex the book that part is free and there is a space. Newer books tend to have the pages glued together, sometimes either eliminating the cloth or you’ll see paper.

“This one appears to have the pages attached directly to the spine’s portion of the book.”

“You’re talking over my head.” Warren said.

“And here I thought I was being plain.” She said, “Suffice it to say. Its somewhere between old and modern. Not something I’d find in the stores today, unless it were soft cover, and not something I would find as old enough to interest me. Finding that odd, I’d require further investigation.

“Especially in eliminating the question of age of the book over the way it appears. So yes, it’s of interest to me. I’ll look into it.” she said.

“Does that mean I get another kiss?” he asked.

“You are unstoppable.” She said leaning back looking at him. “You know if the timing had been just a little different...it doesn’t matter, I love you just as well as a friend. And yes a polite friend kiss.”

She kissed him on the cheek again. “I’m glad I didn’t waste your time.” He said.

“Well this would be my lunch hour, so I better get back in there now.” She held the book in her arm and smiled at him. “I’ll see you this weekend.” She headed back towards the gate.

“If I didn’t waste your time and your interested than I’m not required to help you paint.” He said. She didn’t turn around and kept walking. “Athena?”

“Bye Warren, love you.” She said without looking back.

“Shit.” He groaned when she was out of earshot. He got back into his car and headed back towards downtown.

Warren missed lunch at the bar. He picked up something that would fill the hole in his belly and he didn’t even bother to rescue the stuff from the bag yet. He headed towards the church. At this point he was ready to see about the front of the foundation. After that, hopefully the following day, he’d attempt to persuade Kit to return his camera. He’d borrowed it on the excuse he wanted to take pictures of everything he owned in case his ex-wife took anything she wasn’t suppose to on her frequent return trips to what used to be their house. He’d skated out of the court room still owning it as long as her, what he called salary, was keep up high enough. If they had had kids she might have gotten the house in addition to it.

Warren set his lunch on the steps and moved to the side of the church peering down the alleyway and inspecting what he could see of the foundation that way through the chain link fence. So far as he could peruse with just his eyes from a distance the exterior foundation was buffered with layers of cement. He scanned back along it noting the incline. At some point he’d need to get past the fence and get a closer look. He’d need to get someone from Kit Construction to get the fence pulled up for him. And it might allow him to go all

the way around the building without tearing up the opposite side of the building's fence as well.

Next he needed to see if there wasn't access to the forward part of the foundation, but it might be completely enclosed. If it was he'd have to tear up some part of the floor in the vestibule.

Warren swung around to the steps and grabbed his lunch bag and headed up to the steps with ease. He reached for the door handle and then crumbled to his knees. This time his excuse of drinking too much and not eating was not applicable as he found himself pushing himself backwards off the steps until his feeling of wanting to barf receded. After that he returned to his feet and looked up.

He looked up at Saint Howard. He shook his head back and fourth. He then tried to run through, getting ready and rushing up the steps, grabbing the handle, intending it to get it open and get beyond before he could be overwhelmed again.

He got his hand on the door handle and collapsed completely this time. He was so weakened from the feeling he was having trouble getting back and away. He eventually did though and gasping for breath for a moment as he felt the accompanying feeling of general heat along side the sick feeling. It wasn't a trick, he decided. There was something more to it. Whether it was anything mystical wasn't something he was ready to decide though.

Once recovered he looked at the stain glass window of the saint holding up a golden chalice. Not just a cup, he finally realized, but a full chalice with ornamentation and all. He stepped back and stared getting it firm in his head that the cup was in fact in his left hand being held forward in the way the artwork was done, but it still appeared on the right side of the window.

"Alright." Warren said, "Perhaps you could let me get to work. I really am hoping the whole of the church can be salvaged, if possible."

He continued to stare at the window for a long time, seeing nothing change. He then turned his head away, looking down the street at traffic crossing the intersection down and away from where he stood. When he swung his head back around the cup was now in Howard's right hand, swung all the way to left side.

Warren approached it closely, studying it for the details and coming to a conclusion. The entire window was now reversed. Unfortunately it was too high for him to reach up and touch, to see if it was even a stain glass window at all. But all he really needed to do was go inside and inspect it from there.

He went back up the stairs reclaiming his lunch and touched the door handle. No weak feeling then. He pulled the door and opened it. He set his lunch down on the bench and looked at the cross window first. For everything that had been worked into the image, it was something that could be flipped side to side and he would never notice it. He reached up and ran his hand along the glass.

"Hmm." He remarked as he recognized the feel. It wasn't a common request, but some structures had required more than just plain clear glass in their construction and Warren wasn't wholly unfamiliar. He moved over to the other side seeing the backside of the saint.

"Warren?" Barnes called. She must have seen him cross the opening to the rest of the church.

"Yes." He called back to her. After a while she came all the way to the front to greet him where he stood still staring at the window.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Pondering the possibility that the physical window actually turns from one side to another." He answered.

"Not that I'm always quick to give into a more mystical explanation of something that might otherwise be obvious, like the trap door, this one has none." Barnes said, "That window is secure in the frame work."

“I am drawing the same conclusion.” Warren agreed. He moved forward and ran his hand along the glass. “That just leaves the strange effect at the threshold. There are incidences of magnetism making people ill in the same way.”

“Really?” she asked.

“Really.” He agreed.

“How powerful of a magnetic force?” she asked. Warren frowned and finally looked at her.

“Very.” He answered.

“Why not give in to the idea that it’s not going to have a scientific explanation?” she asked.

“Not something I do.” Warren answered, “Not that I’ll be wasting my whole day on it.”

He moved away from the window to where the stairs round its way upward and then branched along the incline to the peak for access to the steeple. He went to the door below the first part and opened it. Inside was what he’d first suspected, a closet. And it was empty.

“Still trying to get down there?” Barnes asked.

“Yes. I might have to tear up the floor, this looks like a likely spot to do that.”

“You might want to clear it with Howard first.” Barnes said. Warren looked at her and she was pointing at the window with the saint again.

From the inside Warren could see that the cup had switched hands again or the image had been reversed. He shook his head against it and moved towards it again. “There has to be an explanation.” He complained.

“If you find one, let me know.” Barnes said. He smiled at her and she smiled back. “You missed lunch. It was cute the way Kit acted. Called your office to check up on you and make sure you were okay.”

“He didn’t.” Warren argued.

“He most certainly did.” She said expressively and landing him with another smile.

“Well, I haven’t actually eaten yet.” Warren said, “I can do that here with you, before I go back to the office.”

“Your more than welcome, but I should get busy.” She said. Warren grabbed his lunch and followed her into the church. While she went back to her work Warren sat on the edge of the dais and ate his lunch.

“So Kit was overly apologetic today.” Barnes said, “I guess he needed the night to think about it. All the things we’d ever said to one another and it became a point that it should have been obvious to him.”

“Nothing is obvious to Kit.” Warren said.

“Well, I think we’ll be okay.” She added.

“Good.”

“So.” She said dragging out the word, “Where were you?”

“I went to see Athena down near Wilderness.” He answered.

“Your friend you wanted to the show the book to?” she asked.

“Indeed.” He agreed between bites.

“And what did she have to say?”

“Not much.” He admitted, “Looked new to her, too. But something got her interested enough to look at it further.”

“I guess my telling you to be careful with that and saying you should extend some warning to her will fall on deaf ears?” Barnes asked.

“Afraid so.” He agreed.

“My Grandmother gave out dire predictions almost weekly.” She said, “And no one ever took her seriously until after she died and they all came to pass. My uncle almost dieing in a car wreck. She’d told him not to drive on a rainy Sunday after his daughter came home the night before crying about her boyfriend breaking up with her.

“She used to shoot these things out like fortune cookies. Well he drove on a rainy Sunday after his daughter

broke up with her boyfriend the night before. He was crossing a bridge. He hydroplaned and went off the side of the bridge.”

“Did he live?” Warren asked.

“Yes, but he went to her grave and apologized profusely for calling her his insane mother.” She said. She turned to look at him as he finished up. He crinkled his bag.

“And?” he asked thinking the man had succumbed to the suggestion that something bad was going to happen to him on the particulars of her prediction lining up.

“She told my sister to never go into Di’Angelo’s at Noon. It was okay if she went there in the morning or after one, but never at noon.” Barnes said.

“Some kind of restaurant?” Warren asked.

“Yes and not a place to get breakfast.” Barnes said, “And although she had the same idea about her everyone else had about Grandmother, she did try to avoid the place at noon. It was just as well to grab lunch at eleven. And you know it was one of her favorite places to get lunch. So the likelihood that she would go there was high.”

“And?”

“And her watch died and she wasn’t really paying it enough attention and stepped through the door at noon, saw that on the clock and laughed.” Barnes said, “She told me she’d decided it was superstitious nonsense. So she went in and sat down for lunch.”

Barnes paused to wash out her brush. She glanced back to see that Warren was no longer doing anything but listening to her.

“It wasn’t a good day to get lunch there.” Barnes began again, “Some kind of gas leak. The flames from the broiler caught the gas on fire and the kitchen exploded sending everything in the back of the restaurant towards the front.

“My sister was in intensive care for a few months before she recovered. She was hit by one of the tables from

further in. Oddly, it protected her from the actual fire. In all ways it was an unpleasant experience for her.”

“So these predictions.” Warren asked, “They were the same ones she told every week?”

“Yes, Warren, your right, it wasn’t that she had an endless stream of them, she just seemed to have one for each of us and she would tell them each week, given the chance. My mother hushed her on several occasions though.”

“And it makes no difference to tell someone about them.” Warren said, “Especially if they can’t be changed.”

“A very strict idea there.” Barnes said turning towards him and giving him her full attention, “What if? Right? What if you could heed the warning well enough and avoid the unpleasant event.

“I can remember her telling Louie, ‘Don’t ever ride your bike down fourth after getting a flat tire.’ Where we were at the time there was no fourth and he wasn’t likely to be riding his bike anywhere near it. He grew up and stopped riding a bike anyway. Nothing further for him to worry about, right?”

“I guess.” Warren said.

“Well not until Miss Bell. And he was busy romancing her and came across the idea of riding rented bicycles in downtown. And they were doing okay and he might not have even thought about what he’d been told if he hadn’t gotten a flat tire.

“They had both just turned on fourth and the tire was completely flat. At this point he would go no further. He wanted to either go on another street to get the bike back or just leave it. Miss Bell thought he was acting foolish. The bikes were rented and it would continue to ride well enough to get it back.

“In the middle of their argument about it, with him still refusing, a car came flying off the road and crashed into a nearby store.

“If he hadn’t stopped. If he hadn’t resisted her argument that everything would be fine, than it was highly likely they would have both been hit by the car.”

Warren tilted his head and then smiled. “Reminds me of a TV show on Fox.” He said.

“You watch that?” Barnes asked. Warren’s grin widened. “Right.” She said, “The Babe on the show.”

“There is that.” He agreed.

“Yea, a little different there.” She said, “The idea of changing the past not unlike changing the future. It’s written in much the same way. We just don’t realize it because we are always moving forward and only looking back at what cannot be changed. But if we could see ahead, know the day for it’s events before they happen, then we can apply changes as necessary.”

“And you can do that?” Warren asked.

“Not like my Grandmother. At least in not in the way she could describe certain particulars about each event. The hard part is the idea that she only ever warned us about the bad things, but that’s not all she saw. She saw good things, too. Nobody got upset with her when she told my sister she would grow up and live in a big house and have four dogs, then a daughter and then a son.” Barnes said. “She ended up with all those things.”

“What did she warn you about?” Warren asked. Barnes had gone back to her work. She hesitated in answering. “It hasn’t happened yet.” Warren decided.

“She said don’t leave Rocky and move to Seattle.” Barnes said. She turned to look at Warren again. “I couldn’t have told you then if she was talking about a person when she mentioned Rocky. And when she said Seattle, all I could think about at the time was a Saddle. And I got it all mixed up to where I was not to leave the Rockies in a saddle.”

“Damn.” Warren said grinning at her.

“Maybe funny.” She said, “But I’ve done exactly what she told me not to do.”

“Are you expecting something immediately to happen?” Warren asked.

“I’m afraid it’s already begun.” Barnes said.

“You seem ok to me.” Warren suggested.

“Not everything is intended for the person who’s been told.” She said, “I’ve done something that is going to effect changes.”

“Chaos theory?” Warren asked.

“A rippled in the pond, yes.” She agreed. “Would you even be in this church right now if I hadn’t come?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Look past the obvious.” She suggested, “Dig deeper from the moment to see it more and then answer.”

“Nothing comes to mind.” Warren admitted.

“You like me?”

“I do.” Warren agreed.

“Is that why you took the project over your sensibility to hand it back to Kit?” she asked. Warren hesitated in answering. “Didn’t think I’d caught that, did you?”

“Well, there is the idea that I could play for more time for you to keep working in here.” He admitted, “I don’t know if I’d effectively throw it back into Kit’s lap if you weren’t.”

“I’m just bold enough to suggest you would.” Barnes said, “I’m also willing to suggest that you would not have made it to the basement without me. And then there’s the idea that Kit sent you here, not to piss you off about it, which was probably worth him risking, considering, but just to get the two of us to meet.

“Had you not thought he might have just kept this place around for some time for me himself?”

“Not likely.” Warren said, “You saw how he reacted to my asking for six months.”

“Now go below the surface.” She said. Warren took a minute to do that.

“Are you suggesting he gave me this project because he knew I’d do that? Give you time here?” he asked.

“In favor of us getting along this well.” She agreed, “Absolutely and although he’s clever enough to have taken the responsibility of it off his own shoulders, he might have done it anyway if you had refused this project.”

Warren ran his hand along his chin thinking about it. “And?” he asked, waiting for her to tie it all in.

“And if I hadn’t come here against her warning, then you would not be in here right now, something else would have happened, you would have not gone below. I failed to show enough concern over it. Now...well now I need to pass on the warning, firstly to you, then you need to tell your friend to be careful with that book. I don’t like it Warren, its got bad written all over it in capitol letters.”

“What would you have me tell her?” Warren asked.

“My wording would not suffice.” Barnes said, “I guess I don’t have my grandmother’s knack for narrowing it down to a simple statement. Like so, ‘Don’t show the book to anyone else.’”

“You think I should tell her that?” Warren asked.

“Please, before it’s too late.” Barnes said.

“There is no logical reason for me to warn Athena about a book.” He said. He got up at this point and started to get ready to leave. They locked eyes over it for a moment while she frowned at him.

“I should have listened to her.” she finally said, “Because I’ll never get through to you.”

“Help me out.” Warren said as he spread his hands out, “Give me something more to go on.”

“Howard.”

“Weird, but I’m not convinced it’s mystical.” Warren said.

“By the time you believe me it’s going to be too late.” She said.

“You have nothing else?” he asked. She turned to look at him as she considered it.

“Maybe something on my own.” She said.

“What do you mean?” Warren asked.

“Meaning I’m putting most of the burden on myself over what she said. But I have my own premonitions to deal with.”

“Okay what?” he asked trying to sound respectful.

“Trying it her way, doesn’t work for me well. I’m not seeing enough.” She said, “But if you can help it, Warren. Don’t let the girl anywhere near the boy.”

“*What?*” He asked with almost curious laughter.

“I know, it makes no sense.” She said, “The same way don’t leave the Rockies in a saddle sounded to me.”

“Ok.” Warren said, “Don’t let the girl anywhere near the boy, right?”

“Right.”

“It’s wide open.” Warren said.

“Just keep it in mind.” She suggested, “And if you see that, if this makes sense to you then, please warn your friend about the book.”

“Okay, taken under advisement.” Warren said, “I’ll keep my mind open about it.”

“You should do that anyway. You should always look for the flaws.” She said, “That is how we judge our art, on how many obvious flaws it has. There are always more than you think there are. Things that do not match up, things that don’t quite make sense. Don’t be quick to disregard them.”

“Okay, I’m going back to my office now. Hopefully I won’t miss lunch tomorrow.” Warren said putting his right hand up in a wave. She smiled at him and nodded with her hands being busy.

“Bye Warren.”

“Later Barnes.” He said and headed out of the church.