

# The Dawning Ore

By

Ion Light

EHP: Experimental Home Publishing

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This book is also available for free at 'free-ebooks.net,' as well as others by the author. You may find books by him under the name John Erik Ege, and books by his Tulpa, Loxy Isadora Bliss. This book is a sequel to 'Under a Starless Sky,' but can be read independently.

WARNING: This book is intended for a mature audience. Due to violence and sexual themes, some persons, especially those suffering from PTSD or childhood trauma, could possibly experience unpleasant feelings or flashbacks. If you're a person who has abducted by UFOs, suffering from DID, or possessed, be forewarned: you could be unintentionally triggered.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. (I would like to say 'duh,' but apparently, there were actually people who believed the Castaways of Gilligan's Island were actually stranded! No joke. There were people writing the US Navy asking them to please stop spending money on warfare and rescue those poor people before they starved. Tim Allen's movie 'Galaxy Quest' made reference to it, but I thought it was a joke till I saw a documentary on Gilligan's Island. Of course, it probably doesn't help that there is a stature in Iowa place marking the birth place of Captain Kirk. Oh, how reality and fiction love to mix. (And yes, I watched Gilligan's Island. And if you have to know: Mary Ann, no contest.)

Some people have noted there is element of therapy to much of my writing. You would not be mistaken.

All of my work, for me, has been a journey in healing. Welcome to my world of narrative therapy.

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## Chapter 1

The city of Overlay was a square city in the middle of a circular fresh water lake- Ishara. It was a modern city that had an ancient feel, hosting a steady population of three hundred thousand people. The bulk of the city rested in the Southern portion of a lake. There were habitable islands in the Northern part of the lake, where most of the wealthier people lived. Northern Ishara had the unique feature of being cradled by a quarter moon shaped mountain range, the Goddess' Tiara.

The prominent artifact of Overlay was the flat top pyramid dead center of Southern Ishara, where the elite and gods looked down upon the people. Aztec, Buddhist, Egyptian, and Venetian attributes suggesting a collision of art and architecture that would make an origin anthropologist give up their religion. Much of the pedestrian traffic and movement of commodities to and from Overlay was by canal. There were solid roads, bridges of part earth that ran East to West, and North to South. The North road led to an island in Northern Ishara and from there one would take a boat to the appropriate island of choice. South, East and West roads led out over Ishara where the outer satellite cities filtered traffic and exchange. A bridge connected to sides of the Tiara to Overlay, and an Impossible Bridge went across the south connected the tips of the crescent island. The Impossible Bridge was a garden park. Two living trees rose from the water and towered above the bridges, offering their support to the bridge. The canopy of the trees intermingled with clouds. By road, it was faster to cross the East West Passage than to go around the lake, except for all the tolls and harassment that slowed human progress. Beyond the city was a mixture of wild and cultivated forests. As world law had it, all trees lining roads connecting cities were fruit or nut bearing trees. The walking man was not likely to starve. The world was a paradise for squirrels.

Ishara was closed to foreigners. To become a citizen, one had to live in an outer settlement and through documented and established history as a person of good repute for one year before one could apply to go in. To even get to an outer settlement, one had to live with the Far Elders for six months. The tribe of elders occupied the outer most circle of the city, the last boundary of what constituted the city. The Elders were the preferred ambassadors to the remote, neighboring cities and villages. Every city had a buffer of Elders. Strangers tarried and mingled with the elders, and after six months if the Elders so approved, the stranger could pass to the next

station. Strangers at the periphery of Overlay were subjected to daily examinations, harassment, coerced sex, the loss of personal property which may or not get returned, and barrage of repetitious stories from Elder that adopted or hosted you for six months. If you were not adopted, you paid the host. You could be adopted and still end up paying the host. The lay people had forgotten the origin of the custom. No one wanting to become a resident of Overlay questioned the custom. The Elders were not abandoned to the outskirts of society- this was their retirement package; in truth it afforded them a bit more leisure and freedom than the folks inside the city were privilege to. A few of the Elite remembered the reasons- this was disease control. Healthy people could be carriers, and a city could be devastated in no time at all. If a stranger made it six months without killing off the Elders, they were allowed passage into the next social tier. If after a year, they were still relatively healthy, and demonstrated a useful art or skill, they could be passed on the next tier.

No modern city relied on tourist for income. Travel and exploration was highly discouraged in the folklore. Most cities had a minimum standard of self-sufficiency. Work and leisure were well balanced, and most people could weather a storm or siege for six months without too much discomfort. At Overlay, one of the barometers for whether or not they were living in accordance to Ishara's will was the visibility of the water in the canals. On the second day of not being able to see the bottom of specific streets, if the fish withdrew to the outer lakes, a period of rest was called for. Rest meant people stayed home. They stayed at home until the canals were liquid-crystal clear and the fish once again returned to the steps of Overlay. If you could see a fish and the fish could see it's shadow, things were good.

There were bazars, and entertainment, and places to eat for the citizens. There were places to live around the city, some on solid earth, tiny islands that orbited the stepped pyramid. Many floating homes, with netted trap doors that kept farmed carps. There were occasional flash floods that cleaned the city and killed folks, but life continued on. It was pleasant for many. Not for all.

Kea wanted out. Getting out of a city was almost as difficult as getting in, more so for women than men. Men could be travelers, it was even expected of them, but women were considered the settlers and land owners. Kea owned no property. She had had many trades. She grounded corn into meal. She washed clothes. She had catered to several wealthy families, which typically meant cleaning. She had experience cleaning the giant aquarium, caring for the farmed

species; as a mermaid she had earned some notoriety. Her most lucrative venture was being the paramour for the Prince. Paramours were esteemed. Marriages were mostly for the elite. Only women held property. A husband was property, by definition; property in this sense being the equivalent of a pet or a farm animal and though some women wanted to show their husband the way dog breeders showed their dogs, most wives didn't want to be obligated to appease a spouse by design, to groom and dress them proper, and so a Paramour was brought in to do these things and more. In Kea's case, she was paid handsomely to tolerate the affections of the prince. He was not a nice man. She didn't mind his weight, but he was offensive, and resistant to being instructed to clean. His teeth reflected his taste for sweets, and in rare moment of compassion directed towards him she would entertain the idea he was not nice because he was in pain.

Kea gave birth to a child. This child had the misfortune of being born female to a landless Paramour. She was marked with a tattoo making her ineligible for life from any potential property rights, from either the Prince's wife, or his parents. Still, they had a pretty good life together, in a tiny hut that was on Northern Island that faced the highest peak of the Tiara's Crescent range. It was when the Prince started fondling the daughter that she decided she would have to leave.

Kea knew the Prince well enough that she could reasonably predict outcomes. There were times he was in a mood, and he would simply come in and pump her and be gone. The quicker she got him off, the quicker he was gone and she could go about her day. There were the days that he lingered. Usually by the second cumming he had had his fill of her would find excuse to leave. As if he needed the excuse. She allowed him to believe the arrangement was more than trade- but wondered if he truly understood the arrangement. The long days were when he wanted four or more session. First one was always quick. The second one was hard earned and a labor on his part as he would grope her, grind on her, and lick on her till he was up to full performance mode. The third one was a labor on her part, as she was expected to engage him in a manner that shortened his refractory period. Sometimes, he responded to particular techniques. On the times he didn't, he would blame her. Sometimes accusations of not trying hard enough resulted in injury. She was sporting evidence of this when she finalized the deal for departure.

"I can't get you out of the North, but if you make it to the West Passage, I will get you and your daughter out. Once in my care, you will commit to the path, or die," the man said. He had the mark of a soldier, but dressed as a civilian.

“Just tell me where to be, and we will be there,” Kea said.

So, the arrangements were made. On the expected day, the Prince was in one of his lingering moods. She encouraged him to leave sooner than not by giving him such high affections that he actually believed he had been missed during their time apart. ‘Nothing runs a man off faster than genuine affection,’ she mused as she quickly gathered her daughter and what amounted to a shopping purse. She was allowed passage by boat to North passage. She and her daughter walked the edge of the Bridge, hand in hand. They passed under the shadow of Over Bridge, which felt magically placed in the air, vines hanging from the sides. They came to a gate and were passed through to a bazar that ran the rest of the length of the bridge. They catered to the high end. A passerby remarked on the daughters tattoo on the forearm and lamented, ‘life isn’t fair.’ She found the shop and per her instructions made a purchase. She bought a wooden, flat top pyramid coin display. One gold coin would lay on the top, and all the sides the pyramid held coins in a vertical position. The pyramid was capable of spinning so one could examine all the coins from either side without having to take it up in hand. The pyramid pedestal was heavy as fuck.

“You collect?” the woman asked.

“I know someone fond of coins, I thought it would be a nice gift,” Kea said.

“You should buy a mint. I have several here,” the woman recommended. “Unless you want me to make one special- your own coin perhaps? Anyone worth know has their own mint.”

Kea pointed to the coin with a soldier symbol. The coin next to it was identical, revealing the flip side- a bow and arrow that hinted at a heart.

“The Heartland’s Protector,” the woman said. “I can’t guarantee its value. Right now the militia is esteemed, so it’s quite valuable. Fifty two gold.”

“Forty gold,” Kea said.

“This is not a haggle. A percentage of the sell goes to the militia funds,” the woman said.

“I was told...”

“That was earlier,” the woman said. “Now, it’s fifty two.”

“I...”

“Can eat apples on the road for all I care. If you find one with a worm, you even get protein,” the woman said.

Kea produced fifty two gold coins. The woman measured the contents of her purse. She also noted the backpack she carried, and the miniature pack the daughter carried.

“You should tip me,” the woman said.

“Twelve extra isn’t the tip of the crop?” Kea asked.

The woman put a hand out. Kea grudgingly put a gold coin in it. It went away with the second coin. The coin and the display case for coins were wrapped and handed over. Kea put it in her pack.

The soldier came forwards. “I couldn’t help but notice you supported the Militia. Would you allow me to buy you and your daughter a meal, as an expression of my gratitude?”

“It isn’t necessary...”

“I am a Gate Captain, and can afford this minimum charity. Please, allow me this kindness,” he said.

“Thank you, Captain,” Kea said. “We accept.”

Kea, daughter Tay, and the Captain walked from North Gate to West Gate. They shared a meal while traffic came and went. Outer gate drivers remained on the outer gates, and inner gate drivers remained on the inner gates, and commodities were exchanged through official vendors and transporters. Carriages were disconnected from horse, or horse teams, and then passed over the receiving horse or horse team. There was a ton of paperwork. If there were bribery happening at this gate, it did not happen while Kea and Tay were guest. At a certain point they were asked to come see something. Another man was there, an assumed traveler based on his loose clothing and side bag. A tarp was pulled back to reveal the content of free lavender. The purple flower had been cut, bundled, and tied with stems. Kea and Tay were instructed to lay in it. The stranger also climbed in it. Kea put Tay on the far side of her.

“You will remain concealed until three wraps are made on the right side of the wagon. If you need to urinate, just pee and lay in it. It will be dark when you’re allowed out. At that time, you will be able to go your way unimpeded. I recommend westwards. You will not speak or make sounds. If you do, you will all die, and likely be the cause of death of my traveling merchant,” the Captain said. He pulled the tarp tight and shut. He called out and the wagon proceeded west.

निर्मित

The stranger's hands found their way to Kea. She blocked. A warm whisper in her ear informed her she would consent, or he would kill her and use the daughter for relief. She didn't protest further. He turned her on her side, and spoon fucked her. She told her daughter to close her eyes and sleep, it would be a long day. A little later, the man climbed on top of her. She made sure his hands stayed on her, not her daughter. She accepted the assault without noise. She suffered the pain of unwelcomed entry with silent tears. She tolerated three more attacks before night came. One of those attacks came even as the wagon was stopped at a militia check point. There was enough light speckled into their artificial cave she could see his eyes and his stupid smile. A pinprick of light became a beam due to eyes filled with tears. She wanted to scream out and let that be the end of him. It would likely result in her death, her daughter's death, but maybe they would believe she was being kidnapped- the man would die, the driver would die, she would be returned to a life she no longer wanted... She gave the robber nothing. No smile, no sympathetic motion, not even evidence of being present. He simply gratified himself with a corpse. He departed the wagon while in motion. She was relieved he was gone until she realized he had also taken her bag, what was left of her coin, and the mint and display case. She did not sleep. The wagon came to a halt and the signal wrap was given. She emerged from the wagon, her daughter in tow. Her daughter still had her bag. There was lavender petals in her hair. Kea helped her down.

"There was a man," the merchant said.

"He departed before signaled," Kea said.

The merchant cursed and looked about himself. "How long ago?"

Kea didn't answer.

The merchant grabbed her arm. "How long ago?"

"I don't know!" she said.

"Fuck! Why didn't you say something?"

"I was told to be silent," Kea said.

The merchant secured the tarp and headed back to the front. There was enough moon light to see the edges of the road. It helped that glowworms also sparked the trees along the road.

"Wait. Please. He robbed me," Kea said.

"Welcome to the real world, princess," the merchant said.

"Wait. What?" She followed him to the front.

“You had a plan, stick to the plan,” the merchant said. He took out a pack and handed it to her. “Compliments of the Captain. There’s food enough in the wild if you’re smart about it. I’d stay off this road, though, if I were you.”

निर्मित

Rumors of walking bears had wanted to keep her on the road. She and Tay went south. The moon was full. Tay asked questions. Would they be home soon? No. Complaint: I want to sleep in my bed. We’re not ever going to that home again. Silence. “So, who will sleep in my bed?”

Kea stopped walking. She went to her knees first, then prostrate, and cried into the grass.

Tay touched her shoulder. “Don’t cry, K’Ma. We’ll be alright.”

Kea forced herself up. She undid her daughters pack and rolled out a blanket. She and Tay lay on it; mostly Tay. They lay close and looked up at the stars and the moon.

“Tell me about the beginning,” Tay asked.

“In the beginning, there were no stars. There was no moon. And the first people knew how to see in the dark. They could see with their hearts,” Kea said. “There were no lies, because the heart knows all. There was no theft, because the heart has everything. People lived in a state of bliss before the fall.”

“If everything was perfect, why did we fall?”

Kea didn’t have an answer.

“Will we ever be right again? With the gods and each other?”

“Some say there must be a total of seven falls before we accept the rightness of the recommended path,” Kea said. The words in her head were scripture; ‘Every fall is a step up if taken.’

“Recommended is a funny word,” Tay said.

“You’re a funny child,” Kea said.

“Think about it. Recommended means choice. If we called it the true path or the right path, people might be more inclined to walk correctly,” Kea said.

“The Sisters teach free will. Some people learn vicariously. Some people are blessed with just a knowing. Some of us, myself included, are stubborn and stupid and must learn through doing,” Kea said. “When we have learned what we need to learn, there will be consensus, and once more there will be blissful communion of heart.”

“What if there are people that don’t want to learn?” Tay asked.

“Then we don’t advance,” Kea said.

“What if one person doesn’t want to learn?” Tay asked.

“Then we don’t advance,” Kea said.

“That’s not fair,” Tay said.

“We rise together, we fall together. We are on the boat together,” Kea said.

“But,” Tay began.

“Enough. Sleep.”

“I would sleep better in my bed,” Tay said.

Tay pointed at a moving light in the sky. It was the third brightest object in the sky, tracking sun, moon, and this. “Look, it’s the Emissary.” Emissary was small, fast moving moon that tracked across the sky and would be gone soon going from west to east. It would orbit three times in a day. “She’s really bright tonight.”

Kea made a prayer for their wellbeing and asked the Emissary to deliver it, if it was so convenient.

“Did we do something wrong?” Tay asked.

“No, we have done nothing wrong.”

“Then why was there a fall?” Tay asked again.

Kea realized she had misunderstood the question and in light of this tangent she began answering before she knew the better of it. “Falls are inevitable. Change is inevitable,” Kea heard herself saying. She decided to make the best of it and didn’t retract. “We simply get up and continue to do the best we can.”

“I hope the girl who gets my bed is nice.”

“Or boy. Maybe it will be a boy.”

“Boys are mean.”

“They are different.”

“I don’t like them.”

Kea didn’t say anything.

“Do you like them?”

“If you’re lucky, you will know some boys who become men.”

“Do you like men?”

“I have liked a few.”

“Do you love men?”

“I have loved fewer than I liked,” Kea said.

“The Sisters say we are to love everyone.”

“Yeah,” Kea said. “Sleep.”

Tay screamed, going to her feet in nothing flat. Kea was up, checking her. A frog stood prominent on the blanket, moonlight on the blanket, dark frog shape in the center. Eye whites reflected moon.

“I want to go home now!” Tay said.

“It’s a frog. It’s a good omen. It will protect us from bugs.”

“I want my own bed.”

The frog was moved off the blanket and Tay was made to lay down. They eventually slept; staggered. Kea woke every time her daughter shifted, spied the world through weary eyes. In her sleepy haze, the glow worms blended in so well with the starry night she thought the trees had vanished.

## Chapter 2

The moon shone over the lake, giving it a tight silver sheen. Two of Mother's Arms were draped lazily across the horizon. Mother, The Sleeping Spider, the bottom of a spiral galaxy, was the most sacred artifact of the sky. The Shiny Jeweled center piece was sometimes even visible during the day. There were the Solar Legends, the stories that came after the Fall, the time before any stars; all shared a version of the story that the stars were given so people could find their way back from the dark. Just as they all shared a Great Flood story, they also shared the Gifted Stars story. And then there was the Mundane Theory: they lived on a planet that orbited a simple star that orbited a galaxy in an atypical orbit. There was a neighboring galaxy that had a halo, a stream of stars, going around it like a ribbon wound the wrong way over a spool. They were this, minus the stream. Maybe they were first to be streamed? Maybe they were first to be cast off from the Great Mother? Maybe they were fly about to get caught in the web? Maybe they were a glow worm that had gained its wings and was departing? Maybe they were a seedling star? Maybe they were rejected because they had so many falls from grace, cut loose like an unwanted meal... These were the things Kelly pondered while fishing at night.

Brothers Kelly, Mino, and Lint sat with bamboo poles fishing together. Mino and Lint were not fond of fishing, but they had been threatened with hunger if they didn't participate. Behind them was the forest. Lint, the youngest, kept looking back at the forest for threats. There was smattering of glow worms in the tree; spider like creatures that spun webs, ate their fill of flying insects, only to one day cocoon themselves, metamorphose, and then, too, become flying insects. Kelly considered the metaphor of the great mother and glow worms again, wondering if people were prey, or glow worms struggling to wings. If the first, they were still in the era of the Great Fall- falling to their deaths because the mother had rejected them. Rock bottom was a liquid pool of stars where all was consumed by fire and light.

“What if a Walking Bear comes?”

“They don't exist,” Kelly said.

“They're in the book.”

“There are lots of books,” Kelly said. “We've read books without Walking Bears. There are more books without Walking Bears than there are books with Walking Bears, therefore, there are no Walking Bears.”

Mino looked at the elder. "That doesn't follow."

"There are no Walking Bears in our family book," Kelly said.

"Clearly there are Walking Bears in our family book, or we wouldn't be able to discuss them," Mino said.

"The longer you guys talk, the longer we will be out here," Kelly said. "Be quiet and catch fish. Stop looking at the forest, Lint. Focus."

"I don't see how talking will impede catching..."

"They hear you. They feel you. Sound travels through the pole, into the water through the string," Kelly said. "They sense your fear, your hunger, your thoughts. Still your thoughts. Allow this moment to be."

"Father said we shouldn't be out after dark while he is away," Lint said.

"The best catch is at night, in this full moon," Kelly said. He observed the Emissary coming into light. "Look, there's the truth of it."

Mino displayed skeptical anger. "Emissary is a clock. You can't just speak something and say it is truth because a clock ticks forwards."

"Did you complete school?" Kelly asked.

"No, and neither did you," Mino said.

"I went further than you," Kelly said.

"Further into stupid?" Mino asked.

Lint tapped his brother's arm.

"What?" Mino asked, aggravated.

"Is that a ghost?"

Mino looked against his want and paused. He saw something, but couldn't make it out. He sat down his pole, stood and faced the thing.

"If you two don't pay attention and catch, I swear you will go without meat tomorrow," Kelly said.

Mino and Lint were transfixed, trying to figure it out. Kelly finally gave it enough attention that he put down his pole in frustration and got up.

"It's just a broken tree," Kelly said; he found himself unable to look away.

"I don't remember a broken tree there before," Mino said.

“Because you’re not as observant as I,” Kelly said. “The moon and Mother’s Arms are playing tricks on us.”

“Maybe it’s a tree ghost?” Lint said.

“It’s not a ghost,” Kelly said.

To prove it, he advanced on what he perceived to be a human sized tree stump. His greatest fear would be a raccoon would leap out. The closer he got, the slower he got. He became uncertain. He became angry in his uncertainty and his resolve to push through moved him forwards. When the perceived tree limbs moved as if to reach out to catch him, Kelly fell backwards, his breath taken. As he was falling, he was reprimanding himself- branches moving in the wind; another part didn’t believe that for a moment. What had appeared as a broken tree transfigured into a cloaked, silhouette of a human. Kelly scrambled backwards on his butt to get out of reach, without averting his gaze, still transfixed in disbelief. Kelly didn’t see his brothers flee. They moved so fast, it was likely no one saw them run away. Kelly could only see this thing advancing on him. Its shadowy form became less of an old beaten, bedraggled tree, and more human.

Kelly’s hand serendipitously fell upon a stick. He grasped it unconsciously and raised it in defense, pointing it at the ghost. The ghost ceased its advanced. It unfurled a hood and revealed a face that was human enough. The ears and long hair suggested elf. The smile that exposed teeth suggested vampire. The teeth in this moonlight seemed to be self-illuminated.

“Identify yourself,” Kelly said.

“You think that stick will save you?” it said.

Kelly shrugged. The creature was not advancing. Proof enough for now.

“What do you want?” Kelly asked.

“What do you think I want?” it said.

“You will answer my questions or depart this place forever,” Kelly said.

It laughed. “Do you think this is a child’s story? Do you really suppose creatures of the night are so rule bound they will respond to your expectations? Still, I like you. Such boldness should be rewarded,” it said. “My name is Dell. Prey, come closer.”

“No,” Kelly said.

“What is your name, Prey,” Dell asked.

Kelly struggled, wanting to keep it a secret. He found himself speaking his name. “Kelly.” He found himself lowering the stick.

“Isn’t that a girl’s name?” Dell asked, coming forwards.

Anger. The stick came up, pointing. Dell stopped his advanced. He offered a palms up gesture that suggested harmless, innocence.

“This is going to happen, my lovely new friend,” Dell said. “There is no malice. I am patient.”

“What is your intent?!” Kelly asked.

“What was your intent with the pole on the lake?” Dell asked. “I am a fisher of men. I have you. I am patient. Relax. Allow it to be.”

The stick was becoming heavy, sinking. Dell took another step forwards. Kelly brought the stick back up.

“It won’t help you,” Dell said. “Your life’s blood is mine. The fish will dine on your corpse, and your spirit will return to the forest from which it came. That is a good thing. You will have a chance to be born again, or cease the endless toiling that humans are so hell bent to engage in.”

“I demand you leave this area and not return,” Kelly said.

Dell blinked at him, appealingly. “I could make your end really pleasant for you.” He transfigured into a female form. Accent and personality changed. It was bubbly and fun and sparkly, like some of the comics Kelly had read. “Hello, I am Della. Do you come here often?”

Kelly became aware of the stick trembling. He was confused until he realized his hand was trembling. He became very aware of being aroused. He had been aroused from the beginning of the encounter, but now, the evidence was painful.

“You want me,” Della said, she shifted her hips by alternating knee flexes.

“Go away,” Kelly said.

“Or what? You’ll slay me? I will allow you to penetrate me with your wood, if you would,” Della said.

Della unzipped her jacket revealing cleavage. It was as if undoing her jacket had allowed more of her to manifest. Her clothing tightened against her, accentuating hips and breast, as if her clothing were also a living thing, hugging her. Her inner shirt shrank, allowing her navel to be visible. Her skin shone with a reflected gleam of sunlight, as if she were freshly oiled. Her

breasts grew. She pushed them together, accentuating the line, drawing his eyes towards cleavage. She was able to take two steps forwards. Kelly reinforced his gesture, pointing the stick at her- locking eyes on her eyes. If he knew anything about fencing, he would have turned his side to her as well, but he stood there, awkwardly, holding a stick at a phantom.

“I love a boy and his wood,” Della said. “I should have led with this form. You like red heads.” Her eyes flashed orange; she shook her head and launched a wave of silky, shoulder length hair- as straight as hard spaghetti. “Look into my eyes. Trace the constellation of freckles. You want to kiss me.”

“No!” Kelly said.

She was able to inch forwards. “Lying gives me measure.”

“Yes,” Kelly said. “Fuck! You will cease your attack and leave me alone.”

“I cannot,” Della said. “I am fixated. In my desire to possess you, I have become possessed. I promise, your first time will be everything you imagined.”

“The first time will be my last time,” Kelly said.

She mused, nodding her head in agreement. “There is that. Can you think of a better way to die?”

“No more talk. Leave,” Kelly said.

“I will outlast you,” Della assured him. “This is inevitable. Come, allow me to ease your pain.”

“I have you figured out. You must do as I say,” Kelly said.

“Oh, I like this game,” Della said. “What have you figured out?”

“As long as I hold my ground, you are trapped,” Kelly said.

“Interesting premise. Or maybe I am just waiting you out,” Della said. “Both of your woods are getting heavy. Even now, you can’t hold the one in your hand. I would cradle the other for you.”

“You will cease with the innuendoes,” Kelly said.

“Okay. I want to fuck you, Kelly,” Della said. “I want my mouth on yours. I want...”

“Fuck you!” Kelly said.

“You want me to masturbate in front of you first?” Della asked.

“You’re trapped and desperate,” Kelly said. “Grant me three wishes and I will let you depart with your life.”

“I am not a Jinn!” Della said. She pouted, hands on her hip. “How dare you?!”

“Ah, you can be angered,” Kelly said.

She relaxed, chuckling. “Submit, and I promise not to eat your brothers,” Della said.

“You can have them,” Kelly offered.

Della was surprised. She couldn't inch forwards. She tested, but got no ground.

“Interesting,” she mused. “Either you don't care about them, or you realize if I wanted them you couldn't stop me, and like any proper fish, it is upon the fish to avoid the hook...”

“I don't think you can find them or trace them. I think this is random. I think the goddess will protect them or the village and, well, what are the odds of a person encountering two ghosts in a lifetime, much less the same ghost. Go fetch them if you like, but you will leave this area,” Kelly said.

Della sucked on her thumb, clicking her nail against an upper tooth.

“I am fixated on you. There is nowhere you can go that I can't go. There is nowhere you have been that I can't revisit,” Della said. “Preserve your brothers, your father's lineage, by submitting to me.”

“Or never going home,” Kelly offered.

There was a hint of something in her face. Were they playing poker? Had she just revealed a truth to him? Was she young? What was he forgetting? How was it that all of his childhood stories and myth were suddenly lost to him the moment he needed those lessons most?

“You will not last the night,” Della promised. “I am patient. Still, there will be penalty. I will find your brothers.”

“You will not survive the dawn,” Kelly said.

“You will not make it to the dawn,” Della said.

“I will survive this trap. Can you survive the light of day?” Kelly asked.

“Oh, I love you. I have not met a man who can hold a wood without eventually submitting,” Della said. “How long can you keep it up?”

“The rest of my life,” Kelly said.

“Agreed,” Della said.

“Or until sunrise where I watch you whither,” Kelly said.

They stood there, quietly appraising each other. She smiled broadly at him. She pulled up her trousers and they magically became a skirt. Her legs shined in this light, like the rest of her.

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