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"Hey Brooke, do your parents know you are hanging out with Trent's Wal-Mart substitute?" Brennan had begun his assault.

"Felix?" Brooke deftly parried. "Nah. I dated him once, but he turned out to be another degenerate frat-boy loser, so I dumped him." Maybe I should have let Libra and Brooke dispose of Mr. Keyes for me as well. "Cáel's not like that. He cares."

"Come on now," Brennan battled back. "He's some minimum wage paper-shredder whereas Trent worked directly for his department head."

At this same moment I was convincing Casper and Anima that I was a professional assassin... just for some relevance.

"That's why they pay him a quarter-million a year," Brooke snickered. "Or put him on a jet to come back from his father's funeral, or around the clock bodyguards."

Minimum wage has improved a good deal under the Obama Administration, but I don't think it has gone up that much," Brooke finished up.

"He told you that?" Brennan mockingly laughed. "Come on Brooke, that's a total snow job."

Back to the current reality.

"Cáel," Brooke got my attention, "can you prove you are rich?"

"Nope," I reassured her. "You've seen where I live and what I ride to work. I'm a pauper."

"What about those bodyguards?" she prodded me. I had to turn so that Brooke and I were face to face. I was back with Aya explaining how 'not' is a very dangerous word.

"We do not talk about that, Brooke. Never. You've seen my office, you know I work for Executive Services and I'm only an intern. I am not some 'specialist-in-training' for ES," I clarified. Yes... I was Nýilas, Cáel Nýilas of Ishara's Secret Service; license to invalidate reality.

Life got better.Ⓢ©W. *nove* Ⓢ Worm. Com

"So, you've convinced Brooke you are James Bond," Brennan kept trying to belittle me.

"Why, yes I have and that would make you Octopussy - congrats Stud," I laughed at him. Worse, several others laughed as well, Anima included.

"What are you doing here again?" Brennan tried to use the 'host' thing to insinuate I was rude, which I was.

"You think you can bamboozle Brooke into having sex with you and I'm telling you right now, barring drugs, or blackmail, that isn't happening because she's far too independent minded to be attracted to a shallow, immoral creep like you," I answered. "I think that covers it." *Www.Novelworm.Com*

"Stop it," Brooke touched my left bicep. "Don't go picking fights on my account." Brooke was having pity on Brennan, exerting her authority over me and letting everyone know that she could 'unleash my wrath' at her will - the 'picking fights' detail.

"Four hour sex session tonight, or I'm going to be a very grumpy guy come sunup," I challenged Brooke.

"Four?" Brooke giggled. "Not feeling up to your normal level of excellence?" I kissed her then roped in Libra for a quick bonding moment.

That was it for Brennan's first attempt. Palatial pad, sports cars, rich friends and making me look like a stock clerk/bag boy/guy out for a payday - all failures. Even his 'ringer' hadn't delivered - my disrespectful self hadn't been spanked and/or humiliated by any stretch of the imagination.

(Illusions)

"Let's go to Illusions," Brennan called out. I was curious about his next angle of attack. The pathetic thing was that if he devoted his weaseling ways toward bettering his life, he could be worth a damn. "It's a members club, Kibble. Let me know if you need something to wear."

"No need to bother yourself, Brennan," I grinned.

"I found a garment truck stalled on 33rd and engaged in a little 'social justice' and 'wealth redistribution'. Your fake generosity has been noted and found to be rather weak and unoriginal," I nodded as I turned to leave with 'my' two ladies, "though consistent with your performance so far." More laughter at Brennan's expense as we headed off to our rooms to change.

"Wow," Brooke muttered as we put on our party attire, "I hadn't recalled him being so... underwhelming."

"Honestly, I think the three of us are the only ones to have graduated college," Libra added. "I noticed Brennan didn't have a Carnegie-Melon ring." We three had our 'we've been slapped upside our heads with a sheepskin' jewelry on - two Vassars and a Bolingbrook.

Driving/seating assignments were the next social rumba. Unluckily, it was obvious that we couldn't go to this club with the same set-up as Brooke, Libra and I came in. The plan was to split apart the new people under the auspices of us not knowing where Illusions could be found. Since it made sense, we had to go our separate ways.

Brennan ended up with Brooke, Libra ended up with a waste-of-space guy whose name I hadn't bothered to remember, and I found myself driving some custom sports machine with Amina.

"Why don't you like me?" Anima mused after twenty minutes on the road. She wasn't asking me to defend my vibe. She wanted to know what she was doing right about being 'wrong'.

"You find creating excuses for bad behavior to be tedious," I enlightened her. When my mentor, Dr. Kimberly Geisler, had educated me about women, she had opened my overly romantic eyes to all sorts of pitfalls young men could fall into including emotional ant-lions like Anima. "You find it amusing that people consider you broken, hollow, depressed, despairing of hope, or empty of life. They are so wrong - you are evil.

You feast upon the weaknesses you find in others and drink in their misery as you publically expose their painful secrets. Creating random suffering bores you," I continued. "You revel in destroying virtue, hope and trust, staying close and concealed as a confidante until you administer the coup de grâce. Only a lack of anything approaching a work ethic keeps you from being a serial emotional rapist. I think that description covers how I feel about you."

"You've only just met me," Anima said. "This sounds all a bit contrived and hurtful. I think you are the person who likes tormenting others." I laughed. "Do you know what I see in you?"

"It is hardly something I care about, but by all means, give it your best shot," I chuckled.

"You want every women in the room to want you," she began.

"Having a woman reject you attracts you. You have to turn that woman around and once you are done, you abandon her to her doubts, worries and regrets," Anima weeviled her magic.

"Whoa... that is what you made of the discussion between me, you and Casper?" I snorted. She gave me a smoky, sexy twist of the lips.

"Hmmm... how much longer is this road trip going to take?" I asked *www.noveWorm.Com*

"Half an hour," she answered. We had been driving west, back toward NYC... for three-quarters hour almost.

"Ah, what the hell," I mumbled to myself. "Anima, I'm not a psychiatrist, psychologist, or spiritual advisor. I'm a responsible man and that's all I've ever wanted to be.

Sex with women? Absolutely. Intercourse is wonderful and it doesn't have to be a contest. A lady says 'not interested', I'm moving on to the next one. Am I unfaithful? Hell yeah and I'm honest about it now. Do I have other vulnerabilities? Yes and go looking for them. I dislike you enough to send you that way knowing you could get killed for doing so. Since I've warned you about the potential threat, I remain a Good Guy," I finished up.

"Death isn't all it is cut out to be," Anima gave a depressing lilt. "I'm not afraid."

"Anima, nothing short of decapitation will cure what ills you," I grinned. "Not a damn thing I can say will convince you that your demise will be anything, but bad. That misconception it totally on you. I've been on the cusp of death and it was awesome for me... that was because I love and was loved.

Laugh if you like. You are evil, so 'love' doesn't register with you the way it would to a normal person. Evil isn't strength. Evil isn't a 'tool' that the foolish mass of humanity can't conceive of. Evil is a defect and you are going to find that out the hard way, no doubt," I ruminated.

"Philosophy major?" she wondered.

"Philosophy minor - Business major," I replied.

"Do you believe people can truly be evil?" Anima took her eyes off the road to drink in my introspection. "Without being crazy," she qualified.

"Of course. Evil isn't a 24/7 thing so it isn't like you wicked freaks run around with a flashing neon sign over your heads announcing your 'monstrosity' status," I started.

"Evil slips around the sides," I went on. "As I alluded to earlier, those actions are layered in excuses and misdirection. Science wants to wrap the whole concept of evil in bubble-wrap and give a descriptor to the psychosis with the open suggestion that it can be cured with therapy and pills. Not you - you don't inflict pain out of some sadistic impulse, Anima.

You aren't lashing out because Mommy and Daddy didn't love you enough, or because you were abused by someone close, and no one did anything to help you. Nope, you are a beast with above average looks and more financial resources than is remotely healthy. Please don't get me wrong - I don't care about your nature. I am not trying to save, or change, you.

Feel free to be you without an ounce of concern on my part as long as you leave me and mine alone. Anima, you are hardly unique. I have more than enough on my plate without worrying about your predilections. Here ends my lecture on the kitty-poo that is your soul," I sighed.

"Casper is mine for the weekend," Anima stated after a few minutes.

"I'm going to bypass the 'people are not property' debate and go straight to the 'I warned you' and going back up my threat with a promise of escalation," I looked deep into her dark eyes.

"You are going to hurt me?" she gave a sloppy smirk.

"No. This is a matter of restraint. Pain doesn't scare you - it should, but it doesn't," I smirked right back with greater energy.

"This isn't a game, Anima," I clarified. "Either you are an anathema with self-control, or a slithering horror at the edge of human perception; that is the issue. If you wanted to be treated like an inhuman threat to a community I am a member of... well, you know the fate of monsters, don't you?" *©WWW.noveWorm.Com*