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"Ewww, a death threat," she giggled.

"You will be hard pressed to find the words 'exterminate', 'murder', or 'killing' in my lecture above," I grinned. "The 'fate of monsters' could be exile, entrapped, or killed - open to interpretation."

"You sound like a lawyer," Anima kept talking.

"My father was murdered Monday night, so I've been dealing with some lawyers," I replied.

"Murdered? What did he do?" Anima attempted to not seem terminally bored.

"Married the woman he loved, had a son who he was proud of and mostly minded his own business," I said. "He owned his house, left no debts, and lived and died by the same simple code he taught me - take charge of your own destiny."

"How noble," she sneered.

"If you thought I was soliciting your input, you were mistaken," I shook my head mirthfully. "The polar opposition of our natures makes anything you think/say about me so much drivel. Women - I came with better looking ladies. Engaging personalities - I have three with far rosier outlooks on life. Wealth and connections - I don't give a damn.

You have nothing I want, but if you did, I'd find a less onerous way to get it than getting socially close to you," I dipped into the Amazon credo.

"I've met people who thought they were untouchable before - independent, moral, or cloaked in happiness," Anima laughed. "They've all been wrong."

"You have gone from a prattling annoyance to an overworked joke, Anima," I looked at her with pity. "Take my job? Good luck with that. Sully my reputation? I don't care. Take a 'woman' away from me? There is precisely one woman I care about enough to bend my life for. If you go after her, I'm not going to be the one you need to worry about." Aya.

"Money? I can always get more. Dwelling? Mine isn't all that grand anyway. Friends? Good-luck finding any that would ever be deceived by you. Physical pain and suffering? I have been hurt before and my health plan borders on the magical. I'm not untouchable. You simply lack the imagination to affect me," I laid out truth for her. She didn't believe me. In her mindset, everyone was a potential victim for her to devour.

I had done my due diligence. Anima attempted to get me to open up. I sandwiched lies with the truth until we finally rolled into Illusions' parking lot. It was a gentlemen's club - that's a strip joint for us less fortunates. I clawed my way through life feeding upon the small, positive sparks I brought to lives around me. Brooke held forth her own sparkler for me to enjoy*Ww.n@veLwoRm.Com*

Brooke, Casper and Libra were outside the club, waiting on me (and Anima). Brennan's plan was for the group to arrive separately, he and Brooke first. Brooke wouldn't have a choice, in his mind, except to go in this place with him. Mind you, it looked very high-class. The shock for Brooke was being taken to a gentlemen's club in the first place*xWw.n@veLworm.Com*

The old Brooke would have been outraged yet stumbled over her ignorance. The new Brooke was still outraged. She countered that by putting her faith in Libra and I showing up and supporting her decision about how to proceed, which we did. Brennan had kept trying to 'shame' Brooke into going inside until the next car arrived.

He had left Brooke outside to face the scorn of the other dirt-bags on his troupe as they went into the club. Casper decided to wait with Brooke, Libra had rallied to her as well and I rounded them all up. Anima pretended to approve of Casper's kindness then flashed her ID to the first of the bouncers of this 'Members Only' establishment.

First impression: big and competent security; always a mixed blessing at any club. The rest were given a cursory glance while I got the magnetic wand. Nothing beeped. Amazon knives had ceased being made of metal two decades ago so Brennan's attempt at annoying me failed. The super-rich crowd was made obvious by the professional female attention gathered around their cushy seats.

"You look like trouble," this Vietnamese-American dancer/waitress stroked a finger from my Adam's apple to the cleft of my chin. That was 'exotic' dancer speak for 'I'll let you be a little bad'. Trust me. I've met a plethora of exotic dancers over the past two years.

"Dad was a grifter and Mom was a monkey-whisperer," I winked. "That has left me morally confused and financially directionless."

Laughter.

"Get us some drinks, you skank," Brennan commanded loftily. My latest buddy huffed and rolled her eyes.

"I apologize. It isn't small penis syndrome," I 'explained' to her.

"In fact, Brennan here is so well hung, when he gets excited, it crawls up his ass crack and he fucks himself," I grinned. As she turned to fill the current drink orders, she showed me a smirk and brandished her pinky, indicating she thought Brennan's anaconda was more of an earthworm.

It was blatantly obvious there was one spot on the circular lounge for Brooke - right next to Brennan with Anima on the other side and Casper pinned in next to her. Libra could sit on one end of the 'U' and I could sit on the other. Nah.

"Excuse me," I motioned to the closest poster child for the failures of the posh and pompous.

"I'm good," he snorted derisively. Ah, he thought I was making a request. I surreptitiously grabbed the back of his shark-skin jacket, yanked him onto his side on the seat then rapidly slid him straight out of the 'U'. I motioned Libra in and took 'his' seat by the time fuck-nut regained his feet. Extensive time in various nightclubs had helped me become a past master of knowing how to avoid attracting attention from bouncers.*Ww.N(c)veLworm.Com*

"Mother-fucker," he yipped at me. I looked slightly up at him, face blank. At that moment, his drug and booze soaked mind began grasping the enormity of his major life mistakes. His friends weren't friends. They were more than happy to sneer, mock and derided his discomforts and failures. We weren't in elementary school. There was no 'seating assignments'.

He could attack me, but we both knew what that outcome would be. He could complain to Brennan. Short of unleashing his attack dog, Brennan could do nothing and without a doubt, his 'leader' cared much more for Brooke's curves than 'dumbass's' pride. Mumbling, he took the seat on the other side.

"When it occurs to you to throw a drink at me, do realize I will publically strip you down for towel material," I gave the cock-sucker a crocodilian grin.

"They have towel's here," one of the useless women pointed out. It is an indicator of how little I thought of her that looking her ways didn't automatically incite the siren song of 'sex' in my mind.

"I know," I nodded her way.

"I don't think that's going to happen," Orlando challenged.

"You had a good view of the door, Keyes," I met his simmering anger with my iron-clad bravery. "Did you see them take anything from me? If not, you may assume I'm still armed."

"Drinks," one the waitresses showed up with a tray. Another waitress and my V-A exotic mistress followed.

"I brought you a Rust Nail," she grinned. Since she was behind me, I had to roll my head back into her enhanced cleavage as she handed it over.

"You do see me sitting here - right?" Libra half turned her body and fully turned on her petulance.

"Best of luck with this one, Miss," the girl chuckled. "I can tell he's a handful and I mean that in the best possible way."

"I know," Libra mastered the situation. "He does all kinds of things... including bondage." Libra was swiftly becoming confidently adventurous.

"Top, or bottom?" our exotic hostess grinned seductively. Libra was uncertain.*Ww.n@veLworm.Com*

"Both," I informed the lady. To Libra, "She was asking if I tie you down - top, or get tied down - bottom."

"Good for you," she patted my head then sashayed away.

"Hey Dog, you got a way with hookers and strippers," a gibbering chump snorted at me.

"Dude, it is not that dark in here," I shook my head. "White tops indicate waitresses (they wore a risqué, white, pseudo-peasant blouse) - don't grab one and we won't get thrown out. The lightly clad ladies are exotic dancers - they are only called strippers by polyester-clad, middle-aged businesspersons, and illiterate knuckle-dragging degenerates."

"Even the waitresses put out in this place," Brennan tried to sound worldly, "... if you have the money." Sigh. Beating the poverty drum.

"Have you ever paid for sex?" Brooke gave me a smoking hot, hungry gaze. She was 'playing' and really getting into it.

"Physically, or financially?" I requested.

"Both," Casper jumped in.

"I've been too poor most of my life to ever afford it. Later on, girls weren't happy until I bled and no number of zeros on a check would have kept them at bay," I let my eyes spark her way. Blush.

"Or maybe you don't know how the system works," Brennan countered. "You treat ladies properly; you treat pick-ups like nameless screws and move on."

"You mean you initiate sex with a woman with the prejudiced decision of never seeing her again? What fun is that? Ladies are always the 'road less traveled', not a cul-de-sac," I smiled.

"With every woman I've been with, it has been the journey we've shared that mattered. Had I not constantly crossed lanes into oncoming traffic, I'd have a lot fewer scars, but I am who I am," I shrugged.

"See," Brennan snaked an arm around Brooke's shoulders, "he's no good for you. He is one of 'those' people."

Perhaps Brennan should have taken into account that Orlando Keyes was one of 'those' people as well. By the man's look and that of his GF, they weren't pleased.

"Brennan," Brooke pulled away slightly, "you do realize Cael is sleeping with me and Libra tonight, don't you?"

"Besides, Cael also has a live-in female fuck-buddy, has had sex with at least two women at work as well as this female lawyer he met at an upscale club (Nicole)," Libra added. But wait - there is more!