

He slowly undressed and put her clothes back in the closet, careful to leave everything as close to how he found it as possible.

He heard her come in. She and McDoogle always chatted at the door for a few minutes before he left. Jeremy wondered if they'd ever slept together. Brian McDoogle was about 20 years her senior, but he doubted that mattered.

He heard the music downstairs... he had gotten to know her taste in music pretty well. She would likely pour herself a glass of wine and work on whatever commissions she was hired for this week, before going to bed.

Meanwhile, in the dim light of the attic, he sat, still reading American Gods.

She would be gone all day. She was at another one of the conventions that she sold at. He listened to the sounds of her getting ready. This house was over 100 years old and the walls were thin. He wished he could see her. What dress was she wearing? Was her hair up or down? She always tried to style it in a way that made her crossed eyes less obvious. He heard the shuffling around, the occasional mumbling to herself. And of course the music. She really loved her metal. Most of it was stuff he had never heard, European metal.

He could tell when she put her boots on because her footsteps became so heavy on the wooden floor. She was not graceful, the times he'd seen her down at the 5th she seemed rather clumsy.

Her assistant, Val, was late as usual. But after the banter that was expected, they were gone and the house was silent.

First things first, the bathroom. Living like this he'd gotten pretty good at planning his day around when and where to relieve himself. Once he felt confident she wouldn't come back after something that was forgotten, he made his way slow and quiet down the attic stairs and into the bathroom. The same lipstick he'd used was sitting on the counter. He picked it up, rolling it in his hand. Opening it up, he examined the deep blood red waxy substance. It had touched both of their lips.

The smell of honeysuckle and spices still lingered in the bathroom.

A few long red hairs clung to the counter. He picked them up and ran them through his fingers, wondering what kind of spell could be cast with them.

He had all day to wander. It would probably be the early morning hours when she was back. So, going back to sleep for a bit was next on the agenda. Passing her bedroom doorway he decided to do something he'd never done before.

Sitting on her bed he looked around the small cluttered room. The black switchblade on the nightstand always drew his attention. He picked it up and examined it, popping the blade out and then back in. Out again and in again...

Her laundry hamper sat within arm's reach, one fishnet stocking draped over the edge. He stood up and dug through it until he found what he was seeking. He held them up, they were black like most of her clothes. He ran the string of the thong through his fingers much like he had done with her hair in the bathroom.

He imagined pulling them off her in lust filled rage. He knew she liked angry sex. He'd heard it. Without even thinking he held the panties to his face and took a deep breath. Her scent was pungent and intoxicating. He saw himself throwing her onto the bed, ripping her clothes off and cutting through the fishnets with the switchblade. He saw himself pull her hair, her loud cries echoing through the old house. She would open up wide and swallow him, and he would lap up her juices like a thirsty wolf.

The things I would do to you, my love...

Sleeping in a real bed was heaven after so many nights sleeping on hard wood with only a fleece blanket to lay on.

The sun was starting to set when he woke up. He made his way downstairs to see what he could steal from the kitchen without her noticing. An apple here, a beer there. She never noticed when it was just one of something. She was a healthy eater. He liked that about her.

In the living room right by the fireplace was her altar. He had never seen what she did here. But he had smelled incense burning and other random scents when passing by this room. Reigh was not the housekeeper of the year, by any standards. But the altar was always kept immaculate. A semicircle of small black candles kept watch over the ornate knife in the center. Had she cut herself with this,, he wondered, picking it up and turning it over in his hands. It was a beautiful knife. The head of a wolf sat atop a black leather wrapped hilt. The sleek stainless steel blade with a cut bloodline had been made by someone who cared about their craft, it was obvious.

A wooden box seemed out of place on the corner of the table. He opened it up to see a deck of Tarot cards. He had been raised to fear this stuff. But intrigue pushed all that aside. The deck was larger than an average deck of playing cards, so shuffling was a challenge, but he managed.

On the second shuffle one card flew out of the deck landing facedown on the altar, right next to the knife. He had heard a gypsy he met down south say that when a card flies out of the deck it's the spirits trying to tell us something. It was face down and he almost didn't want to pick it up, fearing the Death card.

The two of cups... Love.

What could this mean? Did it mean she could actually grow to love him if given the chance? Should he try...?

He put the deck back in the box.

In the downstairs bathroom he decided to risk a shower. The shower was dry as stone and he knew it would be dry again by the time she got home. The bathroom lights had to stay off. Her neighbors could be nosy at times and he didn't want one of them asking about a light being on.

Showering in the dark was no big deal. He had done it as a kid dozens of times.

It really was miraculous that he had never gotten caught. The door to the basement was in the back of the house, concealed to outsiders. He tried to only come and go when it was dark out. But he also knew this couldn't last forever. Dave used to say the only constant is change. Sooner or later... he would be found out.

The image of the two of cups flashed again in his mind. Love. Could she love him one day?

In the small kitchen he made a peanut butter sandwich in the dark. There was a dirty plate and a fork in the sink waiting to be washed. He washed the knife he'd used, careful not to disturb the other dirty dishes. She might not notice one knife, but he didn't want to chance it. He put the knife in the drainer where he had found it.

The kitchen was small with a black and white checkered floor. Several bottles of liquor held court on a high shelf above the cabinets. He reached up and grabbed the first one to touch his hand, a sleek black bottle with the bold red letters. Blavod, black vodka.

What fueled her obsession with the color black? Black was not truly a color at all, but the absence of color. All her appliances were black. Her kitchen table, black. The couch in the living room, black. The queen size bed and all its linens, black. Did she just like the color? He suspected there was more to it.

Opening the cupboard he rummaged around for a shot glass. The same dark tinted glass he had always used was a little harder to find this time. He poured the black liquid out and held the glass up, peering through it. The liquid was near opaque in the dark room. He downed it and slammed the glass on the blue counter. The warmth rising in his chest was comforting and reminded him of all those nights when he and Dave drank whiskey. He hadn't drank much since Dave went away.

The urge to tip the bottle up and chug it like water hit him. He could have finished it all and been drunkenly waiting for her on the front porch when she came home. Then what? Either the

night (and probably the following day) would be spent in her bed. Or he may end up joining Dave in prison.

One more shot... Just one more. Instead of bothering with the glass he brought the bottle to his lips. One shot. He resisted the temptation to swallow more.

Hours later he heard the crunch of gravel in the driveway. He heard her say goodnight to Val. He heard the door open and close, followed by the clunking of her boots on the hard floor. Panic hit him like a battering ram. Heat rose to his face and his pulse quickened. Did he put the shot glass back...?