

Lump Part 2

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A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

My phone barked -- I picked it out of my pocket and answered it -- Kathy! "Where are you? Okay, 120 North and 99, stay in the left lane as you go down the ramp, and turn left. That takes you back under the freeway. Stay in the left lane and turn into the shopping center -- I'm waiting in the In-N-Out Burger. You should be here in five minutes. I've missed you, too!" Put the phone back in my pocket and headed for the loo.

Washing my hands after taking a leak, the turkey in the mirror still surprised me. Starting this escapade, my hair had been a light brown. Yeah, my mustache had changed from salt-and-pepper to mostly salt a few years ago. But now my hair was white, a silvery white. I really wanted to look at that photo album again -- I expected I was the spitting image of my grandfather Benjamin. I smiled at the witch in the mirror; inside, I was quite a bit grandfather Benjamin.

Kathy came in the far door; she looked around -- and saw me. Surprise, shock?

We collided in a hug. "I missed you," I told her, holding her close and kissing her neck. I could feel the bond between us; finally, after nearly two weeks, here was someone I didn't have to worry was going to attack me.

"I need you," she whispered, holding me, pressing into me.

Oh, I could feel that! When hugging started to hurt I asked, "You want something to eat?"

She shook her head. "You?"

"I ate already."

"Then let's go."

I picked up my bag. She took my other hand and led me to her car. I put my bag in the back of her car. We hugged again, and she gave me more of a squeeze. It hurt, and it showed.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "And what the hell happened to your hair!"

I sighed. "Pull up my shirt," I told her.

“Out here?” she questioned.

“If you want to know,” I told her. Either she does or she doesn’t.

She pulled up my shirt, a little ways, then farther. “Oh my God! What happened! What did they do to you?” she cried, circling me, occasionally touching the quite painful colours.

My ribs and trunk were covered in bruises. “I’ll explain. I’m alive,” I sighed.

She kissed my sides, which helped; I could feel her concern. She dropped my shirt, sighing and shaking her head. We got in her car and headed South and West.

Traffic getting back on the freeway, merging in, transitioning to the other freeway, she only had time to give me the occasional glance, full of questioning and surprise. Once we were in more stable traffic, she asked, “What happened to you? What did they do to you?”

The contact with her -- the support I felt, all the conflicting emotions I felt in her. “I was formed on the forge,” I sighed. I could feel it, start to recognize it now, the tightness, carrying myself so tight, so on edge, ready to defend, to attack. All the time with them in that house, and even at the burger place -- I was on edge. Here, with just her, tied to me, and with others at a distance, I could feel how I was holding myself. Another deep breath, let it out, try to loosen up. Damn, my ribs hurt; they’d hurt for weeks.

I felt her thigh, warm and fit. Trying to remember the sensation of thighs squeezing my head... Had it been so long ago? For that strange week, starting from walking into the mattress place, I’d been in a world of steamy sensation, of elemental desires and fulfillment. And from there, thrown into the forge...

“Pretty much from the moment they woke me, I was under attack. Oh, occasionally two of them taught me, but there was always at least one who was hanging back, just waiting for the opportunity to spring something on me, to flatten me. Starting out, they got me a lot. They got me a lot that first week. But I learned -- I had to. I was picking up the patterns and rolling with things better, at least making them work harder to get me.”

“And it was anything goes -- slipping things into my food, drink, even coating the cup I used in the bathroom with drugs, but I picked up on those and managed to avoid them.” I smiled for a moment; I knew it was a smile with an edge on it. “One night, they pumped a room full of a hallucinogen, getting everybody. They didn’t know I’d spent most of an undergrad semester stoned out of my mind. Didn’t bug me in the least.”

“But your ribs? How...” she asked.

I shook my head. “A few days ago? Early on, they’d throw different things at me, and eventually someone would get tired of toying with me and flatten me. I’d wake up on the floor with a psychic concussion, often with blood caked on my face from a bloody nose, soaked pants

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from peeing myself, sometimes with the bonus of a pool of my own barf. I guess they decided that if they just flattened me every time, I wasn't going to learn, and they weren't having as much fun if I went down quickly, so they'd toy with me, letting me defend myself for a while, and then flatten me when they got bored. A few days ago, early in the morning, they jumped me in the hallway. I guess I wasn't fast enough, and went down. When I woke up, in pain, wet pants, nose bleeding of course, Penny was standing over me crying. She's the only one who did anything to protect me, and she did the most to teach me. I saw it in her mind -- seeing them in the hallway, kicking me as I lay unconscious on the floor, her screaming at them to stop." I shook my head. "If this is what friends do to you, I don't want to cross your enemies..."

She held my hand, silent.

"They left me alone for a few hours. Penny got me cleaned up, and I actually got something to eat. I remember sitting at the kitchen table with her, so hungry as I ate, my hands were shaking, forcing myself to eat even though I was in so much fucking pain and I had no idea if I'd be able to keep things down. Late afternoon the crap resumed on and off, and the next day they started at dawn, attacking in groups, more than one at a time. I defended, blocked as best I could. Another attack, a different attack, or the same one harder, thrown by two or three of them. Attacks in succession or overlapping. This went on, hour after hour after hour -- it was draining, yet I found the energy to continue. No choice; I had to! On and on, occasionally letting up for a moment, then wham! Three or four at once! On and on... After more than a goddamn day non-stop, and I hadn't gotten any real sleep for days, anything to eat other than a banana, only water to drink, they attacked me even when I was trying to use the can! In the living room I had a pair that I'd blocked for the moment. They were gathering their next attack when I noticed the two queued up to attack me next were chatting, one of them playing with the curls in her hair and talking about her nails! This was a fucking game to them! Talk about making me fucking furious!"

"That did it! Something clicked, something opened up. Oh, I'd struck back, and was getting better, but they just brushed me off; mostly they laughed at my attack attempts. This was different; I felt it, cold and hard. The one who was playing with her hair -- I flattened her first. No wind-up, just bam and she's down. Then the ones that were attacking me, fast and hard. Then the others standing around. One turned and tried to run -- dropped her in her tracks. It was over in the space of a few heartbeats."

"I walked into the kitchen; two of them. One of them started to form something, making a gesture, and I dropped her. Penny, at the sink, stepped back and asked me what I needed. I asked for something to eat. I sat at the table and she made me some sandwiches. I sat at the table eating them and drank about a liter of root beer. My hands were shaking again, but this time it was also with anger. Part of me wanted to go through the place flattening every fucking one of them, but another part needed to wait until they actually tried something -- *then* flatten them. I did a quick sweep of the ones I'd clobbered -- they were all okay. Oh, they'd be out for a while, and wake up feeling like they'd been hit by a truck -- just like I had time and again. I went back to my little room and cleaned the space, blasting out the magic anyone had done. I cast the strongest protection I could, and propped myself up on the bed, leaning back against the wall and facing the door, not visible from either window. I didn't sleep, but I wasn't awake,

either -- the same place, the same way I'd rested so far. But whatever I'd done that time, they couldn't get through it, and they tried, oh how they tried. About three in the morning, I felt a group of them, four of them, preparing something. I waited until they were joined up and clobbered them as a group; I hit them hard."

"The following morning when I got up, I went to the bathroom to clean up. For the first time since I'd gotten there, I took ten steps without being attacked! Looking in the mirror -- my hair was white! But suddenly I understood part of what had happened."

Kathy's hand was on mine; she gave me a squeeze. "What? How did you do it, after only a few days?"

"Oh, I didn't at first -- the first few days when they attacked me, I was completely unprepared. That first morning, one of them, Rita, dropped me to my knees, such incredible pain that I peed my pants. Another one, Anne, helped me to the couch, but as we sat down, she took me, filling me with lust for her, only to step away laughing and drop me to the floor writhing in pain again. I did something to reach for Miriam -- I remembered her saying that she would always be able to hear me. But she didn't answer. And I realized that she wouldn't, not now. Another said, 'Defend yourself, freak,' and whacked me hard. I hit the floor, throwing up, my nose bleeding, and someone else whacked me, leaving me unconscious. I was fucking lucky I didn't aspirate my own vomit, not that I think they cared."

I took a breath and smiled. "I guess Penny cleaned me up and moved me. Later she sat with me. She actually helped, taking away some of the pain, explaining what she'd done, and teaching me how to protect myself. I couldn't have done it without her help. I was sitting on the couch with Penny, playing games, learning to defend myself, when one of them came up behind me and tried something. I blocked her, still focused on Penny. I was starting to wake up."

"Was it a vision, or a memory?" I shook my head. "I saw it, lived it, whatever, back at my place, when Veronica held me. I was little, three years old, holding Miriam's hand, with this man standing in front of us. I don't know if it was a vision or a memory, because I see things from different perspectives, switching back and forth. Some of it I see, feel, remember, from the perspective of a three year old, holding my mother's hand, my hand so small in hers, she's so big standing next to me, and the man is so big standing in front of us. But at the same time I'm an adult, and confused that he looks so much like me, except his hair is silver, just like ours is now. Mine? Ours? Anyway, he was my grandfather Benjamin, and he wanted to give me something. I was scared, not sure I wanted it. Miriam told me I needed to take it. He leaned down and kissed me on the forehead, holding my head -- it was like a spark, burning into me. Then Miriam held me and kissed me on the forehead trying to make it better as I cried."

I took a deep breath and sighed it out. "And decades later, all that opened up, and in an instant I had what my grandfather Benjamin, a great and good witch, had given me. I had his skills, his talent, his defenses, and his weapons. I think the power is a combination; some of the things I do, taking after him, I remember him feeling they were very difficult. Yet they're easy for me, a matter of concentration. At the end of that day and a half long battle with those bitches, sorry, I used what he gave me and more. I learned that defending myself isn't enough."

I shook my head again. "That following morning, after I cleaned up in the bathroom, I went to the kitchen to get something to eat; I was still hungry, having not eaten regularly since I'd been there. I no sooner walk into the kitchen when one of them tried to hit me with a dart from the dining room. I ... threw a cool one at her, making her think I was jumping to one side, and she darted one of her buddies instead of me. I flattened her, and as one of the others started, I dropped her too. She hit the floor with blood coming out of her nose. I let the rest of them know that I would do the same to anyone that attacked me in any way."

"Then what?" Kathy asked.

"One of them asked me how I'd like my eggs. I had breakfast. God, I was starving! Afterwards, Penny and Anne sat with me and taught me more, working with me. Both were pleased with the way I'd finally responded, and told me so. An hour or so later, we were working at the kitchen table, an exercise working with water and ink in a scrying glass, like what Emily did at the Faire. One of the others cast a sneeze at Penny -- innocuous to some, but it would have made a mess. I flattened her, *very* hard. Don't know if her nose was bleeding because of how hard I hit her, or the way she hit the floor. Don't care. The rest of them left us alone for four or five hours."

Kathy sighed, shaking her head. "With... With our training, you usually don't get any of that for at least a year, and then it's gentle. I had an intense challenge when I was twenty, but even that was only a couple of hours. They kept it up the whole time you were there?"

I nodded. "I arrived there sedated. They started when I woke up. 'Defend yourself, freak!' Nice welcome! We had dinner together last night. They even returned my phone, my clothes all cleaned and nice, and the contents of my pockets! Smiles and congratulations. Bullshit! Luisa and Anne wanted to spend the night with me, and I agreed; Luisa is full figured. God, I need you! Please hold me! This has been two weeks of hell!"

Kathy moved her hand to my shoulder. "I'll hold you; I promise. We'll be safe."

I snorted. "Like I hoped to be last night -- getting into bed with both of them, Luisa so delicious, both of them holding me. They spent time running their hands over me, temporarily easing the pain in my ribs, getting me spaced out, then Luisa on top of me, slow and delicious... Just before I came, almost at the edge, I was trying to please her, and I looked into her to see how to please her more, to see what she wanted and needed. That's when I saw it -- she's an expert at binding, and had it all ready to go, ready bind me in that instant after I came. I cried out, not wanting to believe it! I cried out and stiffened up, and she thought I was at the edge, confirming my suspicions more. I felt her get ready to cast it, with Anne there to back her up. I flattened both of them! When I whacked Luisa, she convulsed, taking me over the edge. I held her tight on top of me as I filled her, crying. Oh God, how I wanted to be held! But they even poisoned that! I held her, both of them collapsed on top of me, and I cried. Eventually I got up. I cleaned up, got dressed, packed my shit, and moved downstairs. One of the bitches tried to trip me going down the goddamn stairs! I whacked her so hard... I sat alone in the kitchen all night. Penny drove me to the burger place this morning."

“I’m so sorry...” she whispered, her hand on my shoulder.

“That’s all right -- I learned. Any easier and I might not have learned as well.”

We sat in silence again. As we sat, I thought, the first time I’d had the opportunity in a couple of weeks. What Luisa had done -- she had the binding ready to go, ready to drop on me, not like what others did nominally, putting things together with gestures, (sub)vocalization, or a combination. Just bam! But wait -- I’d been doing that! When I flattened someone, I just did it -- I didn’t put the spell (curse) together on the spot. It was like I had it precompiled and ready to go... Thinking about it, there were a wide variety of things I could do that way, most of them offensive/defensive, many of them block/attack pairs. Studying, I saw how it worked. Something else inherited from Benjamin... As I worked it over in my mind, I saw larger patterns and regrouped. Inherited from Benjamin, and now improved, faster. The sensing/blocking I wanted to be as fast as possible, but I wanted some leeway in the response, the attack. Or did I? That bitch early this morning tried to trip me at the top of the stairs. My hands had been full -- I would have been seriously injured, at least! Okay, she didn’t give a damn, but does that mean I should be equally insensitive?

If the person trying to nail me is on a tightrope crossing a roiling lava pit full of flaming ravenous alligators, is it my problem? Compassion in that context sounds like another way for me to lose. Look on the bright side -- I’ll be giving them an earlier start on the next turn of the Wheel, if they believe in that kind of thing. That’s compassion!

With a sigh I told her, “They formed me on the forge, but they also destroyed my openness, my trust. God, I can feel it! I’m holding myself so tight, still waiting for that next attack, not trusting anyone! I know I can’t go back, but can I find a middle ground, being safe and aware, ready and able to respond, to defend, without being on edge?” I realized I was gripping her thigh tightly. I relaxed my grip. “I’m sorry -- see what I mean?”

She nodded; I could see her eyes filling up.

I took another breath, letting it out, trying to relax. That was the trick, to keep the awareness but lose the tension.

Altamont Pass, the wind turbines turning topography into energy. I chuckled a bit -- would my Mini Cooper forgive me for riding in a Camry? I knew I could accelerate up the road we were on in my car, something Kathy’s Camry couldn’t do...

“What?” she asked, wiping her eyes and trying to smile.

“Thank you for rescuing me, multiple times. What happened with Andrea?” I asked.

Her smile disappeared. “What do you know?”

I shrugged. "Very little. Just that on recollection, on reflection, things don't add up! Supposedly a madwand, self-taught, yet the binding she tried to cast on me was very advanced. From what I know from Benjamin, I'd even call what she tried an older form, or at least more formal than what was taught on the Left Coast in my grandfather's time. Whatever was in her perfume -- what was that? The thing she stuck in my right hand -- if she'd done my left I would have been so screwed, and that is *very* advanced -- something else you wouldn't expect from a madwand... What happened?"

Kathy nodded, frowning a bit. "Yeah. Think you know Emily and Miriam went to her place with her the morning you left. They had the same questions and concerns, based on what you told us. Do you remember what you told us?"

"When I was being held at the Faire, or later? I think I can fish for it and remember if I want. I'm pretty sure I told you some of what she'd chanted Monday night, and in my dreams."

"Yeah, you did. Like you said, how could a madwand know that? In that form? Sunday afternoon and night, Miriam, Carol, and Emily got a lot out of her, and it didn't make sense. Oh, she's a neuropsych researcher; the drugs mixed in with her perfume and in the pillows is her own invention, and damn powerful. Damn nice, too, and we've got plenty of that stuff, and some others she came up with. The poison thorn -- that's what it's called -- is a very old, very powerful weapon, and as you guessed, something a madwand wouldn't know about, yet alone have. Anyway, they sent Andrea off to work and proceeded to take her home apart, trying to find clues without leaving any. You partially released her that morning? Why?"

I shrugged. "A hunch. The main reason was to protect myself; I'd feel anything that happened to her while bound. The way I did it, she won't harm me, but she's not bound to me."

She smiled. "Yeah, and when Emily and Miriam figured *that* out Monday, did they ever freak out! They expected that you'd just cut the enchantment, but no -- *you* were doing things way out of a madwand's league, too..."

"I guess they didn't warn the others..." I managed a slight smile.

She shook her head. "They argued, but decided not to, with Miriam saying it would serve them right... Sounds like it did, like she knew what was going to happen?"

I sighed. "Don't know if she knew, or just hoped. What did they do about Andrea?"

She shook her head. "Not really sure. Miriam flew out Wednesday morning with Carol, the girls, and Rachel. Rachel flies back tomorrow -- you can pick her up at the airport; I think she'd like that, or I can do it for you. Miriam helped Emily and Veronica work over Andrea before she left, and Veronica and Emily continued. Best I understand, Andrea thought you might be a witch, but now is convinced you weren't -- she tried the thorn, and it didn't work, proving you weren't a witch. And you were too old for her in bed, even with the drugs and the spells, so she cut you loose without binding you. I think you're *great* in bed, but I want to be sure..." She squeezed my shoulder. "They were talking about steering her to a research position on the East

Coast, but I don't know what happened with that. The girls hung out at Starbucks Monday and Tuesday, but didn't learn anything. Haven't called the gal from Friday; you need to do that. We're just gonna have to be careful."

"Yeah. They don't know who taught Andrea, who set her up, or why?"

Kathy shook her head. "Someone did, but Andrea doesn't remember. It was years ago, as she's screwed up two other guys in the last year and a half here on the Left Coast, and a few back East before she moved here; so it happened when she was in New England. They're having friends back there look around cautiously. Oh, she won't screw up anybody else."

I put a hand on her thigh. "Good. What now?"

She sighed and gave me a quick tentative glance, focusing on driving. "I hope you don't mind -- both Emily and Miriam said it was important for me to move in with you. I..."

I smiled and kneaded her thigh a little as I sighed. "That's wonderful! The first good thing I've heard! What about work, school, what are you doing?" I could feel some of the tightness fall away!

"Oh, I work out of an office in Los Altos; I work for a publisher and spend my time going around to firms and libraries updating reference collections, more and more it's DVD ROMs and dongles, so moving actually helps, I mean besides saving a lot of money."

"How about Rachel?" I asked. "I haven't felt much from her over the two weeks -- except for some really strong orgasms one night."

Kathy smirked. "We'll find out tomorrow, I guess. I know she lives in an apartment near the shop, and Miriam and Emily really want her living with you, with us, as well. I'm supposed to continue teaching her, and you, but it sounds like there's not a lot I can teach you."

I patted her leg. "I don't know about that. Defense/attack, I think I've got that down, at least until I run into someone that can flatten me. So much other stuff, and the history and development though..." My eyes clouded up and my throat tightened; I had to clear it a bit before I could speak. "It will be so wonderful to have the house alive again, and ... not ... wake up alone," I barely got those last words out.

"Well I sure don't want you sleeping alone! And I think Rachel can get you a really good deal on a new bed!" She sighed. "I don't think anybody wants you sleeping alone."

"Sounds unanimous," I grumbled.

Kathy grumbled. "Sure does to me! And Rachel doesn't fly in until tomorrow afternoon, so we can sleep in a little, even though I need to get back to work."

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I sighed. "I haven't slept for shit in two weeks -- at best propped up in a corner half-awake, worried if the protection I've cast is strong enough, what they're going to try next. Some nights I don't know if they were attacking me or I was just hallucinating!"

"That's horrible! I was surprised enough when they sent you off separately..."

I grunted. "My so-called talent -- I remember saying something about trees and frogs. Didn't know what that meant until we left this morning; I was in a place just outside Angels Camp, home of the famous Calaveras Jumping Frog..."

"Yeah, Emily told us later she almost freaked when you said that. She expects you to be one powerful witch, as does Miriam."

I shook my head. "I don't want to know why."

She sighed, nodding and putting a hand on my leg. "I hope we don't find out too soon."

But I knew, at least partially. "Gift from Grandfather Benjamin..."

Keep focusing on the breath; take it in and let it out, letting go a little bit more with each breath.

Close to home, coming up the 280 freeway, I had a thought. "Let's get off at Wolfe -- I want to visit a fabric store -- on Stevens Creek near Wolfe."

Kathy nodded. "Okay, what do you need?"

"Thread," I replied with a smile.

She gave me a strange look.

The fabric store was where I'd remembered it. A short, stacked cutie with purple-streaked black hair and a black ribbon around her neck <D8> showed us to the thread. Not quite what I was looking for; I had the feeling they had what I wanted, though. "Something handmade?" I queried, maybe that was the key word.

She showed us to the crafts section.

Aha! "Artisan" thread, made and dyed in small batches -- in Everett, Washington! I laughed when I saw that, and pointed it out to Kathy. Our helper, named Nina, wanted to know what was so funny. I told her that's where my mother lived. Got some thread (it felt right), and some artisan silver-plated needles that fit the thread.

"You're mine," Kathy growled, squeezing my arm as we went back to her car.

I gave her a funny look. "What?"

“Did you notice how Nina looked at you?” she asked.

“Not really,” I admitted.

She smiled. “Good. Get in.”

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We finally made it home. As we pulled around the corner, Kathy said, “That’s Emily’s car, the silver one. The white one is Jen’s -- you’ll like her.” We parked in the driveway next to my Mini Cooper.

Getting out slowly, I looked over Kathy’s car. Not sure I liked the wear on the tires.

We went in the back door. Emily was in the family room reading *The Economist*.

“Welcome home!” she called out, standing.

We held hands. Another woman came from the kitchen. She was full, round, and bubbly. She looked like she’d be delicious in bed. “I’m Jennifer -- it’s so good to meet you!”

She held out her hands as she approached, taking my eyes in hers.

Damn -- I saw it, felt it. I felt her set the trigger on the ring on her right hand, extending the poisoned thorn as she focused on my eyes, smiling, so inviting, her nipples tightening as she deliberately filled her mind with intensely sexual thoughts and images of suckling and riding me.

And I felt that tightness start to form, to spring up in me and around me, but I did something to hold it back, balancing precariously where I was as we moved closer to each other.

I moved my hands toward hers, looking at her bosom. As our hands converged I quickly swung mine out and slapped hers together, sticking her with her own thorn.

She threw her spell at me even as the poison hit her. I blocked as I stepped back and flattened her. She crumpled to the floor.

“Oh my God!” shrieked Kathy.

Emily gave me a calculating look. “Was that necessary?” she accused coldly.

I turned to her. My stomach was sour again. I was somewhat relaxed but ready to attack her, anyone. “Yes -- and that’s what’s going to happen when *ever* someone attacks. Doesn’t matter if they’re just trying to make me sneeze, that is what is going to happen -- I promise.”

“What... What did she do?” Kathy cried, starting to bend down to reach for her.

I grabbed Kathy by the arm, pulling her up and not being gentle about it. “She’s got a ring on her right hand with the poisoned thorn. She was going to use it on me, then drop me with pain until I peed my pants.”

Emily raised an eyebrow. She glanced down and frowned. I glanced down and got a newspaper section from the coffee table and slipped it under her head. “I don’t want blood stains on the floor,” I said. Her nose was bleeding.

Emily looked at me crossly. “Do you know what she is going to go through when she wakes up?”

It was hard for me to contain the venom in my voice, the taste in my mouth. “What I went through so many fucking times in the last two weeks? I also could have made it a *lot* worse by holding her hands as I attacked. And I know that there are things *you* can do to help her, *if* you actually care. But not only is that not my problem, I want it to make it clear that this is what happens to *anyone* who attacks me -- this is the *least* of what happens.”

I turned to Kathy and took her hands. “This is serious. This is a promise. This is what will happen to anyone who attacks me.” Even though she was bound to me...

She broke into tears. I held her and let her cry. I felt cold and hard inside, and I didn’t like it. I held Kathy, my arm around her shoulders, trying to replace that cold hardness in the pit of my stomach with warmth. One breath at a time.

Turning more, Emily looked at me, frowning. “She’s going to feel that for days!” she accused.

I seethed, still holding Kathy. “Just as I have! Last night, this morning, one of your dear friends in Angels Camp tried to trip me as I headed down a flight of stairs! Had she succeeded, I would have been seriously injured -- broken bones at the least. Didn’t bother her at all! I want it clear that there is a price to be paid for such behaviour.”

Kathy moved from my side, but it was to pull up my shirt. “Look! Look at what they did! What part of ‘training’ is this?” she demanded, tears in her eyes and emotion in her voice.

Emily’s look changed. She stepped closer, raising a hand near one set of bruises.

“Who did this to you?” she asked quietly but grimly.

“I don’t know -- I was unconscious,” I informed her.

“This is still painful?”

“Extremely. And I’m still pissing the occasional blood clot -- someone got my left kidney from the feel of things.”

Emily looked at me differently, as if re-evaluating. "I'll get Veronica to come over."

Still holding Kathy, I walked us to the living room and pulled a photo album off a shelf. I flipped through until I found the photo I wanted: a black and white showing my grandfather Benjamin, Miriam, and me about three. On the facing page a portrait of Benjamin.

I showed them to Kathy. I was now the spitting image of my grandfather; I would get my hair trimmed to make the resemblance closer. "A clue," I told her. "I might just change my middle name to Benjamin."

Both her eyebrows went up. She nodded.

Back to Jennifer. I sighed and told Kathy, "Take her feet -- let's move her to the sofa."

She was heavy, and picking her up hurt. More ways than one. Her figure -- she was probably delicious. We put her on the sofa. I leaned over, closed my eyes, and kissed her forehead, clearing up part of it. I left some for her to remember, though. As I stood up, I said, "Infinitely more than was done for me..." I picked up the bag with thread and needles in it, and took Kathy's hand. "Upstairs for a nap?" Emily was nowhere to be seen.

She nodded, trying to smile.

Upstairs, I closed the bedroom door behind us and locked it. "Help me move the bed out from the wall a bit?" I asked.

Kathy nodded, unsure. Together we pulled at the foot of the bed, moving the whole thing about a foot and a half from the wall.

"That's enough." I picked up the bag I'd tossed on the bed and got a spool of thread and one of the needles.

"Ah," Kathy started out, "I wanna take a shower? I've been like driving forever."

I hugged her and kissed her forehead. "Please -- I should be done by the time you finish. Help pull off my shirt?"

She nodded silently and helped with my shirt. She kissed a few spots on my chest, then turned and started to the bathroom.

I pulled her back into my arms for a moment. "And I'm very glad you're here. Thank you for rescuing me, multiple times." I kissed her on the forehead again. "Hold me for a moment, please."

Lump

She held me, head on my shoulder. I held her gently, closing my eyes, feeling her, feeling her warmth, breathing her in, slowly loosening that cold, hard knot in my stomach. It was working, but was going to take more. I kissed her on the forehead.

She sighed and went into the bathroom.

I sat down on the floor and pricked a fingertip with the needle as I whispered softly. Squeezing my fingertip, I coated the needle with my blood as I whispered. Now that it was mine, I could begin, threading the needle and looping the thread through the box springs every few inches. I did one half, then back to the top for the other half, which went quicker. Tied the threads together at the bottom, my lips moving a bit as I chanted, finishing up. I felt better; I'd sleep better, protected. *We* would sleep better.

As I did, I heard Kathy turning off the shower. Great timing! I put thread and needle on the dresser and stripped the rest of the way. I stepped into the bathroom and sat on the loo.

"What a great shower!" Kathy exclaimed as she stepped out, drying her short hair.

I wrapped my arms around her, leading her to the bedroom and on to the bed.

I started kissing my way down her body, enjoying her so much, but I got distracted at her nipples. The way she held me, and the joy and happiness I felt radiating from her -- I let go. So good to let go, to let things happen. With each touch, each caress, I could let go a little more, open up a little more. Gently, passionately, we made love and curled up together afterwards.

I could have slept like that for a lot longer, but Kathy kissed me on the forehead and said, "We need to get up." Four in the afternoon -- I guess so.

I held her closer. "I haven't slept so well in weeks." With another hug and a brief kiss, we got up. I felt a lot better.

"You want to push the bed back?" Kathy asked after she helped me get dressed.

"Not just yet -- maybe after we replace the mattress." I got my thread and needle.

With another hug and kiss we headed downstairs. Emily was in the kitchen. Jennifer was sitting in the family room sipping a cup of tea.

"How are you feeling?" I asked Jennifer.

"Better, thanks. I won't do that again!"

I nodded, heading to the recliner I usually sit in if I'm in the room.

Lump

Jennifer reached for me with a hand -- her left hand, no rings. "No, really. Emily told me what you said and what you did. You did the right thing. I'm sorry, and I hope I can earn your trust. ... Did they ... really?"

I pulled up one side of my shirt, showing the colors.

She shook her head. She placed a soft, cool hand at my side and closed her eyes. I felt her effort; I took a deeper breath, and it felt better, at least in that spot.

She opened her eyes, smiling a little. "Veronica is coming over; she can help a lot more."

"Thank you," I told her.

Moving to my chair, I picked up the cushion, then sat down in the cushion-less chair. Thread and needle, I measured and bit off a piece of thread, tied a small knot at the halfway point, threaded an end, and started stitching it loosely around the cushion.

Emily garbled something off in the kitchen.

I shook my head and replied loudly with, "Someone check the windows; we have a little wisp a'runnin through here..."

"WHAT DID YOU SAY?" shouted Emily from about ten feet away, hands on her hips.

I looked at her crossly. "Emily -- when you are in *my* house, if you have something to say to someone, if you have a request, you will speak to people in a polite and conversational tone of voice, and in proximity of the person, face to face. Yelling out commands in an imperious manner and expecting people in other parts of the house to hear and immediately obey is rude, demeaning, and not acceptable at the very least. Do you understand?"

She frowned, her mouth hanging open.

I did another stitch and she came closer, pointing and demanding, "Where... Who taught you that?"

Without thinking I replied, "Bea -- Lady Beatrice to you." I went back to my work and did another stitch.

Kathy made a noise. I looked up to see her and Jennifer helping Emily to the couch; Emily was pale as a sheet, a hand on her chest.

I'd finished half of the cushion, so I turned it in my lap and started the other half. The stitching went quickly. I tied the knot and sealed it with a drop of blood. Stood up and placed the cushion back in the chair and had a seat. "That's better!" I announced.

Emily had some of her colour back. Kathy and Jennifer looked concerned, though.

Lump

Emily had her hands in her lap. She looked at me, head tilted a little to one side, and sighed. "Well, it doesn't matter what I think, does it? We're just going to have to live with it!" She looked to Kathy. "Dear, could you help me in the kitchen, please?"

"Certainly, My Lady," Kathy replied, giving me a strange glance as she stood up and helped Emily to her feet.

"I'm going to do dining room chairs," I announced to nobody in particular. In the dining room, I wove my protective thread around the cushions of the two end chairs. Maybe I'd do the rest later. I'd need to do one for Rachel. After she got home, I reminded myself. I sighed; after she got home and it was clear if she was still on my side or not. So much for trust!

I did the two end chairs.

Tired again... Went into the living room and picked up one of the throw pillows from the couch and did it. Put the needle and thread on the table. Sitting on the floor, I swung around, putting my calves and feet on the love seat, my ass scooted close to it. I reclined back, stretching out my spine, putting the pillow I'd just done under my head. Damn, I was going to hurt for weeks! I took a breath, as deep as I could without incurring a lot of pain, and let it out.

Once again, working with the breath, using the breath to loosen those knots and move to a relaxed awareness.

I felt someone approaching a while later -- Jennifer. Getting closer, I heard her whisper, "I'm sorry -- please accept my apology." She moved one of my outstretched arms; I felt her next to me, and then felt the softness of a breast. I took her nipple with a sigh; we both sighed. She moved to be comfortable, and I turned my head a bit. Her hands were soft and comforting.

Later I felt someone arriving. I started getting up.

Jennifer held me. "Shhh -- it's Veronica."

I knew that it was Veronica. And I knew she wasn't out to do me dirt. Heard the door open and Kathy greeting her.

"Can we move to the middle of the floor?" she asked.

I sighed and opened my eyes. "Thank you," I told Jennifer.

I moved (with help) to the middle of the floor, losing shirt and pants in the process.

Veronica touched me gently, asking occasionally, "Does that hurt?" as she did, and then, "Sharp or dull pain?" for some spots. She had me roll to my stomach and repeated the process.

"You've been passing blood in your urine?" she asked, hands resting over my left kidney.

“Spots and clots, not streams,” I told her.

“Diminishing over time, more, less?”

“Diminishing over the last few days; a bit more after the ride back and other activity.”

She smiled a bit. “To be expected. Fluid intake since the incident?”

“Irregular and inadequate, same with sleeping and eating,” I sighed.

She sat back and sighed. “Can we push back dinner until seven?” she called to the kitchen.

“Of course!” came the response.

She looked at me again and smiled. “Let’s go upstairs.”

Jennifer and Veronica helped me up, and up the stairs.

In the bathroom, Veronica had me drink four glasses of water, and then had me on the bed. She went to the closet, returning with a hat box? Not something I recognized.

Veronica smiled as she took the lid off the box. “I don’t think she introduced you to this one. But it’s just what we need.” Out of the hat box she pulled a large furry breast, dark brown fur with a pinkish nipple. “Exhale as best you can. I’ll take care of you.”

As I exhaled, she positioned the nipple at my mouth. As I inhaled she pressed the breast into me, filling me. A subtle scent, and as I breathed it in deep, a metallic aftertaste crept in, turning into a buzzing which filled me and carried me away.

I woke in Veronica’s arms, held to a nipple. She filled me with comfort and healing. She moved, and Jennifer took her place. As we held each other, I felt the spark, the flare of sexual desire. But that was replaced by waves of comfort, healing, and relaxation. Somewhere in the background I could hear and feel Veronica coaching her, getting her to focus on comfort and healing. And I heard her mention, “There will be time for the rest later...”

More internal barriers falling away, awash in memories, in feelings. Holding on and letting go at the same time. Working on those knots still, yet, again.

They helped me get up and get dressed. I was still sore, but felt a lot better.

Veronica had me pee through a little metal strainer lined with a paper filter. Caught a few dark red spots. Veronica frowned.

Lump

Walking down the stairs with them, glancing at my right hand on the stair railing -- my hand, my skin looked so young! I paused at the landing, looking at my hand, then taking a breath. Even with the pain in my ribs, I felt good. I felt strong.

Downstairs going into the dining room, seeing Emily -- such strong emotions, my eyes filling with tears, seeing her as a young woman, as a girl, remembering that little wisp, her bright eyes, her smile, her challenges. I stepped to her and took her in my arms, tears flowing. I kissed her on top of the head, as I'd done long ago. Stepping back we looked at her in joy, wonder and sadness; the joy and wonder of who the little wisp had become, the sadness realizing her age, our age, and that the passage of time is inexorable.

She looked at me, jaw set and firm, head tilted slightly, the firm look turning into one of wonder, a slight smile, a slight nod of her head.

"Part of him is in here," I whispered, unable to speak louder, "and he is so happy and so proud of who the little wisp has become, what she has done, particularly in helping others."

She smiled more, turning suddenly and going to the kitchen, but not before I saw the tears well up in her eyes.

Dinner, sitting at one end of the table with Emily at the other, Kathy to my right and Veronica and Jennifer to my left.

Veronica gave everyone a summary. I had bruised ribs, at least. While I could get x-rays to see if any were broken, she didn't think that was worth the trouble, as even if they were, there's nothing that could be done to assist healing more than what she'd done, and was teaching Jennifer to do. I also had a bruised kidney, which she was more concerned about. Lots of fluids, bed REST -- she emphasized the REST part with Kathy, who gave her a pout. Monitor over the next few days for improvement.

I told them that when I was young, my grandfather Benjamin gave me a gift. That gift is what got me through my ordeal. Like it or not, I was stuck with it.

"What are you going to tell Rachel?" Emily challenged.

I smiled as I remembered another time, another place, looking at the small but intense young woman sitting before me in tears, wrought with so much turmoil, trying to understand what she was going through, the strange new world awakening within and around her...

I looked at Emily again, that pang of sadness striking me again, the young one still so vibrant in my mind, and *this* Emily here, now...

"Don't ask why," I said, my voice getting stronger, "It's too late for that. Ask instead what are you going to do with this gift, and it is a gift; what are you going to do with it for the betterment of those around you? Think of yourself as a farmer. Are you going to let this gift go fallow? Or are you going to study and develop it to the best of your ability for the betterment of

all? And think of the farmer -- can he personally use hundreds of bushels of corn? No! Just as the farmer only benefits by making the fruits of his labors available to others, so you will only benefit from this gift as you use it to help others.” I looked at Emily, at the other end of the table, smiling, nodding, tears streaming down her face. Was her memory of that afternoon as strong as the one I’d been given? “Just as Lady Emily has helped so many others,” I finished in a whisper, wiping my own eyes with my napkin and picking up my water glass for a sip.

And what the hell was I going to do with my Grandfather’s advice? With his gift? I grunted -- I’d already done one thing that Emily hadn’t -- I’d passed the gift along, two daughters who were strong witches. Had I done that voluntarily? I chuckled and shook my head. In one sense I’d been quite the enthusiastic participant, in another I’d been completely unaware. As usual -- such is life!

I looked to the confused women sitting around me. “If this guy hangs around in my head much longer, one of us should start paying rent!” Picked up the wine glass and had a sip.

Veronica gave me a curious look. “I don’t understand! I... I felt part of ... him when we were upstairs, but not at the Faire?”

I looked to Emily, who now looked serious and studious, a bit of a smile returning.

Kathy was frowning, nodding as well.

“I think it has to do with the way Benjamin left his gift for me, burying it so deep and so securely, so it would only appear under some circumstances. Layered around that, surrounding it on all sides if you will, was the protection from my mother. Did those protections delay my Awakening? Is that why it didn’t happen in Whistler?” I shrugged. “Then something in me responded to the Summoning that Andrea and Rachel cast. I guess between the two of them, they bashed enough chinks in the armor for Kathy, once given the clues, to get through.” I took another sip of wine, then finished the glass. “The rest was left to the gentle ministrations of dear friends...” I thought about flinging my empty glass, but put it down gently instead.

Kathy smiled, but still had a furrowed brow, and shook her head slowly. “Those ... first few times -- I could feel Lady Miriam’s protection, and leftovers of what Andrea tried, but I couldn’t feel anything from your grandfather, not like what I felt today! But now, it’s, he’s so much a part of you!” She shook her head more. “It’s difficult to explain.” She gave me a lusty smile. “I’ll have to study it more; a lot more...”

Veronica gave her a stern look. “AFTER he has recovered, please...”

I had to laugh. “Actually, I’m thinking of taking a long shower and going to bed early.”

Veronica cheered up at that. “Good! I want to give you some medication once you’re in bed, and then we’ll work more at healing you.”

I nodded, then looked to the other end of the table. “Lady Emily, thank you.”

Lump

She smiled, nodding her head. "You are welcome," she managed to say.

I spent some time going through the non-crap mail while the others cleaned up. Nothing earthshaking. I thought about e-mail, but that could wait until tomorrow. And what did I want to do when I grew up? Have I retired, or just taken another week of vacation time?

Let's go shower. Those problems will still be here in the morning.

I started upstairs. I was tired, and sore. Kathy caught up with me as I reached the landing halfway up. "Thank you for being here," I told her. In the bathroom, she helped me get undressed. I couldn't help but notice she was sad, practically pouting.

"What's the matter?" I asked, holding her. "Please hold me tonight," I whispered.

"Oh I will," she replied with a sigh. "I have to go to work tomorrow... I was lucky to get today off."

I kissed her neck. "I'm very glad; thank you for rescuing me, and that's what you did!"

She sighed again. "What are you going to do?"

"Tomorrow? Go get my hair cut in the morning, pick up Rachel, come home, keep breathing. I'll probably go in Friday. What I'll do there, I'm not sure."

We separated with sighs and hugs. I got into the shower. It felt good.

When I got out, Kathy and Jennifer dried me off. I could feel the sexual tension build... From there I was on my back on the bed, with Veronica giving me an injection -- muscle relaxant and some pain relief. They slipped my eyeshades on, and started talking to my body. I faded out. I do remember being held by Veronica, Jennifer, and finally Kathy. I remember being between the sheets in the dark, with Kathy holding me. That was a very good place to be.

END of Part 2
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