

## Chapter 12

### *A Side Trip*

His brain still numb, Silver listened to the gurgling of the coffee maker and then smelled the brew. He wasn't a fan of these plastic hotel machines, but coffee was exactly what he needed. When his eyes opened, he saw the naked and tattooed Gwendolyn pouring a cup.

"Cream and sugar?"

"Yeah, both, but easy on the sugar."

"You got it, baby."

Gwendolyn set the steaming cup on the night table, then leaned in to press a lingering kiss on Silver's lips. She waited while he arranged himself on the bed with his back against the headboard. Then she handed him the cup.

"Thanks." He drank greedily, feeling the caffeine jumpstart his brain.

Gwendolyn sat on the edge of the bed. She took the empty cup from his hand and set it back on the night table. She looked even more amazing than she had the night before. It's what people always say about art, that the more you look at it, the more you see. Now he noticed the leopard's paw covering her left breast.

"You know, you're really beautiful."

She smiled. "I know. And you're not in bad shape for an old guy. In fact," she leaned towards him, "you were pretty fucking good last night."

He did feel a bit proud of himself.

"I'm telling you, Dan. When you fuck a guy in his twenties, it's over in fifteen seconds. Nothing there. I'll take an older man any day."

Silver looked at the hand that lay on the sheet next to him. A green

lizard was crawling towards her finger tips. He covered her hand with his own. "I just want you to know that you were right. Last night was definitely the best fuck of my life. The absolute best. Not even close."

She laughed, "You doubted me?"

"No, not really."

"You sure it was the best?"

"Definitely. By a mile."

"Good," she said, "because we need to talk."

She had his attention.

"You see, baby, you know how I told you that last night was free?"

"Yeah?" He wasn't sure that he wanted to hear this.

"I lied to you, baby. I told you it was free because I wanted you to enjoy it."

Silver took a moment to process this.

Of course, she was dead right. It wouldn't have been the same experience if he thought he was paying for it. Maybe not bad, but definitely not the same.

"You understand, honey? I did it for you."

Silver's ego was a bit bruised, but he understood.

"But baby," she squeezed his hand with her own, "You know it was great for me too. It's just that I'm a professional. I can't give it away. And you did say it was the best, right? Want to take it back?"

He laughed a little. "No, of course not. So what do I owe you?"

"A grand." She said it quickly, as if that would reduce the pain. "Believe me, it would be two for anyone else."

Silver nodded. He was okay with the money. A thousand bucks was hardly a bad day on the market. That wasn't what bothered him.

“It’s the lying,” he told her. “I have a hard time with lying.”

She held his hand a little tighter. “Don’t you get it, Dan? I lied for you. I lied to make it better for you.”

“Yeah, I know that, but if you lie, how do I know when you’re telling the truth.”

Gwendolyn smiled. She ran a hand through Silver’s uncombed hair. “Listen, Dan baby, I get what you’re saying, but it’s a generational thing. Your demographic just hasn’t caught on yet.” Silver guessed that ‘his demographic’ was old people. She was being polite. “Truth hasn’t been a thing for a couple of decades. It’s just not happening anymore.”

Silver knew this. He’d seen it happening. Complained about it. Railed against it. He just hadn’t accepted it yet.

Silver got out of bed and found his jeans on the floor. He fished the phone from a pocket. “You take Venmo?”

“Sure. Send it to artfuck17.com.”

He looked at her. “Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

Gwendolyn unlocked her own phone. “Got it,” she announced after a moment.

“At least now I know what a performance artist does.” He’d meant this as a joke, but she didn’t seem to take it that way.

“You don’t have a fucking clue, Dan. Not a fucking clue. But I’m taking you on as a personal project.”

He remembered Mary’s warning about losing his cash in Eden. “I’m not rich, you know.”

“We’re talking about mortality, Dan. Life isn’t about money, it’s about experience. You want to leave anything on the table when you go?”

She certainly had Silver’s number.

“And you can stop worrying because I’m not going to take all your money. Maybe just a little wealth redistribution.”

She wrapped an arm behind his neck and drew his naked aging body against hers, then reached down to check on Lance and the boys. “We’re going to have a good good time, honey.”

Then she had a look at the phone that was still in her hand. A shadow of concern crossed her face. “Come on, Dan baby, let’s hit the road.”