

# Cock-Punched By The Changeling

By S. Caine

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## Dedication

My thanks to Jorge, Kirk, Mina, Elodie, Sean, Max, and everyone else without whom this book would've ended up as bad as it sounded.

Olivia's voice came out of the darkroom slowly, hesitantly, like it had to evaporate under the door and through cracks in the floor. "Gareth? I... I think I photographed a murder."

"Oh, you did not!" Gareth called back, not even bothering to shift back to human. His voice came out small and reedy.

"No," Olivia confessed, the gemstone above the door no longer glowing, now indicating she had turned off the red light inside. She wore a simple white blouse, jeans that'd been with her since college, but on her the clothes looked amazing. In deference to the cold, a red sweater was tied loosely around her slender shoulders. It billowed behind her like a cape as she came out waving a sheath of developed photographs, the last in her left hand, still slightly wet from the clothesline. Behind her—optical enlargers, porcelain trays, timers. "But that would be cool, right? Certainly worth more than these..."

She walked across their studio apartment, dodging haphazardly arranged furniture, loose spools of backdrop for half-finished photography projects that numbered in the dozens. Her mother, visiting, had told her their place reminded her of an old TV studio, where you could take twenty steps and go from a Middle Eastern palace to a Wild West saloon to NASA Mission Control. She hadn't judged; just wished all the different sets were clean.

Olivia slapped the photos down in front of Gareth, who presently was a cat—a Norwegian fairy cat, to be precise, with twenty pounds of muscle underneath Cruella DeVil fluff and cave-climbing claws. For someone who was in the fashion industry, even peripherally, Gareth could be such a baby about emasculation.

Then again, as long as they couldn't afford to bribe the super into getting some heat in their studio apartment, she could do with a fur coat herself. She stepped out of her hush puppies and into a set of slippers that doubled down on the insulation of her socks.

"They look good though," Gareth said, as if rewarding her for charitably scratching him behind the ears. "Course, they always do when *she's* in them."

"Don't start," she said, more chiding than warning.

"You're the one developing some of the million pictures you took of her a million years ago instead of finding us work. Yes, they're good, you're a genius, but they're not going to sell. C'mon..."

She picked him up, warming her cold fingers in his luxurious fur as she pressed him to her shoulder like a baby, petted him. “Hey,” she needled back. “Wasn’t it your turn to develop the pictures?”

“Wasn’t it your turn to stop using film and use a digital camera like a normal person?”

“I’m not normal. I’m special and unique. Can you be human again, please, you’re offending me with how comfortable you look.”

“*Fine*,” Gareth said once she’d sat him down, and a moment later there was a man sitting where the cat had laid. As usual, he came out of the transformation looking like he’d been in a wind tunnel, his flannel shirt untucked, his jeans hitched down his belly, his shaggy hair in disarray all over his face. She’d known other changelings; she knew he showered as often as she did, even touched a razor once in a while. But if he spent even one second in the animal kingdom, he came back with a five o’clock shadow to match his yellow eyes and slightly enlarged canines. “Now we’re both cold.”

“Solidarity,” Olivia said.

Gareth shivered again just to spite her. “I’m tired of being poor. Let’s take pictures of white people enjoying quality K-Mart appliances. Or a wedding. Wedding at a K-Mart. That’ll pay better than the last three jobs put together. Have you seen my phone?”

“No. Have you looked for it?”

Gareth slanted sideways in his chair, as if trying to replicate one of his feline postures. “Why would I look for it when you might have it?”

“Well...” Olivia raised her hands.

Gareth started looking around, flipping through mail, magazines, and old paperbacks that collected on the apartment’s every flat surface like some strange bacterial growth with a fondness for L. Sprague de Camp.

Olivia’s peeved expression had not abated. “What’s wrong with mechanical cameras? They’re alive, they’re in motion, a shutter and an iris and a thousand moving parts, a taste of light coming through the lens to set the film on fire, silver halide crystals burning like blood inside of it—digital cameras just click and beep. There’s no jazz.”

“You are such an elf.”

Olivia brushed her hair back from her ears, tapping the point of one like she was testing a knife’s sharpness. “You’re not wrong. So we need a job.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying.”

“Yes, but you blow through your cut like a goat through cans. I, on the other hand, know what a bank statement looks like. When I say we need a job, we definitely need a job.”

“So if I were to ask for beer money?”

“There would be no beer money. We need a job.

“Mmm.” Gareth tapped his fuzzy chin. “You know, changelings spending time as black cats is what gave rise to the myth of the black cat as a witch’s familiar?”

“I did not know that.”

Gareth dug through a box of DVDs that was supposed to be rendered obsolete by the cabinet they were supposed to buy. “Okay, I feel I’ve contributed enough.”

“*Why would your phone possibly be in there?*”

“I’m sure I had my reasons. Past Me was very smart. He took the responsibility of getting my phone to Present Me very seriously...”

“Just activate the rune.”

“But then it’s gonna bug me, not knowing where it was—“

“You want me to call your phone?”

“Yes. Please.”

With a sigh, and with her ears curling, Olivia pressed the photographs to her chest, freeing one hand to pick up the wall phone and dial Gareth’s number.

Nothing rang.

“I have not encountered such willful unhelpfulness since I called my cable company,” Gareth said. “Rare to encounter it in the wild.” He shifted into a bat, hanging upside-down from a sprinkler head to strain his gargantuan ears for his ringtone.

Olivia lowered the phone she’d automatically put to her ear in favor of the photographs in her other hand. The roll she’d developed were all the same. Same blonde woman, same smile, same love. Same sigh when she came back to the first one. The same thought she always had—if she could only live her days like a stack of photographs. Get to the end, then just flip back to that first photograph she’d taken of *her*. She hadn’t found it yet, but she could still remember the sight through her viewfinder.

Kate Anderson, fresh out of high school, first day on the college quad—looking like a million dollars even then. The belly-bearing top over her jeans, showing off her tight little stomach of

golden skin like it was the sun coming up over her belt, the smile that hid on her face from a world that was too serious for it, unconsciously peeked out when she wasn't even paying attention like she was always thinking of something that had made her laugh one, two jokes ago.

The photograph she held wasn't *bad*. Kate was still beautiful. She was *always* beautiful. The framing was wonderful, the lighting fine, the angle perfect. It was just that there was a distance, an artifice. It wasn't that perfect, uncaring shot that Olivia had taken that first day, a woman who didn't know she was being photographed, didn't care. Who smiled wide enough to make a shy little bookworm come across the quad and ask if she minded being in the photograph that'd just been taken. Who said the photograph was all Olivia's if she'd just show her around campus...

A bat glided down to land atop the phone's base station. "Are we going to get rich off emo poetry?" Gareth asked. "Because I think that's all you're going to get, staring at those old photographs. That, or discover you can set things on fire *with your mind*..."

"No, no need, Myspace is still in operation."

"Really?" Gareth jumped off the phone, transforming so his feet hit the floor without gravity ever getting a hold of him. Didn't even make a noise. He rubbed his jaw to check the fresh scruff, finding a two-day stubble there now. "That's like hearing Strom Thurmond is still on life support."

Olivia forced the pictures down out of her hand, onto an already crowded coffee table. "I have a job for us."

Gareth's eyebrows knitted together. "Seriously?"

"Seriously."

Gareth clapped his hands and came up onto the back of their futon in a distinctly avian perch. "Okay! Alright!"

"But I'm not telling you anything until you hit the rune."

He sighed. "Fine. This is going to haunt me, though." He activated the rune sewn into the pocket of his jeans, and a spell by the 'Geniusmancers' at Apple instantly summoned his phone back into his pocket from wherever it'd been. Gareth kept bitching as he took it out and checked. "On my deathbed, I'm going to be wondering where this could've possibly gone. Oh, my mom texted. She says hi." He set the phone down on a table.

"*At least put it in your pocket.*"

"Put what in my pocket?" Gareth teased as he obeyed. "So who are we shadowing this week? I always like knowing which celebrities are pretentious enough to hire us."

Olivia crossed her legs primly, folded her hands like origami. "No shadowing."

Gareth spread his hands as if to hold his incredulity. “No? Olive, it’s what we do. We spend time with the subjects, we get to know them, I sketch them, you shoot ‘em, we develop the pictures in your ridiculous darkroom—“

“It’s not ridiculous.”

“It’s ridiculous that that is not my man-cave. I could have a PS4 in there.” Seamlessly, Gareth switched back to his other complaint. “*We take pictures of people’s souls, Olivia*. Pictures so good wizards have been known to use them in spells. That’s our art. That’s why nobody hires us. Have you suddenly decided to make money? If we’re making money now, I think you should’ve consulted with me first. This is a big change for me.”

Olivia held up a hand to stop him. “We’ll still get to know... the subject. We fly to Hawaii. She’s taking a yacht there, she’s already on route. Then we all go together to this lovely little island in the North Pacific where we do the shoot. There’ll be plenty of time for the artistic process, we’ll just, you know—power through it.”

“Power through inspiration?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds like an ad slogan for shrooms. Okay, name of the island?”

“It’s one of the Marshall Islands, or like an atoll or something. Bù Zhōng Yòng, or something like that.”

Gareth already was checking it on his phone. “Bù Zhōng Yòng... yeah, Marshall Islands. I know a guy there. Carlos Rodriguez. Good guy. Werewolf, but he’s alright. You know, long as the pack is good, ninety-nine percent of the time the dude’s alright. I’ll give him a call, we’ll get a location scouted, pack the toy chest and everything.”

Olivia shook her head, only partially in amazement. “One of these days I’m going to have to start bookmarking every contact you have in Google Earth. It’ll look like one of my mom’s pincushions.”

He shrugged. “I Facebook a lot. Anyway, who’s the gig?”

“Tell you on the plane. Our flight leaves at eleven.”

He blinked, taken aback. “I thought I usually handled transportation.”

“The gig’ bought us first-class tickets.”

“And you waited until just now to tell me?”



“Wanted to make sure you were desperate. Are you a starving artist or aren’t you?”

“I get the feeling I’m being railroaded. How’d the check clear?”

“Thirty thousand dollars.”

“Continue railroading me.”

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First-class flight in a Skyliner 9000 was the next best thing to riding a roc. The stewardesses were pixies who conjured drinks and in-flight meals straight to your tray instead of bumping you with a drink cart, you were close enough to the flight runes on the fuselage to get a little bounce in your step, and at the front of the plane you could see Pegasi and other cloud sprites before they scattered. It was heaven. Gareth put his legs up, his seat flickering out a footrest to catch his heels, and his look of relaxation actually gave his cat-form a run for the money.

He cracked his neck, then passed Olivia his tablet. He’d been coordinating with Carlos ever since they got to the airport. “How’s this look?”

Olivia swiped through a few photos; a white island that was all beach, the size of a baseball diamond or two, with a sizable pubic patch of palm trees and ferns ringing the small lagoon that holed it. The next set of photos were of a cottage built by Spanish explorers—a multilevel villa of sorts with cobblestone walls and a palm frond roof, with even a fence of stacked rocks. Even in the thoughtless digitals of location scouting, it looked picturesque enough for framing.

“Perfect. Rights?”

“One of Carlos’s packmates owns the place. He’ll rent it to us, modest fee. Apparently it’s a bitch to get to, but if the shoot’s small enough...”

“Just you, me, and the girl in the pictures.”

“Okay. I’ll go ahead, set up, you go one on one with our girl. So—porn star desperate for legitimacy or aging star desperate for relevance?”

“Answer hazy, try again later.”

“Your J.J. Abrams act is reaching peak Star Trek Into Darkness.” Still, Gareth shrugged—no skin off his nose—and reached for the in-flight magazine. “Hey, your girl’s on the cover.”

Kate Anderson stared off the magazine, fuck-me eyes and fuck-these bra. She wasn’t the young, hungry girl who Olivia had first met. Time and fame had mellowed her, rounded her out, replacing her wasp-waist with a voluptuous body of lushness and softness, matching her plump ass and teardrop breasts. Her new swimwear line showed them off almost better than Olivia’s antique Nikon F had.

Olivia twisted onto her side, eyes aflicker with annoyance. “Aren’t you deathly afraid of flying?”

Gareth pursed his lips, nodding. “Oh, yeah, hella. Right this minute I’m picturing us dying in a fiery crash. But at least this way I’ll die happy, with a complimentary bottle of Peach Schnapps. You notice there’s no little kids in first class? Do you think that’s a rule?”

Olivia went through the photographs again, mentally planning out poses, lighting, framing. She shut the tablet off, deciding not to get ahead of herself. She was putting off something else already.

Her hand wandered over onto Gareth’s armrest, petting his hirsute forearm. “The bathrooms are bigger too.” Her lips compressed and parted. “Wanna fuck in one?” she asked when the nearest stewardess had passed.

Gareth folded up the magazine. “Okay, what is it?”

“What’s what?”

“You’re being fun.”

“I’m always fun!” Olivia protested.

“Yeah, but you’re not being ‘let’s get high and talk about how the Robocop remake sucked’ fun. You’re being actually fun-fun. What is that? Do you have cancer? Is this a big cancer trip?”

“I do not have to have cancer to enjoy the benefits of having a friend with benefits.”

Gareth sighed. “You’re making me want to change into a butterfly here, you know that?”

“Don’t exaggerate.”

He ran a hand through his hair, not managing to make it any messier than it’d been after he’d switched back to the horse he’d used for the trip to the airport. “Okay. Olive? I respect and support you, and I trust you, you’re my best friend and you’re one hell of a lay. If you have something to say to me, please just say it. I’m taking a transcontinental flight on your word, you can at least meet me halfway.”

“Technically,” Olivia said, “Hawaii is on the same tectonic plate as America, hence the same continent...”

“No, it’s not geographically part of any continent, now come on.”

Olivia shifted her grip to Gareth’s knee, squeezing it and pushing it back and forth as she hemmed. “Okay. Here’s how we’re doing this. I’m telling you who the client is. You’re going to

be upset. We'll exchange a few harsh words, then we're going to the bathroom for some angry sex. Sound good?"

Gareth blinked. "Yes, shockingly. My mom told me the truth about Santa Claus the same way."

"Do not take the promise of the mile-high club as a blanket license for Family Guy jokes."

"You're right, that was beneath me. I should've at least worked in a reference to Krull." He patted the hand she had on his knee. "Hit me."

"Our client's Kate Anderson."

Gareth went *hmm* and leaned back further in his chair, tapping his fingertips together. "Wow. I had no idea that was such a common name. Apparently, both our client *and* the woman who broke your heart have the same name."

"I know, I *know*," Olivia conceded. She held up a finger like it was a groundbreaking discovery. "But! I have a very good reason."

"Yeah?"

"She has money. We need money. We were one bounced check away from doing donkey shows in Tijuana."

"It wasn't that bad—"

"Not for you, you're the donkey!"

"So it's just a job?" Gareth asked. "Take the money and run? No muss, no fuss?"

"No muss or fuss. We just have to put up with her for, like, a second. She won't even be talking. She's a model. I just tell her which direction to look and I snap pictures. Easy money."

"Okay," Gareth said huffily. "I'm irked, but I'm not angry. We can have irked sex."

Olivia abruptly wished he had her long, tapering ears. Without them twitching about, making sense of him was sometimes like reading someone whose face never changed. She didn't know if he was taking this well or wishing they had taken a boat so he could throw himself over the side.

That'd been something nice about Kate. She was so open, so exuberant, that even with smooth ears Olivia could just soak in all her feelings.

She decided Gareth was taking it well, just in need of some reassurance. "Really, you'll see. It won't be that bad."

"You're probably right."

“She’s really different now.”

Gareth sank his face into his waiting hands. “Oh God…”

Olivia persisted. “I mean, just the fact that she reached out to me—“

“Oh *God!*”

“Listen, she contacted me, we’ve been trading e-mails for a while, she’s really ashamed of the way we left it—“

“She should be!”

“She wants to pay back some of the goodwill she owes me, make things right between us.”

Gareth sat up, twisting, grinding his palms onto the armrest between them. “She wants to not be thirty in a twenty-something industry, on minute fifteen of her fame and fortune, with all the artistic integrity of a fucking Vine!”

Olivia held up her hands, more offended on Kate’s behalf than her own. “Alright, you weren’t there, so I don’t wanna hear your color commentary when you didn’t watch the game.”

Gareth backed off minutely, back into his seat, as he went on. “Wasn’t there? You tell me this story every time you have a sip of liquor. You’ve told me this story on nonalcoholic beer.” As he ticked off plot points on his fingers, Olivia reached for her drink. “You were together all through college, she was your muse, your inspiration, she got famous off your photos of her, you were talking about getting married, settling down, doing whatever married lesbians do.”

“Own cats,” Olivia suggested.

“Own cats. Then she dumps you, takes a contract with Victoria’s Secret, sells out!”

Don’t exaggerate, it was a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue.”

“It was both. And *Olive*, she left you for a man!”

“Like I’m one to complain about a person being bisexual?” Olivia drained her drink. “This is really good for an airline drink. I would drink this at a frat party. I would drink this out of a hose…”

“Olivia, c’mon. What am I supposed to think? Five years, you tell me how this girl broke your heart, now suddenly you’re getting the band back together?”

Olivia huffed a sigh as she laid her head down on his arm. “I am not getting back together with her. I am being a good person and letting go of old hurts and moving on with my life, which means having professional contact with my exes, not avoiding them by turning into a moth...”

“That was one time.”

“It was three exes.”

“Yeah, crowded party. What are the odds? Whoa, wait.” Gareth rubbed at his eyes. “You know this isn’t me being jealous, right?”

“I think it’s a little you being jealous.”

“I’m worried about you.” Her head was still on his shoulder and Gareth petted her dark hair with his other hand. “You know I don’t care who you shack up with. Mostly because you’re never going to do better than me, it’s true, but also because we agreed not to be those people who are all couple-y and boring and in love and oh, look, all the words that coincidentally describe you and your ex who you harbor no weird feelings for at all.”

“Of course I have weird feelings, I’m a girl, I have a Spotify playlist for every hour I’ve thought about her. That doesn’t mean you have to be worried. I have a Spotify playlist for, like, fictional people I wanna see touch balls.”

“Okay, be all cool and self-effacing, but I know you’re gonna end up with more emotions about this than a V.C. Andrews novel.”

“Well, I like V.C. Andrews novels.”

“Don’t they have a bunch of incest?”

“Doesn’t *Game of Thrones*?”

“Leave Tyrion out of this.”

Olivia rolled her eyes even as she snuggled deeper into his arm. “Still pissed?”

“On your behalf. And somewhat at your being dumb.”

“I’m entitled to be dumb. It’ll be a fun change of pace. You can be boring for a while.”

“Do I have to know who my Senator is?”

“Yes, sweetie.”

“Now I’m really angry.”

“Let’s go to the bathroom, put your penis in my vagina, see what happens.”

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Gareth was more agitated than Olivia had counted on. Usually, that made it better. She wanted mindless, she wanted fucking, she wanted him to tear her open and let all the emotions pour out of her before they could ever near her voice. But she hadn’t counted on his memories. He remembered how she’d been when Kate had sent birthday presents, the first few years—well-meaning, of course—the tears that’d only stopped when they’d burnt them together. The distant look she got in her eye when she saw a picture of Kate, teaching Gareth to change the channel when a lingerie commercial came on, get the mail so he could search through her subscriptions for pictures. The one time Olivia hadn’t been drunk, just self-pitying enough to wallow in it, and she’d begged Gareth to tell her if she wasn’t enough for him.

(“Tell me, don’t just *leave*.”)

He fucked into her until the hair grew thick and hearty on his groin, his gripping hands, his kissing lips. His teeth snarled into her. He spun her around, forcing her hands down to the sink for support, his body now slapping against hers with an irresistible forcefulness she could never ask for, only enjoy. Her sex twinged sweetly, his cock seeming larger, thicker, the fuck rougher. Her orgasm seemed to be approaching much faster, looming much larger than she had anticipated.

She reached behind her and felt into his hair, now a shaggy mane down to his shoulders—somewhere in the curly mass was a horn, one of two, and she held onto it. She knew the legs holding her own open now bent backward at the knees.

All she could do was moan.

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They didn’t talk about it after they’d gone back to their seats. Gareth stayed in the bathroom after her, took care of business with a pocket trimmer, and came back with his chin chiseled instead of fuzzy. Olivia still didn’t want anyone to know, not when they’d be sharing even another minute in first-class. After they landed, he brought it up for her.

“A satyr, huh?” he mused, as she shoved their bags into his arms.

Her voice was tense but her teeth unclenched as they stood by the carousel, its steady whine whirling around the surrounding conversations in eddies of words and grunts. “Yeah. Warning next time?”

“I tried to lean out of it,” he said apologetically. “I mean, I didn’t go full—“

Olivia’s ears were flattened beside her hairline. “The penis was fully goat. That’s the part that was inside me, so that’s really what I’m concerned about.”

“Sorry. I know it bothers you. But, you know, it’s still *me*. More natural than using a vibrator, anyway...”

Olivia gave him a look that was more irritated than when he’d had goat legs. Gareth winced inwardly. He’d had to use the vibrator line... “This is why my mother said I shouldn’t date outside my species.”

“No, your mother said that because she’s a cow.”

“What, you don’t like cows? But goats are fine?”

“*Satyrs*. And I didn’t want it to happen, it just happened. You date a vampire, you get bit. You date a werewolf, you get fur. You date a changeling, *he changes*. If you just want a human, date a human.”

Olivia picked up the rest of the bags herself, pulling them away from Gareth when he tried to reach for them. There was a vein knotted on the side of her forehead. Gareth watched it throb, like there was something on the inside of her skull, tapping out Morse code.

“I didn’t mean that,” he said, offering his hand as she overburdened herself.

“No, you meant date Kate.”

“Maybe I did,” he conceded. “What do you want to do?”

Begrudgingly, Olivia slapped a suitcase into his outstretched hand. “I want you to treat this like any other job with any other client. If I want to talk about Kate, I’ll talk about Kate. And if I don’t—which I don’t—I want you to remember you’re not my therapist, you’re not my boyfriend, and you’re not my dad.”

“Her name will not cross my lips. It’s your call, you do what you want to do, I’ll just set up the set...”

“No,” Olivia said, firmly, not anything else. “I’m not telling you it’s alright. I tried babying you. Didn’t work. I’m gonna stay bitter and resentful. Drink wine and complain about you.”

“That’s your right.”

“But,” she said, gnashing her teeth once to keep herself serious. “I do want you there. Just so we’re all being professional.”

“Okay then.” Gareth nodded. “Kate Anderson, Destroyer of Worlds. I do kinda want to meet her.”

“Best behavior,” she said warningly. “I mean it. Oh, look, one of those cards with our names on it.”

At the far end of the terminal, one of the chauffeurs held a sign reading ‘Olivia Silverleaf.’

“Our client is very thoughtful,” Gareth said. “You think she’s trying to get into my pants?”

“Too soon.”

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It was 6 A.M. by the time they reached the dock, the sun just coming up, a blotch of color in the darkened sky like a painter who’d just made his first brushstroke and didn’t know where to go from there. At this hour, there were only surfers out, eating and drinking on the shore with skin as tanned as the golden sand, a select few carving up the waves with flicks of their boards, making little incisions in them to prepare for being disemboweled on the shore.

Gareth and Olivia left their things in the town car, Olivia asking if it was alright for the driver to wait for them, him showing her a Sudoku book and nodding her on her way. They walked down onto the baking dunes, getting a murmur of conversation from the guys awaiting their waves. The dock they were to meet Kate at was just another dock, nothing special, no reason for anyone to be on hand with a camera or a microphone. They climbed up the warped, wooden steps onto the pier, went past a few moored fishing boats that would one day or another be sold for mortgage money, and ended up at the end of the pier.

Gareth took his shoes off, dangled his feet in the water, fixed his shaggy hair with a rubber band to work it into a ponytail. Olivia leaned against a piling. The surfers lost interest in them quickly, focusing on a series of breakers that hit the shore like clenched fists, flinging the occasional surfer and pig board flying.

“So why are you afraid of flying?” Olivia asked, ears tentatively upthrust.

“I’m not *afraid* of it, I just don’t like it. Or the possibility of being slammed into the ground at nine hundred miles an hour.”

“But couldn’t you just turn into a bird and fly away?”

Gareth kicked at a fish investigating his toes. “If the plane doesn’t explode, yeah. Or if there’s a hole in the fuselage that I can get to and I’m not dragged down to my death *as a bird*. Or if all my friends don’t die as I fly away, which is better than everyone dying, but still, now I have guilt.”

“Aww,” Olivia said, pressing her hand to her heart. “You’d feel bad if I died.”

“Just a little bit,” Gareth replied, mock-defensive. “And then I’d remember I’d get, like, all the leftovers in the fridge. I wouldn’t have to share anything.”



“Ooh, good point.”

But Olivia wasn't really listening to him, she was looking out at the horizon, where a flash of light and a suckling V-shaped riptide told her magic was in the offing. It was a chainsaw of a disturbance, ripping up swells the size of houses from the calm waters. As it neared, the horns of a radiant crown emerged, first one, then the two flanking it, then five, the crown breaching the water to show it was the top of a motel-sized conch shell stood on the end. Chains were set in the horns, leading down to the whitewater horses drawing the shell through the water, a six-team of kelpies billowing into existence as the tide hit the shallows, their hooves now striking the sands, their shoal-manes thrashing above the waterline.

Gareth let out a whistle, impressed, as the kelpies pulled into the pier, circled their reins around the pilings, and docked the shell. The side-slit opening was blocked up by a manmade bulkhead, but a door at the very top opened and let down a gangplank that was flat until it hit the dock at a steep angle, whereupon it contorted into a set of stairs.

Kate Anderson herself appeared at the head of them. Even dressed down—as much as a voluptuous figure like hers could be dressed down—in a tightly clinging blue-black sweater and artfully ripped jeans, all of her five feet, ten inches seemed to have been sculpted into one ode to femininity without an ounce of wasted clay. Gareth had seen her magazines, but it was nothing compared to how she looked in person, how she moved, the little self-effacing smiles made in the midst of her seemingly effusive happiness to see him. Gareth looked at Olivia and saw she was equally stunned.

“Hullo, lovelies!” Kate cried out to them in a British accent as she waved, doffing her playfully-worn captain's cap at them. She put it back on at a jaunty angle, adjusted it with a single finger to tip it over her eye.

“You never said she was British,” Gareth whispered to Olivia.

“She's not. Just... obnoxious.”

“Oh, you have a type...” he replied, and she nudged him in the ribs.

“Permission to come aboard!” Kate called as she came down the steps to them, gripping both railings. Without the fake accent, she had the dialect of beaches. A bouncing, lilting voice that hit the ear with the warmth of a summer sun.

“That's what we say to you,” Olivia said with loving exasperation. Even after all these years, the fondness rushed back into her voice like scar tissue filling a wound.

“Oh, you know you don't have to ask permission!” Kate said, chagrining, hands on her hips, before vaulting the last of the steps two at a time to wrap Olivia in a hug.

She wrenched Olivia up off her feet, held her so tight she seemed on the verge of carrying her back into the conch and kidnapping her before she set Olivia back down and withdrew, still inside her personal space, but now fiercely gripping Olivia's hands. She rubbed at Olivia's knuckles like they were religious talismans.

"You have gotten so pretty. I mean, you were *always* pretty, but now you're *beautiful*. And you're dressed so fancy and you don't have that weird dye job anymore... oh God, I can't even take it. You look so good, you lucky bitch! The years have been fucking *fantastic* to you. Just a smidgen of age complements your features so well. I want to take a picture of you to my plastic surgeon."

"You have a plastic surgeon?"

"On retainer. He's only done a little lipo so far, but like you always said, plan ahead. Won't be long until I'll need a nip, a lift, and a tuck." She shifted her grip, clasping Olivia's slender forearms quickly before turning to Gareth, who found himself taken aback by the sunniness of her attention. "And *you* must be Gareth Lagerton, the man himself! O told me everything about you, but she never mentioned you were so cute—!"

She came in for a hug; before Gareth knew it her breasts were compacting against his chest. He felt the soft flesh cushion him, press firmly against his skin before giving in to their proximity. Her skin was so warm, so caressing, it seemed impossible she was wearing a bra under her sweater. Maybe not even a top...

All too soon, she pulled away; Gareth felt an erection growing steadily down one pantleg. Kate reached out and ruffled his hair. "Please, no formality, just call me Kate."

"Did you just say I could call you?" Gareth replied in a daze.

Olivia bounced him with her hip as Kate laughed uproariously, breasts bounding with every giggle. "She said you were funny! Oh, maaaaan—you've gotta come with us!" Her eyes rebounded to Olivia's, big cartoon hearts like she was the wolf in a Red-Hot Riding Hood short. "O, how's this sound—lunch at this tiki bar, right on the beach, it's this big secret of Michael Duncan's, you know, the entrepreneur, he's flown me there three times in the last month trying to seduce me and it actually worked the first time, the place isn't *blowing up* or anything but it does alright, it's the best-kept secret I know, kālua pork, lomi salmon, long rice... we go there, my treat, we catch up on old times, talk about the job—"

"We can talk about the job on the way," Olivia said. "In your giant magic seashell."

"Oh?" Kate looked at it. "Oh, that's Graco's, he's nice. Wait, you don't want to get lunch?"

"We ate on the plane."

"We ate *airplane food* on the plane," Gareth pointed out. "What's this place do for desserts?"

“They take a coconut and they—“

Olivia broke in. “We haven’t used the location or the scout before, so the sooner we get there, the more time we’ll have to iron out the rough spots. I don’t want to leave anything to the last minute, right Gareth?”

“I could give Carlos another call—“

Kate’s smile was a glaze over her pouting. “No Fun Silverleaf, has to get her syllabus dead and buried in the first week of the semester. Glad to see the years haven’t damaged your work ethic. Alright, permission to come aboard.”

“I told you—“

“And I told you,” Kate interrupted. “You can come whenever you want.”

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The inside of the conch was a structure that looped around the core, following a spiral staircase into individual rooms and floors. The façade that closed it off to the ocean was interspersed with portholes, allowing a panoramic view of the depths as the kelpies carried them off. Kate gave them the quick tour. They settled into the lounge at the very bottom, where the floor dipped into a wrap-around couch and you could see the ocean floor out the porthole.

“I want you to treat me like any other client,” Kate was saying, fetching them a tray of cheese and crackers, wine and cold cuts. Gareth was quick to build a little sandwich with them, but Olivia was too busy staring at Kate to bother. She took a wineglass just to have something to occupy her hands. “I *love* what you do, I’ve read *all about* your method—“ (Here Olivia winced; Gareth thought it was that she’d had to *read* about it.) “how you get to know your subjects, and you photograph the inner them... it’s great. Very nouveau.”

“Nouveau what?” Gareth asked, mouth slightly full.

“Just nouveau,” Kate said. “And Gareth, you sketch me, right? Then O takes your sketches and they help her figure out how to shoot me? Love it! C’mon, Olivia, ask me anything.”

Olivia gave Gareth the all-clear. He brushed off crumbs on his jeans, then pulled out his sketchpad. Kate leaned back into a comfortable pose, and Gareth started with the line of her silhouette. She had a lush, round face, contoured by a casual updo into a sweep of cupid’s bow lips, cat-dark eyes, pert nose, and stenciled eyebrows. It lent itself easily to the description of his pencil. He just had to draw the perfect woman and her face appeared under his graphite.

Olivia was reassured by the scratch of Gareth’s pencil on paper. “Okay, Kate. Who commissioned the shoot?”

“Really no need to be secretive, huh? We are under way!” Kate held up her arms in a little cheer. She quickly lowered them. “You’ve heard of Graco Vorexus, Great Wyrms of the North?”

She wasn’t likely to have forgotten him once she had. “Breathes fire, right?”

“Not in all the time I’ve known him, but he seems like the type,” Kate said, blissfully free of sarcasm. “Well, he’s releasing a new jewelry line. Starstones from his dwarven mine-hoards. Very expensive. Each one is worth millions and he wants them to be talked about. So, during the shoot, I’ll be wearing a necklace.” Her smile rose like the dawn. “Even if that’s all I’m wearing.”

“That makes sense,” Olivia said, as Gareth hastily erased the mis-stroke he’d just made. “Take a hot... a *famous* celebrity, pair them with an underground artist, see what happens.”

“Oh, that is not it at all!” Kate crossed her legs and Olivia scooted a little closer to Gareth. “I requested you. Graco wanted something very special for this, and I told him no one did special like Olivia Silverleaf.”

A smile scratched at the inside of Olivia’s lips, her ears quirking. “You know, this isn’t an interview. It’s a conversation. You can say something unprompted, or ask something, whatever’s on your mind.”

Kate’s big blue eyes darted to Gareth, his brow knitted in concentration, tongue caressing his teeth as he penciled in her curves. “Hey, Gareth, are you really a shifter? You are, right?”

“Changeling,” he corrected without thinking, then looked up from his pad upon realizing they’d exchanged words. After a few seconds of meeting Kate’s gaze, he flipped the page and started a new drawing. Immortalizing their shared glance in shades of gray. “But shifter’s fine...”

“Do you prefer changeling?”

“The NAACP does. And they’ve done pretty well by us, so if everybody wants to call us changelings, I’m with changelings.”

“Oh, now I feel bad. Is something wrong with the word ‘shifter’?”

“Not really,” Gareth shrugged, unused to the force of her attention. It felt like three women at once were flirting with him. He looked to Olivia for reassurance and she was inscrutable. “I guess someone thought it would be confusing. Vampires and werewolves can only *shift* into one or two forms, but changelings can change into any animal. I mean, that’s the theory...”

“You can’t change into any animal?” Kate’s mock-disappointment felt real.

He chuckled, simultaneously uneasy and enjoying his own nervousness, like he was on a roller coaster climbing uphill. He buried himself into the drawing. “I can change into quite a few animals, but not every single one. I’ve never met anyone who can change into every animal. There are, like, a million different birds—mostly changelings have the usual stuff. Flier, runner,

digger... or dog, cat, rodent... I knew a guy who did dinosaurs. He was paleontologist, had to really study to try it. Dinosaurs are hard. Not quite birds, not quite lizards—warm-blooded, I think. I can't do 'em. Something like a saber-toothed tiger, a mammoth, those are just mammals, I could pull that."

Olivia flopped back in her seat, her ears drooping. "You cannot change into a woolly mammoth."

"Not right *now*, no, but under the right circumstances..."

"Like a genie gave you a wish, those circumstances?"

"O, be nice," Kate chided.

"She's just teasing," Gareth assured her. "She teases. She's a teaser."

"Don't I know it."

"If anyone's a tease—" Olivia began dangerously.

"It's not a tease if you follow through," Kate laughed her off, or tried to.

Olivia was momentarily relentless. "Depends how much you follow through."

"Why, were you unsatisfied?" But Kate said it looking back at Gareth, and he didn't know if it was a come-on or what. She planted her hands on her crossed leg, long fingers playing at a hole in her denim. Her nails were cut short and painted pink. "Sorry about the curiosity," she continued, now obviously speaking to Gareth. "I was raised in—well, my family and their friends had a lot of ideas about the more magical peoples. I'm a hundred percent human."

*No wonder she's so popular*, said an uncharitable part of Gareth's mind.

"But my parents thought that if we lived a certain way and I was raised a certain way, I'd grow up close to nature. Like you."

"I'm not any closer to nature than anyone," Gareth assured her. "I can turn into a woodpecker, but you really think a woodpecker knows anything about the ecosystem?"

"Yeah, he's sorta an idiot," Olivia chimed in with a smile, which Kate whirled to check on. Assured Olivia was kidding by the lightly upturned tilt of her ears, she leaned back to take in both of them with a wary look in her eyes.

"I'm not saying being a changeling makes you the chosen people, just that my parents thought so."

"They were one of those goddess cults?" Gareth asked.

“Not a cult,” Kate stressed, interrupting Olivia, who’d been saying the same thing. They shared a look. “More like an... art colony that you couldn’t leave. That’s why I’m so much of a hippie, I guess. Take pictures of me, have sex with me, look at my boobs—what’s the big deal? We’re all just animals.”

“Some animals mate for life,” Olivia said into her wineglass. She’d just drained it.

The good cheer drained out of Kate even faster. “It takes two people to break up,” she said softly. “One person to leave, and one not to go after her.”

“Did the guy you left me for tell you that one?”

“If he did, it wouldn’t be for another four months, when I *met him*.”

“So why’d you leave?”

“Because you wanted something I couldn’t give.”

“Funny. I would’ve given you anything.”

Kate scurried away from Olivia’s words, busying herself with throwing together an assortment of cheese and crackers, a Leaning Tower of Pisa she constantly straightened, as she spoke almost to herself. “You think I didn’t want to give you what you wanted? You were never satisfied. Those pictures you were always taking, you liked them well enough at first, but then nothing I did was ever good enough, *I wasn’t good enough*. You wanted something—“

“I wanted more than some blank-faced, empty smile on the cover of Maxim...”

“*That’s me*. Looking sexy, that’s me. You can take a picture of George Clooney reading a book and it’s a revelation, it’s his inner child, but with me, I’m always posing, I’m being fake, I’m not showing you my *soul*...”

“I was trying to help you be a better picture, not a better... underwear ad!”

“I like being an underwear ad. I like getting paid.”

Olivia turned to Gareth as if in shock, disbelief over what Kate had just said.

He shrugged. “Getting paid is nice?”

Olivia switched back to Kate. “All you had to do was be open with me.”

“All *you* had to do,” Kate fired back, “was be satisfied with who I am!”

Olivia dropped her head into one hand, the fingers bulging out in an apoplexy before steeping into her scalp. “I’m getting a migraine. Let’s pick this up later.”

She got up, already facing her cabin.

“That’s what you said eight years ago,” Kate said.

“And we picked it up,” Olivia replied.

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Gareth and Kate kept the conversation going a little after that, pointedly ignoring the blow-up, Gareth continuing his drawings and Kate checking her phone on and off. They joked around, kept it light, Kate picking at him for details about Olivia—Gareth gently deferring her with things he hoped Olivia wouldn’t mind being told.

Olivia didn’t come out of her cabin for dinner, either. Even without her, Kate’s entourage filled the table—a chef, a make-up artist, a hair stylist, a costumer, life coach, personal trainer, bodyguard. They seemed a pretty close-knit team, or at least one without any obvious conflicts. Kate enjoyed buzzing about with them, gushing to them about how brilliant Gareth was, making him the guest of honor. He appreciated it, but felt a little awkward about so much attention without Olivia there too. When he could manage it and still seem polite, he excused himself, taking a full plate of food not to the sink, but to Olivia’s cabin.

She opened the door, saw the food, heard the buzz of conversation like a party in full swing, and dismally stepped out of the way. “She always does this to me.”

Olivia had already unfolded two chairs for them to sit in. Gareth twisted his around and planted himself backward in it, sagging on its back as Olivia ate her dinner. He felt like he was coming down after so much time spent with Kate—like listening to her was a sugar rush.

“Eight years,” Gareth said. “Did you really think you could just pick up where you left off?”

“That’s not what I wanted, though.”

“Then did you think what you wanted was going to have much of a bearing on what happened?”

Olivia twisted her fork around in the piece of meat she’d just speared. “I’m not going to fall into bed with her, if that’s what you’re saying.”

“You’ll note I didn’t say that. However, *you just did.*”

“Because I’m not going to fall into bed with her.”

“And yet you seem pissed at Kate for, what, *not* being willing to fall into bed with you? You know. If ya wanted to.”

Olivia’s downturned ears bracketed her eyes, glaring silently at him.

“I mean, obviously, you *don't*.”

She kept glaring.

“And she doesn't either, probably, not when she could have a threesome with Taylor Swift or whatever it is models do—“

“Have you ever thought of just how cruel it is,” Olivia started, “that there exist men who can transform into animals, and even that won't shut them up?”

Gareth gripped the top of the chairback and pushed himself up, cracking his spine, then leaning backward until his head was nearly upside-down. “So what do you want from her? She got you this job. As peace offerings go—“

“Did I say I wanted peace?”

Gareth sighed heavily, pulling himself upright. “I swear to God, you're going to wake up one morning and be an L Word DVD. Okay. *What do you want?*”

“I don't know—“ Olivia tapped her fork against the plate. She spoke in quick clusters, now impaling morsels with her tines and popping them into her mouth between sentences. “I want her to value me. Like, trusting my judgment. I keep telling her there's more to her than underwear. She never listens.”

“Maybe it's the way you say it.”

“You should start a business,” Olivia growled. She wagged her finger at him. “Couples counseling in fifteen minutes or less. Save people a bunch of time, let 'em get straight to the divorce...”

Gareth pushed himself up, standing, taking a few steps with his lanky gait like he was trying to remember a soft-shoes routine. “I'm just saying, you do have a certain... mien. *You're right, you're right, you're right*. And if you just use small enough words, everyone will see it and we'll all be hunky-dory. Don't get me wrong, you're right a lot. But that does mean you have very little experience in being wrong.”

“An obligatory rejoinder comes to mind.”

He flared out his hands. “Hey, what else do I bring to this relationship but boundless experience in being wrong?”

“Cuddles?” Olivia sagged down her seat, with the kind of quiet that indicated the conversation was over—she had something to think on and there was nothing more to be gained from poking her with a stick. “Gorilla cuddles?”



Gareth transformed, slowly to make sure the floor of the cabin could hold him, then lumbered over to Olivia, picked her up, held her in the middle of his vast fuzzy bulk. She relaxed into his clever hands grooming her.

“I’m doing it for her own good, you know.”

“I know.”

“She thinks she’s pretty, but she has no idea how beautiful she is. She could be the next Mona Lisa.”

“The thing about ol’ Lisa is—no one remembers who modeled for it. Just the guy who painted it.”

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“O, you in there? I made breakfast Gareth you have to wake up, *get up*, God! You could sleep through a stampede!”

Gareth blinked awake, trying to reconcile the sudden change in the voice he was hearing.  
“Wha?”

Olivia was leaning over him. “C’mon, *up!* We have to hide you!”

The bed was comfortable enough for Gareth to be perfectly fine hiding under the sheets like something shrink-wrapped. “*Why?*” he whined.

“Because I don’t want her to see you!”

His mind was still tamped down with sleep. This seemed familiar. “Your sister?”

“No, Kate!” Olivia cried, and Gareth realized that her voice hadn’t changed, it was just also the voice knocking at the door. Describing breakfast items.

“Oh, right,” Gareth said, realizing he wasn’t at Olivia’s parents’ house and it wasn’t Christmas. And Kate wasn’t Olivia’s sister. “Smaller breasts.”

Olivia groaned. “I invite you over to spend one holiday and it haunts me forever. Will you just change?”

“What good’ll that do?” Gareth yawned.

Olivia put her frantically waving hands down. “If you change into something small, she won’t notice you,” Olivia explained slowly.

Gareth thought it over. “That might work.”

Olivia wrenched herself off the bed, jabbing a finger at him to promise epic retaliation if he didn't transform. Gareth stifled another yawn and pushed himself into being a mouse, and promptly lost himself again in the warm, comfortable sheets.

"Unbelievable," Olivia muttered as she went to rip the door open.

Kate stood there, tray in hand, actual silver platters on it alongside a breakfast smoothie. She was once again dressed *almost* modestly—a long white fleece sweater covered her from wrists to navel, terminating abruptly in the top of a tartan skirt that came down to her thighs, which showed briefly golden before meeting her long white socks. No shoes, just some warmth against the chilled ocean air that permeated the conch.

But there was a self-awareness to how she dressed down. With her natural voluptuousness, there was no need of flattering clothes. She flattered everything she wore. The well-sized sweater—clinging tenaciously across her broad cleavage—was just overkill. Olivia was sure that the watching Gareth was full up on thoughts of Catholic schoolgirls, if he could think at all. Even 4K video couldn't give him the impact of her physicality in person, her presence, the sense of... mass.

Not that Olivia cared about such things.

"I made your favorite," Kate said. She bustled into the room, searching for a place to set the tray down, and Olivia winced when she chose the bed, started picking up the plate covers. "Blueberry pancake muffins, pan-seared oatmeal, fennel seed scone, a side of bacon, and a shortstack of Belgian waffles with organic syrup."

"You asked your chef to make all that?" Olivia asked drolly. "That's so thoughtful."

"I made it," Kate shot back. "My chef would have a total heart attack if I asked him to make anything without kale in it. My *water* has kale in it." She stole one of Olivia's muffins, tossed it from hand to hand. "I suppose it was pretty silly of me to expect we could just start working together again with so much history."

"Suppose we're both pretty silly." Olivia picked up the plate of oatmeal, a fork. "But I think we can work together. Maybe just—avoid the heart-to-hearts?"

"I don't know if that works for me. One of the things I always liked about us was that we could talk about everything."

"Well, if you liked it that much..." Olivia trailed off.

"I did," Kate said, voice firm. "But we weren't talking at the end."

"No. I guess we weren't."

“And we don’t have to now. I just came to say ‘truce?’”

Olivia nodded. “Truce.”

“Good. By the way, have you seen Gareth? I had a whole box of donuts for him, but he wasn’t in his room.”

“Oh?”

“Bed didn’t even look slept in.”

“Maybe he made it after he got up.”

Kate’s brow furrowed. “We’re talking about the same guy, right?” She sat down on the bed. This time, she caught Olivia’s wince. “It’s alright. He’s cute and he can turn into a pony. If you weren’t sleeping with him, I would be.”

“Really?” Gareth exclaimed.

Kate pulled back the sheet. Gareth was nestled on the pillow, a perfectly black mouse. She oohed, smiled, gave his chubby form a stroke with her finger. “So cute!”

“I know, I should be a mouse all the time.”

“Nah, I think we’d get more use out of the man. You’re tall. You can reach more stuff.”

Olivia recovered. “We didn’t do anything. I just didn’t want to be alone.”

“You never did,” Kate said. “It’s *fine*. It’s not like I’ve been a nun.”

“Ruin my fantasy life, why don’t you?” Gareth put in.

Kate tittered. “Are his shape-changes always black?”

“Melanistic,” Olivia corrected. “It’s part of the magic. Who knows?”

“It’s nice.” Kate adopted a mock-chiding tone. “Now if I see any black mice in my changing room, I’ll know who to have a word with about it.”

“Please, madam!” Gareth said in an affected British accent. “I just download pictures of you modeling lingerie, like everyone else.”

“You mean buy magazines where I’m modeling lingerie, right?”

“I would, but magazines aren’t waterproof.”

“Should I leave you two alone?” Olivia asked. “You seem to have a lot to talk about.”

“Well, this is a big bed.” Kate laid back, spreading herself out on it, and Gareth eyed her suddenly upthrust breasts as if trying to determine if they were more comfortable than his current perch. “I don’t think anyone has to leave for us all to be comfortable.”

“We’re docked,” Olivia said with a flat-eared glance out the window. “We should probably get the ball rolling before the paparazzi realize you’re here.”

“My team doesn’t leak information like that.”

“I still like rolling balls.”

“If that’s the kind of balls you like,” Kate replied, with a glance to Gareth. “Let’s go take pictures of me half-naked, then.”

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Wake Island was mostly reef and airstrip, with a few miles of land that was almost wholly military base. A contingent of officers met them in a Zodiac to ferry them over the coral to the atoll, where Kate’s team went into practiced routine with the enlisted men. Kate signed autographs, traded jokes, posed for pictures; the beauty queen in an impromptu parade.

Olivia kept looking over her shoulder as she and Gareth walked away. Kate’s charisma was quite something, even spread out over a crowd. Centered on one person, it was—it had been—intoxicating.

Gareth only noticed Olivia. Her clothing was comfortable, loose and long, turning what was underneath into only a display of the fabrics she wore, the patterns she’d paired. The Army guys didn’t even notice her toned arms, her firm thighs, and her tight ass, not when Kate was around. The Internet had made them used to bare skin, not imagining what was underneath. Gareth wondered if he’d be as gaga over Kate if he didn’t know firsthand Olivia’s beauty.

It was a brisk hike to Carlos Rodriguez’s place—a collection of World War 2 wreckage where his pack lived. Crashed F4F-3 Wildcats and Mitsubishi G3M Rikkos. Gareth gave a shudder, passing the skeletal remains, retrofitted into open-air condos of sorts. Olivia didn’t think this experience would make his next flight any more fun.

“Carlos?” Gareth called, though his bellowing voice didn’t do more than draw a pack of puppies from a hollow landing gear bay. “Carlos Rodriguez?”

The puppies nipped around his feet, skidding paws kicking up little shots of sand from the beach. Gareth growled at them, but they festively ignored him, barking and scampering about in circles.

“Making friends wherever you go,” Olivia opined, ears bending back but the tips curling up in amusement.

“I told you, I’m more of a cat person...”

“No wonder they like you so much,” Carlos called, swinging down from the underbelly of a wrecked bomber. “They know how good you’d taste.”

Like a lot of werewolves, Carlos went barefoot and shirtless, though he gripped a guayabera shirt in one hand. Unlike a lot of Rodriguezes, he was a blond, with pale Nordic skin, clear blue eyes, and though he’d shaved his head recently, scalp and jaw were both scruffy with the burr of going back and forth between beast and man.

In his other hand was a teddy bear. He threw it to the puppies and they went wild for it, abandoning Gareth’s shoes to play-fight over the teddy bear. Four squeaky little balls of fluff grabbed each of the teddy’s limbs, while a fifth tried to get its tiny jaws around the bear’s head. They tugged it around the beach, drunkenly yipping this way and that.

“These your dogs?” Gareth asked.

“No, my kids. Wife had a litter about a year ago.”

“*That* must’ve been fun,” Olivia commented.

“Picnic compared to them teething. So, you all the photographers?”

They nodded, Olivia tapping the Polaroid SX-70 she held for gruntwork. “You’re Carlos Rodriguez?”

He nodded. “I’m adopted. Breezed through high school Spanish. Usually I just go by Carl. Don’t spell it with a K, though. You know, mentally? So fucking pretentious...” Carl shrugged on his shirt, leaving it unbuttoned. “Or German...”

“Fair enough,” Gareth said. “Where’s our island?”

Carl slipped a ring off his finger, then pulled it between thumbs and forefingers until it expanded to the size of a coaster. He held it up. Through the middle, a speck of land on the horizon was magnified into a tropical island. The kind of place you’d expect to find Matthew Fox not getting answers to any of his questions.

“Your conch won’t be able to make it, but I ferry people back and forth. One trip in the morning, one in the evening. If you aren’t on one of those, you aren’t going.”

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In the boathouse was a selection of handmade straw hats that Carl apparently got for a pittance from a local grandmother, and were free to anyone who wanted to avoid sunburn. Most of Kate’s crew already sported baseball caps, with Gareth wearing a bandanna and Kate and Olivia having

sunhats that coincidentally matched. Shirtless, freshly anointed with sunscreen, Carl rowed them to Bù Zhōng Yòng in the kind of canoe that looked like people spear-fished from it; a project he'd done in college for an Anthropology course that still served him. He told them all about it over the first half-mile they covered. Apparently, it was all the rage in precolonial Hawaii.

“There were puppies and you didn't tell me?” Kate asked. She was in a whispered conversation with Olivia. “I know the break-up was bad, but I didn't know you had that much of a grudge.”

“They weren't puppies, they were babies. That turned into puppies.”

“Puppy babies?” Kate demanded, sounding like she was on the verge of a heart attack from the notion. “And you kept it from me? We'd better be even now!”

“I wasn't keeping score.”

“*Why* doesn't this boat just have a motor?” Ms. Yana interrupted. A vampire, her pale skin glimmered with daylight cream. She was Kate's bodyguard, and a Buddhist, convinced that her immortal life was to be spent paying for the bad karma of a prior incarnation. It made her pouty. “They're not that expensive, are they?”

“These are deep waters,” Carl explained. “Deep magic. Things here—don't take kindly to tech.”

“We are going to be taking pictures,” Gareth said, in not quite a question.

“That should be fine. Just don't do anything a teenager would do in a horror movie. You see anything that looks ancient, *leave it alone*.”

“Good advice,” Gareth agreed.

Yana grunted as she made a mental note.

The island was as promised. Black sand beaches, the lingering evidence of the volcano that had created Bù Zhōng Yòng. Deeper inland, it roughened into brown soil, from which sprung an assortment of palm trees, scrubs, jungle vines. Right at that demarcation point, partially overrun with creepers, stood the cottage—a sprawling project of Spanish explorers, restored and watched over by Carl. He'd place their supplies inside.

It was a long morning, then a long afternoon. Gareth supervised the action, Olivia and Carl pitching in, setting up the lights, the props, experimenting with the reflector. Kate's team disappeared inside the cottage for hair and make-up. Someone connected their iPod to a set of speakers, and music blared out from the cottage as everyone worked. Olivia ran the black sand through her fingers as she discussed lighting with Gareth, angles, the boring technical stuff that made them sound like a Mamet play without any cursing.

“I think we should wait until evening,” Olivia said. “That's when the light'll be best.”

“Like when?” Gareth replied.

“Sixish.”

“Carl rows back at eight. That’s cutting it close.”

“I’d rather have the shot and cut it close than be finished on time, under budget, with nothing to show for it.”

“Okay,” Gareth said. “We’ll get lunch.”

If Olivia needed a little more time before shooting Kate, then that was what she needed.

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Hurry up and wait. Kate’s people sunned themselves on the beach, Olivia disassembled and assembled her cameras like a Marine sergeant going over guns, and Gareth—Gareth shifted into a nice, comfortable pelican form to perch on top of the cottage. Seeing the kind of people Kate rolled with in swimwear didn’t make him feel like being his usual scruffy self.

Him and a girl like Olivia. He really was pretty lucky. Maybe too lucky. Finding Olivia after Kate had ripped her heart out, having her latch onto him—if she’d met him *before* Kate instead of after, would they have anything? Or would she be too good for him in fact as well as looks?

“Awww, what a cute penguin!” Kate said, leaning out a window to look up at him. She wore a bathrobe, her hair in curlers. The deep plunge of her skin into the V of the robe revealed no bra.

Gareth wondered if she could notice a bird gasping.

“Pelican,” Gareth squawked, shifting back into his humanoid form. He wore board shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, with a straw hat rounding out the modest look. He didn’t even try to wear the kind of swimsuits that most of the others got away with. Even Olivia wore a white poncho villa tunic over a crop top and jean shorts; the kind of thing that made him want to brag to his twelve-year-old self.

“Got a minute?” Kate asked.

“For you? Fifteen.”

“Inside then, flyboy.” She went back inside.

Gareth hopped down from the roof, vaulted the windowsill, was in the cottage. Kate’s team had taken over, turning a good half of the place into a dressing room. A mirror spell turned a patch of wall reflective, a curtain hovered to give Kate some modesty, the usual. Along the far wall was a rack of bikinis, bottoms and tops, waiting like knives in a kitchen block. Otherwise, it was empty. Her touch-up team was as hungry as anyone else.

Kate ditched the robe as she walked back to it. “I just want to know which looks best on me. I know, they all look good, and I promise I’ll let you gush over how pretty I am later. But I want *the best*. And anyone who’s been around Olivia as long as you have should have *some* notion of beauty.”

Gareth made a good-faith effort not to look at her ass. He thought it shouldn’t count against him that he hadn’t *known* she wasn’t wearing panties. “You don’t have a guy for that?”

Kate put an equally bare minimum of effort into keeping her back to him as she changed. Every time she spoke to him, she turned so he had just enough sideboob for a PG-13 rating. He couldn’t wait for the unrated DVD... “You mean a boyfriend?”

Gareth wished he was still a pelican. Then she wouldn’t notice him blush. “I mean—the one who makes you macrobiotic hot dogs. He can’t double-task?”

Her nimble hands flicked a bra hook together behind her back. “Nah. They’re used to it. And mostly gay. I need a fresh pair of eyes. And you have really great eyes. I think you’re an old soul.” She turned around. Navy bikini, the top dripping with fringe that that drew the eye down from her cleavage to her pancake-flat midriff, the tassels stirring with each movement to mirror the ripples of her abs with each breath.

“I’m... fresh,” Gareth said. Kate struck a pose, gauged his reaction. “I think it’s—“

“No, not what I’m going for,” Kate said. She turned around and, before Gareth could look away, was skimming her panties down her long legs.

She really didn’t give him much time to look away. Not much time at all. Her top came off and she flicked through the rack like an academic combing through the pages of a lengthy tome.

“I mean, you and Olivia, you’ve been together a long time. Almost as long as I was with her.”

“Longer, I think—“

“It’s not a competition,” Kate said, looking over her shoulder with a chilled smile. Was the pink at the edge of her breast her areola or just a trick of the light?

He probably shouldn’t care.

She shrugged on two more strips of fabric, white swathing her like brushstrokes on a masterpiece. “But you work together, so you have to have a similar eye. What you like, she likes.” Kate turned around. “And vice versa.”

“Vice?” Gareth stammered. A bandeau top straddled her breasts, a chain around her hips to hold up the middle of her white panties.



Kate held up a finger, signaling him to wait, then added a dotted red cover-up, primping it over herself with extravagant care. “For the shoot, I think I’d add a bracelet, you know, so just imagine your favorite bracelet with this look.”

“It’d be...”

“No, bracelet doesn’t do it.” Kate turned around again. How could her taking off her cover-up, showing nothing more than an expanse of bare back, hit him with such a thrill?

He worried that Olivia would come in. That was exactly what happened with these kinds of things, wasn’t it? Olivia came in, caught him in the act...

He almost wished she would. Maybe it was the animal in him, but he felt the most amazing flight-or-fight reflex, being alone with her.

“Tablet on the table,” Kate said, prompting Gareth to almost instantaneously twist over to a make-up table, where an iPad was nestled among the CGsmoothers BBcream, the TRUblend Minerals Bronzer in Natural Bronze, the Cheekers Blush in Classic Pink. He picked it up to see a woman, a model—an old client.

Each swipe showed him a new angle. “Your pictures, they’re good. I’m not just saying that because they’re in black and white,” Kate said.

“How do you know they’re not O’s?”

“She doesn’t look at women like you do. Even if maybe sometimes I kinda wish she would.” Kate had put on a sailor-themed striped navy and gold swim suit. She primped, she preened, but wasn’t satisfied by the look he gave her. “What does she talk about with you?”

Gareth set the tablet down. “That’s kind of a personal question, isn’t it?”

“I mean, she *does* talk about things?”

“Some things. She’s a very private person.”

“She didn’t used to be.” Now Kate stepped behind the curtain, its magic stretching it to shield her from view. Gareth could’ve run in circles around it, taken a pair of scissors to it, but he wouldn’t see a thing Kate didn’t want him to see with it on guard duty. “God, I feel totally guilty. You’re this weird couple that’s not a couple—you pretend you don’t care about each other as much as you do—did I really break her that bad?”

“She’s not broken. And I’m not some scavenger, picking up your table scraps.” *Right?* “Maybe it’s just what we both want.”

“If you both had what you wanted, why would I be coming between you?”

“You’re not between us,” Gareth protested.

“There’s a lot of ways to be between two people.” Kate stepped into the glow from the vanity light ringing the wall mirror. It came through the curtain, showered her body, and passed her shadow onto Gareth. Her nipples were so swollen, he could see their shade on the end of her breasts. “You remind me of this man Olivia and I knew in college. A frat boy, but not so bad. Oh, he was a sweetheart. And into photography, an amateur, right? Olivia was always a prodigy, and I was hopeless at it. I can barely take a selfie. Olivia and I were sort of friends, sorta dating, and we ended up thinking ‘hey, hello, I’m really pretty, you take pretty pictures, let’s Voltron this biyatch!’ We were all friends; each one of us would take pictures of the other two. And in the photos, me and O would be a lesbian couple. Big surprise, right? But we’d decide we wanted a child—Olivia came up with the idea of shooting us with an empty crib, that was *awesome*—and so I would have sex with the man. His name was Dick, if you can believe it. Olivia would take pictures of us in bed; he was a good-looking guy. Then they’d rig me up to look pregnant, and while I was all fat—this was just for the pictorial, you know, if I really got pregnant, my breasts would look amazing, happens to all the women in my family. But as this child grew inside me, I’d take pictures of Olivia and Dick. They’d get closer, kiss, screw, it’d all be very Nicholas Sparks. Only you wouldn’t be sure if I was taking pictures of them in-character or not, see, if I knew what was going on. Olivia wanted me to cover part of the lens with my thumb, accidentally-on-purpose. She always was a genius. And then for the last picture, we’d use an auto-timer. The three of us would be lying in bed, all lined up like sardines, with a baby crawling across us.”

Kate came out tugging at her bottoms to make sure they fit snugly. Not that there was much of them to fit. A violent white, the panties hugged the very lowest part of her stomach, just above her russet pubic hair, and went drum-taut on her generous hips. Behind, a narrow band of cloth barely concealed the division between her petal-soft buttocks. The two-piece’s top did little more to cover her; it was a band a mere few inches wide which met in a knot between her breasts, tied cruelly tight to prevent it from slipping. And so the band barely cleared the edges of her nipples, leaving the rest of her breasts, the bursting fullness of them, exposed.

“I don’t know why we never took the pictures. You’d like to see them, wouldn’t you?”

Olivia leaned through the window, knocking on the frame. She had her Nikon F in her other hand. “Kate, we’re ready.”

Kate looked into Gareth’s eyes. Saw something there. “Yes, we are. Five minutes. I want to do one last pass to put my face on.”

She flounced away, her whole body a bounce.

“He started dating someone,” Olivia said to Gareth. Her ears stuck straight out from her head. “Dick, I mean. That’s why we didn’t do the shoot. She was the jealous sort.”

It was then Gareth realized his mouth was hanging open.

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The shoot got underway. Kate was the eye of the storm, undaunted by the beehive of activity going on around her, make-up rushing in to give her touch-ups, psychic stylist putting every follicle exactly where Kate wanted it in voluminous side-swept waves, wardrobe stripping her down and rebuilding her like a NASCAR pit crew. Through it all, she stared into the camera, wanting to watch Olivia. The photographer just had to open her lips and Kate knew what she would say, want. Flirty, dangerous, strong, sultry. Emotions Kate could do in her sleep, faces she could wear like masks. Olivia barely looked away from the viewfinder to catch her sleeve tattoo, the sigils acting as ColorChecker, light meter, and color meter. She didn't need them. The shots came as instinct more than anything else.

Working with Kate wasn't easy, but it damn sure wasn't hard.

Gareth controlled the lighting, all business, not even noticing Kate changing wardrobe. Well, barely noticing. He noticed more how *Olivia* noticed, a thousand-yard stare that took in Kate like a scientist would look through a microscope. What was she seeing? The changes over the years? Kate still had the body of a twenty-year-old, no scars, no plastic surgery—maybe the tattoo was new. A bird in flight, tiny emblem of white-ink under her waistline, where a decent set of panties would cover it. Kate rarely wore a decent set of panties.

It was easy not to worry about it when he had so much to worry about. Kate had asked for a small set; usually they'd have more of a human touch, lots of assistants, gypsies who circulated throughout the community, working with them and a dozen other photographers. Olivia liked a big table. But Kate wanted intimate, so they used magic instead.

Beauty dishes, modifiers, diffusers, bounce boards, snoots, soft boxes, key lights, fill lights, all floating in and out as Olivia requested, governed by Gareth's casting. In a wild environment like this, the magic was testy. He had to corral them to keep them all from hitting the shot at once, and it was bit like herding cats. Not much time to ogle the model in the middle of all that.

He was a good multitasker, though.

Hours passed. Olivia used her whole arsenal. The Leica M6, Hasselblad 500C/M, Pentax K1000, Contax 645, Canon AE-1 with a 50mm f1.2, Yashica-Mat LM, Canon EOS 5. Kate splayed herself on the sand, rolled around on it, crawled toward the camera as Olivia knelt down and brandished it at her. They photographed the waves rolling over her, the seawater dripping off her, her hair as she tossed diamond droplets off it. Kate wore tie-dye bikinis and embellished bikinis and pink lace bikinis and flowered bikinis and braided bikinis and netted sarongs and string bikinis. She stared at the camera and with her eyes, begged for it to ravish her, to make love to her, to go out with her, to fuck her, to tease her, to love her, to punish her. Sand covered her body, and LipPerfection Jumbo Gloss Balm in Blush Twist, and Liquiline Blast Eyeliner in Brown Blaze, and Eye Enhancers 1-Kit shadows in Bedazzled Biscotti, five coats of the Clump Crusher by LashBlast in Very Black. And she smiled like Gareth had never seen her do for any camera, any red-carpet, any interview.

It took hours for Gareth to realize why.

She was reveling in finally having Kate focused on her and only her.

The lunch break changed nothing. Afterward, Olivia didn't bother instructing Kate, gesturing to her, directing her even more effortlessly than Gareth worked his magic with the lights. No, she moved in and touched Kate, bringing her to where the light was perfect, adjusting her arms, her legs. Soon, hair and make-up didn't even bother. Olivia would finger Kate's long blonde locks into place, touch up her lipstick, her rouge.

Olivia must've realized what she was doing, because in the middle of one set-up she broke off like Kate was radioactive. "Gareth, come over here."

He locked the lighting into place with a stern warning and went to her.

"Do a cartwheel," she said, and with a shrug, Gareth pitched himself downward, planted his hands in the sand, and spun his legs over himself.

Olivia caught them, hands shockingly warm on his calves as she held him in place. Gareth worked himself into an awkward handstand, feeling tightly gripped by Olivia, like she had him in some kind of wrestling hold.

"This is what I want," Olivia told Kate, her voice carelessly neutral, her ears not so much as twitching. "You're in a handstand, but you're in motion. You're not revolving, the world is revolving around you." She knelt down beside Gareth, bending his legs toward the continuation of the flip but not letting him down, tracing her hands down his biceps as they strained imperceptibly to keep him upright. They were toned. Strong. "A bit of flexing, alright, and keep your legs high. Don't tuck your chin. Look out at the camera. Look at me."

Then she pushed Gareth over and he scrambled onto his feet as Kate did the same, right in the imprints he'd just left in the sand.

Olivia never had looked more beautiful than when she was focused on Kate.

Gareth was a pervert, no two ways about it—a dirty old man in training, he called himself—but even with his tastes running to big boobs and rap video asses, he was nowhere near foolish enough not to recognize Olivia's beauty.

The crazy thing about her was how close she was to Kate while being pretty much completely different. Kate was fierce, animalistic, her sexuality exuberant and in-your-face. Olivia was just the opposite: slender, classically beautiful, with an elegant face that spoke of wisdom while Kate's was full of childlike innocence and lush emotion. And, Gareth noted, Olivia's C-cups were only small in comparison to Kate's monstrous 36Es. He chided himself again. Wasn't enough staring at Kate...

"Olive," he said. "Sun's almost down."

“I know,” Olivia said. “The light’s great...”

Gareth walked past her. “Yeah, it’ll look awesome as Carl takes us back to Wake Island. Remember?”

Olivia stopped shooting. “Silk.”

“What?”

She fell in behind Gareth, following him up the beach as Kate’s assistants wrapped her up in a robe. Her ears were flipping at the tips like they were caught in a strong breeze. “Sheets of different colored silk... we string up clotheslines between the trees, hang up the sheets, shoot Kate in the middle of all of it. Like a forest of weeping willows. She’ll move through them... we don’t put her in wardrobe. We’ll use some of the silks and just wrap her in that, have her wrap it around herself like a towel after a shower. Yeah, like a shower. She’ll come out of the surf covered in sand, maybe just a thong and pasties, then she wipes herself off with the silk, and then we do a whole roll that’s just her being *clean*...”

Olivia was the only person Gareth knew who seemed to literally get high off inspiration. “Okay, that sounds fun. Tomorrow, then.” He whistled to Carl, who had been digging a hole in the sand with his hands. Fucking werewolves... “Hey, Carl, can you get us a bunch of silk?”

“Silk? Silk what?” Carl dusted his hands off. “Silk sheets? Silk shirts?”

“Just *silk*. Like, the kind you’d made a dress out of. Different colors. As many colors as you can get.”

Carl thought about it, slipping a length of jerky from his shirt and gnawing on it idly. “Yeah—reckon I could get some, if you don’t ask many questions and do sign enough checks.”

“How’s a cool thou sound?” Gareth asked. “We’ll need ‘em tomorrow.”

“You want me to bring ‘em over on the morning ferry?”

“That’d be super.”

“Okay, but there’s not much room on the canoe. Have to leave at least two people behind.”

Kate had come over to join them. She now wore a sarong to go with a cut-off tanktop that Gareth just knew would turn translucent as soon as it touched a drop of water. For now, though, she actually looked like the same species as his hairy ass. “What if we stayed here?”

Yana cut in, shouting from far enough away that Gareth wasn’t sure how she’d overheard. “Would that be safe?”

“Of course,” Carl said. “As long as you have good sleeping bags. It can get pretty cold at night, even inside the cottage.”

“We’d just be sleeping in the barracks back on Wake Island anyway. Why not rough it?” Kate bit her lip in a reedy smile at Olivia. “We can sleep under the stars, just like at Fiddler’s.”

“Not *quite* like Fiddler’s.”

Gareth clapped his hands together. “Okay then! Sleepover on the deserted tropical island! You kids have fun, I will watch many hours of trashy cable television in your honor—“

“You’re not staying?” Olivia asked.

“Should I be?”

Her brow furrowed. “Yeah. Of course. We do everything together, c’mon.”

Gareth looked to Kate. She was looking on, her profile turned to him, and he thought he could suddenly see her and Olivia together. She was being just as unreadable as the photographer.

She quickly offered him that reedy, nervous smile. “Yeah, we’ll make a night of it. And you’re not gonna leave two nice girls like us without a big strong man to protect us, are you?”

Olivia fell into lockstep with her. “You heard Carl. The place could be dangerous. Look. Mermaids.”

Out in the bay, two mermaids were floating belly-up, hands locked together to keep them from drifting apart as they slept, leaving each other unprotected. Gareth thought the only danger they posed was starvation—if they didn’t share the fish.

“I’ll punch a mermaid,” Gareth agreed. “I don’t give a shit.”

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Olivia worked in absolute darkness. Gareth had set up her darkroom like he always did, with the precision of a shrine to a god they both worshiped, and she’d barely had to refamiliarize herself with it before getting underway. She’d mixed the chemicals, heated them to a hundred degrees, loaded the film from her rolls onto the reels, popped it into the developing tank, and now was washing the film clean. The cottage didn’t have running water, so she used a spell—the magical water she summoned never overflowed the developing tank, though it had to be focused on lest it get messy. Usually, Olivia would’ve preferred to zone out, decompress from the headspace she had to be in to shoot, but now she liked concentrating. Kept her mind busy.

She’d played a lot of Solitaire when Kate had left her the first time...

A sixth sense told her there was someone outside the door, out in the light. Gareth. “Five minutes till the negatives are ready.”

“I’m sure they look great,” Kate said, her smile in her voice.

Olivia did not groan.

“But, maybe tomorrow, we can actually have a shoot?” Kate’s smile never entirely disappeared from her face. Maybe that was why she had left instead of having it out with Olivia—so Olivia wouldn’t see it tear itself off her face.

In the dark, she could just picture it. Gone from her face but haunting it, making her bite her lower lip, twitch the corners of her mouth... “Is this a conversation we should have face to face?”

“As long as you’re not sick of looking at me. Maybe Gareth doesn’t know when you’re being a bitch, you’re so subtle about it, but I do. You didn’t put the least amount of effort into that shoot. Just tits, ass, move your legs, move your arms, give me sexy, be sexy, open your mouth, close your eyes, fuck, fuck, *fuck!*”

Olivia forced her attention, her mind, to the little ritual of the development. She took the film reel out of the tank, lightly shook it free of water, turned it clockwise and used a clip on the end of the negative. “Isn’t that what you wanted?” The words slipped out of her mouth like blood from a wound.

Kate’s voice had to have a smile in it. A sad little smile that made Olivia want to share it, prod it, make it big again. “I wanted it like it used to be. You challenged me. *We* made each other better.”

Again, the words unbidden while Olivia occupied her hands with running the hooks of the clip through the squares alongside the film. Puncturing the film negative seemed like the only thing she hadn’t done wrong so far in their relationship. “Now you want that.”

“I always wanted it.”

Olivia lifted the clip up, pulling the film away like a Band-Aid. “You wanted to sell your tits and sell your ass, so that’s what I’m doing. If you wanted something else... maybe that ship has sailed.”

The negatives stared at Olivia. Kate as Olivia had seen her, hated her, an endless parade of sultry looks, sexy poses, fuck-me eyes and pouting lips.

“It’s a persona, O.” And Olivia suddenly imagined Kate on the other side of the door, thinking of her as much as she was thinking of Kate. In the dark, Olivia had nothing else to focus on, but maybe Kate was the same way. Staring at the door just because Olivia was behind it. “There is

more to me, but that's still a part of me. I'm not ashamed of it, even if you are. And no matter how much more I am than that, I can't be someone else."

"You are more than this, Kate. I just... hated that you thought I could be satisfied with this one little piece."

"We're past that now. You're not a snob. I'm not an idiot. So let me give you what you want and we'll just see if it can be enough for you. We can be professional. I'll do whatever you want. I'll give you whatever you ask for. Just don't push all of me away because of the parts you hate."

"I don't hate—" Olivia started to say, but lost her voice. Kate was out there. Not the woman on the magazine covers, the talk shows, the tabloids, but the woman she'd known in college. Girl who'd gotten lost on her first day.

"It's been five minutes," Kate said. "Your negatives are drying. You can let me in."

Her smile would be just the same. The same as it always was. Olivia couldn't change it by kissing her or by not kissing her.

"Open the door, O."

Olivia said nothing. She heard, felt, Kate try the knob. The door wasn't locked. She twisted the doorknob, but didn't apply pressure. Olivia stared at it and all around her, in swaths of negatives, Kate stared at her. Her 'persona'. A piece of her. The part that had left, maybe. How big was it?

The doorknob turned the other way as Kate let go of it.

"Open the door."

Olivia had always thought in photographs. Her family had moved around a lot as a kid. Looking through a car window was as familiar as looking through a Viewfinder. You caught sight of something and then it left—the only thing it didn't take with it was a memory, or a photograph. Then she'd gone to college, made a real home for the first time. Not in the dorm, but in Kate.

"It's a small island," Kate said, and her voice was trying hard to project a smile that wasn't there. "You can find me if you look."

The car was moving too fast now. By the time she realized what was on the other side of the window, it had already moved to the rear-view mirror. Olivia opened the door and Kate was gone.

Outside, there were fresh tracks in the sand. They'd been made by bare feet. Two sets. Olivia followed them.

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Inland, the island's underbrush gave way to a lagoon. It was a lipstick mark on the landscape, a dozen feet deep at the middle, with clear waters that were glass-smooth, shining right down to the unbroken white sand beneath. Towering palm trees and boulders sheltered the deserted water on all sides, except for a wide clearing of beach that Gareth and Kate sat upon, dipping their toes into the crystalline water.

"C'mon. Show me," Kate pleaded.

"It's really not that impressive."

"What, do you think I'm going to boo?"

"It's really hard..."

"So? That just means I'll be more impressed."

"Fine. Let me get a running start." Gareth stood, cracked his neck, and took a few steps back.

They'd talked animatedly on their long walk along the trail of mixed sands that slid from the exterior of the island to the interior, the cottage built right on it. Not about anything in particular, though. As good as Olivia was at talking about something—art and politics, conversations that he was hard-pressed to keep up with, so literate he wanted to hang them in a museum—Kate was great at talking about nothing. She drew out all the details of his hometown and childhood like she was boning a fish, laughing at all his jokes, making some of her own that never failed to draw either a chuckle or a groan that was just as good.

And now she wanted to see it.

Gareth ran full-tilt at the shoreline, jumping at the last second to propel himself over the water, tucking his knees to his chest in a cannonball, then shoving himself into the change so that when he hit the water, his mass was already too small for there to be a splash.

As a white dragon king crown betta, he broke the surface, long flowing black fins surrounding his alabaster body like flower petals.

"Whoa!" Kate clapped her hands. "That was amazing!"

"Thank you, thank you—"

"I thought you always had to be black, though?"

Gareth twitched his fins in an approximation of a head-shake. "It's hard, but I can do mixed coloring if it's part of the animal I'm shifting into. Most of the time I don't bother, but if I were changing into a panda, say, I wouldn't be all-black. I couldn't do a green scorpion, though. Or even a black and white one."

Kate laid down on the beach to get closer to him, resting her arms on her elbows and her head on her hands. “That is *so* interesting. But how come? You can change into a little bitty fish, but you can’t make it blue?”

“If you ever wanna see a bunch of college professors fight, ask them. It’s not the kind of thing you figure out, but see if that’s stopped them. Good way to make a quick buck, though, letting them test you. As long as they don’t make you shave your head or anything...”

Kate laughed, rolling onto her back to stare up at the stars. Gareth made a lovely fish. She listened to him splashing in the water behind her. “And how come you can hear me? You don’t have ears, right?”

“Oh, I can hear people whatever state I’m in. Even under the water. It’s part of the magic. It’s like it supersedes your body. If I’m a fly, I hear things as a fly, right, but voices come in like they’re on a different radio station.”

“Maybe you should share that spell with Olivia. She could use a way to listen to people.”

Gareth bobbed to the surface as himself again, floating on his back. “Now, now, don’t pull me in-between you two. I’ll end up quipping ‘girls, girls, you’re both pretty,’ and then the *two of you* will be pissy with me.”

“That would be kinda funny though,” Kate grinned, turning back onto her side to look at him. Sand clung to her body in her brief pants, her damp shirt. “Since we are both pretty. But we should be able to talk about this stuff—Olivia—we’re the only two people she’s dated, ever, so we should compare notes.”

“I don’t take notes.”

“Okay, before you get up on a high horse... or transform into a high horse, whatever... you should know there was no ‘Dick’s jealous girlfriend’. He was seeing someone, but she was a cam girl, okay, she didn’t give a shit if we covered him in barbecue sauce and licked it off.”

Gareth rowed his hands in the water to spin him around facing her. “Was that an option?”

“The only thing that changed was that *we* started dating, me and O, and after that we just never talked about the pictorial. It was all of a sudden behind a boundary and you do *not* cross Olivia’s boundaries.”

“Okay, so you and Olivia remember it differently. What’s your point?”

“My point is, O sets these boundaries on the relationship, and she says she doesn’t do it, and she doesn’t want to let *you* do it, and it’s just frustrating as hell. I love her, but it’s fucking frustrating as hell.” And Olivia, watching, eavesdropping, bit her lip. She’d said ‘loved,’ past-tense, right?

Gareth didn't appear to notice, not with the water gently sliding him around. "Every relationship has boundaries."

"Don't give me that. You get the worst of it. Yeah, it was frustrating with me, but you two have been attached at the hip for half a decade and you're still not boyfriend-girlfriend."

"We don't like labels."

"We're in the same boat, Gareth. Olivia didn't like me modeling for other people, especially not anything sexier than granny panties, or posing a certain way, or giving the camera a certain look—or squeezing from the top of the toothpaste tube, come to think of it..."

"She's a photographer. It's her job not to like stuff."

"Okay, let me put it this way—does she peanut butter you?"

"Peanut butter me?" Gareth shifted around so that his toes were brushing the lakebed, facing Kate. Now she was building a sandcastle.

"You know—a woman, a dog, she spreads some peanut butter here and there, nature takes its course—"

"No! C'mon, you know her, when would she ever be up for that?"

"You are a changeling. Because I don't think turning into an anteater would make a guy worse at eating pussy, you know? (Not that much could.)"

"That's bestiality."

"If it were a regular anteater, yes, but with you, it's basically just a person in an anteater costume."

"Basically." Gareth swam to shore, dragging himself beside Kate to topple a seashell she'd used as the sandcastle's turret. "If you were dating a changeling, would you—'peanut butter'?" Gareth looked away. "I swear, I've never heard that expression, that's a new one on me and *I'm* a changeling."

Kate laughed. "That's me—educational. But hey, not saying I would, saying if I was dating a guy who drove a Ferrari, I'd want him to take me for a ride. If I was dating a guitar player, I'd want him to play me a song. When I dated Olivia, I wanted her to take pictures of me."

"She's still taking pictures of you."

"Yeah."

"You still want her to take pictures of you."

Kate picked up a handful of dry sand, used fingers of it to paint on Gareth's damp skin. Drew a heart on his cheek that lost some of his shape due to his smile.

"I know why you two are together," Kate whispered, her low voice forcing a kind of intimacy on them. "*She won't kiss me either.*"

Olivia slipped out of the brush, cracking a palm frond out of her way, and Gareth rolled away from Kate and Kate went back to playing with the wet sand. Kept playing with the wet sand as Olivia came to stand over her. She wore a lacy white dress over a black one-piece, ready to strip down and join them in the water if that's what they'd been doing.

"I'm in a creative mood," she announced.

"I'm glad she still gets those," Kate said to Gareth.

"You don't have to put up with them." When Olivia was wired up, she expected everyone to keep up with her. Photo shoots kept going as long as she liked the light. She fell in love with darkness falling, ending, even the fatigue in her subjects as they slaved for her.

"Gareth." Olivia sat down cross-legged, her long legs spreading out the sand under her into fortifications around her body. "I want you to be one of the subjects."

"With... your imaginary friend Blotto?"

"Blotto's as real as you or I," Olivia joked back, without any of Gareth's nervousness. Her ears were stock-still, but standing straight up. "But I'd like to do this shoot with Kate. If she's not too tuckered out from—the day."

"I'm up for anything that challenges me." Kate washed her dirty hands off in the lake. "Are you challenging me, Olivia?"

"It'll be just like old times. Pushing ourselves. Taking risks. You two have a good repartee. We should do something with that."

Gareth felt his flight-or-fight reflex demanding an answer again. "Olive, c'mon. You have the physique of a Barbie doll and you look like you could bench more than me. You sure you want me and Kate in the same frame? I'm good at transforming, but I don't think I can make us look like the same species."

"These won't be for Graco," Olivia said. "They're just for us. Clearing the air, messing around. Tomorrow, we can put that dwarf necklace back on and get ourselves paid. These, no one else has to see."

Gareth still felt a swell of inadequacy. It wasn't that he was out of shape. He didn't have man boobs, no matter what Go Fug Yourself said. It was just that he had body hair—*he turned into*

*animals*—and his belly was more Pillsbury Doughboy than Budweiser. *Kate* had more of a six-pack than him. Vana wasn't even an actor, much less a model, and she looked better than him.

He looked to Kate. "I just don't want to embarrass you, ya know? Look at you. You're a goddess. I don't want you to take some pictures with me, like it's nothing, and then have some Perez Hilton wannabe run a story on it: 'look at the dog dating the monkey.'"

Kate knelt up, her long legs almost pure muscle, only softening at her thick thighs. "I would *never* be embarrassed to be associated with you. If you're good enough for Olivia, you're good enough for me." Then she put a strong hand on his bicep and tightened it appreciably. "And I have an idea you make Olivia happier than Perez Hilton ever could. Even without peanut butter."

Gareth suddenly wished he was still a fish. Hard to tell when he was blushing. Way back in the back—back when they were both still *college* enough to go for it—he'd shown off a Neanderthal form. It was pretty much human, after all, just rougher... bigger. Olivia had been amused by it. Then she'd been intrigued...

The memories swirled in Gareth's head, as imposing as Kate's body. Suddenly it seemed as if one intake of breath would be enough to burst through her shirt. God, he could give a guided tour of her nipples... "Are you in, Gareth?" Olivia insisted.

Gareth fought down the answering surge in his groin. Olivia was gazing at him. One look from those piercing eyes and he felt like she could see right into his fantasy life. "If you'll take me."

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The bedroom of the cottage was open-air, with mosquito netting giving it mild protection from the elements. The Spaniards who'd built it hadn't known how cold it would get as the seasons changed, but that wasn't a problem with a few space heater spells going. In fact, Gareth felt a little too warm.

He and Carl hadn't merely renovated the place and given it a darkroom, but had turned a few rooms into state-of-the-art studios for the shoot. Tiny wireless lights were lined up on the ceiling beams, just waiting for a magicked gesture to direct them as one wished, while snakes of cabled wires darted between the floorboards. Gareth found them easy to ignore. He focused on the bed those lights were spotlighting—his stage.

"If you could just change into this," Olivia said, picking up a box.

"I don't know, usually I just do animals..." Gareth took the box and looked inside. There was not much to look at. A set of Armani bikini briefs, so scant that he wasn't convinced they weren't Kate's—something to go with a size-too-small top. "Uh, Olivia? Love of my life? Apple of my eye? Where're my pants? T-shirt? Maybe a nice cape..."

"Kate picked it out," Olivia said, a little defensively. "It's not like she'll be wearing much more."

“Well, she has more to show.” Gareth opened his shirt. “Look at me, Olive. I look like the cast of Fargo.”

“I think you’re handsome,” she assured him, rustling his still-damp hair. “You’re a changeling, after all. Why should you have manscaping or body-sculpting or any of that other metrosexual nonsense? You’re the call of the wild! The king of the jungle!”

“Yeah, I worry that might be a little racist? Shouldn’t the king of the jungle be black? Or at least mulatto?”

“Sometimes you’re black.” Olivia craned her neck to yell to the back of the cottage. “Kate, Gareth’s being a little bitch about his wardrobe. Tell him you won’t let him see you in your outfit until he’s in his!”

“What she said.” From the backdoor to the covered porch, Kate’s arm appeared. It held a T-shirt. Gareth knew she hadn’t been wearing anything under it. A moment later, the shirt fluttered to the ground. “You want to see me in this outfit, Gareth. You really want to see me in it.”

Gareth gulped. Too chivalrous, that was his problem. He’d do anything for the dames. With a look to Olivia, she turned her back, and Gareth was free to quickly change into the briefs. Hairy legs and soft stomach, all came out to play. Gareth even took his hat off.

When Olivia turned around, she gave him some applause that was only half mocking. Her eyes were downcast.

“Okay, Kate, he’s dressed,” Olivia called. “All of him...”

Kate came out. She wore *the* bikini again, the white one that seemed like it was trying to send him into puberty all over again. “Repeat performance?” Olivia asked.

“I like this one,” Kate said. “It makes me feel like I’m naked.”

Gareth sat down on the bed, trembling with excitement and terror. When he shaded his eyes against the glare of the lights, his palm was sweaty. “So, uh, what should I do?”

Olivia set up in front of him, kneeling down with her camera erect, though Gareth could barely look at her while Kate was sitting down beside him, her legs folded under herself.

“Just act natural, casual,” Olivia said, while Gareth stared at the bronze glow of Kate’s skin and the waterfall of golden hair that clothed her more than her underthings did. “Act as though you’ve just made love, as if you’re eager to consummate the relationship once more, but won’t rush, you refuse to rush. So you go to sleep, enjoying Kate’s presence. Enjoy being alone with her. Forget I’m here. Just make love to her with your aura. Do what comes naturally.”

Gareth found it hard to justify fiddling with Kate's aura when her tits bounded and rippled with each tiny breath she took. "So we just, uh, sleep together?" he asked her. She was really good at getting into character. She stared at him with open hunger in her eyes.

Wordlessly, she stretched herself down onto the pillows, cat-like, before patting the space to her right. Clumsy and awkward, Gareth positioned himself beside her, face-up, knee up to distract from his half-hardness. Him make love to Kate? *Now?* How was he supposed to be casual about that? He certainly wouldn't be sleeping if some miracle had thrown Kate into bed with him. He'd be giving it to her all night long!

Abruptly Gareth looked to Kate, as if she could hear his thoughts—or, looking down, see them. And she did wear a feline grin that made him think she was a mind reader on top of everything else.

"Okay," Olivia said, "let's just do something standard to warm up. Gareth, you lie on your back; Kate, I want you to cuddle up with him."

"Certainly," Kate purred. On her side, she vined her left leg over both of his, slid her body into his side, set her left hand on his belly's treasure trail. Gareth could've groaned at the feverish warmth of her touch. She burned hot. Then her breasts touched his arm, so vast that his elbow slid right between them, and Gareth felt his eyes rolling back in his head.

"Perfect!" Olivia said, the snap-flash of her camera bringing Gareth back to his senses. It was business, it was a photo shoot, one of his best friends was taking *pictures!* And someone *Olivia* cared about, someone who could sue him, was just acting for the sake of the shoot. "Now Kate, play with his hair a little."

"With pleasure!"

Her long, manicured fingers dove into Gareth's mop of hair, finding his scalp with the pads of her fingers, drawing little patterns that nicked his head with her lesbian-short nails. Gareth found himself cooing—his left arm sliding under Kate so he could splay his hand on the small of her back. Natural. He was just acting natural.

Another few snap-flashes, keeping Gareth centered. Then Kate flopped away from him, lying on her back in a sculpture of repose. "Now do me."

Gareth managed to include "Excuse me?" in the strangled noise he made.

"Lie down on me, like I did you."

"I..." Another snap-flash caught the befuddled lust in Gareth's eyes. "If that's what you want..."

He shifted next to her, trying to find a way to spoon with her that wouldn't touch her pendulous breasts. Hard to do when they rose like a mountain range off her body. He was still gaping at her when he felt her hands rising to either side of him, closing around his face. She ushered his head

down to her belly, tucking him against it so he was looking down her body at her panties. From this angle, he could see the wiry hairs trapped by her elastic waistband.

“Get one like this,” Kate said, *snap-flash*, “and one like this...” Her hands maneuvered Gareth once more, leading him up her stomach to her sternum, where she laid his chin. He looked up between her heaving breasts to that lovely, rounded face, feeling a bit like a doll with her manipulating him so readily. *Snap-flash*. “And now like this.” Kate said, picking him up by the hair and depositing him right on her breasts.

Gareth might’ve blacked out, because the next thing he was aware of was a snap-flash and Kate’s warmth drawing away from him. The rest of the world came into focus. Olivia was saying “I’m going to move around to your side, Gareth,” and her camera whirred as it crossed over his tense body. Olivia was on the bed now, on the other side of him from Kate, kneeling over him with her long, hard lens aimed right at him. He hardened like drying cement.

“Kate,” she said, “slide around on top of Gareth. Put your, err, your behind up top, you know? I want some shots of you... like that.”

Gareth watched breathlessly as Kate slid her body down to the foot of the bed, her muscular calves at the headboard, the strip of cloth that ringed her pubis and ass right next to Gareth’s head. She laid her cheek almost on Gareth’s crotch, the light forest of abdominal hair grazing her lips. Gareth was horrified to find himself moaning. *Snap-flash*. The camera caught Kate’s face right beside the bulge in Gareth’s briefs.

“Gareth...” Kate’s voice was sweet and plaintive, like she was on the verge of begging him. “Pull on my panties?”

“What? What? *What?*”

“Pull my panties down. Just a little. It’ll make for a great shot.” Kate looked innocently up at Olivia. “Won’t it, O?”

She was daring Olivia to make her stop, and Olivia could only dare her not to.

Olivia’s brow furrowed, sprouting second thoughts. “Yes, I suppose, but Kate, Gareth isn’t a professional like us, he may not want to...”

“I’ll do it,” Gareth said quickly. Without another thought, he reached out and plucked the string of Kate’s bottoms with his finger. Barely controlled himself before he pulled it all the way down, instead applying only enough force to peel the panties down an inch. *Snap-flash*.

The camera shutter no longer made Gareth feel like this was regimented, artificial. It made it feel—surreal. Like this was a dream. Anything could happen.

“My turn!” Kate said sweetly.



And, gripping Gareth's briefs firmly in both hands, she pulled them all the way down.

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Kate found herself gaping, not just at her own impulsive act, but at Gareth. She'd never seen him as the most masculine sort. Her interactions with him had a feel of—just one of the girls. The chemistry was nice, but seemed an extension of his friendship with Olivia—often easy-going, laughing... cute. And he wasn't what she thought of as her type; a macho man. But his *cock*—the moment his underwear no longer contained it, it leapt up, a thickened length of flesh to give a horse envy...

Kate almost wondered if that was where he'd gotten it. Could a shifter do that—have an elephant trunk in human form, or at least something that size? It had to be ten inches long—and *hard*. Kate had known some Fae that big or bigger, but issues of blood flow often made it hard for them to truly get it up. Gareth, though—Gareth seemed to have blood to spare. She felt an unmistakable throb creeping through her body, as wet as her mouth was now dry, and she stared at the organ like she would a baseball bat during a pitch.

Olivia saw her staring. *Snap-flash*. Kate felt a sudden urge to *give her* something to look at, so long as she insisted on seeing the world through a Zeiss 55mm lens. She touched Gareth where they both needed it. *Snap-flash*. Olivia took the picture without thinking as she watched Kate begin to caress Gareth, sliding her hand possessively, proudly over the endless shaft.

Olivia suddenly felt envious, thinking of all the times she'd been a good friend to Gareth, a great friend, while Kate had been *gone*. Who was she to suddenly touch him like he was hers? She flashed with anger at Kate for the ease with which she fondled that huge weapon, and with herself for letting it go unattended long enough for Kate to feel she had any claim on it.

But Olivia shook off her resentful jealousy. It was not the Elven way. Besides, a cock that big would probably rip Kate in two. *Snap-flash*. Still, she thought of it as her finger mindlessly triggered her camera. She wondered if Dick—the name now seemed hopelessly inappropriate—would've been similarly equipped if they'd taken those pictures. She wondered what their relationship would've been like if they had. She wondered what would've been in those photos—and thought she would very soon find out.

Her wild eyes on Olivia's face, Kate leaned down and kissed the base of Gareth's cock, the grove of pubic hair that surrounded it. Gareth was paralyzed, laying there as if Kate were paying him the ultimate homage. *Snap-flash*. A gulp of precum emerged from his bulbous cockhead. *Snap-flash*. Kate moved up to it like a cat stalking a canary, *snap-flash*, her tongue peeking out between her full lips, *snap-flash*, her green eyes only seeing that little berry of ejaculate waiting to be plucked, *snap-flash*, Gareth turning even redder as thick veins stood out on his rod, *snap-flash*...

In a sudden fit of self-consciousness, Gareth was rolling off the bed, barely clearing it before he turned into a donkey. The floor groaned under his sudden weight, while Kate stared at his still quickening erection—even bigger in this form.

“Sorry, sorry, I think I’d better go, take a break, got a cramp, bad cramp, walk it off, I’ll walk it off—“ Gareth said, seemingly in one chanting syllable, and stampeded out the door before another white droplet could spill to the floor.

Kate sighed. “I hate when Gareth makes an ass of himself.”

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On the beach, Gareth rapid-fire shifted between forms—bear-duck-fly-horse-goat-canary-gecko-pentapod. His erection remained maddeningly throbbing, until finally he settled on a sheep, his cock hidden by a wild, woolly hide... and unable to be touched by his quadrupedal limbs.

A mermaid floated by, eyeing him. “Sup?” he asked her.

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“Gareth!” Olivia called, running out onto the beach, not even noticing that Kate wasn’t following her.

Standing in front of the moon-lit tide was, literally, a black sheep. She walked up to Gareth, wishing her thighs would stop pulling together, her body stop clenching, her insides stop burning. God, even now, the only thing she wanted more than to watch was to *join in*...

“I didn’t expect that to happen,” she said softly. She still held the camera. Had to stop herself from clicking the button.

Gareth stayed a sheep. She didn’t blame him for not wanting to let her look at him. “Did you want it to?”

“I don’t know. I just wanted something to happen. Something other than all of us being angry at each other.”

Gareth cut at the sand with his hooves, an unconscious gesture. “I could never be angry at you. Not really.”

“Maybe you should be. Me stringing you along... maybe you should be with someone who... who has feelings instead of world-weary cynicism and snideness.”

“I like cynicism and snideness.”

“I like you being happy. I want you to be happy.”

“I can’t be happy unless you’re happy.”

Olivia looked back at the house. One light was on inside. It showed a silhouette in the window. “Kate’s watching us. I think she wants us to finish up so that... so that she can talk to you.”

“Olive—“

“Please! Just listen to whatever she has to say. Maybe she knows what she wants. One of us has to.”

“You talk to her. You’re the one she wants to talk to. Whatever she has to say to me, she’s wanted to talk to you a whole hell of a lot longer.”

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“That was really... inconsiderate,” Olivia said numbly. Kate still laid on the bed, the knot of her top loosened by the sudden burst of activity, while her panties had shimmied down below her clit. “I think you should talk to Gareth... see if he’s okay.”

“He’s more than okay!” Kate enunciated dryly, splaying herself before Olivia. “Seeing that big cock—I just wanted it up inside me! I wonder if he would let me suck it. That would be photogenic, right?”

Olivia’s finger twitched. She heard a subvocal *snap-flash* in her head. But the photo shoot was over. Right? “He didn’t agree to any of that—this was just supposed to be a little risqué, not pornography!”

“He wanted it. You wanted it. And you know I want it. I always want it...” Kate spread her legs. It was too much for her tight panties. They stretched right open as Kate’s feet migrated to either side of the bed. Olivia saw everything. “Keep shooting, Olivia. Aren’t I sexy? Don’t you want a picture of this—so you’ll always remember—so you can jill off and say my name when I’m not there to *fuck you* myself?”

Olivia’s finger hit the button; *snap-click*. She could almost feel the vibrations of the camera inside her body as she was pulled in closer, closer, getting a better angle on Kate’s soft pink center. “Kate, we’re all... friends...”

Kate reached down, pulling the lips of her cunt open, showing where her flesh was wet and dark. “We’ve never been friends. Never *just* friends. We can hate each other or we can love each other, but we can’t just *like* each other like we all don’t want to *fuck*...”

The camera was on Kate’s womanhood, but Olivia’s eyes were on Kate’s face as the lens touched her. She saw the wanton horniness in Kate as her hips spiked up, her cunt moving over the lens hood, rubbing against the teleconverter.

“Take a picture,” Kate said, as the lens sunk into her. “It’ll last longer.”

Olivia knew what she wanted, because it was what they both wanted. She let go of the camera, letting Kate masturbate herself with it, and put her hands to far better use—pulling her dress up her body. Her blood-engorged labia stood out starkly through her one-piece, and the only thing more appealing than the thought of pulling the swimsuit’s crotch aside for Kate’s tongue was letting Kate lick her right through it. Olivia clambered onto the bed, mounting Kate’s face, forcing her head down into her pillow of burning blonde curls as she straddled the mouth that had brought her so much pleasure.

She’d left the camera on an automatic timer. *Snap-click, snap-click, snap-click.* Olivia could almost feel it, like it was between her legs instead of Kate’s.

“We can’t,” Kate said.

“What?” Olivia demanded. *Snap-click* on her cataclysmic dismay.

“I’m sorry,” Kate continued, *snap-click*, with a moan that made no secret of how good the camera felt grinding against her. “But we can’t.”

“Why not!?”

“It wouldn’t be fair. To Gareth.” *Snap-click* as Kate maneuvered the lens away from herself. “We got him all worked up—“

“*You did...*”

“You and I. It’s not fair that he should go jerk off into the ocean somewhere while we get to enjoy...” Kate looked down at their intertwined bodies. *Snap-click.* “All this.”

“You mean...?”

“We have to include him.” Kate shut the camera off. It was out of film anyway. “We have to include him right now.”

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Feeling some new control over himself, Gareth shifted back to human a little ways into the jungle, his briefs now just about able to contain his erection. A man had to know his limitations; he wasn’t going back into that cottage without taming the beast. Dropping his briefs to his ankles, he closed his eyes and tried to think of a woman that wouldn’t make him feel guilty as sin. It was hard, what with Kate and Olivia pulling his imagination between the two of them like it was a tug-of-war. Any breasts he could think of were secondary to Kate’s, any lips he wanted to kiss just reminded him of Olivia’s.

Gareth was pretty sure he was about to masturbate to the thought of a fucking centaur when the brush stirred behind him. He pulled his briefs up just in time for Kate to emerge, her top and bottoms back in pristine working order.

“There you are, Gareth. Olivia thought you’d left us.”

Gareth knotted his hands in front of his crotch as casually as possible. “Just needed a walk—little fresh air—time to think...”

“And have you been thinking, Gareth? Thinking *hard*?”

He gulped.

Kate giggled, the amusement in her voice sounding damned cocky. “Olivia and I were hoping you could give us a ride.”

“A... a ride?”

“Yeah. Olivia’s always wanted a nice horseback ride on the beach, but it’s not like there are any horses on the island. Are there, Gareth?”

Gareth wasn’t sure what she was implying with that last bit there. Was she talking about his dick? “No. I guess not!” he added brightly.

“You wouldn’t mind, would you? Both of us riding you?”

“No, of course not—you’re not that heavy, I don’t think.”

Kate’s eyebrows quirked. “No... *we’re* not. Why don’t you change right now, Gareth? I’d really like to be the first one on your back.”

Gareth felt himself changing almost involuntarily, like the Arabian form was a throbbing, powerful thing thrusting out from his former body. Now fully equine, Gareth looked at Kate—now eye to eye with her instead of a head shorter. She had such a great smile.

Before he could think better of it, Kate had leapt onto his back, her strong legs tightening on his flanks. A loose hand in his mane directed him as reins would the most well-trained pack animal, and Gareth was quick to follow the instructions of his rider.

Astride him, Kate leaned down to nuzzle her breasts to Gareth’s mane and neck. She was going to enjoy this. So very much.

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For some reason, the smell of Gareth as a horse struck Olivia when Kate came riding up. It was raw and virile. She knew it was all in her head—smells came from animals being animals, being dirty, Gareth had showered just that morning, by all rights the horse should smell of no more than his Old Spice. So maybe it was just the sight of Kate, riding that stallion like she was born to it, that made Olivia ache with yearning.

She'd nearly convinced herself that Kate hadn't meant what she'd thought she'd meant. *Of course* Kate didn't want to sleep with Gareth, didn't want to sleep with him *and* Olivia as well. She just meant, instead of kicking him to the curb to selfishly make it like two horny teenagers, that all three of them should do something together. Something platonic. Friendly. Clothed.

And working on her photography, Olivia had barely had time to explore the island on foot, as nature intended, hiking to the interior of the island with its shining lagoon as she'd promised herself she would upon seeing it from Google Earth. So they'd take a break, ride out to that blue lagoon, and then later, after Gareth had gone to sleep—then Olivia and Kate...

Why was she thinking now of what a lovely horse Gareth made... a sleek, beautiful, shining beast?

Kate extended her hand and Olivia took it, swinging up onto Gareth's bare back with wide-spread legs, gently cresting the powerful musculature. Before she settled behind Kate, an almost excruciating spasm dizzied her. Olivia wrapped her arms around Kate's waist, actually frightened she would fall from Gareth.

As they rode into the jungle, the rhythmic motion of the black stallion underneath her worked strongly upon Olivia. She found herself making an effort not to let her hands slide down the front of Kate's bottoms.

It was little more than a half-mile's ride inland, but Kate's nonchalant permissiveness and Gareth's literal animal magnetism made Olivia's energy unbearable. She wanted to tackle Kate from the horse, scream that she must have her or die in agony. And yet, they rode on, the slip and slide of Olivia's one-piece beneath her making Gareth's every movement another invitation to the stirring in her deepest places. Aching burned her thighs where they strained wide around her mount.

Finally, they returned to the lagoon. Cool air fanned Olivia's face of the perspiration that streamed down her cheeks as Gareth threw himself into the water. Kate, however, took off mid-leap, carrying Olivia with her. All three disappeared into the lagoon.

Gareth turned back to himself before he came up for air. He watched—in a 'oh, let's enjoy this edifying nature documentary' way—as the other two tangled together, frolicking like sea nymphs, splashing each other and laughing, every drop of water in the silver moonlight a new jewel drawing his attention to another contour of their luscious bodies.

The balmy water swirled deliciously around them just as the gulls did high overhead. Gareth thought of turning into one—riding the warm deltas like a tiny little cloud—but then Kate came up for air. She'd left her top bobbing in the water.

"Kate!" Olivia cried, coming up nearby, shocked as Kate relaxed into the water, the choppy waves alternately exposing and revealing her bosom—opulent breasts of creamy smoothness that jutted from her chest with only the slightest regard for gravity. "I thought we agreed—"

“I love being *naked!*” Kate interrupted, slipping back below the surface in a dive that showed off her shapely ass, then her flashing legs kicking her under the water.

Olivia squealed as Kate slipped up to her, undoing one strap off her bikini. Olivia held it together, trying to make her wet fingers slide the clasp back together, but it was too slippery. Or maybe she just didn’t want it to go in. She let go and her strap dangled down her front and back, her one-piece sinking down her body on one shoulder like a caveman garment.

Kate smirked mischievously, her fingers already itching to undo the other strap. But instead, she turned to face Gareth. “Would you like to do the honors?”

“I, uh, err,” Gareth said eloquently.

Then Olivia dunked her from behind. Through the water, Gareth could see each and every one of Kate’s exuberant curves, only refracted by the rippling waves. It occurred to him that the only way he could have a better view was to actually join them under the waves in the lagoon.

“This water is *cold*,” he said abruptly, trying to make conversation—excuses.

Still, Kate stared down through the once-calm water, now roiling with their presence. “Not from what I’m seeing.”

Olivia came up for air, clear blue water coursing over her perfect, delicate features, and followed Kate’s line of sight. “Oh, Gareth...”

Suddenly, Kate was tackling Olivia into the water, the two of them disappearing in a resounding splash. When Olivia came back up, her one-piece was gone. Kate was waving it nearby like a banner.

Olivia’s body, pale and perfect, was exposed in all its lovely, even proportions to Gareth. She was not the overabundance of flesh that Kate was, the sheer *enthusiasm* of sexuality. Olivia was more like an exquisite marble statue, a work of art carved in a different style altogether from Kate, with high, pert breasts and taut buttocks wonderfully befitting her slender frame. And Olivia just stood there, her lower body somewhat veiled by the water, but her torso utterly exposed in the open air, and further delineated by the beads of moisture running the full length of her body.

Gareth could see a certain conflict in her eyes, a shared indecision with him. She, like he, wondered if they were really doing this. If it was really them. But before either of them could move, Kate was back.

She approached Olivia, hands at her sides so the coral tips of her breasts were the first part of her body to meet her friend and lover. Olivia looked at Kate with confused lust, her eyes flitting to Gareth, back to Kate, downward at her own nudity as if she couldn’t quite square all these disparate pieces together. But when Kate embraced her, their lips fell together and

Olivia herself cupped Kate's buttocks within their linen-white confine, drawing the two into one tender coupling.

They slipped into the lagoon water. Their hands slid 'round the curves of each other's hips, keeping either one from escaping, as the rippling water rose to engulf them.

Then they were in motion, hands joined, propelling their bodies with dolphin-undulations to Gareth. He stood there as Kate swam between his legs, Olivia pulling down his briefs. All of a sudden, his erection was wagging in the water like a submarine ready to launch.

Gareth was quick to react. He turned into a puppy.

"Awww!" Olivia cried, picking him up and holding him against her chest—something she'd also been considering when he was human. "Kate, look at him! Look at his widdle nose!"

Kate wore a bemused, dissatisfied smirk as she flanked them, petting Gareth's fur almost with distaste. "I'm more of a cat person."

Nonetheless, she squished Gareth's small body to her chest, perhaps just to draw in Olivia's hands. Gareth felt the heat of her breasts like two great furnaces on either side of him, the abundant flesh pressing in on him as well. He felt as though his whole body was plunging into her, drawn into her soft warmth, but no matter how deep she breathed, the pressure of her skin on his would not grow tight enough. He wanted to truly penetrate her—to impale her! And that was before she started scratching him behind the ears...!

Kate's nose wrinkled, though. "Think you could turn into something that smells better wet?"

"Well, you know what happens when you rub a guy like this." And before his better sense—which tended to sound a lot like Olivia—could intervene, Gareth transformed into a foot-long garter snake

Olivia gasped—good-naturedly—her hand raising to her mouth. But Kate only smiled. "Yes, Gareth. That's much better."

And, drawing her panties out from her body with the thumb of one hand, she lowered Gareth to her crotch.

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When the elastic band snapped back, Gareth was pressed firmly to the volcanic heat of her sex. He simply had no control left in him. Senses awash in the sweetness, the sheer power of Kate's pleasure, he began to explore his new surroundings—his wedge-shaped head leading the way.

Kate threw her head back to moan. Before her face disappeared from sight, Olivia saw the smile on her lips. It wasn't one of Kate's usual wide grins. No, she looked like the cat that'd gotten the canary



Olivia gaped. For as long as they'd been friends, she'd marveled at Kate's beauty, at her uninhibited and proud sexuality, and at the warmth of her friendship. Now, hip-deep in water, naked save for her spectacular mane of hair and the white panties whose crotch rippled with an undeniably phallic, serpentine body within, Olivia saw that Kate truly had no inhibitions. There was no limit to what she could do, so long as it brought her pleasure.

A part of Olivia was provincial enough to think worse of Kate for that. And another part, a larger part—and Olivia truly did not know if she liked that fact or not—was envious of what a good fuck Kate could get out of being such a goddamn slut.

She herself almost shook with need, knowing she could not wait for Kate and Gareth to finish. She didn't know if she wanted them to separate so that she could have Kate or so she could have Gareth; when her hands rolled over her hips, her ass, she did not know whose hands she imagined feeling her up. Only that when Kate opened her arms, her lips already parted to receive Olivia's kiss, the photographer was happy to give it to her.

The women pressed together, almost tight enough to crush Gareth between them in their familiar tribbing. Olivia felt the leaden cold bulging at Kate's groin and knew it was not as big as the snake Gareth had transformed into a moment ago. Some of that modest length had entered the marshes of her wet pubic hair, slithering into the territory Olivia had already charted so well with fingers and tongue.

Olivia could hardly begrudge Gareth that entrance, when she herself had put in much larger than a snake's blunt head.

With the scissoring of her lean legs, Kate's feet left the lakebed. Still embracing Olivia, they trailed through the water until Olivia's back hit a large, water-worn rock. Kate mounted Olivia, pressing their groins even tighter together, Gareth's scaly body separating Olivia's cunt lips. Olivia whooped in enjoyment, fully committed to Kate's impulsiveness. She knew Kate would enjoy herself. She knew she would too. She just hoped Gareth was enjoying her tight womanhood as much as she enjoyed feeling him there.

There was no need to worry. All three of them were gone now, immersed in the sex. Kate in particular lost in nestling her head between Olivia's pert breasts as if she'd never touched them before. She took them in her hands, squeezed them as hard as she dared, covering for it by putting one soft pink tip to her lips. Olivia gasped with pleasure and Kate knew it wasn't the first time she'd been manhandled in such a fashion. Perhaps she and Gareth had more in common than it would appear.

"You know what would make this just... perfect?" Olivia asked, voice caught in her satisfied gasp.

"No," Kate whispered into her hardening nipple. "What?"

"If Gareth were a bit... bigger."

Olivia's nipple vibrated with Kate's response. "So that there was enough for both of us?"

"Yes... yes..."

Kate appeared to ignore Olivia. She suckled onto Olivia's nipple, stuffing more of it into her mouth, between her sharp teeth. The shock of pleasure lifted Olivia's hips off the rock, dragging her clit over Kate's thigh. Kate's own contented hum deepened into a gurgle, feeling Gareth shift inside her. She reached down into her panties and stroked his slender coils, eventually provoking Gareth to retreat from the warmth of her sodden depths.

With a rattle, Gareth glided up from the stretched panties, winding around the pinch of Kate's hourglass figure. He had shifted into a diamondback rattlesnake—body four feet long, tail sliding out the leghole of Minerva's panties to circle a perfect leg.

"Care for a lovebite?" Gareth asked, rattling again. "I wouldn't mind sucking the poison out of either of you..."

"Do whatever you want," Kate said. "Just so long as you do it to Olivia."

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Still firmly coiled around Kate's shapely thigh, Gareth flowed outward, momentarily slithering on the rock that supported them before finding Olivia's shadow. He slid under her, his head slowly, blissfully moving between the snowy slopes of Olivia's ass.

"He's not going to bite me there, is he?" Olivia asked of Kate. She slapped her friend's ass. "I got enough of that from you!"

Kate almost ignored her, more concerned with continuing to mouth Olivia's cleavage. She wanted to drink every drop of water from her body before the tropical sun rose to evaporate it, and she didn't care if that was hours away. "Snakes like it nice and warm—and you have a very nice ass..."

Olivia shuddered in delighted disgust, but Gareth had no intention of burrowing there. Very slowly, very deliberately, he worked his head up and back around Olivia's hip, then up her stomach, between Olivia and Kate's flexing bellies as they helplessly continued to revisit each other's lips.

"You do have a nice ass," Gareth said, his scaly body still winding through the crevice, "but you have even better tits..."

And now he was between Olivia's elegant breasts, squashed as they were against Kate's larger cleavage. When Olivia looked down—something she was barely able to manage with Kate's tongue so desperate for her own—she saw Gareth's eyes within the snake's face, his forked tongue flickering exactly as rakishly as a smile would be on Gareth's human lips.

Moving in as if for a kiss, he looped around Olivia's neck and slithered down her chest on the outside of her cleavage, though Kate pressed herself to that portion of his body as much as Olivia held the rest, rubbing her nipples against Gareth's cool scales.

Olivia spread her legs as well, and soon felt a cool mouth, colder fangs, nuzzling her wet folds—then the icy flame of a forked tongue on her clit. Her knees sagged, only Kate's embrace holding her up. The blocky head prodded into her a few times, like a great finger tapping between her legs, then slowly... *irresistibly*... the finger began to push inside. A steady, wonderful feeling of *fullness* that grew and grew...

"Oh fuck," Olivia swore, "I could've had this every night!"

Olivia heard a rattle; Kate broke into a wide grin.

"Now you know how I feel," Kate said with a soft kiss.

Draping himself over Olivia's body, Gareth had finally wound up with the very tip of his tail between her buttocks. It now flicked back and forth across her asshole—slow, tentative—almost searchingly—until, with a shout of surprised ecstasy, Olivia felt the bulbous contours of the rattle plunge up her ass.

Olivia's jaw hung slack as Kate congratulated her with kisses, all up and down her pale breasts. Reaching behind her, Kate's fingers gripped either half of Olivia's ass, forcing the peachy cheeks apart, allowing the stiff tail to cross deeper and deeper beyond her anus.

In all her experimentation, Olivia had never experienced this: something like two stiff pricks taking her from both front and behind, but really the same lover! She and Kate shared another kiss, of love, of friendship, of boundaries mutually crossed; then Kate was scampering up the rock, thighs splitting, her perfect body now seated on Olivia's face.

Olivia needed no instruction, no entreaty, no convincing. She seized Kate's hips as roughly as would be reverent, ripping the panties from her thighs to smear her face against the temple she still loved so much. And if Kate tasted a little different than she once had, it was only because Gareth had been inside her so recently, and so Olivia loved the taste all the more.

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Olivia hugged arms and legs around Gareth's coiled body as she was battered by ecstasy from both her ass and cunt, her body experiencing something more like a hurricane than a climax. Again and again, Gareth struck, depositing his head a full foot inside Olivia before withdrawing and striking once more, while his tail continued to rattle inside Olivia's rectum—the noise almost audible. Olivia's answering juices doused a quarter of Gareth's length in their sweetness, leaving Gareth's scales glistening like he'd been bathed in oil.

At length, Gareth withdrew from Olivia—the slow trickle from his exit dwindling until all that was left was Olivia’s angry red cunt, still slightly agape. Clutching Gareth to her breast, Olivia inched up the rock until she joined Kate atop it, resting her head on her friend’s strong shoulder. They were dazed, their bodies still swimming in affection, but Olivia knew it wasn’t over yet—something Kate would soon learn.

His ‘neck’ still stably coiled about Olivia’s inner thigh—the position from which he’d repeatedly launched himself inside her—Gareth raised his head into the air, where it wavered uncertainly, tongue stabbing out to sniff the air. Gareth’s beady eyes, a sheen of red to them now, lighted on Kate’s thighs. They glistened where the rest of her body had dried. Her juices, freshly squeezed from a well-pleasured cunt.

His instinct more animal than man, Gareth darted between Kate’s legs, rolling his head in the fluid coating her legs and groin, thrashing, slithering, delighting in every aspect of her liquid climax. Kate moaned. Equally lost to her lust, she seized Gareth in her hands as if she meant to throttle him. But instead, she brought him up her body to her mouth. Her lips parted wide. With the same skill she would use on Gareth’s other snake, she took the entire head within her mouth.

Olivia was shocked at first, but only at first. She had no time to judge Kate. She wanted too badly to join in. She leaned into Kate’s body, one hand groping a pendulous breast, and she licked up the length of Gareth’s body—tasting Kate on him, tasting herself on him, finally tasting Kate’s lips as she licked all the way to Kate’s face and was somehow in a three-way kiss with her two lovers.

Together, they licked, sucked Gareth’s head and body clean. Gareth had frequently been called a man-child; now that he was clean, he quite boyishly wanted to get dirty again. Kate and Olivia had no objections.

“Bigger,” Kate whimpered, as soon as Gareth had retreated from her throat. “As big as you can go. Right, Olivia?”

Olivia could not speak, she could only nod frantically, as if each bob of her head was a demand: *Yes! Yes! Yes!*

A moment later, the two women fell into the water. They hadn’t been prepared for the sudden weight of a boa constrictor. Eight feet long and as wide around as a man’s forearm.

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There was no time to waste. A few moments later and all three were coiled together. Kate and Olivia embraced with both arms and legs, their very hair laced together along with the fingers of their left hands. Their breasts met, the nipples occasionally connecting electrically; their lips found each other with far greater ease.

It was a position Olivia had only known in dreams of flying, dreams without gravity—dreams of Kate. Now it easily adapted to their underwater coupling, with one major difference. In Olivia’s

sleep, the intimate position had been topped by their sexes meeting in a kiss every bit as fiery as that of their mouths. Now, Gareth was part of it.

The wide contours of his midsection, rough and smooth all at once, met both their pussies, massaging either women with every inch Gareth moved. But that was not all Gareth contributed to the coupling. He encircled both women with his long, girthy body, trapping them together, as close to their flesh as a tattoo.

As they kissed and fondled each other, their hands often found a segment of his eight feet length—one more thing to stroke and caress. Each discovery and rediscovery made Gareth burn hotter. Already, the web he'd made of his body could feel Kate *and* Olivia, both of them, all over, all at once. He felt breast and buttock, thigh and tongue—everything. And they felt him like Gareth was lust made physical.

Linked by Gareth in so many ways, the three held their embrace, slowly turning under water that sang with their writhing bodies, each only surfacing for the briefest of moments when in need of air, their revolutions bringing him or her on top. None needed air as much as pleasure.

The trio finally washed up on shore, polished to a sheen by the clear water, their kiss uninterrupted. Atop them, Kate was only convinced to give up on Olivia's tongue by the flexing of Gareth's powerful body against her midsection, finally persuading her to allow herself to be pushed up to a semi-erect position, Olivia sprawled below her on her back.

"What's the big idea?" Kate demanded, almost too offended to be amused, though she never truly could be.

"I'll tell you what *is* big," Gareth replied, and then his jaw unhinged. As a smaller snake would devour an egg so big that it would end up a disproportionate lump in the creature's belly, so Gareth's upper and lower jaw crept over the contours of Kate's left breast. It was firm, warm pressure, encompassing far more of her flesh than a man's hand or mouth ever could, bathing all of the massive globe in pleasure.

Kate looked to Olivia in disbelief, looking for confirmation that this was really happening, but all she saw in Olivia's eyes was painstaking need. The photographer threw herself onto Kate's right breast, making love to it with her mouth, only stopping to look up into Kate's pure green eyes and say "I want your cunt too."

Kate would give Olivia that, and everything else.

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One hand gave Kate's breast a last squeeze; the other cupped Kate's beautiful face as a moan contorted it. Then Olivia's fingers were sliding over the light down of Kate's soft belly until it thickened into a lush bush between her legs. Olivia slipped her hand under the heavy cable of Gareth's body and long experience let her immediately find Kate's clit. She rubbed at it with her thumb, and before she knew it, Kate's passage was slick and open to her fingers. In they went,

Kate's womanhood sucking at them as hard as Olivia was suckling upon Kate's coral-tipped areola.

*Love you, Olivia thought. Love Gareth. Love this picture.*

She felt a confident finger prod into her ass, dilated enough by Gareth's rattle to allow admittance. Olivia returned the favor, fingering Kate's ass as hard as she dared. And all around them and between them, Gareth hissed as loud as whitewater rapids.

The wind whipped at them, drying the waters from their bodies, but unable to do a thing about the liquid dripping between their thighs.

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Olivia screamed out in Elvish, sounding like she was doing a punk cover of some beautiful opera. She laid side by side with Kate on sand that now heartily coated their moist bodies, the three having writhed all over it in their pleasure. Gareth was no longer between them, but all around them, tying the two together in living bondage.

Their bodies had quickly responded to the loosening of each other's anal fingering; now Gareth's head was buried in Kate's ass, pistoning in and out, while his tail was in Olivia's, waving around like a wildly effective vibrator. Their cunts met in a beautifully slippery dance, soon joined by either woman's fingers, and there was nothing for any of them to know but pleasure.

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For over an hour the coupling continued. It was like a boulder had been dropped into the center of the lagoon they had swum in. At some point, the flecks of exploding water simply could not go any higher, the ripples could travel not further—the many explosions of the frenzy that gripped all of them could not help but ebb. But even then, they still had hours yet to go.

Gareth was the first to flag; even the mighty boa constrictor was hard-pressed to keep up with the superhuman endurance of the two beauties. Though he couldn't piston into either of them any longer, he stayed in his serpentine form, wrapping them up in his coils to shelter them from the cold air, the sight and sounds and feel of them more pleasurable for him than the most depraved sex act he could share with any other women.

The sex did not grow any less bestial without Gareth's participation. Kate and Olivia rutted like animals in human form, their thighs, fingers, teeth, tongues all weapons used to ecstatically destroy each other. Olivia found Kate even more wild, more domineering, than the most perverted of their prior encounters. She found herself loving to give into her.

But not even an elf could fuck forever, much as both she and her lover might wish it. After endless minutes of rough, animalistic fucking Olivia would never have believed she'd enjoy so much, their lovemaking cooled into a torpor that could only be considered as soft in comparison to what had come before.

They massaged instead of fingered, kissed instead of bit, licked instead of sucked. Their orgasms unspooled slowly, with the weight of drugged leadenness, instead of hitting hard enough to draw blood. The desire drained from their bodies, letting in pure, liquid satisfaction.

Perhaps one or all of them fell asleep, enjoying the others' instinctual caresses as dreams instead of reality. But after what had become many hours of sex, in however many forms, their slumbering passion was revived. Olivia found Kate once again moving against her energetically, demandingly, and without a thought of her own tiredness Olivia rushed to comply. Soon, whatever fatigue she felt had vanished for the moment, and she was eagerly responding to Kate's touch, her fervent whispers, her naked body in the pale moonlight.

Gareth was likewise aroused, his body twisting and twining around and between them, scaly skin rubbing over all their most sensitive areas. Until none of them could take any more. Until Olivia wanted all her pleasure, all over again, all at once.

Kate worked herself all over the man's fat length like it was a stripper pole, Olivia hard-pressed to keep up, to even watch. "Need you to finish us off, Gareth—no more small—we need big—we need hard—both of us at once, Gareth, I know you've thought about it!"

Gareth had. A particular fantasy he'd always wanted to indulge with two women, though he'd thought the best he'd ever manage would be with some very open-minded, very *expensive* prostitute. He'd never dreamed he'd actually pull this shift with the two sexiest women he'd ever met. Marshaling all his dwindling power, he shifted.

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Kate had been around. She'd made love to swarms of fairies, each fucking a different inch of her skin. She'd taken gargoyles, closed up in their wings as they fucked her. She had even coupled with the goddess Gaia in a few of her many forms, from hundreds upon hundreds of creeping vines to stout trees, her body barely stout enough to survive their holy lovemaking. But seeing Gareth's new form, she actually found herself afraid.

It aroused her.

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He was big. He was strong. He was powerful. He was a woolly mammoth, thirteen feet tall, eight tons heavy, and he announced his presence on a world sixty-five million years his memory by trumpeting his trunk in a roar that shook the birds from every tree on the island. His twin tusks shot from his mouth, each a full eight feet long, curving upward into fully erect, rounded points.

Kate and Olivia had scrambled to their feet as Gareth transformed, and now they did not even need to look at each other for confirmation. One hearing of the other's excited breath and they were upon Gareth, each straddling the ivory that was hard as brick, rubbing the thick tusks between their legs. Moaning, groaning, knowing in the next minute they would be screaming.

Gripping the mighty tusks in their hands, they worked themselves along the lengths, so wet they left shimmering trails that ended up dripping off the underside of the tusks.

Olivia looked over at Kate, enthusiastically rutting the ivory between her thighs. Sweat had replaced the water on her nubile body, some of it being tossed from her with every jiggling thrust of her body. Every second her buttocks clenched, her breasts bounded, and a fresh gasp flew from her parted lips.

Clenching her legs on the tusk as hard as she could, Olivia leaned over and kissed Kate hungrily. Kate kissed her back even harder, leaving Olivia's lip actually bleeding with her sharp teeth. She pulled away, even more an animal than Gareth. "No more foreplay! I want him in me! I want him in both of us!"

Another day, Olivia might've hesitated, worrying that such a penetration might harm her. Now, with Kate, she was invincible. Together they climbed the tusks, mounted them, impaled themselves on points already lubricated with their ample juices.

The makeshift phalluses shot deep inside them both, immediately overstimulating the sensitive tissue. Gareth raising his head only sent them deeper, lifting Kate and Olivia off their collective feet to fully take their fuckings. Both climaxed massively: straining, ripe bodies grinding down on their penetrations, working every morsel of pleasure out of the tusks and into their gaping cunts. Muscles tensed, heads thrown back, mouths open to release explosive screams into each one's private little world of ecstasy.

Olivia reached out to take Kate's hand, to share ever so slightly this unforgettable feeling with her, Kate's hand was there waiting for her. She knew it always would be. Another vibration of the tusk within her, another screaming clench of sheer delight, shouted down only by Kate's similarly voluptuous, similarly loud climax. Then both women were finished, slumped down upon their deep-set invaders like broken toys.

Gareth canted his head, depositing both onto the beach with the mildest pulse of wet sand. For all these hours, he had yet to come. Because his penis in snake form hadn't been directly stimulated, he'd enjoyed the prolonged coupling in an almost masturbatory fashion, never overstimulated, never bored. But now, even the shocking self-control he'd displayed had come to an end.

His mammoth body reared up onto its hind legs, a wicked erection on full display. If either Olivia or Kate could open their eyes, they would've gaped at the oversized hard-on. But they simply laid there, curled in on each other. No matter. Gareth just thought of the merest fraction of what he'd participated in and he orgasmed entirely untouched.

Gareth came literally buckets, the cannon-length of his cock firing burst after burst, raking the two women with the liters of cum his onanistic interlude had created. They were absolutely covered in it, nearly blown away by the gale-force ejaculation.

It was a rude awakening, but not one either woman was unprepared for. As soon as they'd braced themselves against the bombardment, they turned into it, opening their mouths, extending their tongues, and clinging to each other as Gareth's explosion continued apace. His stream had not



even begun to dwindle when they found themselves playing with the slick seed that coated one another—rubbing it over their bodies, into each other’s proud breasts and needy cunts.

Gareth teetered on two ungainly legs as his pounding ejaculations splattered on either woman, spilling down their nude forms like body paint, wave after wave covering every possible inch. When he came back down to all fours, the two women were saturated, every strand of hair and every curve of flesh dripping with the spoils of their affair. Behind them, the lagoon looked as if it had suffered a white oil spill.

“Oh, Gareth,” Olivia muttered, each word sending drops of his cum tumbling from her lips. She was almost incensed by this brazen degradation, an act of obeisance to male sexuality that would surely outrage any decent elf.

But, though part of her *was* annoyed at this one-man bukkake, far more of her was impressed and delighted in the gift Gareth had bestowed upon her and Kate. An impressive and clearly sincere act of homage to their beauty—that’s how Kate would see it. And from the hypnotic feeling of gratification within her, Olivia was feeling like taking a cue from Kate.

“Sorry, sorry,” Gareth said, lumbering to the lagoon. “I’ll fix you up.”

He dunked his trunk into the water, vacuumed up as much uncontaminated water as he could, then directed it at the two women and hosed them down with a somewhat less impressive spray. It did not totally clean them—Olivia doubted anything short of a CDC decontamination would—but it broke up the weight of the cum upon them, letting them brush it off in gooey strands until all that was left was a few errant dollops and an oily sheen. A quick dip in the lagoon or ocean would take care of that. Later.

Clearly as exhausted as she was, the mammoth fell onto his side, wide belly pumping out like canvas with each breath, as a dog would pant after a long walk. And his tusks still dripped. It was all Olivia could do to avoid going to Kate’s for one last helping of her delicious essence; but there should be limits.

Many men shrunk after sex, but Gareth outdid them all. After catching his breath, he made the shift to his five-foot-eight human form, his cock a dainty, deflated six inches against his thigh. Kate *knew* that’d been a bit of shapeshifter flim-flam.

“I don’t think I’ve spent that long going wild,” one of Gareth’s euphemisms for shifting, “since I was a teenager. Frickin’ drains me!”

“It was worth it,” Kate said, sitting up, her ample posterior making a nice dent in the sand under her. “It was so worth it.”

It was just about then that Olivia was finally able to lift her head. She saw two identical grins on her counterparts.

She really did have awful taste in lovers.

“What’s so funny?” she demanded.

“Well, I just got laid,” Kate said.

“And *I*,” said Gareth, “*told you* I could do a woolly mammoth.”

“I think we’re the ones who did the mammoth,” Kate said.

Olivia closed her eyes. Now she had two of them to put up with.

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The nature reserve in Micronesia had been built around the Cosmic Dragon that had landed there in 1999, fucking up all those doomsday cults. It was roughly as old as the universe, about the size of the Titanic, with a hide of starscape and wings of nebula. It was still sleeping its twenty-year sleep, eating starlight when the sun set. If you subscribed to the reserve’s mailing list, you could see a long-exposure shot of its starry skin mirroring the passage of the night sky overhead.

Kate bought coffee for them in the guest house built around its head.

“You didn’t pay extra for the luck charm, did you?” Olivia asked, taking hers. “Because you know those don’t do anything.”

“I don’t know, I’m pretty lucky, and I have been taking luck charms in my coffee for the last four months.”

“This is why I wanted you to take that philosophy course with me back in college, so you would know all the logical fallacies in what you just said.”

Gareth came out of the photo center holding an ice cream cone. “They’ll have the negatives developed in an hour. Which is long enough to buy a digital camera, have another shoot, and send the photos around the world with our phones...”

“Gareth, be nice,” Kate told him, laying a hand on his chest. “It’s nice slowing down. We can enjoy this cute little place, and talk, and have coffee—“

“I bought an ice cream,” Gareth told her.

Kate’s jealousy made her snippy. “Does it come with a luck charm?”

Gareth gestured between them. “Do I need one?”

“You need all the help you can get,” Olivia told him, and Gareth offered her a lick on his drumstick.

It wasn't long before Kate was holding it. Even biting into the waffle cone.

They explored the grove of trees that had grown between the Cosmic Dragon's claws, where tiny dragons, all colorful scales and dragonfly wings, ate the trees' fruits and drank the flowers' nectar.

They walked underground, following the heavier-than-air exhales of the Cosmic Dragon through the topsoil to an underground river, where a window let them see the bioluminescent aquatic dragons that came to stir the water where the strange gas touched it. Science still couldn't explain why.

In what looked like a mattress store, Micronesians with sleeping disorders, nightmares, would come to rest and if their sleep was troubled, dream dragons with fluffy feathers instead of scales would materialize almost inside the mattresses, skin-to-skin contact comforting the humans as the dragons fed on what bothered them.

Someone asked if one of them would like to try a nap, but they had no food for the dream dragons.

Finally, having seen all the sanctuary had to see, they returned to the photo center. Gareth paid the man and collected their envelope.

"Remember that time you spilled champagne all over my photographs?" Olivia asked. "Right before the exhibition?"

"Yeah." Kate tried not to grin too widely—Olivia really had been heartbroken for a minute there—but it was a losing battle. "You put them on like that, everyone thought it was so avant-garde, and a month later that guy ripped you off with coffee cup rings."

"Those were good times."

"Yeah." Kate took her hand. "We're gonna have more good times."

"And bad times." Olivia didn't say it woefully. Her ears were extended, upright and confident. It was just a statement.

"Yeah," Kate agreed. "But they'll be our times." She reached out with her other hand to squeeze Gareth's shoulder. "All of ours."

Gareth was still flipping through their shots, keeping them in the envelope. "Oh, whoa."

"None of those could possibly shock you after last week."

"Huh? Oh, no, I'm more of a sex tape guy. It's just I really am ruggedly handsome." He took out a few of the bedroom shots that wouldn't cause a riot if he dropped them on the floor. "Why didn't we take pictures of me before? I'm gorgeous."

Olivia took the selection, showing them to Kate. “Which print is better, one or two?”

“Two.”

“I was smiling when I developed that one,” Olivia said smugly.

Gareth rolled his eyes to Kate. “She is such an elf.”

“She *is!*”

Olivia would’ve retorted, but she was focused on the dragon that had just wandered into the guest house. It was harmless, of course. The size of a horse or hippogriff, sleek red scales armoring its body, wings tucked along its back, looking for some place warm to laze in as the sun set. It showed off, smoldering smoke out of its nostrils, getting people to pet it, feed it, pay attention to it. But even being such an obvious prima donna, it was a majestic creature.

“Gareth,” Olivia whispered, “do you think you could do that one? Tonight?”