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"Brennan, I didn't come up this weekend because I'm lonely," Brooke continued.

"I came up because Cáel has had a rough week - his father dying, and him having to handle all those affairs - so I thought he could relax, unwind and sex me up a whole bunch... and Libra," Brooke winked at her friend. To Brennan, "I thought you were simply being apologetic about initially taking Trent's side in that blow-up instead of mine. Is that not the case?"

Of course that wasn't the case. No one at the table thought Brennan was acting apologetic, or out of the goodness of his soul. Brennan was well-connected enough to lash out like a spoiled brat and get away with it. His father's lawyers would bury the mess and he was far, far away from feeling self-conscious about being 22 and having his parent still picking up after him.

What Brennan couldn't figure out was why he was losing and looking foolish. Brooke was perfect - as in perfectly vulnerable. She was a non-sleazy, rich girl who was arrogant yet kicked to the curb - totally a prey animal in his book. What had gone wrong? Hmmm... Brooke refused to have sex with me then did.

Brooke refused to have anal sex with me yet did and loved it. She came over to my hovel and had sex again - because she wanted it. She dated Felix - a disaster, then I showed up and stood by/slept by her... then we had sex. Then she felt strong enough to share me back with Libra. Kinky sex at my place was replaced by some sort of corporate disaster equipped with macho women with guns.

And Cáel took Brooke to her home, for her own safety, first. The bottom line was that in two short weeks, Brooke had corralled her sexuality and made some serious post-Trent decisions. The most crucial was to get over Trent - he was old news now. She could even make jokes about him. Felix had come and gone, leaving her feeling shabbily treated, despite their shared social class.

She hadn't even needed to come back to me. I had come to her and made her feel good. I had lavished her with the proper accolades and compliments. I hadn't given her any new concepts, only reinforced the traits she wanted to use to define herself - free-willed, independent and intelligent.

"Of course, Brooke. Anything for you," Brennan's words came out like molasses.

"I'm glad we got that out of the way," I took a sip of my Rusty Nail. Then, I decided to toss Brooke another gem. "I'll be naming my third condom after you, Buddy." Brennan prepared his verbal retort yet it was Brooke who responded first.**Www.novElworm.cOM**

"Cáel, apologize," Brooke insisted. Who was in charge? Brooke was. "That was uncalled for."

"Fine," I grumbled. "Brennan, I lashed out and it was damn rude of me. Please accept my apology."

"You don't know your place, so I understand," Brennan sneered. Dumbass. I knew my 'place' and it was with Brooke. Brooke and Libra knew it. Why couldn't he see it?

But wait! It gets better one more time!

"Cáel, where is your place?" Brooke's body language was positively molten.

"Beneath Brooke, beside Brooke, on top of Brooke, in a Libra/Brooke/me sandwich... need I go on?" I answered.**W(www.nóVellwÖRm.C.M**

"See," Brooke turned to Brennan, "Cáel knows precisely where he needs to be. He's Libra's male companion, but I don't mind. After all, when he isn't devoting all his sexual energy to me, he turns on Libra so I can catch my breath."

"Good to know," Brennan grumbled.

Brennan decided that since his huge house and pushing around working class people had made no headway with Brooke, he'd up the ante. He had access to an insane amount of his Daddy's money. The problem wasn't the approach, but the amount of moolah squandered, so all he had to do was throw even more of his father's money around. Fiscal responsibility was the problem he couldn't grapple with. Brooke herself was an unemployed college graduate living off her very wealthy family.

What separated Brooke in her mind from Brennan was that she had an exit plan. She had, probably with Trent's connivance, decided to move towards being a 'professional' wife. Trent pulled a social vanishing act so she was allowed some recouping time. I believed she was going to go job hunting. She had a college and sorority network to fall back on so her future looked good.

Brennan apparently had decided to take both his native intellect and family fortune for granted and was a four year college non-grad. He had finished with some top-flight grades from some snobbish prep school which, with some influence pedaling, had gotten him into Carnegie-Melon and he repaid everyone else's efforts on his behalf by becoming a party animal, frat boy, educational failure. Would/could he go back to college for another year in hopes of earning a diploma?

Who cared? Certainly not me, or Brooke, or Libra. The two ladies were a step above Casper's folks - two well-respected doctors in Delaware - and money was not on my list of top ten concerns. Despite the clear indicators that finances weren't a stumbling block, Brennan opened up the dollar spigot. He bought us a private room and ratcheted up the humiliation.

To the dancers escorted to the suite, it was a race to suck up the dollars before the cost of disinfectant needed to put this night behind them exceeded the reward. By dancer number two, they had figured Libra and I were the 'safe' corner. The rest of the clientele thought nothing of slapping, spanking and disrobing the ladies. I had never witnesses such outrageous behavior in what should have been regulated surroundings.

Bouncers? They apparently knew the score. For the girls, it was running a gauntlet. As a depiction of the human experience, I wanted to leave before I did something stupider than showing up in the first place. Anima did me a favor by smiling at me with a sense of accomplishment.**www.novElworm.cOm**

The Vietnamese dancer had been shanghaied down to Brennan's area and he upped his show of superiority by twisting her nipples until she yelped, then mocked her silicon-enhanced assets. There were two other entertainers with us at the time.

"Libra, why don't you give it a shot," I prodded my friend. Libra looked shocked and unwilling.

"Rope in Casper," I whispered. "Let's kick Brennan in his pea-sized testicles." That brought Libra into my scheme. Libra's efforts brought out some hoots from the other 'guests' and looks of relief from the dancers trapped in the room with us. Whatever Brennan thought about their smarts/desperation, the girls latched onto the situation immediately.

This was hardly their first 'girl-customer dances with the entertainment' go-round. I had never seen it so quickly seized upon by the professionals. Libra and one of the exotic dancers had Casper up in no time. Less welcome was Anima coming my way and proving she was both limber and coordinated. Worse, she didn't even put on an overly trashy effort.

I almost missed Brooke and the Asian pro double-teaming Brennan. It was rather clever of the Vietnamese to rile our host up then shield herself with Brooke. On either the fourth, or fifth such ploy, he chose to sexually molest Brooke for her collaboration with the working class. Brennan must have forgotten that Brooke wasn't 'paid for'.**www.Nov@lWöRM.Com**

Brooke slapped him hard enough to bounce his head off the padded backrest of the sofa. He slapped Brooke back, clearly enraged. The Vietnamese lady yanked Brooke away from all but the tip of the blow. Brennan stood, I stood and Orlando stood. Then two barbs connected with Orlando and he danced with the lightning. Huh? I wasn't alone in that expression either.

The barbs' wires went back to the private room's doorway and the lithe figure standing right inside. I hadn't seen her enter and if I had, I wasn't sure how happy I would have been.

"Estere?" I murmured. "Estere Abed, what are you doing here?" The business suit was tailored to be salacious yet causal. The turquoise veil was the give-away. Everyone stopped moving.