



**DINAH**

**AND**

**DIANA**

**A NOVELLA**

**BY**

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# Chapter One

“Hello, Dinah.”

“Hello, Diana.”

“I was wondering if you could help me out with an issue I’ve been dealing with.”

“How can I help you?”

“I have recently come to the realization that I might be a bit of a . . . a snob.”

Dinah’s laugh was a boom that shook the rafters.

“Really, Dinah?”

“No, it’s just—I’m sorry. That was the funniest thing I’ve heard in a long time, so thank you for that. But no, I did not mean to make light of your issue, but, really, you’re just coming to that realization?”

“You are acting as if this should not be an issue of concern.”

“Well it’s just, we know that you’re a snob, Diana. You’re a big fat elitist corporate snob, but that’s why we love you, honey.”

“I don’t see how I’m corporate—“

“Okay, maybe that’s Oliver coming out in me, but, no I don’t see what’s your issue.”

“Well, I don’t want to be seen that way. It doesn’t correspond to my values. I love people, *all* people, I would never want anyone to think I valued someone’s life over another because of their station—“

Another tremulous snicker.

“What?!”

“Nothing. You just still use words like *station*. Listen, why would you come to me on this?”

“Because you have a touchable, feel-able, gritty . . . earthy quality. There’s a common element about you.”

“Damn. You probably don’t mean that the way it sounds.”

"I don't mean it in a bad way, it's just—"

"I know. I love you, Diana."

"And I love you too, Dinah. And I admire the way you conduct yourself in this world. I want to understand it better. I feel that I am alienating people in my life that I do not wish to alienate. Will you help me?"

"I will, my sister-at-arms. So, are you ready?"

"I am."

"The First Lesson: People are going to judge you by the size of your tits."

"What did you just—?"

"It's not fair, it's not just. It's just how it is. It doesn't matter how smart you are how, how sensitive you are, or how brave you are. And this is with both men *and* women. The first thing they're going to think is that you're a dumb bimbo. So people like us, we're always going to start with a strike against us."

"That's . . . unbelievable."

"Now, once they get to know you, you have a chance to make or break on your own merit, but their initial impulse is going to be to underestimate you."

"So how do you . . . deal with that?"

"There are so many ways. . . . First you resist . . . then you adapt . . . hopefully you live long enough to become savvy, and learn to manipulate that initial impression."

"The bustier . . . the fishnets . . ."

"The bustier . . . the fishnets. I consider myself a bit of a performance artist, really. I love when I can kick someone's teeth out while they're taking a look at my legs."

"Literally kick their teeth out?"

"Literally kick their teeth out. I have a collection."

"You are a rare bird. What's the second lesson?"

"The Second Lesson is . . . you can't please everybody, so you might as well not even try. The truth is, even when you try to please everyone, you only end up pleasing half the people anyway because the other half is jealous of whatever you got from pleasing the first half. So I just say, be yourself. That way, you're still only pleasing half the people, but at least you can relax, you know?"

"Yes, I think I do."

“I spent a lot of time thinking I was being a good person by always trying to be the person people wanted me to be, but that wasn’t being a good person. That wasn’t being a person at all, it was just multiple-personality disorder. Once I realized my first priority was to my own happiness, that’s when my life changed.”

“Is that when you started . . . ?”

“That’s when I first put on the wig. A new personality. The ‘me’ I’ve always wanted to be.”

“I admire the way you conduct yourself in this world.”

“Let’s talk about your costume.”

# Chapter Two

"Hi, Dinah."

"Hi, Diana."

"So, what about my costume?"

"So, what's up with your costume?"

"It's our traditional fighting armor. It allows for full range of motion."

"You don't ever get cold?"

"It's never cold on our island."

"What about here?"

"I never get cold."

"Well, you look hot in it."

"I never get hot, either."

"That's not what I meant."

"I know. I was making a joke."

"HA! Good one, Mama D!"

"Have you still been encouraging the female recruits to call me that?"

"Nope," she snickered.

"You know, everyone is free to simply call me Diana . . . "

"But you're *not* Diana! You're Mama D! You are the only woman on the Trinity."

"Oh, I wish people would stop using that term."

"I know. Because you are not a snob. And that is the realization of yourself that we are working on."

“Yes. But thank you for the compliment.”

“You’re welcome.”

“This uniform you’re wearing is very stylish. More leather than the last one.”

“It’s winter.”

“Of course.”

“So how is our project coming along?”

“I believe I have been very good this week. I had meals in several establishments without servants—er, service. I listened to some music with some boys that had several slang terms that I could appreciate, some of them a little too vulgar for my taste, but I could see the artistic merit in the music.”

“What were the boys’ names?”

“Terrell, Andrew, and James. James wants to be a businessman.”

“Alright, here’s your project. I want you to get his mother to invite you over for tea.”

“But what would be the pretext for such an intrusion—“

“You said you wanted more field work in undercover, Diana.”

“Yes, but that was for work.”

“This will help with work. Figure out some way to get this kid’s mother to invite you over, and then bring back three things you learn about their family’s culture.”

“Okay. Okay, I can do this. This might be fun. You people are so fascinating with your ethnic distinctions. On the island we are all one under the goddess.”

““You people . . . ?””

“You know what I mean.”

“You do have gender distinctions on the island, though.”

“Yes, but I told you, it’s not the same. They’re . . . “

“They’re men.”

“You’d have to be from the island.”

“I love you so much.”

“And I love you too, Dinah.”

“This project is fun for me, too. I like hearing about your little social adventures. And you tend to attract really good people when you’re just being yourself.”

“I appreciate your guidance.”

“Oh, hey, I found out the source of the slave-labor ring. We’ve got people in Prague and Warsaw . . . It’s a small syndicate with ties to plutocratic countries.”

“Half of Eastern Europe.”

“So are we a go on this mission, or . . . ?”

“I think so. I’m going to enlist Barbara’s and Bruce’s help on technological intel. Keep the briefs coming.”

“Roger that. I’m ready to rock on this one.”

“Dinah, I want you to remember what I said about a steady hand.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“It is not our job to ‘give a beating to scumbags.’”

“I remember.”

“Even on general principle.”

“Diana, look. Even if these guys aren’t good for this, I know they’re good for something. My intel is tight.”

“Dinah, we’ve been over—That is not the point. I am talking about justice. That is not the way of justice.”

“It *is* justice. It’s real justice.”

# Chapter Three

"Hi, Dinah."

"Hi, Diana."

"I'd like to talk."

"What about?"

"I'm concerned about your behavior in the field. There are some emotional-behavioral counseling courses my center offers and I was wondering if you'd attend one with me."

"You're joking, right?"

"Would you consider it?"

"I don't understand why you just can't get let this go, Diana. We just don't see eye to eye on some things, that's all. Some people just need to get hurt. And that's what I bring 'em."

"But people can be redeemed."

Dinah lit a smoke and took a long slow drag.

"Well some people need to be punished first. Like I told you. Real justice." *Exhale.*

"Sometimes I feel . . . sometimes I feel a depth of darkness in your soul, Dinah."

"That's impossible. I'm the blonde."

"You're not . . . you're not a real blonde, Dinah."

"Fuck you."

"Dinah—"

"Don't call me that."

"Dinah—"



"I don't understand why people make comments like that. That is so rude commenting on a woman's hair color."

"Dinah, it's me. I know how you are when you are . . . how you get when we are in battle."

"Diana, look, you're gonna have to let me be free. I've gotta spread my wings. I gotta fly. I know you're worried about me but you don't have to be. But I like how you look after me, mommy."

"I'll come back later."

"No, I didn't mean it. I'm just being a bitch."

"What is the matter?"

"I want to . . . I want to trade mothers. Is yours free?"

"Oh, Dinah."

"It actually wasn't that bad this time. I mean I think she actually heard three words I said."

"Your mother has a unique way of showing her love."

"Is that what she's doing? You know what? Forget it. I put so much into searching for her approval. Just to . . . just a little appreciation now and then wouldn't be too much to ask, would it? I brought down her *biggest enemy*. Brought his butt right to justice. And do you know what she said? She asked me if I had to fuck anybody while I was on the inside. Can you believe that? Who *talks* that way? I got the job done. I can't believe that she would . . . think that something like that's . . . appropriate."

"Your mother was a great hero. But she was also . . . a child of her generation. The way women had to submit themselves to men back then was like some sort of absurd farce. I didn't think I would actually want to have a life in this world back then but . . . things are different now. People are different now. You can't blame your mother. She is simply choosing to spend out her golden years reliving her Golden Age, in a sense. Do you see what I mean? Is that hard to understand?"

"I can't believe I still let it get to me. I fret about her but then I have people like you and Bruce and Oliver and Clark who are always there to give me every affirmation."

"You are my chosen sister-at-arms."

"I know, honey. That means so much to me. I'm sorry I get so . . . worked up. Does she still call you?"

"She does. Guess what we talk about?"

"All she does is talk about how proud she is of me, I know. It'd just be nice to hear it from *her*. And for once for her not to tell me everything I did wrong."

“She wants you to be strong. She needs you to be, you see? My mother was the same way. When I was a child, she once dropped me in the nest of a great eagle. I had to find my way back home.”

“Okay, well, that’s harsh.”

“What I’m saying is that mothers are . . . they’re doing the best they can. They know it’s a . . . ‘harsh’ world.”

“I’ll take the counseling courses.”

“That is my brave sister. Join me in an embrace.”

# Chapter Four

“Hi, Dinah.”

“Hi, Diana.”

“I had a question I was hoping you could help me with.”

“What is it?”

“Colonel Trevor has been more insistent about us formalizing our relationship.”

“Oooh, that might be nice. He is a cute-cute cutie.”

“The problem is that whenever we are together, I can tell he is somewhere . . . very far away.”

“Like he’s thinking about another woman?”

“No . . . well, yes, in a sense. He’s thinking about me, but not the me that’s right there in front of him. When he looks into my eyes, it feels like he’s looking at some idealized version of me, some ‘perfect’ me. But in the moment, he’s not with the me that’s standing there.”

“Yeah, that’s men. They seldom know what they want, and when they get what they think they want, they’re not so sure they want it anymore. I think the male species was put on earth to torture us.”

“He is a sweet man, but I can’t be with someone who makes me feel as if I should always be putting on a performance.”

“You need someone you can be yourself with.”

“Is that what you have with Oliver?”

“Hm. Me and Ollie. Yeah, I guess you could say that. There’s a part of me that’s completely at ease when I’m with him. It’s pretty scary. But that’s not the part I have to worry about.”

“What is the part you have to worry about?”

“The part of me that, when I’m with him, is not so at ease. Man, I have issues, Diana.”

“That is the human condition, sister. Issues are what make life such a grand adventure.”

“Speaking of adventures, Shiera’s report on the community is really encouraging. I think we can start adding more classes.”

“And our congressmen have been helpful, then?”

“We have 37 states covered. Most social service programs look to us now as the number-two option for orphans and runaways, after themselves.”

“Do you still think it’s a good idea that I restricted it to women?”

“We gotta fight one battle at a time. Let’s build our communities of strong high-esteemed future mothers and leaders. I think once we really start to make a dent, maybe some of the boys will be inspired to start their own projects.”

“This is something I could really see Ronnie becoming a part of. Or Barry.”

“Shiera also made notes about potential recruits. Some really amazingly talented girls.”

“I think James’ mother is a criminal. She uses a variety of tactics to evade the truth.”

“You think it’s serious?”

“No, she doesn’t have the constitution. I’d wager some sort of petty larceny. She passes on positive values to her son, though. At least while I was there.”

“The father?”

“He’s a truck driver. The family’s roots are Dominican; the father’s goes back generations, but the mother’s family is from Haiti. As a result, they are often the objects of anti-black racism from the Dominican side.”

“She went there with you?”

“She gave hints and leads and then I researched the history. It is evidently fairly common. As a result, James has been challenged here in the states about what identity to adopt, that of his African American peers or his Latino heritage. The father is apparently the mediating influence in the family, however. They miss him very much. He has been pressured by his management to take longer hours and more trips on the road. The mother is worried about James not learning about how to become a man.”

“A lot of families have a hard time finding ways to spend time together. Most people have to work so much that when they get home they’re too tired to appreciate the life they’re working for. That is a condition of our . . . well, if Ollie were here he would say it’s a condition of the consumerist pathology. He says we’re like little drone robots programmed to work the gears of the machine.”

“You do not agree?”

"Its . . . complicated. It can be a struggle to fight all of the messages and pressure to be or act or look a certain way in this world, you know? It takes a lot of stamina to form an . . . independent thought, sometimes."

"Your culture I believe has not quite crafted a reasonable narrative for happiness yet."

"That's one way of putting it."

"You create ideals for happiness but you don't create paradigms for how to enjoy it once you get there. So you just create more ideals and start reaching for those and the cycle continues. And then you die eventually. It's quite sad, really."

"You really know how to create a mood, Diana."

"Do you have any more of that banana chocolate ice cream?"

"It's in the freezer."

"Talk about *happiness*. Am I right?"

"You're killing me right now."

# Chapter Five

“Hi, Diana.”

“Hi, Dinah”

“So are we ready to move on the Baltic connection?”

“All the pieces seem to fit together.”

“What does your gut tell you?”

“Marscapone is getting his raw materials from the inside. He’s never had the connections to synthesize his own product.”

“Which means we’re looking at a first-world connection. That’s the only kind of state that’s going to have a high demand for domestic goods as well as manufacturing centers to process them. It feels right to my people too.”

“It’s funny. When you asked me what my gut tells me . . . I could never imagine Bruce asking me that. Or Clark.”

“Why not?”

“They always just ask me about . . . my expertise, and the like. Tactical advice, field and mission objectives . . . but rarely do they inquire into how I feel or believe.”

“Men aren’t taught to value their feelings. They think the only way to really know something is to analyze it to death.”

“It’s moreso Clark that Bruce. Clark’s in touch with his feelings, believe me, but he’s so guided by these strict rules about what’s right and wrong and a lot of times he just won’t take into account what his heart is telling him, do you know what I mean?”

“I do. It’s what postmodern philosophers call the ‘grand narrative.’ Cultures gain knowledge however they gain knowledge, and then construct elaborate stories justifying their behavior. Like, men in our culture value reason and logic because they are told that that’s what smart people do because reason and logic gave men the knowledge they needed to burn witches and control women’s bodies.”

“That is a shrewd reading. How came you across these words?”

"I majored in philosophy. Don't ask me why. So Bruce is more in touch with his feelings, you think?"

"In a different way than Clark. Bruce has his limitations, but I've never seen a man more in touch with his morality."

"That's funny."

"It's true. In any given situation, he listens to his heart first. Doubtless, when it comes to the mission, he never flinches from delivering justice. But he often lets his heart guide how that justice is administered in quite an . . . elegant way."

"Oh my God, you have feelings for him."

"Where I come from, men are not given much credit for being in touch with their feelings. Everyone back home for the most part figures men always just have one thing on their minds, so that's how we treat them. Men that can actually . . . express their feelings, with passion . . . it's very rare, and considered . . . quite attractive."

"It's attractive anywhere. But before you go any far with this, Diana, I feel I have to warn you about Bruce—"

"Please don't say he's too intense."

"How did you . . . how'd you know I was gonna say that?"

"All of a sudden I'm feeling a little ill."

"What's happening right now?"

"You slept with Bruce."

A moment flits by.

"Why did you just say that? You know I'm with Ollie."

"Oh my God, I'm feeling nauseous."

"Diana, what is going on with you? Do you seriously have feelings for Bruce?"

"I didn't think I did."

"Are you gonna go for it?"

"No. I've already prayed about it. She's usually good at revealing visions of who I'm supposed to be with. Bruce is never in those dreams. Not those kinds of dreams, anyway. I don't think that's the purpose he's supposed to serve in my life. I think that he is supposed to help me reach my destiny. Our bond is more of a . . . spiritual one."

“I don’t know, sounds like a pretty grey area to me.”

“What is love if not infinite shades of grey?”



# Chapter Six

“Hi, Dinah.”

“Hi, Diana.”

“What’d you call me?”

“Oh—sorry—that was weird. I was having a dream.”

“About talking to Diana?”

“About us. I was talking to Diana about us.”

“Was I a dashing hero?”

“Do you have to ask?”

“I’ve been wondering . . . how have you been feeling?”

“I’m fine. My kung-fu is strong.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“Do you know how strong my kung-fu is?”

“Pretty strong.”

“Exactly. You don’t even *know* how much.”

“How have those counseling courses she sent you to been going?”

“You know it’s actually been pretty nice. I thought it was just going to be a bunch of pathetic women crying because I’m a such sexist pig, but it’s really a good mix of just . . . people, you know? Men, women, young, old, all just mostly trying to figure out why they’ve pushed so many people in their lives away.”

“Hal says Diana uses her empathy for people as a weapon.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“Like, whenever there’s a consensus building against her, she twists her arguments to make it seem like they’re based in an empathy for people that only *she* has.”

“Hal said all that?”

“More or less.”

“Diana’s just got a . . . she feels very passionately about things.”

“Who among us doesn’t?”

“Diana was raised in royalty. She still has to deal with having to work with people and them not just bending to her command.”

“That would make it tough for her to be on a team.”

“But she *is* a team player. She likes taking commands. It’s just mostly only when she agrees with them.”

“She and Hal have only ever teamed up once on a mission and then their names have never come up on the duty roster together again.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I thought team-ups were randomly chosen.”

“Yeah. That’s funny. You know what I want to do this weekend?”

“What’s that?”

“Let’s go to the museum. Just you and me.”

“No, not the museum.”

“Why not?”

“Because all you do at the museum is try to catch me looking at women.”

“You’re supposed to be looking at the paintings.”

“I’m supposed to be looking at art.”

“I won’t be like last time. I like going to the museum with you, Oliver. I like learning from you.”

“You have a good eye. You coulda made some money as a dealer.”

“Well that was not the type of lifestyle my upbringing afforded.”

“It’s never too late to take up a hobby.”

“Are you working tonight?”

“I’m working all week, out at the docks.”

“Any progress?”

“Yeah, some. We’re cleaning out their nests, making them uncomfortable.”

“Make sure you only force Marscapone into corners when Pileggi isn’t around. That guy keeps him wound tight.”

“Yeah we know, we been keeping Pileggi busy. He’s just a punk hood. Gaming him is like making pizza.”

“Did you say you were making pizza later?”

“I guess I did.”

“Cuddle with me till I have to report for roster duty.”

“When’s that?”

“Fifteen minutes.”

“We can’t do anything fun in fifteen minutes.”

“We could do some things.”

“Nothing good.”

She ruffled her feathers.

“I’m still not cool with what went down Thursday, Dinah.”

“I was patrolling.”

“Why did you come back smelling like men’s cologne?”

“Because those sleazebags wear enough to fill a supertanker.”

“But it’s always the same . . . kind.”

“I must have gotten some into the leather and it won’t come out. Look, I’ll get that smell out, and it won’t ever be like that again. You’ll see. I promise.”

“I don’t like when you promise me.”

“Promises are . . . all I got.”

# Chapter Seven

"Hello, Diana."

"Hi, Bruce."

"I like what you've done with the place."

"Just some statuary I brought from the island."

"I thought you were gonna give me a tour one of these days."

"That offer was made under . . . certain circumstances."

"The circumstance was a tour. Your offer of one."

"Okay. Fine. I'm going back in two-weeks' time. You will stay in the Royal Guest Villa."

"Oh, please, nothing big. Don't you have anything small and cozy?"

"Not at the palace."

"What was so important you had me fly down to D.C. in the middle of the night?"

"I thought you liked your 'midnight rides.'"

"I do. And your wish is my command, Your Highness."

*Sigh* "I do like when you do that. You know it reminds me of home."

"I do."

"So. To business. I am . . . not so sure I am still comfortable with the idea of assessing Dinah like this without her knowledge."

"I don't see how this op could work otherwise. If we truly agree that she might be working for the other side, as soon as she gets a whiff that she might be under surveillance, it'll be over. She's too careful. And if the psych workup is right, she won't have any scruples about continuing to consciously mislead us."

"I truly don't think she is a bad person . . . we all get confused sometimes about where our good parts end and our bad parts begin."

“You don’t have to tell me. Look, if it helps, don’t look at this as an op. I think this idea of her helping you getting acclimated to society is a perfect cover for you. Maybe you could look at it as an opportunity.”

“I knew you liked that idea a little too much.”

“Come on, you said it yourself. Probably the reason why Dinah might seem a little ‘self-righteous’ is because she really has spent a lot of time getting to know the streets . . . getting to know people.”

“Do you think I have a problem relating to people?”

“Your heart doesn’t. The compassion you have is something all people share. Maybe some of our social conventions you have some trouble with . . . adjusting to men’s place in our society.”

“You have to admit that it is elevated above . . . reasonable levels.”

“We do not have gender equality, no. We are still working on that.”

“Alright, I’ll keep the operation going, but I will do like you said. I will see it as a mutual operation. She is assessing my social skills and I am assessing . . . what? . . . the very nature of her soul?”

“Don’t put it like that.”

“How am I supposed to put it?”

“You always get mythical.”

“How am I supposed to put it?”

“You are doing a very tactical, very necessary assessment of her potential to cross the line that we set up, that *she* agreed to. You are just supposed to assess her potential. There’s no way of telling what’s in someone’s soul.”

“It sounds the same to me. I’m sorry if I sound too . . . mystical, as you say.”

“I said *mythical*.”

“Sounds the same to me.”

“We need this intel. We’ve got to be able to set up plausible counter-stories, we have to get ahead of the backlash—“

“I know the whole dirty business. We have to be able to cover ourselves. But answer me one thing, Bruce.”

“What is it?”

“Why have you never . . . It seems that your reasoning always come from the perspective of what will be good for the team. But what about what will be good for Dinah?”

“If she crosses that line, Diana, she’s got to pay.”

“But before she does, we’ve got to save her.”

“We can’t save everyone.”

“But that’s what we do.”

“But we can’t do it if they don’t trust us.”

“How can they trust us if we are manipulating circumstances so they think they like us?”

“Because what matters is what’s in our hearts. We’re trying to help them. So sometimes if we have to . . . blur the lines a little for the greater good . . . well . . . it’s for the greater good.”

“Consider the idea that transparency might be the greater good. I would like to . . . I would like to share something with you, Bruce. Something I have not shared with . . . something I am not *supposed* to share with anyone in the world of men.”

The moment of truth.

“Are you sure you wanna do this?”

“I do. Bruce, I’ve told you about the mission I was given when I left home. What I haven’t told you is that I had ancillary missions.”

“I figured.”

“You did?”

“You’re an extraordinary operative, Diana. It would be a waste to only give you one mission.”

“Have you figured out what they are?”

“I have not, to this point. I haven’t really focused much energy into it. I’m working on this thing with Luthor.”

“Yes, I’ve heard.”

“I really think I’m close to getting him.”

“I believe you will.”

“So . . . ?”

“So, one of them was to change men’s minds about conquest and success.”

"I can see that."

"I was tasked with the job of helping transition your society into new leadership paradigms. One being that a leader who is honest about their actions can still maintain control without anarchy."

"There's bound to be *some* anarchy."

"There is always going to be a little anarchy. I was tasked with the job of convincing your leaders that that's not such a bad thing."

"You're here to break down the nation-state system."

"Anarcho-collectivist communes are . . . the only way to paradise."

"So you're saying that my lack of transparency is a tactic I picked up from how our culture has organized itself politically."

"It is a fundamental tenet of your model of centralized rule. But it is not a necessary one. That is what I am here to teach."

"If Dinah's crossed the line, that's a choice she's made."

"But what if she's waiting for a hand to help pull her back across?"

"We can't save everyone, Diana."

"But we can save our own people."

"Not once they've gone over."

"Especially once they've gone over."

"There's a bigger picture here—"

"Do you want paradise or not, Bruce?"

"Sometimes the end justifies the me—"

"Do you want paradise or not?"

# Chapter Eight

"Hi, Diana."

"Hi, Dinah."

"So, when were you going to tell me you were sending me to Slovenia to sit on those stash houses?"

"We need you back east."

"Since when am I not a part of central operations?"

"You are, Dinah, but I made this call alone because I thought it would be best to keep you from where the laborers disembark."

"The sex slaves, yes. I should be there."

"Why?"

"Because that's my area of expertise."

"Just because you have assigned yourself to every case that has to do with human trafficking does not make that your area of expertise."

"I'm an expert in it now."

"You're an expert in Baltic crime networks. We need you in Eastern Europe for a whole shipping cycle to figure out their schedules."

"But Slovenia's an Adriatic port."

"But the Eastern connection's corridor goes straight up to the Baltic ports, don't they?"

*Breathy grunt*

"Were you trying to . . . were you trying to handle me just then? Operations is my area of expertise, Dinah."

"I just . . . I would just really appreciate being able to stay close to the human-trafficking routes. I get a lot job satisfaction out of it."



“Dinah, the type of satisfaction you get from that work is not . . . “

“Not what? Not *healthy* satisfaction?”

“Dinah . . . “

“When are you gonna get it, Diana? Why do you feel you have the right to judge why I do what I do? What difference does it make? I get the job done, don’t I?”

“I feel it is my duty as the mission commander to put you in the most optimal position.”

“Is that what this is about?”

“I feel it is my duty as your friend to look out for your welfare.”

“Dinah, I’m a big girl. And I can’t help feeling that you feel your values are superior to mine. And that hurts me. And what’s worse, it pisses me off. I went through a lot to become the person I am, and I don’t like the feeling that your opinion of it is keeping me from doing what I need to do on this team. Now are we a coalition of diverse individuals dedicated to a common cause or aren’t we?”

“You know I wrote those words.”

“Well you fucked up when you wrote them, Diana. Because you know what ‘diverse individuals’ means? It means people with different beliefs as well as different backgrounds and races working together. It means once you accepted me into the group you were agreeing to accept my beliefs as part of the group. If you’re not doing that then you’re not as good as your word.”

“I need you in Slovenia, Dinah.”

“Don’t put me on any more missions when I get back.”

“Dinah . . . “

“Are you still committed to the project?”

“Of course I am.”

“I just . . . I can’t read you, Diana. I’m trying to talk to you and I feel like . . . you’re trying to close me off.”

“I’ve just . . . I have lot of issues I am trying to deal with and it could be . . . it could be that I am putting some of it on you.”

“Well, I’m your comrade. You know that, don’t you?”

“I do. I really do.”

“What’s going on?”

"I just feel so . . . I don't know how to relate to . . . It wounds me gravely that you feel that I close you off. You are probably the only person in this world who . . . 'gets me'? Is that how you say it? Back home, we didn't have to play these games. I didn't have to . . . act so . . . I don't know . . . 'mature,' I think you'd call it."

"You don't want to be mature?"

"I want you to do me a favor. Close your eyes."

"Okay, let's do this. I wanna get where you're going here."

"Take yourself back to childhood. Take yourself back to running on an open meadow, the grass is green, the sun is shining, the bees are buzzing."

"Sounds nice."

"No, it doesn't."

"It doesn't?"

"No, because you are still looking with adult eyes, smelling with an adult nose. That picture I set up for you sounds nice because it's comfortable. What I want you to do is go back to a time when it wasn't comfortable. I want you to go back to a time when it was new."

"New?"

"Smell the grass, and remember that *you are not used to that smell*. And every time you smell it you remember and realize how lucky you are to be alive because, remember, you haven't been alive that long. These sensations are all new to a child, and we haven't yet figured out that we'll be able to experience them for the next 60 years."

"Yeah . . ."

"Feel the sun beating down on your face and how divine it feels after not so long ago having your senses restricted to the wet warmth of your mother's womb."

"Yeah."

"Hear the bees for the first time. Remember the wonderment at hearing the sound of wings flapping so fast that they hum. That's a miracle! It seems like a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence but then you open your eyes to dozens, hundreds of flying creatures in that meadow."

"*Oh my god, I'm starting to get it.*"

"Remember the wonder of childhood? Remember the wonder of first-time experience? Nearly everything we do as adults are attempts to recapture that wonder. When everything on the earth was

new, every time you had a new experience you were giddy with excitement, running around and trying to wrap the earth around you.”

“I can’t believe I’ve forgotten.”

“Where I come from, we haven’t forgotten it. We live with it. We walk around in it. We may not be as playful as children all the time, but we never forget how lucky we are; that we could very easily have not been born, or the cells that make up our bodies could have instead comprised a lump of inanimate clay.”

“I can’t believe I’ve forgotten why kids are so hyperactive all the time. If I landed on a new planet, I’d be running around too trying to see new things, experience new things.”

“Of course you would. You’d be foolish not to.”

“It’s like I put a wall in my memory where my joy at the world began.”

“You should lift that wall. This world is still as beautiful as it was the day you were born. It is *you* that has changed.”

“You’re right. I think it would be hard to relate in our society with an attitude like that.”

“It is a core value of my spiritual beliefs. And yet I feel . . . outcast here. Some sort of spectre . . . acting like I’m living but not really communing with my fellow man about . . . this constant feeling of wonder. When I’m on the bus, I want to point out how the smooth metal of the chair feels against my skin. When I’m walking home, I want to share with people on the street when I find a stand of night-blooming jasmine. But if I do these things . . . the world has a lot of vicious names for someone who would conduct themselves in this manner.”

“I do . . . get you, Diana. I think I do. You have a mission to do, and you can’t even take the breaks from the mission that give you joy. So you just throw yourself back into your work.”

“It is mentally exhausting. I don’t like having to act ‘mature’ in this world.”

“Maybe it’s not mature. Maybe it’s just jaded.”

“Maybe it’s just scared.”

“You’re right. I ask for those sex-slave missions because I’ve . . . I’ve become addicted to the anger. I like getting mad at those guys and feeling that my anger is justified. But that’s not . . . “

“That’s doing a lot of damage to your inner little girl. Your inner girl of wonder.”

“God, I’ve put her away. Or when I do let her out I feel guilty.”

“Do you think that’s how Our Father wants you to experience His gifts?”

“I don’t believe in gods.”

“What do you believe gave you the gift of existence?”

“Chance. Luck. Inevitability?”

“So why would you spend your good fortune feeling guilty?”

“I don’t think I knew I had a choice.”

# Chapter Nine

“Hello, Dinah.”

“Hi, Bruce.”

“You got a sit-rep for me?”

“It all checks out like you said. Diana’s pretty set in her principles. I think she’d be willing to look the other way if she believed there really was some question of one of our people hurting somebody, but she’s not going to cover up a bad bust. It’s just not gonna happen. She believes you have to be doing this with a sort of . . . love in your heart. She’s not okay with the darkness.”

“Well, that’s fine. I mean, that’s good. As long as she’s reasonable when we make reasonable mistakes. Dealing with someone with a mythological relationship to absolutes is a challenge.”

“Only if you don’t believe the gods work in our favor.”

“I believe the gods are fairly whimsical in my case.”

“My old friend. My brave dark bird. How are we gonna get your stuff together?”

“Start with getting me my intel.”

“Diana suspects something went on between us.”

“Why would she suspect that?”

“I’m not the detective.”

“Oh, that’s right, you’re the damsel in distress.”

“Sometimes.”

“Are you really in distress, though, Dinah?”

“What are you asking me, Bruce?”

“I wish I knew. I wish to God I knew. I’ve decided to stop being such a dick to Oliver.”

“That’s big of you.”

"It's not my place to decide who I think is right for you."

"I know."

"You do?"

"I do."

"I suppose you do."

"There is a kind of . . . sick sweetness to it, though. Don't ever lose that."

"There's a club downtown where you can meet people into cemeteries."

"Did you meet anyone . . . special?"

"Betsy. She was in the Rag Dolls for a while."

"Not familiar."

"Goth punk band from the Pop Arts Scene. Surprisingly not-derivative."

"Sounds delightful."

"She also liked torture porn."

"And right up your alley."

"She was too much with the threesomes, though."

"Should I even ask?"

"You're the one who's always asking for the details."

"Two guys/one girl?"

"One girl/one boy/one tran."

"I am getting too old."

"Which is what I told her. She texts me on full moons now."

"That is disturbingly hot. Does she know tantra?"

"She does."

"You asked her right away, hunh?"

"When I started the breathing, she jumped right in."

"Lucky boy."

"Sometimes I wonder."

"How so?"

"Clark seems to think my . . . tastes are too dark."

"The boy scout? Who cares? Is he going to do the things to you Betsy does?"

"No, he most certainly is not."

"Clark's from where? Kansas?"

"Yeah."

"I'm sure there are some freaky people Kansas, but he is not in our weight class."

"Is there something wrong with us?"

"Not me anymore. I'm a good girl, now."

"You were always a good girl."

"My man handles his business , though, if I do say so myself, so it's easier."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"I think he wants to pop the question."

"How do you feel about that?"

"Excited. Nervous. I think he's stupid for wanting it. Though if he does want it, it had better be with me."

"Go ahead and lay off the tough-girl act with Diana. I don't like seeing her upset."

"Just like that? You don't like seeing her upset?"

"Just like that. Things like that are important."

"Amen to that."

Land-bound prey go scurrying off in all directions.

"I am pretty tough, by the way."

"What?"

"I mean, there's an act, and then there's me."

“Yes, but the real you has got a soft creamy middle.”

“Not this middle. My abs are rock hard.”

“You know I’m talking about your sweet sweet nature.”

“I’ve got exes that would claim otherwise.”

“Your exes know when to keep quiet.”

“Yeah but I teach ‘em how to sing first.”

“You are a formidable woman.”

*swoons* “My hero” *swoons*