**Midnight**

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**Midnight Ch. 04: GOSSAMER**

"Clam chowder for table two is up Midnight!"

Naomi Culpepper, a fellow waitress reminded the girl who appeared lost in her job the last two hours. Unresponsive Naomi slapped the girl's ass hoping that might lure her back to reality. What it did though was make Midnight moan a soft unexpected thank you by arching her back as if hoping for another. Naomi narrowed her eyes at her co-worker, "What's gotten into you lately? First you let those Tuna Boat Bastard's paw you up yesterday, now you act like you want me to paddle your bottom."

"Just...being silly." Midnight Amador attempted to talk her way out of any real answer.

"No you weren't! Soon as business slows down you and I are having a no nonsense talk Critter." The 35 year old waitress knew better. She had kids of her own at home, she knew lovesick when she saw it. Or, at least a worthy fancy.

"I have a..." She almost said date but slowed down, "...meeting tonight."

"Surely not AA! You don't drink. What kind of meeting?"

"Someone." Her soft spoken voice led to an unblinking stare. Her gaze almost hoping Naomi might read her mind. The longer they glared at one another it dawned on Naomi who reacted with awe, then worry.

"That fella yesterday in black? Tats all up and down his arms? Isn't he a tad old for you? He's my age or older."

"Does it matter? Age?" The raven haired beauty let her eyes seek answers, sparkling orbs with so much curiosity it was almost a child like sympathy ploy.

"Well...no! I guess not, but sweetie...you're an angel. I see Satan in that guy." She sighs loudly, "Maybe not Satan, but surely a protégé."

"He was nice."

"He didn't lift a pinky to defend you against Pete Barstow's mitts. A real man would have stood up to them." She hadn't heard Nick Sanchez share a threat when Pete had pushed his limits. That was for men's ears alone. "It almost looked as if you...wanted them to feel you up." Shrugging shyly Midnight slipped past Naomi and claimed the clam chowder taking it to table two. Naomi still expressing awe in a more loitering manner watched Midnight deliver the bowl then keep her distance. "She did. I better keep my eyes on this girl."

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Five miles down the road...

Nick Sanchez spent the remainder of his afternoon brooding. He hoped that he might get a call back from Tilly Cooper over speaking with the bank about the foreclosed on property and his counter offer. With no reply in the last three hours he dove into his daily workout just to occupy his mind, nude to feel comfortable, he enjoyed his privacy. Swatting and slapping at a Wushu Wing Chun practice dummy that his buddy Marcus had on hand in his beach house gym kept his physical process at peak performance. After a good thirty minute workout he took a breather and grabbed a bottle of water to hydrate against the Carolina heat.

From there he did chin ups in a door threshold amounting to 100 repetitions, Nick Sanchez was hardly a lazy man. Ending that dedicated pleasure he took another breather to get some air, stepping back out to the back deck to take in the ocean. Crisp clean air filling his lungs he chose down time. Going back indoors he sat at a circular dining table with his journal and as every day wrote what was on his mind. After getting a good look at the island home Harbinger Shoals he opted to design rooms in his mind, then simple drawings on the blank pages in the back of the book. From there he jotted down a list of needed items to fix and compliment its refurbishing, that is what he was aware of. This was going to be a big project, hiring locals seemed smart but at the same time he preferred his privacy. Letting too many people know his business and how he lived would not serve him well.

"Six!" He decided upon. "I'll hire six professional carpenters, no more. They do it all or I finish it myself." That decided he began making small sketches into a secondary art pad for interpretations of each individual room. "I'll need an electrician too. Someone who knows more than just wiring." That meant a seventh employee. "Guess I start getting recommendations from locals." That could wait until he was certain his offer would be accepted. Being vacant so long he was pretty certain the bank wanted to unload the burden. Yet, it was prime real estate with the ocean behind the property. Even he was shocked it was going unnoticed. Perfect in his mind. Their loss his Empire.

Drawn back to his journal's over abundant pages and the BDSM drawings within, he paused upon a number of designs for torture and submission. Fascinated by the visuals he had sketched from photographs he had seen in both magazines, videos, and finally in person. Having tracked down a club in New York specializing in the darker side of human slavery, the respect he sought was tantalizing. He however wanted to be his own Lord of the Manor...his way. This move in his mind was only the beginning.

"Midnight!" It was just a word. A point in time. When it was right. When...she was right. Perhaps!

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"1.8 million?" Banker Lowell Hardwick sat back facing Matilda and Sheldon Cooper within the local branch of Santee Federal, a small outlet that rarely did more than cash checks and finance car loans. Home loans were not their specialty but what few they had in foreclosure kept them in business small scale. "That's a heck of a drop in what it's worth Tilly."

"How long do you plan on sitting on that property Lowell?" Sheldon cut in on his wife then apologized with a hand gesture.

"What he said." She scowled. "Unload it while you can Lowell. You need the money as much as we do. If Mister Sanchez thinks he can rescue that dump let him try. This is a cash sale, not a loan. How often does that kind of offer come along here in Caretaker? That chunk of change can tide us all over for six months. I don't know about you but I could use a vacation."

"You're right Tilly. Should we at least counter offer at 2 mill?"

"Take it or leave it said." Tilly posed her palm defensively. "We're talking about a man that killed a six foot coral snake with a machete. Do you truly believe he won't walk away?"

"He really did that?" Sheldon looked shocked.

"Threw it on the hood of his vehicle and drove me back to the diner where we met. I should have taken a picture but I was just happy to see friendly faces. The man is...dark."

"Dark?"

"A soldier he said. A pilot as well."

"Wonderful we have us a disgruntled vet for a neighbor." Sheldon scowled folding his hands over his portly belly.

"A very rich disgruntled vet it appears." Lowell sighed, "Do you feel he's a threat to the community Tilly?"

Mulling it over she shrugs, "He appears respectful, and he did mention hiring locals to restore the place, which helps our economy. Obviously he has to purchase lumber, and other building needs. I say take the 1.8 and cross our fingers."

"Alright! Have him bring me a check I'll dust off the deed. He can have that hellhole."

"I'll call him from our car. Thank you Lowell."

"Tell him to leave the snake outside the bank."

"What? No thank you gift?" She smirked.

"I'll give him a toaster if he opens a checking account."

"I'm sure he will love the gesture." Tilly and her husband got up and shook Lowell's hand before leaving the bank. Getting into Sheldon's restored 1967 Corvette Stingray convertible Sheldon looks to his wife grinning at their financial gain.

"Is this where I say Bazinga?"

"Don't start Sheldon." She had to giggle.

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Coastal Waiter's diner by the big blue sea...

"Finally! The lunch rush is over..." Naomi kicked her heels off and threw herself into a booth to stretch out. "Sit with me Sweetie. That's an order." Midnight clearing the table next to her fidgeted and did as she was told. It seemed like the right thing to do. Saying no was barely in her vocabulary. Joining Naomi for a breather became tense, words seeking vocalization but trying to conclude how best to speak them. Sighing Naomi just reached over the table and patted Midnight's hand, "Fill me in Sweetheart. You know you can talk to me about anything."

"About what?"

"That whole touching you thing."

"You are touching me."

"Your hand not your bare bottom." Naomi scowled at the difference.

"You slapped it earlier."

"Outside your skirt. This isn't about me Midnight. What's going on with you and letting Pete and his dumbass crew abuse you like they did. You...into that kind of thing?'

"It doesn't bother me."

"How do you not have a man Miss Amador?"

"I guess I'm not what they want."

"I think Pete and his boys wanted you, or they wouldn't have gotten so handsy."

"Still here." Midnight softly spoke.

"You and that Man in Black. Nick I believe his name was? Are you...getting a crush on him?"

"No. I only waited on him. I would do it again."

"This appears to be more than just waiting on the guy Midnight. Please...talk to me."

"I...just take his order."

"You exhaust me Critter. If that man hurts you I'll be breaking out Kyle's shotgun and going after him."

"It won't come to that."

"You're so sure?"

"I've been hurt my entire life. I'm tough." She wanted to say try living with my Father, but respectfully held her tongue.

"No...you're a soft soul Midnight. Half the time you whisper. The other half you're dead silent."

"Just shy."

"Toward me? We've worked together a year now. You know I adore you Critter."

"I adore you as well."

"Alright!" Naomi slaps her palms on the table lightly giving up, "You do your thing... just know I'm here for you if you need me."

"I know. It's getting late, I need to clear my tables and help wash dishes."

"Go on. I'll watch the counter and clean the tabletops. Fill the condiments." She lets Midnight slip away and do her job. Naomi just couldn't shake the fear that the girl was out of her league. The next two hours led to six customers, more dishes, and a clock ticking slowly by.

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"Mister Sanchez?"

Nick answered his ringing cell after a soothing shower, it resting on the sink next to him. Dripping wet he recognized the voice. "Matilda!"

"You are now the proud owner of a 1.8 million dollar islet."

"Bank agreed? Perfect! I'll give you a bonus for serving my needs."

"I assisted you in your goal. Serving your needs sounds...like something my husband requires." She winks at Sheldon behind the steering wheel of their car. "Bring a check to Santee Federal tomorrow morning, ask for Lowell Hardwick, he's the loan officer and President of the Bank. It opens at 9:00 AM. He said he would have your deed ready upon cashier's check."

"I'll wire it in. While I have you on the phone, would you have any references as to who I might retain for Carpentry? Electrical experience?"

"Niles Gullivant built our home, he's a master at woodworking. Electrical and landscaping I'll look around for you and give you a call back. Would you like Mister Gullivant's number?"

"Stepping out of the shower, close your eyes." He mentioned as if making a joke, "Let me grab a pen and paper." Tilly envisioned him nude suddenly and turned away from Sheldon to hide her grin, peering out the passenger side while waiting. It dawned on her that she did need to look his number up on her phone. To her left Sheldon beat her to it clearing his throat and sharing it from his contact list. "Ready when you are." Nick growled. Tilly felt a sudden dampness between her legs, strangely thinking, "What an intriguing offer."

"His number is 843-555-6996. Again his name is Niles Gullivant."

"Appreciate it! I'll drop by your Realty office with a bonus check after I get my deed."

"Wonderful! We open at 10:00 AM."

"See you before noon." Nick hung up without saying goodbye. Tilly was almost sad to let him go. A pat to Sheldon's knee led to a, "Honey? Let's celebrate."

"Wine and dine?"

"After..." She flirted.

"Ohhhhhh? Frisky!" He started the car and they headed home. It had been awhile for both of them. "I like your style Mrs. Cooper."

"That includes doggy...not the bag."

"You got it!"

He got it too.

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Sunset closing in Midnight Amador found herself drawn to the windows overlooking the pier below, the beach being empty felt lonely like her soul. With her shift almost over she was becoming increasingly nervous, she wanted to be what Nick seemed to be grooming her for. Yet, she herself wasn't completely understanding what it was. She only had a single picture on a note of a nude woman on her knees, a woman that curiously looked a bit like her. She prayed she wasn't reading into the sketch the wrong way. Although earlier in the day he did coax her into showing off her breasts as he sat outside the window to the front of the diner. He seemed...pleased. Hopefully he would continue to be pleased with her.

This being all new to her yet reflecting back to her rape at age 16, her raspy intruder yelling at her by saying, "ON YOUR KNEES!" That command stuck with her all this time, as if...a calling. Perhaps even in the assailant's savage fucking of her in the weeds along the dark sand road near her home felt...right! She didn't know any better. Right from wrong was cloudy. What she did know was even afterwards she hoped he might return. Thus, she did not report it. Thankfully, she did not get pregnant.

Three years later she met Nick Sanchez, a mystery, yet an omen, be he good or bad. Her heart almost hoped he might be her past attacker. Knowing he was not by voice alone, almost made her sad. Still, the type was what attracted her spirit. Perhaps this was why boys did not chase her, they were too immature, not nearly aggressive enough to spark her imagination. To this day only that night was all she had, her bizarre comfort zone. Only two barked commands, "ON YOUR KNEES!" and "I OWN THESE HOLES!" A delight to be heard but not followed through with. She still walked that dark road fearing her home more than the darkness itself. Maybe she was fucked up. Maybe she was holding her breath. Maybe Midnight...maybe at midnight. Her name spoke to her more often than not.

"You can go Sweetie. I'll finish up." Naomi startled her.

"Okay! See you tomorrow." She grabs her bag and her divided tips, set aside by Naomi. Leaving the front of the diner she peers back to see if she were being watched. Finding no eyes upon her she slips around the side of the diner and took the sand path down to the beach. At the base of the hill she sat her bag in some weeds to hide it, again searching the area for prying eyes before undressing. Her shoes off, bobby socks followed.

Yet another inspection of her surroundings, including the partially obscured diner, she takes off her uniform and folds it neatly, placing it inside her bag, exchanging it for her see through dress. Her...veil more aptly described. A breeze launched over her almost tugging at her body, nipples reacting by reaching their full potential. Pussy wet she closed her eyes and stood nude without the dress feeling the momentary freedom. Generous though it was, the dress would be what little prison it was designed to be. Merely, a pale comparison to her flesh beneath she put it on, tying it about her waist with a sash made of the curtains, keeping it in the family. Hood added she drew it over her hair and smiled. It was time to take a walk.

Risking bare feet she strolled the beach until entering the cusp of the pier. Looking out over blue sky with the falling sun at her back she took one step at a time, hearing the waves creaking the decades old pier. With the Man in Black nowhere in sight she pouted but stayed on course to the very end of the pier before a rail halted her step. Wind whipping at her hood she held it tightly to keep it on her long raven tress. Alone, silent save for the shrill sounds of gulls settling in for the night. Peace!

For ten minutes she stood peering out to sea like a sailor wondering if the world was really square. The unknown drop off just over the horizon expected at any minute. Not even a sigh escaped her lips. No words. Her eyes wide and hopeful. Something was coming, her heart felt a resuscitation from it's waver. He was near, she just knew it. Afraid to turn around she remained vigil. Calm before the storm.

To her left a fish flew skyward and over the pier's rail, landing on the planks with a thud. She could have screamed but resisted. While shock was within her realm so was a fearless nature. Finally, opting to turn and face the dancing Red Drum, observing it's zest for life. While exploring it's relentless fight she heard a creaking behind her and froze, knowing something larger was behind her.

"Is that you floundering? Gasping for life? Fighting to survive?"

"Yes." She spoke without facing him. It was obvious to her that the Man in Black had emerged from below the pier, having gone fishing by hand perhaps. It made her eyes flare knowing that he too was fearless, dominating, taking what he wanted, capturing it knowing it's life was in his grasp.

"Do I throw her back? Or keep it?"

"That is your decision." She mumbled.

"Louder."

"THAT IS YOUR DECISION."

"Too loud!"

"Sorry!"

"You have an amazing body."

"Do I?"

"You know you do, you just choose to feel you don't."

"I am nothing special."

"You're right! You never will be. Does that matter?"

"No."

"They say life sprang from the sea. I tend to believe that. Let the strong survive they say."

"They must. Those that are not...fall." She drops slowly to her knees, her back to him.

"That would likely be their first reaction. Is that a curtain?"

"Caretaker does not have much to pick from. I made the dress. Have I...failed you?"

"Not yet! Ingenuity keeps you afloat." He plucks the fish up from the pier and hurls it back into the water. Saved by the hand that took it from its world and thrust it into another.

"I did not want to fail you."

"I said not yet. There's still time." She remains silent as he circles her slowly, her eyes refusing to meet his. "Forget something?"

"Did I?" She nearly shed a tear in that moment.

"You didn't shave."

Huffing loudly she whimpers, "I...forgot."

"On your back...or I throw you back like that fish." He instructs. The second he finished his command she dropped backwards and lay flat on the planks as if the fish. "Legs wide." Parting her legs she trembled at his approach. Afraid to look up at him she feels him kneel between her legs and touch her with something cold. "If you move you have no one to blame but yourself."

"I won't move."

Feeling his left palm on her belly she feels the cold abandon her. Suddenly a scraping sensation graces her thighs. He was shaving her pubes with a hunting knife. Awe setting in she froze, even her lungs afraid to inhale, for having to exhale. Tenderly, his razor sharp blade eliminated the majority of her thick bush. There was no silky smoothness but it was better. Once done to his satisfaction he stabs the tip of the blade between her legs a mere inch from her pussy, the edge of the knife facing her. "Which would hurt more? The blade or my leaving you to your life?"

"If you leave I might as well use the blade to end my life."

"Suicidal?"

"No. I...have no life as it is."

"No purpose?"

"None! I...exist. That is all."

"Virgin?"

"No." She swallowed dryly.

"So much for being a sacrifice." He attempted to make her laugh, she did no such thing. "Pussy looks really wet from here."

"It is."

"Gonna give me reason to stay?"

"I remain here."

Gripping the hilt of his knife he yanks it from the wood and flips it three times in his hand. Should Nick drop it he would easily cut her thighs. She remained vigil, confident in his ability. Staring at her he now held the blade as it should be. Using the pointed tip he delicately touches her hood, taunting her. Using it further he creases her clit with the coolness of the blade's side without pressure just to see if she would panic. She was a statue locked in time, very impressive.

Withdrawing his knife he sheathes it inside a leather cover attached to his belt and locks it in. Standing up he takes a deep breath. "Cum for me." Without hesitation her fingers raced to her pussy and began massaging it. "Find the darkness within."

Her eyes closed, thoughts lured back to her rape three years ago. There was no moon that night. It took her to the darkest night of her lifetime. A time she still fantasized about. Fingers burrowed deeply inside her, almost primal in her hunger to cum for this man. Her other hand rubbing her clit ferociously, yet resisting any moan, any signature that he might not approve of. As climax closed in she imprisoned her breath for all she held dear, if there was fear in Midnight Amador, it was in losing this man's interest in what was within her. Squirting for the very first time in her life she nearly passed out. Silence!

Five minutes she lay there thinking him watching. Finally, Midnight opened her eyes finding darkness, the sun had set. She was still in darkness, a new found darkness. Lifting her head she realized the Man in Black was gone. Had she disappointed him? Crawling to her feet she stood in the night breeze and shivered. Deciding it over she walked back to her bag of clothing and switched dresses. Finding her shoes she discovered her bobby socks missing. Giving up she just put on her pumps and packed her sheer dress for another day. If that day should ever rise.

For now...she had a long walk home.

So much for catching a bus.

That dirt road was waiting.

So was she.

**Midnight Ch. 05: TREASURE**

"You must be Lowell. Only guy in the joint."

"That would be me. Mister Sanchez I presume?" Lowell Hardwick rises from his seat to offer a hand shake. Nick evading it hands him a cashier's check instead.

"Shake this."

"Unconventional but I won't pry." The Banker looks at the check, his eyes bulging. "I thought we agreed on 1.8? This is for 2 even. Did I misunderstand something?"

"Nope! The extra $200,000 is my retaining your services. Get me a checking account started with $150,000 of that, the remaining 50,000 is for you. Earn your tip Lowell."

"And, how exactly am I doing that?"

"First off my gut tells me that property has a history that goes beyond the last few owners. I expect a file of every dirty little secret it's hiding."

"Are you expecting to find buried treasure there?"

"Never know! Seems to me it might have been a nice hideaway for someone if not some thing. Pirates might not be out of the realm. When was that place built?"

"1882 if I'm not mistaken. It's had a number of owners over 139 years. Long before me I'm afraid. You might drop by the Bureau of Land Management and they can give you a..."

"You want that money or not?"

"I suppose I could be your errand boy. Make a few calls. Am I making coffee too?"

"Also...you know the locals around here. I want a tree cutting crew and some landscapers out there to mow the weeds down, get it looking presentable before I can bring in contractors to shape the structures up. Hire only those who really need the money, not someone greedy."

"Illegals?"

"Don't insult me."

"I just presumed you wanted to make the money go further."

"I'm not poor Lowell. Just use that money wisely. Be a gentleman and put it in the hands of those that really need the job."

"Well, if I only hire those out of work where do I get the equipment to do the job?"

"Rent it. Receipts Lowell. You have my deed ready?"

"As soon as you sign papers and I notarize."

"Let's get down to business I have things to do."

"Take a seat, and a pen."

Ink fresh Nick Sanchez owned a home. Lowell admired the man already. He knew what he wanted. A born leader. Tough as nails and too the point. Obviously, a heart was in his steely gaze somewhere. He just might be good for Caretaker. He was already taking care of them.

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On the borderline of the Santee Rez...one property over from the gene pool.

"Did Veronica like her dress?"

"Yes. It still needs more altering so I brought it back home." Midnight Amador told her Mother Irene while she was baking bread for their dinner, Midnight seeking a glass of water to quench her thirst. "Fresh bread. So...fattening."

"Your Father likes fresh bread."

"He is finally coming home?"

"He is." Irene tried to be optimistic, her husband Esteban was hardly reliable. With only a land line phone, cell's far too man's world, that was all they had to go by. "Tonight! Come straight home after your shift at the diner."

"Yes Mother."

"You were...quite late last night." Irene had only heard Midnight return home toward 10:00 PM., highly unusual.

"I met with Veronica remember?"

"Yes, of course. I only worry for your safety. Our home has no lights along the road for over a mile." Midnight knew this quite well, it was due to that fact that got her raped at age 16. Fond memories when it should not have been. Unlike most young women Midnight Isabella Amador...was different.

"The moon was out."

"Yes. Please be careful daughter."

"I will. I must go bathe before work." She turns her back to her mother and hides the fact that she swiped a knife from the cutlery set on the counter. Taking it with her she goes straight to the bathroom and locks herself inside for privacy. Her mother had not even noticed. If she had she might have presumed the worst, that perhaps her daughter contemplated suicide. Hardly the case.

Waiting on her tub to fill Midnight took off her pajamas and stood in the mirror leaning against a wall with peeling wallpaper. Their home was in dire need for repair. Peering at her reflection she ran her fingers over her pubic area where Nick Sanchez, the Man in Black had shaved her with his fierce looking blade, the kind she had never seen before. Perhaps, a predators weapon. Finding her stubble grotesque she turned away from her vision and obtained a wash cloth. Stepping over the tubs edge she sank down into the still filling water. It was hot, for once. The water heater was on its last leg and her Father didn't seem that worried until it finally pooped out. Esteban was a penny pincher they say, mainly so he would have money to spend at the local bars. She knew if he did show up tonight he would be drunk, fuck his wife, sleep it off, then leave again by morning first light.

She often worried he must have a girlfriend elsewhere, only coming home possibly two days a week, saying he was working. Her mother Irene did not argue with him, she knew his hand well, his fist even more. Even Midnight was well aware of his belt, ofttimes the palm of his hand, the back of his knuckles, never however his fist. That was reserved for Irene. Esteban was not a nice fellow most days. Hardly ever to be honest. Still, he was a provider. Food on the table if not sparse.

Irene took orders for sewing, and blanket making when her customers bought the materials first, paying her upon final delivery of goods. Native Santee, Irene did have friends who often helped them, even if the outcast was married to another race. Midnight however, was not embraced being of two worlds. A loner outside of her friendship with Veronica Redmane, her soul sister she called her. Veronica was not in any better shape, even her man was white. Living off the Rez was the best thing to ever happen to V. Her man William aka Will was good to her. They were happy, which made Midnight happy...for them.

Midnight herself did not understand happiness, all she had in her life was despair, a very low self esteem, a desire only to make others happy when she could not claim it as her own. Shyness, and being awkward due to her isolation did not help. What made others happy made her feel unworthy. She...existed.

Water valve turned her water flow ended and cleaning up became priority. Once she had washed her body thoroughly, and shampooed her hair, a luxury her Father might say of shampoo, Midnight held her bar of soap and moved up to her knees in the cloudy water. Soaping up her pubic area she used the knife to carefully shave her pubes. Even razors were something Esteban found unnecessary. This knife was hardly perfect but she had nothing better for shaving not only her pubes, but her legs. Having to wear short dresses at the diner required her to keep them smooth. They were never silky soft, but at least not noticed. Finding her knife awkward in getting within the crevices around the hood of her pussy she did her best and prayed the Man in Black should he return approved. It was definitely an improvement over his butcher job to make a point. Point!

Recalling him use the razor sharp tip of his huge blade on her clit made her tremble in the water. Sitting back down in the tub she poised her legs wide and bit her lower lip. Taking the steak knife she did as he had in tickling her clit with the tip, careful not to cut herself or ruin a perfectly good clitoris for life. The sensations made her tense up, drawing away for fear of a bloody mess. Again and again she used it, shiver after shiver she questioned why he had shared this experience with her. Was it some lesson he was trying to offer, letting her figure out what it was meant to be? It would remain a mystery for now. Hearing an unexpected knock she nearly nicked herself and held her breath, eyes like saucers.

"Midnight? I need to use the potty."

"One moment Mother. Let me dry off."

"Why do you lock the door?"

"Did I? It must have been an accident." She quickly hid the knife beneath some towels on a shelf, taking a single towel to dry off and hurry to unlock the door. As her mother entered without a moment to waste, dropping her shorts to squat, Midnight gathered her pajamas and scurried to her room. Irene seeing hair floating in the tub surmised what her daughter had done.

"I will drain your bathwater." Irene wipes then washes her hands beneath the bath faucet, she was already there in uncorking the drain. Did it matter how she did it?

"Thank you Mother."

Hardly naïve Irene tracked the steak knife under the towels it was stashed beneath and pondered what kind of life they had. Fidgeting Irene sighed, "Perhaps I should use this on my husband." Perish the thought. She would take the knife back to the kitchen after rinsing the tub ring and washing the blade with soap and water at the tub's faucet. Like before, did it matter? Irene said nothing about her discovery. Let her daughter realize it on her own, like so many other things in life.

Midnight got dressed in her clean waitress uniform and pinned up her hair. With minutes to spare and her walk to the main road distant she hurried from her home, a peck to Irene's cheek her final farewell. It was then in passing she noted the steak knife returned to the cutlery set. Like her mother she let it go unsaid.

A vivid smile led Midnight in her journey.

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While downtown Nick Sanchez decided to take a stroll around the business district of Caretaker, having time before meeting the Cooper's for lunch. While early most local shops were just now opening up for business. What caught his eye most while driving to the bank earlier was an antique store. He had a thing for tradition and used treasures. Something his Grandfather instilled in him at a young age growing up in New York. Being the only person walking the streets seemed fitting considering he was pretty much a loner these days. Pausing in front of the shop known as Al's Cove or as it was meant to interpret Alcove, he chuckled under his breath at the originality in the name. Window shopping at first he found himself lured inside by a young woman with blond hair, possibly mid 20's waving him in. As soon as he ventured in she met him with, "Save me."

"Excuse me?"

"Save me from boredom. My Grandfather left me in charge today so he could go fishing. I hate my life."

"And this is my problem?"

"It can be." She flirted, hiking her skirt up to show him her butt. She was definitely not shy. While not the most impressive body in the town she wasn't any ugly duckling either. Nick merely ignored her and set about looking at items in the store. "Are you gay?"

"Nope! Just not interested."

"Sucks to be you. I could have rocked your world." She felt jilted.

"I doubt that. I take it your grandfather's name is Al."

"Alonzo, yeah! I'm Alexis so I'm an Al too. As in Alexis Texas." She grew bubbly bouncing about still trying to tempt him, tits bobbing didn't hurt, didn't help either. "But seeing as I'm from South Carolina you can call me Carolina Vagina. I hope to be a Pornstar someday."

"I'm sure you'll turn a few heads."

"I give awesome head."

"How much for that old trunk over there?"

"As if I know. Give me $20 bucks it's yours."

"It's worth more than that."

"That things been sitting there since I was a baby. Nobody wants that piece of crap."

"I do." He crouches inspecting its ornate hinges and rusted lock. "Gotta key for it?"

"Why do you think it's been there forever?"

"So...no key." He examines the lock closer jostling it a bit, "Wouldn't take much to break the lock. But, that would ruin its charisma."

"Maybe there's a treasure inside. I know there's something in the trunk you can hear it move when you lift it."

"I'll give you $100 bucks."

"I was going to give it to you for free." She steps closer and lifts her skirt in front, this time showing off no panties, a cute enough cunt smiling back at him.

"No key for that either. Get it through your head. Not interested."

"Then it's not for sale." She grew defiant and vindictive.

Nodding at her ignorance Nick stood up and took out his wallet. Plucking out a hundred dollar bill he went to the counter and found a pen, writing, "For the trunk. If you want more than this my name is Sanchez. Find me. Ask around I'm new to town." on the bill. From there he moved to the front door and reached above it where a horseshoe hung. Tucking it in he then used his cell to take a picture of it. From there he returned to the trunk and found Alexis sitting on it.

"Not for sale." She folded her arms. "Unless?" She placed her feet up on it and pulled her skirt back up to rub her clit hoping Nick would cave.

"Fine! Backroom?"

"YESSSSSS!" Alexis squealed and leaped off of the trunk and headed toward a curtained doorway. As soon as she crawled off Nick plucked up the chest and began carrying it out. Realizing his bluff she yelled, "I'll call the cops. You're stealing from us."

"Money's waiting on Al." He opened the door and carried the trunk down the street to his borrowed 4Runner. Putting it in back he saw Alexis go next door to the ice cream parlor and tell them she had a thief. The owner of the shop stepped out to get a license plate number off of the 4Runner but found Nick pulling right up to the curb beside the man.

"Relay a message to Al for me." He told the owner, "Money's above the door. You can go look for yourself." He then showed him the picture he took on his cell. Grumbling at Alexis the owner nodded for Nick to drive on. Alexis was nothing but trouble. Sadly, the parlor owner let her give him a BJ. Anything to shut that bitch up.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

"Hi Auntie."

"There's my lovely niece. How are you this fine morning?" Tilly Cooper followed by her husband Sheldon entered the diner. Hardly busy at the moment they chose their own booth in waiting for Nick Sanchez. Midnight covered Naomi and fellow waitress Caprice who were outside smoking.

"Menu's?"

"We can wait until Mister Sanchez shows up before ordering Sweetheart. He's paying anyway." Sheldon grinned at his niece by marriage. While in love with his wife even Sheldon had a roving eye. Never venturing to acknowledge a deeper fondness for Midnight he chose the better part of valor.

"I'll take ice water though." Tilly patted her niece's forearm gently. "Oh! We sold the old Harbinger Shoal's area to Mister Sanchez. 1.8 million dollars. Can you believe that? The man doesn't appear wealthy but he must be."

Midnight looked stunned but withheld speech concerning what her aunt thought of the man, "I'll grab two waters." Sheldon would get one regardless.

"So where are we vacationing after we get this bonus?" Sheldon chuckled already considering options. "I say we head to the mountains. This beach living is getting old."

"Colorado?"

"Let's do that. Horse back riding, whitewater rafting, looking for UFO's."

"None of which you will really do Dear. Let's just go somewhere and relax once I make calls for Mister Sanchez."

"Make calls? You gave him Gullivant's number, let him do the calling."

"He asked us to locate those less fortunate to assist him in rebuilding. I want to touch base with the Tribal Council and have them round up some..."

"You really think those old farts are going to help the white folk?"

"If money is involved they will. Let me at least try and see if Newton Waterfall will talk to Mister Sanchez. We both know the poverty level around here Sheldon."

"Yep! There's your millionaire." He nodded out the window to see Nick pull up in his 4Runner right on time. "Let's get paid."

"Technically we already did."

"You know what I mean."

"It's only lunch Sheldon. He paid us by just buying the place."

"You're right. I'm just jolly today."

"Aren't you always?" She rubs her belly to emphasize he could lose a few pounds.

"Hey! Pie sounds good." He wiggled his brows flirtatiously.

"I give up."

Entering the diner Nick Sanchez easily found the realtors and joined them at their booth, sitting next to the much thinner Tilly. Nodding at Sheldon was all he got.

"Deed in hand?" Tilly smiled.

"Deed's done! Thank you again Tilly. I set Lowell on a mission like I did you. I want a complete history on Harbinger Shoals, from the first boot to ever to set foot on the land to my ownership."

"Have you called Niles yet?"

"Not yet. After lunch. You two order?"

"No, we felt it respectful to wait on you."

"That's her job." Nick pointed at Midnight who was looking their way sheepishly, giving them time to talk before intervening. A point toward the floor next to their booth Nick lured the girl in. Hurrying to his side she shyly stood there until she noticed him continuing to point at the tile. With her Aunt and Uncle there a brief hesitation made her pause. Using her pen she drops it on the floor as her excuse to kneel as if picking it up but remains there as if ready to take the order.

"What can I get you?" She mumbled.

"Kneepads?" Sheldon chuckled, "You staying down there Kiddo?"

"I...like it down here."

Tilly lifted her right eyebrow and scowled at her behavior. Uncertain why she was acting this way Tilly tapped her silverware on the table top. "Where are your manners Dear?"

"She's fine!" Nick interjected, ignoring Midnight to peruse the menu. Tilly snapped a glance at Sheldon noticing his eyes lured toward her fallen niece. Being tucked against the window Tilly could only see Midnight from her shoulders up. What she was missing was Midnight's legs in her crouch, knees not on the floor but instead fanning wide, her skirt up enough in her pose to reveal no panties and a nicely groomed pussy. Sheldon was beginning to drool. It took Tilly to clear her throat before her husband would even look at his menu.

"Pork loin with carrots and baby red potatoes." Nick gave his order. "Peach pie for dessert."

"I was just thinking of pie myself." Sheldon said, again admiring Midnight's slice. It was a sweet peach. "I'll take a Lobster."

"That's too expensive Sheldon." Tilly grimaced.

"My money." Nick growled, "Live it up! I plan to." It was then he dared to peer at Midnight. Eying her feet he saw no socks. A wink at her that led to, "Stand!" Rising swiftly Midnight acted proper, Tilly noting her expression of pride.

"Aunt Tilly?" She enquired an answer on her decision of appetite.

"I'll take a Lobster too. Extra lemon on the side."

"Good choice." Nick grinned.

"Watch those pincher's." Sheldon chuckled using his fingers as if wanting to pinch her nipples but keeping it clean for Tilly. Knowing it looked obvious he moved in Tilly's direction with them as if to pinch her instead. Tilly merely swatted him with her menu.

"Drinks?" Midnight asked.

Nick took point with, "Pitcher of tea. Lemon for Tilly there."

"Trying to make my wife pucker up?" Sheldon winked at him.

"That's your job." Nick handed Midnight his menu, the others joining in passing them over. "Midnight?"

"Yes, Sir?"

"What did I tell you about calling me Sir?"

"Sorry! Yes?"

"No ice cream this time."

"Got it!"

"Not yet!" He paused her as she turned away. Returning Midnight awaited further words. "Whip cream! For Sheldon there. He wants peach pie too."

"You read my mind Buddy." Sheldon huffed.

"Easy enough."

"Is that all?" Midnight probed the table, avoiding her Aunt's scrutiny the best she could.

"For now!" Nick ignored her again. Taking her leave Midnight turned her order into the kitchen. In filling a fresh pitcher of tea her partner Caprice returned from her extended smoke break and approached her after spotting Nick.

"Who's the tattooed hottie?" The blond with tats of her own flirted verbally. Caprice Comstock alias CC was 25 years of age, and leggy as all get out. Having been a biker's ole' lady for a few years she had her share of sleeved tats herself. On her own these days she was needy in every way. Big green eyes full of intrigue matched her perky 38C breasts, a second pair of peepers bulging at Nick's physique.

"A client of my Aunt."

"Need help carrying that big ole' pitcher of tea?" Caprice smirked, "I'd be his client any day."

"He just bought Harbinger Shoals."

"Money man! Just my type." Men were her type, money an added bonus. "I got this." She takes the pitcher away from Midnight leaving the girl shocked by her sudden insistence. Following behind Caprice with a bowl of lemon wedges Midnight felt ill. Upon reaching the table Caprice bubbled up, "Here's your tea. New in town I hear." She brushed her hand against Nick's cheek without permission. Tilly frowned at the girl's overstepped actions.

Switching persona Nick smiled up at her, "Here to stay. Nice tats."

"I was about to say the same of yours. I have more." She winked.

"I bet you do."

"I bet you do too. Maybe we should show off sometime."

"Sounds like a good time." He grinned charming her with his smile.

"Midnight told me you purchased Harbinger Shoals. That's awesome. I used to party out there with my Ex and his friends."

"Really? So you're the one that painted my upstairs wallpaper."

"Not muah! The place is spooky but that's the charm of it. My Ex...Ollie told the best ghost stories about that island, if you can call it that."

"Ghost's huh?" Nick began pointing at the floor knowing Midnight stood loitering behind the girl. Seeing him she edged around Caprice and sat the bowl of lemons on the table before kneeling. Caprice in her jabbering let her eyes follow her to the floor with a puzzled look. Continuing her ramble she did her best to ignore Midnight. Tilly was growing concerned. Sheldon was growing an erection. Two for the price of one he thought of both girls.

"Yes. He's Santee Nation like Mrs. Cooper there. Midnight...down there." She wavered slightly as Nick returned his interest toward Caprice. "Ollie mentioned the island was a frequent hideaway for a pirate known as Captain Spry."

"Thought you were gonna say Sparrow." Sheldon laughed, "But, hey I don't know Jack."

"That's cute." Caprice winked, "I think the full name was Abraham Spry. There's also the story of a Santee warrior that was banished to the Shoal's."

"I've heard that story." Tilly grew invested suddenly, "Nawtahnwi! My Great grandfather told us the story of how he was banished for practicing dark arts, that he had learned from a so-called Spanish Druid. Celtic that is, but from Spain in the 1700's. I doubt that to be true, from what I understand Druid's were non existent in the 1700's. If he was, my guess is he was only referring to himself as one."

"I heard he could turn things into gold. That's why Captain Spry frequented the area, looking for gold."

"A fool's errand, Sweetie." Tilly shook her head, "For God's sake Midnight! Why are you on your knees?"

"I...am listening."

"Get up please." Tilly recommended, "I'm certain you're making Mister Sanchez uncomfortable."

"Not bothering me any. Stay put." He winked at Caprice, not Midnight.

"Well it bothers me. Get up Midnight." Tilly growled. Nick sighed and motioned the girl to her feet.

"I'm Caprice by the way." She offered Nick a hand to shake but he ignored it. Nick shocked her, instead of offering his name he insisted upon another.

"Sir!"

"Hello...Sir." She flirted shamelessly, Midnight confused as to why Caprice could call him Sir and she could not. Regardless Midnight stood up and hovered close.

"Free after your shift?" Nick asked Caprice.

"I am...nothing to tie me down."

"That might change." He winked.

"Oh, really?"

"I think I'm losing my appetite." Tilly sighed.

"We'll talk later." Nick motioned Caprice away with a nod.

"I'm off at 6:00."

"I'll be by then to pick you up."

"I'll need to change at home."

"Don't bother. You can shower at my place. Clothing is overrated." He knew Midnight was a sponge.

"I like your style...Sir."

"We'll see." He waved her away. Taking the hint Caprice went back toward the front counter to brag to Naomi about her date. Naomi instantly looked at Midnight, the girl was smiling. In her thoughts Naomi sighed not understanding why when she knew Midnight liked him herself, her thought on it was easy, "I'm lost."

Lunch was delivered five minutes later by Midnight who left them alone and went on about her job until they had finished their main course. Knowing dessert imminent she cleared their plates and told them, "I'll bring your pie."

Belching Sheldon rubbed his paunch and admired her wiggle. "Gotta say Sanchez, you have a way about you."

"Is that what we're calling it?" Tilly dabbed the corners of her mouth with a napkin.

"Blending in to Caretaker...my way." Nick grinned.

"Caprice is a wild one." Tilly sighed. "Her man Oliver Heavy Feather...Ollie has a nasty rep on the Rez. Biker, bar room brawler, sells drugs I hear. At least she got away from him I'll give her that."

"Don't care." He reached into his wallet and passed Tilly another hand signed check. Taking it she opened its fold to see the amount then closed it, putting it in her bra for safe keeping. Puckering toward Sheldon she sighs, "Your life Mister Sanchez."

"Exactly!"

"She likes it when I go after those checks." Sheldon like earlier used his fingers as if pinchers, but only with a W.C. Field's style flutter to them, Tilly held her palm over her chest preventing his thievery. "Backing it up." He withdrew chuckling.

"Dessert?" Midnight returned with their peach pie slices smothered in whip crème. By the way she approached them, almost as if a pregnant woman carrying a blissful burden Nick had a hunch she caught on to his hint well. After resting the plates on the table Midnight kneels on her own and spreads her knees wide enabling Nick to look up her skirt. Sure enough Midnight had whip cream smeared all over her pussy. Sheldon sensing something looks over the edge of the table as if she might have dropped something. Spying her creamy goodness he flared his eyes just enough to make Tilly question why. Unable to witness it herself being trapped by her build and Nick's body she just rolled her eyes.

"That's what's needed." Nick held up a kept bread knife implying that she required shaving crème to shave herself properly. Midnight understood and waited on Nick to motion her to her feet.

"Pie looks delicious." Sheldon winked at Midnight who seemed to be relaxed even though she knew her Uncle had seen her private parts. Nodding at her to leave Midnight returned to the register to print out their check. Head waitress Naomi moving next to Midnight winces then dares to lift the girls skirt while nobody was there to see her. Finding whip cream drying over her thighs Naomi shook her head and dropped the skirt.

"I don't want to know."

"You looked. You must." Midnight slyly grins.

"You stress me out Critter."

Finishing their meal Nick watches Caprice at one of her own tables, a pair of young women giggling as Caprice compliments one on the scent of her perfume. Showing the waitress the tiny bottle and it's brand Caprice took their order and made her way back to the kitchen.

"We should be going. Our office is closed while we sit here lollygagging." Tilly admitted toward her husband.

"We made enough to enjoy a day off." Sheldon shrugged, until he noted his wife's glare, "But, yeah you're right. Never know when a perspective buyer might stroll in...like Mister Sanchez here." He scoots out of their booth and stands up to stretch, Nick joining him to allow Tilly access to get up. "Give us a call if you need anything else."

"I'll do that." He nods at Sheldon then at Tilly once she straightened out her dress from being wrinkled so long. "Get back with me on those workers. I'll call this Niles guy here in a bit. Think I'll set here and let my meal...digest."

"Enjoy your new home Mister Sanchez." Tilly smiled and snapped a glance at Midnight bringing their check to Nick. A thin smile led Midnight to hug her Aunt. Sighing Tilly patted her niece's back and whispered. "I hope you know what you're doing." Midnight did not reply but when their hug parted she did share an unblinking moment with Tilly. Nodding Matilda Cooper let it go. "Coming Sheldon?"

"You know I am." He winked at Midnight, then followed his wife out the door.

Nick returned to his seat and accepted his check, clearing his throat to get her full attention he asked, "Want your socks back?"

"No."

"Good answer. If you had said yes I would have walked away. Ready to earn your tip?"

"Yes."

He reached behind him for his wallet then drew out a hundred dollar bill. "You can have this...or...you can buy something for me."

"Buy what?"

"See that table over there?"

"The two women?"

"That's the one. Take this money and go to the woman with her back to us, tell her you want to buy her perfume. Bring it back to me."

"For a hundred dollars?"

"Need change?"

"Very much." She smiled.

"Monetary?"

"No."

"Another good answer."

"If she says no?"

"Then, I'll have Caprice bring her another hundred."

Haunted by his droll gaze she took the money without further questions and stepped across the diner to approach the women. While she did Nick ignored them and reached again into his wallet, this time bringing out three tightly folded pieces of drawing paper, sprawling them out on his table face down as if playing a card game. From there he opted to explore Midnight's attempt.

He noticed the woman eying the hundred dollar bill but hesitantly. Sensing failure Midnight reached into her apron and produced her own tip money from the day, adding another twenty to Nick's cash. Biting, the woman dug into her purse and handed Midnight the bottle, accepting the money.

Thinking Midnight crazy the girls laughed, watching the waitress return to Nick, just as Caprice carried out their food and wondered why Midnight was bothering her table. In passing off plates the women told Caprice what Midnight had done. Caprice winced as if threatened by it. At Nick's table Midnight sat the perfume bottle on his tabletop, noting the pieces of paper.

"Very good. Choose one of the three pieces of paper, then hand it to me." Honoring his wishes she plucked up the one in the center and didn't look at it, merely passing it to him. Unfolding it Nick looked at the drawing on it. "Oh, that's a good pose." Pocketing it in his pants he then returned the other two to his wallet. Taking out three hundred dollar bills he slid them toward her with the check.

Standing up in front of her he said, "The most precious treasure is what one gives up in favor of another." Taking the perfume he leaves her with the money and walks over to Caprice. Handing the blond the perfume he told her to wear it when he picks her up at 6:00. Midnight observed until he stepped over to Naomi telling her something. Midnight was curious but afraid to pry once he left the diner. Naomi stood in awe of whatever he said but remained quiet. As Midnight rang up the check and made change leaving her with $210 as a tip she handed Naomi half of it, the other went to Caprice. Midnight did not accept the tip.

Clearing her table Midnight noticed Nick Sanchez go to his 4Runner and bring out a trunk, carrying it to the front of the diner. Resting it beneath the window in front of Midnight, and his table, he showed her a key, having replaced the old lock. The key was on a thin chain. From his pocket he shared Military dog tags to show her that was where the chain came from. Putting the tags back in his pocket he left the key on the exterior window ledge. Once he did he turned his back to her and walked away. Midnight got goosebumps. Curiosity was driving her crazy. Watching Nick drive away she was frozen in time.

"Go look." Naomi approached her from behind, she knew it was going to happen. "I'll keep Caprice busy." Smiling at her sheepishly Midnight stepped outside and stared down at the old trunk. Eyes raising to the key she snatched it up and then knelt to unlock the trunk. Opening it to a disturbing creak she found another folded piece of paper. Reaching in for it a chill overtook her and she paused to rub her arms, looking around for anyone watching her. There was no one.

Temptation forced her to pick out the paper and unfold it. Reading it carefully it said, "Leave a piece of treasure each day until it is full. By giving up everything you keep my notice. To be nothing, you must own nothing. To be mine...you must...dig deep. Unlock your soul."

Staring at the note then the trunk she closed the letter back inside and locked it up. The key went around her neck.

The chain would get shorter each day.

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