

**1005**

My gut was to play the White Knight and save the damsel in distress. That would require me to forget the dead peripheral players in Anima's drama as well as Casper. I couldn't take the coward's path and do nothing either.

"Anima, do you recall that trip we took to illusions?" I reminded her.

"Ye - yes," she sounded worried.

"Two things stick out in my memory. You said 'death isn't all it is cracked up to be' and you claimed to have never met a person who was untouchable," I recalled. "You don't seem to be scoffing at death and pain anymore, Anima."

You have also managed to meet someone you can't touch. I remain the Good Guy and I feel fine with my decision of leaving you to face the consequences of your choices," I stated deadpan.

"You are simply going to let me die?" Anima wailed. "How is that good?"[www.NopeWorm.com](http://www.NopeWorm.com)

"It is the virtue of Justice," I told her[www.NopeWorm.com](http://www.NopeWorm.com)

"That is something you could never grasp, Anima. Good isn't soft. Forgiveness isn't a blanket license to commit evil, over and over again. It is a second chance for the worthy who have made a mistake. You are neither worthy nor did you make a mistake. You knew exactly what you were doing," I glared. "Shut up!"... Anima had attempted to make another plea.

"Do you know what you could have done to save yourself? You could have made the last few weeks of your life matter by helping others. You could have exhibited bravery and charity, yet you chose not to. I'm not okay with all the resulting deaths. This brings me no joy. But my sorrow does not translate to me second guessing myself."[www.NopeWorm.com](http://www.NopeWorm.com)

I'm willing to take responsibility for what has happened. I could have backed down - given in. I didn't. I met you half way in our moral challenge. You haven't changed and I'm fresh out of give. We remain where we were that Saturday - morally deadlocked. Good-bye," and I was done.

"Time for you to go," Buffy emphasized by grabbing Anima by the scruff of the neck.

"Cael?" Anima made one more attempt. Buffy yanked her out the door. I was dealing with Timothy and Sovann.

"Sorry about this guys," I shook my head.

"You are not dull," Timothy admitted after a few seconds. He stepped up and we hugged.

"What is going to happen to her?" Sovann asked. He was still rightfully shaken up by the whole 'psycho girl with a gun threatening to end his life'.

"I don't know," I replied. "Buffy isn't going to kill her, but she's under a death sentence for orchestrating a gang rape of a girl after I specifically requested that she restrain herself."

Hell, if I thought that was going to be a one-time thing, I would have cut her some slack. Instead, she and her sick crew of rich, overly privileged friends chose to live beyond the law."

"So you are the law now?" Sovann stared intently.

"Yeah," I nodded, still in a partial hug with Timothy.

"I don't ask for a lot, Sovann. I do ask that people treat people with respect. If they fuck up, I ask them to not do it again. You are thinking 'who make me God?' and I don't have an answer to that. I do my best. And I have people like Timothy and Odette to kick me in the right direction when I stray. That's the best I can do, because doing nothing when you can make a difference is cowardice."

"Cael, Sovann and I will discuss this after you go," Timothy intervened. "By the way, why did you come back?"

"Crap," I quick-stepped to my room, dug out two handfuls of fortune cookies from the box on my dresser, stuffed them in my pockets, then headed for the exit.

"Fortune cookies," I explained. "Now, if I am late I'll probably have to sleep with one of my aunts. Sorry again, guys," and out the door I went. Wieslawa kept to my side as we went down to the GL.

"Buffy said she had business to take care of," the driver informed us.

Off we traveled to JFK International Airport and the O'Shea Boeing BBJ3 that was waiting for us. Some guy with an Irish brogue and some serious letterhead had the TSA wave us through the gate into a restricted part of the tarmac. Havenstone Executive Services had packed up my clothes and kit, as well as Wieslawa's. Hopefully, someone had bought some extra clothes for Sakuniyas.

Daphne and Tigger were there to send me off... and to drive the Havenstone vehicles back to base. A quick hug and a kiss was all I could spare. I was cutting our departure window very close. For starters, this was my aunts' jet and that was made abundantly clear.

Staff wise, the pilot, co-pilot, chef (yes, the jet had a galley) and three flight attendants were all tiny cogs in the Illuminati structure. Each aunt had a personal assistant (always female) and a bodyguard (3 males, 2 females). As for my family - there was Aunt Deidre, who I did know and Aunts Kelly, Matilda, Imogen and Baibre, who I had last seen at Dad's wake.

Honestly, I felt like a heroin dealer walking into a drug den filled with five ladies about to fall of their '12 Step Program'. They may have all had the same genetics, but they all seem to have taken different paths. Kelly and Matilda were cold-hearted, ruthless, professional killers... which helped explain Uncle Lumpy's demise.

Deidre was sort of the referee that the other aunts didn't respect. Imogen was an up-beat and perkily impish sort with the heart of a medusa. Baibre was... nuts. The 'walks the hallways of the old manor house late at night having conversations with the portraits of her dead ancestors' kind of nuts. Definitely detached from reality.

On my team, I had Rachel's squad, Pamela, Sakuniyas and, of course, Wieslawa. Deiliah had sprouted a buddy - good ole Chaz Tomorrow... the guy Pamela respected more than me. Apparently the US government thought me running off to parts unknown was unhealthy. Both Virginia and Vincent of the FBI had joined us with Riki Martin in tow. Why? Not sure.

Our guide for our upcoming adventure, Selena Jovanovic of the Black Hand, was here alone.

"Hi," I greeted the ensemble. "Sorry I was almost late."

"I see dead people too," Baibre gifted me with a lopsided grin and a sing-song voice. Sweet! Me seeing the restless dead was freaking genetic![www.NopeWorm.com](http://www.NopeWorm.com)

Then introductions went around, mutual animosity was exchanged and, as the 'Fasten Your Seatbelt' warning came on, the turf war began. Where was I going to sit? Rachel was adamant that I sit ensconced with my Amazons in the middle region. My aunts wanted me nearer to the rear of the plane... close to the curtained off sleeping areas.

I had one huge advantage over virtually everyone else on the plane - I regularly dated dangerous and somewhat unstable women. I joined my aunts after whispering a quick something in Rachel's ear. Five minutes after take-off, Kelly and I almost came to blows. She was - aggressive and demanding.

Having been down this road before, I derailed our conflict by calling her out. The fuselage of this jet wasn't ideal, but with the beds folded back, we could create a makeshift sparring area. This kind of sexual foreplay was new to Kelly, giving me an immediate advantage. I gave Kelly most of what she wanted - personal contact without sleeping with her - the reason I had the bedding put away.

Ten minutes into the bout, Matilda decided to switch places with Kelly. Kelly didn't agree but didn't want to start a catfight here and now. By the time Matilda was about to up our public display of affection beyond my acceptable levels, Imogen intervened. I was getting a definite 'cuddle' vibe from her, which I liked... though I doubted I was getting my shirt back on anytime soon.

Deidre called for a late dinner before we all crashed out.

"Where is your personal assistant?" Deidre inquired. I was pretty sure that she wasn't talking about Riki, who had already fall asleep, and she definitely didn't mean my Amazons.

"I don't have a personal assistant," I responded.

"Then who was the girl who delivered your luggage?" Kelly's gaze grew intense.

"Where is Cael's luggage?" Rachel popped up. Matilda tapped her bodyguard and he led Rachel to the hatch down to the luggage compartment. Sure enough, there was my suitcase, travel bag and dress bag (for my suits). No bombs or tracking devices that they could discover.

Upstairs, I was getting the bad news vis a vis a description of my PA... Odette for sure. Damn it. Turning around wasn't possible. With the crowd we had, the unviability of surviving a trip in the cargo hold and the limited hiding places, we found Odette super-

quick. She had rearranged the storage in the galley and hid in one of the galley cabinets.

Odette was not a gymnast, or a contortionist. Delilah had to pull her out because her muscles were so cramped.

"Hi," she greeted me. "Don't be angry," she begged. I responded to that by banging my noggin against one of the overhead compartments.

I didn't ask why she did it. Odette had been living vicariously on the stories of my adventures to the point that she wanted to be part of the action, not a member of the audience. She was totally unprepared mentally and physically for the mission my team was embarking on. I couldn't ask anyone to be her guardian. That wasn't their job.

"I'll protect her," Sakuniyas spoke up. I was floored. Saku didn't like people, especially defenseless ones like Odette. The only person pleased with that announcement was Odette.

"Why would you do this?" I asked Saku.

"So I can later use her for leverage against you to help Alai," Saku stated.

"What?" Odette mumbled.

"Fine," I shrugged. "Odette, welcome to the ugly underbelly of barely constrained violence that I call home. This is what you have said you wanted. Live with it."

"But Sakuniyas is going to use me to hurt you," she protested. "Why can't Delilah protect me?"

"I have an assignment, Odette, and it doesn't include babysitting a civilian," Delilah told her. "Except for Saku, we all have jobs to do."

"Ms. Seibert," Virginia reluctantly joined in, "as a US citizen, I and Agent Loire will do our best to protect you."

"Do understand, our primary mission is to guard Ms. Martin and liaison with the law enforcement bodies," Vincent chimed in. Odette nodded.

"Sakuniyas, please do your best," I wasn't letting Saku, or Odette, off the hook.

"I do more idle boasting, isn't it? Wakkō Ishara," Saku gave a shark-like grin. "Now, why don't you tell me more of it?"