

ANNOTATIONS FOR BLIZZARD

WARNING: This document assumes that you have already read the entire text of my novel *Blizzard*.

More specifically, it assumes that you have read the *updated* version of **Blizzard**. If you remember Sam being blonde, then you haven't read the updated version, and a lot of things won't make sense to you.

This is an in-depth look under the hood of *Blizzard*. Gene (like all narrators) is somewhat unreliable, and though he mentions what he sees and hears, he doesn't understand all of it, and doesn't bother with details he thinks are irrelevant. Here, I explain what he missed. If you liked the story, you'll *really* enjoy this.

This document is *full* of spoilers. Over and over, I point out details whose true meaning doesn't become apparent until several chapters later. The very first thing in the annotations is an explanation of the biggest change in the plot that resulted from my working with an editor, and why it meant he and I had to replace several scenes entirely, and add others.

Final spoiler warning: this is your last chance to turn back.

Seriously.

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Okay, here we go.

The big change.

DS started working with me shortly after I published chapter 23. I gave him access to the Google Drive folder in which I stored the chapters before publication; to get in the proper headspace, he read the entire novel in a single sitting, including the then-unpublished chapter 24.

Shortly thereafter, he messaged me with a question.

“Sam’s freakout in chapter 10 – that’s because she’s gay, right? I mean, it’s a significant contributing factor?”

And I said, “What? No, *Alex* is gay. Sam is straightest.”

And he said “Uh...”, and showed me the part of chapter 24 where I had written Sam very emotionally outing herself to Gene, shortly after Alex had gone back to her dorm. I seriously hadn’t realized I’d done that.

My earliest plans for the novel had Alex being The Gay One, but as all writers know, sometimes characters get away from you and do their own thing. And then you have to figure out – do I force them back where I had intended for them to go? Or do I let them continue going on this natural path?

Since chapter 24 wasn’t going to be published for quite a while, I had the chance to rewrite and undo it. Sam talks to Gene about... stuff. Alex outs herself because of... reasons. I probably could have made it work, although I probably would have had to make changes to earlier chapters.

But.

Sam is the literature student. She’s all about subtext. If I kept her as gay... then *so many* of the things she says and does take on new meaning. That’s probably why my subconscious made that decision, I suppose. Pay attention to everything Sam says, and consider what it means if it’s coming from a closeted gay girl who’s halfway in denial, who’s got a massive crush on her roommate, and who’s magically been induced to fall in love with one specific man. Since it all has subtext, I’ll only mention specific points if there’s something special about them.

We had to change a lot of things in earlier chapters anyway, to accommodate Sam being gay and crushing on Max, but I like these characters, and getting to spend more time with them was fun. And it was amazing, when rereading the logs of my chats with DS, to see how I moved from “Sam is straight” to “oops, Sam is gay now” to “okay, I suppose she maybe had a *little* crush on Max” to “Sam is desperately, heartbreakingly crushing on Max, pining and writing mediocre poetry.”

(The crushing started the day they met. The pining only set in a week later, after Sam had started writing poems about Max and realized they all sucked. ‘How can I make her love me if I can’t write poems about her?’)

There’s another major change to the plot that’s the result of a question DS asked. I’ll mention it when we get there.

CHAPTER 1

I was enjoying the snow day. It had to be really bad for me to call off work. It was! It really was! It amazingly was!

Ah, Halifax in February. This is the first instance of one of the major themes of *Blizzard*: the number three. Over and over (and over!), something will be said in three ways, or there will be three of something, or three different *kinds* of something, or an event will happen in three steps, or three times. That's why the story takes place over a 9-day interval.

playing Netflix on my desktop, watching porn on my laptop, and reading comics on my phone

This is what I was doing when I first got the idea to write *Blizzard*. Also, notice the 3 things.

After three years

I originally had Gene living there for a *decade*, but a) that's too much inertia, and b) 3!

There was a loud bang. I feared my front door had blown open.

Notice: *Gene's front door wasn't locked*. This will come up again. And it's why all this happened to him.

I was surprised to find a girl at the bottom of the stairs.

Assuming you've read the novel, you'll know that this is actually *two* entities: a human woman (named Gretchen), and a free-floating mind called 'the Girl'. But calling her 'the Girl' gets confusing, so DS and I decided to call her "Crystal" for the purposes of our conversations. That name never appears in the novel, and if you were to tell her that was her name she would be confused, but it's easier to refer to characters when they have names. Crystal is able to inhabit multiple human bodies; in chapter 3, Gene meets her in the body of a woman named Faye, and subsequently uses that name to refer to her in all her bodies.

She has snow powers. "Snow" as a name was too on the nose. "Blanche" as a name reminded me of *Golden Girls* ('80s sitcom about old women, one of whom was a slut named Blanche). "Crystal", though, for snow crystals...

There's one other thing you should know about Crystal.

She's a Sidhe. Or 'fae'.

Gene never learns this, but it explains a *lot*.

My first thought was "Get out of my apartment!" My second thought was "Pull your boxers up from your ankles!" Finally I thought: "Help her!"

Three!

No, Gene's first thought *isn't* "help her!", but he does think it *pretty* quickly.

"I, uh, no," she mumbled. "I shouldn't have just barged in but--"

Original text was "I'm sorry I barged in", but it's essential that Crystal not actually *lie*. She *shouldn't* have barged in... but she's *not* sorry.

"Right, milk and cereal," I announced. "Honey Nut Cheerios, OK?"

This is Gene serving his guest *milk and honey*.

"This is the chair of the head of the household," she announced,

Right here, this is her casting a spell on Gene's chair. Or... whatever it is that she does (learning too much about how the Sidhe do their magic can be hazardous to your health).

"Thank you, so much," she smiled.

See that extra comma? That's deliberate. A human would say "Thank you so much" – a rote phrase, all at once. But Gretchen is possessed by a Sidhe, a creature for whom gratitude and debt are matters of life and death. When she says "thank you", she then has to consider *how much* she is thanking you. It is a separate thought, a meaningful qualifier.

The power was back on and my front door was still deadbolted

This is a spoiler, but not in the sense of "here's what happens in the story"; instead, it's in the sense of "here's how that trick works".

DS asked if it was 'magic housebreaking powers', as Gene thought.

It's not. Gene and his elderly neighbor have spare keys to each other's apartments, in case of emergency, and Gretchen/Crystal borrowed it.

Who lent it to her is another issue entirely, though...

One of them stepped on a patch of ice

Wow, what a conveniently placed patch of ice. Gene will never find out why it was there. But *you* will.

Several chapters from now.

"It's store brand from Richardson's," I apologized.

First mention of Richardson's.

I always knew that Peter owned an engineering firm, but in my earliest notes for the story, Wayne was a wealthy history professor specializing in Maritime exploration of the New World ("Oversaw the salvage of a sunken pirate ship, his share of the recovered gold has made him quite rich"), and Jared was an investment banker from Toronto.

Eventually I made Wayne into a professor of physics instead, and offloaded the flashy parts onto Jared – since it wasn't going to be in the story, I decided I could be silly. An adventurer! Self-made, discovering lots of treasure!

DS felt that we needed something more plausible. I had already told him that Sam's from Prince Edward Island (because I like Prince Edward Island), so he proposed that Jared owned a chain of supermarkets ("the last time I was on the Island was in 2002 or so, for a job interview. I remember stopping in the parking lot of a huge supermarket to change into my interview clothes. That's why PEI and huge supermarkets go together in my backbrain"), which I immediately seized on. If you're Canadian – especially if you're from the Maritimes – you'll know the Sobeys chain. Gene's never heard of Sobeys, but he goes to the Richardson's on a regular basis.

"Richardson" is also a common enough name that Gene won't necessarily associate "Samantha Richardson" with "the very wealthy family that owns a huge chain of supermarkets". It's very important, later on, that Gene's not aware of just how rich Sam is.

Maxine had light red hair, pale blue eyes,

I deliberately gave each girl an eye color that was not the one most commonly associated with her hair color (and asked DS for suggestions). Red hair usually goes with *green* eyes.

For the hair colors, I rolled a d10: 1 Blonde, 2 Brunette, 3, Redhead, 4 Black Haired, 5 Black Girl, 6 Asian Girl, 7 Latina, 8 Middle Eastern, 9 Add Glasses plus reroll, 0 Repeat the last roll – and then rerolled until I had a trio that included a redhead. I like redheads.

fair brown hair. She had large grey eyes,

Brown hair usually goes with *brown* eyes.

"But it doesn't look like we're getting to the liquor store or the party tonight."

They didn't miss much. Max wouldn't have enjoyed it, which means that Sam wouldn't have enjoyed it, and they both would have brought Alex down. They wouldn't have had a *bad* time... just not a *good* one. Honestly, it wasn't the party Sam really wanted to go to, either – Max doesn't get along with the rest of Sam's friends (and Sam is pulling away from them), but Alex really did want to go out, so Sam found a party. It was a lot less vetted than Sam's first choice would have been – but that one was being put on by a guy who Alex didn't like (because he was always hitting on her).

“I’ll start with the rum.” Maxine had taken out the bottle and was mixing a rum and coke on her own anyways. She seemed embarrassed to realize she had assumed she could simply help herself.

DS asked me: given that a) Crystal checks in on Gene several times throughout the story, b) Crystal is able to possess redheaded women who were serving food, c) Crystal’s powers are stronger in snow, d) a snowstorm is in progress, e) Max is a redheaded woman who is mixing and serving drinks for her friends, and f) Max seems to have done things without realizing... is Max being possessed by Crystal at any point? Answer: No, because Max is mixing and serving drinks *for her friends*, not as a job. She’s not a servant. She just didn’t think to ask, because she’s not the most socially aware person in the world.

Maxine apparently had been texting everyone they knew between sips.

“We’re at [address], Sam hurt her ankle but it seems OK. If things get bad we’ll go to the ER and I’ll text again.”

I suspected Maxine cheated

Max didn’t cheat. She doesn’t do that sort of thing. But *Crystal* does. She’s still influencing things.

Halfway through our ninth go-round, Alexa drew our first 6 of the game.

You almost certainly didn’t notice that, in the update, the game went from 4 rounds to 9. There’s a few reasons for this: first, 3*3. But more importantly: given that Gene usually leaves work around 6pm, factoring in travel time for Gene to get home, and then the rescue, and the first aid, and the start of the friendship, and the hour of conversation before they start the game, and assuming an average of 5 minutes per turn, with 4 turns per round...

that’s just long enough for Max to say “I do” at the stroke of midnight. And *that* – not Sam slipping on the ice and hurting her ankle – is the beginning of the 9 days of **Blizzard**.

And the card was changed from 8 to 6 for reasons of threeness, again.

Also, halfway through the 9th round, with 4 turns per round, is turn #34. “Rule 34” is “if it exists, someone has made porn of it”. But that one’s just a coincidence.

(To be absolutely honest, “day 1 starts when Max says ‘I do’” is a post-hoc rationalization. I lost track of the timeline and wrote 10 days of events. Shhh.)

the friendly safe guy, the simple uncomplicated white knight, the decent upstanding citizen

three! And we're using "white knight" as a rote phrase, so each descriptor itself has three parts.

From now on, I won't be pointing out every occurrence of 'three', unless it's something subtle (like how there's three magical items: two boots and one chair, or how Gene has three named coworkers: Issa, Steve, and Rashid, or how the girls represent not only three different hair colors and three different eye colors, but also three different sexual orientations: Max is straight, Alex is bi, Sam is gay).

"I do," she grinned.

"I do!" piped in Alex before Sam could chuckle her own "I do."

"Uh," I laughed with my alcohol, "sure, I do too."

And as of this moment, the magic considers all four of them to be married. The girls don't *think* they're his wives - mentally, they're all still on 'girlfriend', and will continue to be for a few years - but they *feel* that they are. This is why they have no problem going into his apartment without asking: they feel as if it's theirs too. It works both ways: they feel that what's theirs is his. In chapter 28, when Peter points out that Gene is now homeless, all the girls briefly get the impulse to offer to let him stay in their dorm rooms. They're all smart enough to know why this isn't feasible, although Alex does later mention it as maybe an option that he could maybe possibly consider, maybe. She was sure he'd say no (and he does - if nothing else, it'd be unfair to Alex's roommate), but she wanted to say it.

CHAPTER 2

I climbed back into my chair. I was in a warm and happy place. I just wasn't asleep.

This is the first occurrence of Gene being maybe asleep, maybe awake: from his point of view he's awake but the women around him think he's asleep.

Is this magic, as opposed to him just faking being asleep? ... I'm not saying.

"Shh... you'll wake Gene up, sweetheart..." Max whispered.

First occurrence of Max calling Sam "sweetheart". Originally, this took place in chapter 9. And, originally, it was nothing special when she did it. In the original scene, Sam had latched onto Gene in her sleep, preventing him from getting out of bed so he could go to the toilet. And then Max called her 'sweetheart,' and tried to convince semiconscious Sam to let go. But Sam kept holding on, until Alex stuck her wet finger in Sam's ear.

But when reviewing and reconstructing the text to accommodate Sam not only being gay, but having an intense

passionate desperate crush on Max... we both misremembered the scene. “What if,” DS suggested, “Sam is reluctant to do something, and then when Max calls Sam ‘sweetheart’, Sam obeys? Not out of any magic or anything, just psychology? Max doesn’t realize that this is happening, because she’s just saying ‘sweetheart’ to be nice.”

I liked that idea a lot, but in order for it to work, it would have to happen multiple times. How *many* times? Three, of course. So we picked apart the text and added in two more places where Sam refuses to do something... until Max calls her 'sweetheart'.

Then, during a later review, we hit chapter 9 again, and realized that when Max calls Sam ‘Sweetheart’ there, Sam doesn't obey.

And the ‘finger in ear’ bit wouldn’t have worked if Sam woke up and let go of Gene when Max told her to, so I couldn’t change that. But it was too good an idea to omit entirely, especially since I’d already added it to two other chapters. So I removed it from chapter 9, and figured out a way to add it here.

You noticed that Sam yelps because she’s now topless, right? She took off her shirt earlier, and now Max removed her bra. This is *not* how Sam hoped her first experience of “I’m in bed with Max and she takes off my bra” would go.

I figured you’d done more than me, but I figured you’d done... you know, a *lot* more," Alex said.

Sam coughed. “Um. Why... why would you think that?” she said in a slow, wobbly voice.

“You’re so much prettier than me. And you go to a lot more parties.”

“I’m not prettier,” Sam mumbled.

Alex originally was surprised that, of the three girls, *she* had the most sexual experience – I had the idea that, although she hadn’t even kissed a boy, maybe she had rubbed a dick through jeans. But it works better if she had *no* sexual experiences with a boy *at all* (although she’s definitely watched the most porn). Plus this way we get a better image of who Sam and Alex are and how they think of each other.

And *none* of the girls believes herself to be the prettiest.

Charlie said I was ‘a prudey little ice queen’ and Graham called me ‘The High Bitch of Repression’. With capitals!

There’s something that happened to Sam in her childhood, something that played a major part in shaping who she is. That something doesn’t come up at all in *Blizzard*. Maybe I’ll do something with it eventually, maybe not. But that something also happened to someone who DS knew in *his* childhood, and that someone was named ‘Graham’. ‘Charlie’ is just a name I picked because it starts with C. No other names here start with C. ‘Graham’ and ‘Gene’ both start with ‘G’. And the capital letters are because, although Charlie *told* people how badly his date with Sam went... Graham *blogged* about it. And you *know* Sam went and read what he posted.

“Had a date with The High Bitch of Repression last night. Hottest girl in school, and a total waste of my fucking time.” He didn’t use her name, but everyone knew who he meant.

We figured out a lot of details about what happened next (and a few years down the road). I know why Sam agreed to go out with Charlie – he just sort of swaggered up and didn't give her an opportunity to easily say no – and why she agreed to go out with Graham – he was her friend, and he asked. She thought maybe that would be enough. (It wasn't.) But you don't need these details to understand or appreciate *Blizzard*.

Every writer paints beyond the canvas, as Bernard Cornwell said when I met him.

"It's not even sore!" Sam whispered back, pirouetting on an undamaged ankle.

First occurrence of fairy healing powers. I had originally intended this to be a one-off: Crystal magically puts a fake injury on Sam, and lets it expire overnight. But DS pointed out that there's a scene later on in which Sam falls in the shower, and expects to get a big ugly bruise as a result... and that in later chapters, this bruise is not mentioned. Big ugly bruises have no place in happy fluffy romance sex stories, I said, but he argued that since I'd gone to the trouble of mentioning that a bruise was expected, one should have been noticed. And since it wasn't, that meant it didn't happen. Which, combined with the unnaturally fast healing of Sam's ankle, and the presence of magic, means there's some kind of healing spell involved.

Several more times throughout the story, Gene, Max, Sam, and Alex experience small injuries that should nonetheless take longer to heal than they actually do. Ultimately I made this a major part of the ending.

That's a genuine pirouette, by the way – Sam has ballet training.

As for how she discovered that her ankle was intact: woke up, desperately needed the toilet, got up, ran to the bathroom, and was halfway through peeing when she realized. (By this point, Max was already curled up on Gene, so Sam didn't have to climb over her.)

Breakfast was OK. The bacon was undercooked, the eggs were overcooked.

Another one of the recurring themes in *Blizzard* is stuff that doesn't quite work right. Grand dramatic gestures that don't quite come off. Sam isn't a great cook. She's an *okay* cook. She's *good enough*.

And 'meh, good enough' has been the major theme of Gene's life for years.

"Here's your phone back." She stuffed a cell phone in my pocket.

"Why'd you have my phone?" (...)

"Just so you'd have our numbers."

The same way that Gene doesn't bother to lock his door, he doesn't have a passcode on his phone.

CHAPTER 3

DS: At what point did you realize that there was something more here than just another dirty story?

Me: I always aim for more, I first felt I was succeeding with the meeting Peter chapter

I had the feeling he would've rather started at the power differential where he was calling me Gene and I was calling him Mr Alexa's-Last-Name. I decided to withhold that lack of knowledge on my part.

This is the first moment that Gene has realized that he doesn't know Alex's last name. Sam introduced herself formally in chapter 1, before they even got into the drinking game- "I'm Samantha Richardson, I'm taking English Lit, I'm from Summerside" - because when she's in a new and potentially uncomfortable situation, she takes refuge in codified behaviors and rulesets.

Max put her full contact details in Gene's cellphone (in chapter 2), because that's the sensible thing to do.

Alex didn't tell him her full name that evening because she didn't see any reason to, at first - this is just a one-off random encounter, she's sure they'll just be bit parts in each other's lives. By the time she was madly in love with him, she was a bit too drunk and tired to think of it - and the next morning, it just didn't occur to her.

I'd never felt so attractive as under the gaze of those gleaming green eyes.

As with Sam and Max, Alex's hair color is not often associated with her eye color: blonde hair usually goes with *blue* eyes.

The Sapphire was way out of my price range. Everything was impenetrable black or crystalline blue.

The Sapphire is based on a real restaurant, called "The Onyx".

"Hi," she beamed back. "We have your table waiting, Mr McArthur."

"McArthur" was originally just a placeholder name I had misspelled. I often use 'Allen MacArthur' as a placeholder, and ctrl+f – find and replace – didn't find 'McArthur'. But DS pointed out that Crystal later describes Gene as 'knightly', and told him that she made his armchair into a throne, so it became an allusion to King Arthur.

I still had her boots. There had been half a foot of snow when she had left; I didn't understand how that act of forgetfulness could have occurred.

If you've got fairy healing powers, then you can walk home in the snow barefoot, and prevent yourself from sustaining any real damage. Originally, this was the result of Crystal *protecting* Gretchen's feet from damage, but it works better to have the damage occur and then be healed. Gretchen had to eat a lot of butter to fuel that.

“I’ll have to ask for ID,” our waitress said. Alex made a mad dash through her purse for her wallet and card. “Oh, a young one indeed. A week-old belated happy birthday!”

Given that Chapter 26 takes place mostly in the early hours of March... that Alex is being wished a “week-old belated happy birthday” here means that she’s a Valentine’s Day baby. I seriously didn’t plan that – originally, the story began in early February, except DS pointed out that it’s a nine-day interval that stretches into the first day of March, so I had to change it – but it works perfectly.

And given that Alex was born on a holiday, clearly they all were. Sam is a Halloween baby, because she’s disguising who she is. Max is Remembrance Day (November 11), because she’s all about learning and remembering.

Gene was born on Canada Day (July 1).

“I started in pre-med at Acadia, actually.”

DS said that the subtle magic, unreliable narrator, and fairy tale allusions in *Blizzard* reminded him slightly of the work of science fiction grandmaster Gene Wolfe. *Blizzard*’s narrator is a man named Gene, who lives in Nova Scotia. There’s a town in Nova Scotia called “Wolfville”. Clearly, Gene is from Wolfville.

The university in Wolfville is Acadia.

I’ve been doing this for almost ten years now

so, *nine* years. Maybe nine years *and nine months*, in fact?

She and Max and Sam -- the Sam she mentioned earlier? -- were headed to the LC across the street from my place

For the international readers: ‘LC’ = “Nova Scotia Liquor Commission”.

the snow had stopped while we had been dining. I looked around, hoping to say goodbye to Faye, but it was a different tall redhead who returned Peter’s Mastercard

The ‘different tall redhead’ is still Faye – but it’s Faye *without* Crystal possessing her. Because the snowfall has stopped.

I was feeling heady and happy.

He was actually feeling *three* h***y things, but he kept himself from acknowledging the third one, because (he tells himself) Alex is too young for him to be horny about her.

“You don’t have to do that, Dad. We’re already here at Gene’s. I know you’re not happy with the idea that--”

“... with the idea that we’ll be having sex.”

The door swung inward. Maxine was standing there.

The reason it’s Max who’s here instead of Sam: Sam was all flustered and second- and third-guessing herself about what to do, what does Gene expect, what’s the right behavior from a girlfriend. All her role models in this respect - the girls from her ballet class when she was in junior high, the ones who she had crushes on - waited for the guy to make the first move. Max, on the other hand, decided as soon as she got back to the dorm that she’d spend the night at Gene’s after she finished her assignments, and packed her overnight bag while Sam was at dinner.

Then, when Sam got back to the room, she was so nervous and agitated about everything that Max couldn’t focus, so she just got up and left with her assignments. If she’d told Sam “I’m going to Gene’s”, Sam would have tagged along, but Max isn’t the most socially aware person in the world (and she’s not madly in love with Sam just quite yet).

CHAPTER 4

"Thinking of you." The image that followed woke up every part of me. She had taken off her red top.

Another thing about those girls from ballet class who Sam had crushes on: they all sent nudes to their boyfriends, and so Sam saw this as just a standard part of being a girlfriend. Thus, Gene got nudes right away. She’s pretty sure this doesn’t count as her making the first move, because she already considers herself to be his. (Also, she couldn’t sleep for all the fantasizing she’d been doing about Max and Gene once she realized that if Max hadn’t come back to the dorm after 11pm, and Alex hadn’t posted any pics of Max on social media, that meant Max had to be with Gene. Are there sadder explanations of where Max could have been? Not in *Blizzard* there aren’t.)

“Boyfriends get nudes” is also why Sam asked about saving the Gene/Alex stream in chapter 12, and why she asked if she could film Gene/Max in chapter 15 (plus she was hoping to get mementos of Max nudity. She still wasn’t used to the idea that she’s going to have access to Max nudity for life).

"We'll go to Tara's." It was nicer, warmer, and the booths were more private than any of the dives I'd meet up with my brother at.

Tara's is based on a real restaurant, called "Cora's".

I had *no idea* that Tara is the hill in Ireland that the Sidhe are named for.

"Sorry about your blah night. Coffee at 3. Play Grounds."

Play Grounds (a name I'm proud of) is based on a real coffee shop in Sydney, Nova Scotia. I don't remember its name.

"I don't drink coffee <sad face>." Why would she type 'sad face' when there were perfectly good smileys, I wondered.

Sam *hates* smileys. She wants to be able to express herself in *words*, dammit. This is her attempt to be Girly And Seductive, by mimicking the ways that certain other girls talk to guys, in hopes that Gene will like it.

She went back and forth on typing the smiley and deleting it almost 30 times before she came up with that alternative. It took her three minutes, which Gene didn't mention because why would he?

I used to candy-stripe and go to school. That was way too much to handle.

Just in case: "candy-stripe" = "be a hospital volunteer".

Max wore her most tolerant face. She grabbed three milks from the bowl by the dessert menu. She fingered through the sweetener packets looking for something.

She's looking for stevia. Don't *all* authors know what their characters' favorite artificial sweeteners are?

I'm glad I was able to help Sam when she needed it. I'm surprised Alex introduced me to her dad. I'm proud you felt safe enough to come by my apartment to study. I'm worried you're all going to end up fighting. I'm certain you're expecting more than I'm giving. I'm not going to hurt you.

Not *three* statements – but six.

(Yes, we added one to make it work.)

“No, for everything. And I literally mean everything. I always wanted someone to rescue me. My heart was racing!”

First mention of Sam’s fantasy of being rescued.

And Sam is using ‘literally’ correctly.

Straight out of Harlequin.

Just in case: “Harlequin Romance”, a decades-long line of medium-to-low-quality romance novels. Sam was hooked on them for three months when she was 12, but they were too formulaic for her. Also, she could tell that she was supposed to be fantasizing about the male leads, but none of them did anything for her.

CHAPTER 5

Her nametag said Carmine. Not Faye. Not Gretchen.

Another reason DS said my work sort of reminded him of Gene Wolfe was the meaningful character names. “Faye”, obviously, is Fae.

“Carmine” means “Red”... as in “Little Riding Hood”. And “Gretchen” is cognate with “Gretel”... as in “Hansel and”. I also considered “Cindy” for “Cinderella” and “Snow” for “Snow White”, as I mentioned in naming Crystal. I settled on “Carmine” and “Gretchen” because they weren’t as blunt as “Faye”, and I only wanted 3.

“And you think those girls look just like Carmine in there?”

Crystal bypasses the part of Gene’s brain that recognizes faces, and directly activates the emotional response associated with that recognition. DS calls it “induced Fregoli delusion”.

After my last relationship exploded

We worked out a surprising amount of detail about what happened to Gene’s previous relationship (her name was Barbara). Perhaps I’ll do something with it someday.

“I’m not being shallow.”

“I know you’re not. I snapped a little. I’m sorry.” The small voice returned.

“No, you *don’t* know. We met each other two nights ago.

What Sam has enough self-control to not say here is that she knows a lot more about Gene than he thinks, because the afternoon after the night they met him, they all data-mined his social media accounts. Alex spent 10 minutes, getting the basics about what were important topics to him, so that she’d have something to talk about with him that evening over dinner. Max spent 45 minutes reading about who his friends were, what books he enjoyed, where he worked, where he went to school. Sam spent 3+ hours scrolling and scrolling and scrolling and learning every detail she could.

“OK, so I don’t know you well enough. That’s why we’re going for ice cream. So we can sit down and get to know each other.”

Would Sam be agreeing with Gene quite so much if she wasn’t magically subservient?

the greasy pizza place that sustained me through my doomed college career.

Gene *started* at Acadia University in Wolfville. He subsequently *transferred* to Dalhousie University in Halifax, in hopes that it would be more to his liking.

Didn’t help.

“It’s easy. You find a guy you like. You make him happy. You expect him to make you happy.”

This is a really subtle change from the original, pre-“Sam is gay” text:

originally, it was “you find *the* guy you like”. Consider the difference between how those two sentences feel: “*the* guy” assumes that he exists, “*a* guy” does not.

the sports bar with the fantastic milkshakes was on the left.

It’s called “Darrell’s”, and they really do make fantastic milkshakes. My favorite burgers in Halifax, I used the same restaurant as the setting in *Every Woman has a Price*.

“Build an army of murder-bots,” Alex added helpfully.

Changed from the original in which Alex doesn’t recognize the joke at first. Alex recognizes the joke, and she’s trained in improv. This is a “yes, and”.

“Oh, fine.” Max took a big slurp of Sam’s vanilla shake.

“You had your mouth on my straw...” Sam stepped back as Max swung around the table. When Sam

caught us looking at her, she added: “Gross.”

Sam crushing on Max. They’ll get used to constant bodily-fluid exchanges pretty quickly, but for now this is an intense moment for Sam.

Sam slunk in right up against me. I was putting down the glass when her hand slid over my thigh and made an aggressive fondle of my dick

As with sending nudes, Sam is following the example of one of her crushes from ballet, who she actually saw doing this backstage after rehearsal. (Martine honestly wasn’t very happy with Rory, but that’s a much sadder story than we’ll get into .)

“Oh hi!” I was startled by the blue-eyed girl at the door next to mine.

First appearance of Winter. Massive spoilers: she too is being ridden by a Sidhe – one with wind powers.

For internal purposes, we named that Sidhe “Victoria”. DS suggested ‘Tori’ which made me go: “Ew.” This is a Lady, she deserves a regnal name, not a Girlish one. I pointed out that ‘Tori’ is short for ‘Victoria’. She speaks in a classical way and is basically taxing Crystal’s boon to Gene. Taxes come from the state, the Queen is the state, Queen Victoria. It was great. It wasn’t until weeks later that DS reminded me that he suggested ‘Tori’ in the first place because Victoria is an auditor. *Auditor*. I probably wouldn’t have gotten it if he had suggested ‘Audrey’. Though I might’ve gone for ‘Audrey’.

Victoria has wind powers. Crystal has snow powers. What’s a blizzard but a conflict between snow and wind?

She wore her platinum blonde hair in a pixie cut.

Pixie cut, because she’s possessed by a Sidhe.

It took DS almost a month to make that connection.

CHAPTER 6

I was drawing so little willpower from my reserves, maybe I even thought it was a good idea. I wanted to illustrate how dangerous this was.

Willpower depletion is another recurring theme. When you use up your ability to resist following an impulse...

Had I a moment to let the momentum boil off, to let the rider get my elephant under control, I might’ve come up with a sane plan.

The ‘elephant/rider’ metaphor comes from Jonathan Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind* – one of the most influential

books in my life. This is the basis of how the Sidhe control people without possessing them: by changing not their *thoughts and rationality* (the rider) but their *intuitions and emotions* (the elephant). The rider tells the elephant where to go, but sometimes the elephant is too powerful to be controlled, and takes the rider in completely the wrong direction.

“I got asked out to a dance in grade 9. I was so afraid Spencer was going to kiss me, and I didn’t know what to do, so I bullied Max into practicing.

As with Sam talking about Graham and Charlie, DS insisted that the girls should mention the names of people from important moments in their lives, instead of just calling them “a boy”, etc. He suggested that I call the boy who didn’t kiss Alex “Liam”, because at his old address, he had neighbors with a son named Liam who would be in grade 9 about now, and because the name “Liam” is all about lacking *will*.

Except I was using the name “Liam” in another story: *Space Nut*. So we went with Liam’s brother Spencer.

God, I’m so glad I del--No, I wish I had acted. I wish I hadn’t ki--No, I knew I didn’t regret anything.

Just in case: “I’m so glad I *delayed things*”, and “I wish I hadn’t *kissed her*”

“Oh yes, the brunette one! Hello again, Sam Daddy!”

First instance of Wayne not being very good at telling jokes.

I mean, even for dad jokes, he’s not very good.

The tan line of a mildly conservative bikini was on her chest. It was late February in Canada. Why she’d get in a tanning bed wearing that seemed crazy

Sam has been more or less following the example of girls who she was crushing on from ballet. Tanning isn’t something that’s super important to her, so when Max starts talking about skin cancer, and about how Sam will be beautiful no matter what, Sam will take that as an excuse to quit.

CHAPTER 7

Remember: read everything Sam says and does through the lens of her having a pre-existing crush on Max. For instance:

She looked like she’d gone beyond euphoric and into delirious. “W-you gotta make her cum!” Sam stuttered excitedly.

Sam was about to say “*We* gotta make her cum”, but stopped herself because she’s still closeted. And she’s not

stuttering.

Her thumb was really starting to hurt me. Her grip on my shoulder had landed so she could stab under my collarbone with her thumb. I'd feel a sharp pain. I'd smack her thumb with my chin.

It's always more fun to write sex scenes where things don't go entirely right. I do this a *lot*.

Alex was soaking me through our jeans.

"Oh crap! I'm--" She moaned and bumped. Alex's wrists wrenched and pulled trying to escape my hands. "I'm--Jesus--" She caught a breath. "I don't do that all of the time. I'm sorry and--"

Alex just squirted. Note: "I don't do that all of the time", and not "that's never happened before".

The snow was piling up on the window and darkening the room.

Remember, Crystal's powers result in snow.

Anyone who could've looked into this girl's brilliant big eyes and warm smile and said "No" would be so heartless, so brainless, and so cowardly there was no wizard that could ever help them.

Everyone recognizes the "Wizard of Oz" allusion? Everyone? OK, good.

"I don't think I could do more..." Max worried.

Max knows that this is all going a little too fast for her. If it were just her and a guy - any guy, even Gene - this would be the point where she stopped. But she's not going to tell Alex and Sam that *they* have to stop just because *she's* had enough.

If you're wondering how Max can consider a handjob to be her limit when she's already spent the night with Gene, she had total faith that he would never do anything sexual that she didn't ask him to. There's a reason she kept her pajamas on.

CHAPTER 8

I had broken the world and become the dragon.

Wheel of Time reference.

“What about a boobjob?” Max had a small towel and was drying off her hands in the bathroom doorway.

Max has, as mentioned in chapter 2, read a *lot* of books about sex. But she’s not perfect with words like Sam, thus the mixup between “titfuck” and “boobjob”.

“It’s good. Alex has done a wonderful job,” Sam whispered. “She’s working so hard.” Sam’s breath hitched. “Reward her.” She panted. “Cum for her.” She whimpered. “Make her drippy and beautiful.” She sighed.

Sam is *not* orgasming here. She’s coming close, but stopping too soon.

This is the second-last time that Sam will ever stop partway through.

I thumbed her cheeks, pushing her smile to Joker size.

This is *not* an allusion to the ‘exactly that close’ game, but I’ll admit that they were probably inspired by the same neurons firing in my brain.

She rose off of me before my mind caught up to my reactions.

“Oh my God, Sam! I’m so jealous!”

“But you got a turn and--” Sam shut up when she saw Alex’s smile

Note that Sam didn’t quite *volunteer*, not exactly. Alex kind of decided that it was Sam’s turn because she’s being sharing and generous, because sometimes theater nerds direct instead of act - and because she really really likes the idea of watching her girlfriends being fucked. Sam went along with it because she’s a bottom, because the only other option is Max who clearly isn’t ready - and because she’s horny out of her mind for Gene.

“Can we go back in time four years? That’s when I was first ready for... Um...” She had the bravest face for almost an entire heartbeat. Her eyes flitted about the room, from me to Max to Alex to Max to me.

Again, a super subtle change from Straight Sam to Gay Sam:

Straight Sam said that four years ago is when she “was first ready for *this*” – which is, in this context, not just

‘having sex’ but ‘having sex *with a guy*’. Gay Sam was ready (or thought she was) at the same time, but ready for something completely different, which is why she trails off: she always says what she means, and she realizes that she’s about to say something incorrect.

CHAPTER 9

I heard the door close. I saw the pair climb the stairs into my apartment.

Really changes the mood of the magical home invasion when you realize that they used a key, doesn’t it? Winter/Victoria bribed the landlord into giving her a key to her upstairs neighbor’s apartment.

Not like it was *her* \$900.

“He’s asleep,” she announced.

Or is he? Second instance of Gene being a semiconscious listener while women describe plot events.

He’s practically a king for the riches you’ve foolishly heaped upon his lap! Earth, fire, and gold.

Earth: a brunette. Fire: a redhead. Gold: a blonde.

Originally, she described them as “riches of fire and gold”, because it was a redhead and *two* blondes... but, more importantly, they’re *not* earth, fire, and gold, they’re flesh and blood. One of the last editing passes was to make sure that everything the Sidhe characters say is literally true.

Victoria’s description of the girls as “riches” is based on their value as pieces in the Sidhe’s games: beauty, fertility, and financial wealth. And each of the girls has, by this point, literally been on Gene’s lap - something which she has not just inferred, but magically confirmed.

“Like the mixture of flavors of a grand meal and well-paired wine.”

Remember, this mortal body is a sommelier.

Her nose liked Alex, but Winter’s head nodded upon evaluating Sam.

Alex is a better match for Gene, but he's had sex with Sam, so...

“Apologies, Lady.” Faye sounded so sweet and deferential. I could feel the insincerity and the sarcasm billowing off of her.

The reason we had to make sure that everything the Sidhe say is literally true, is that the Sidhe do not lie.

They *can't*.

They can *deceive* and *mislead* and *imply*... but they can't actually *lie*. Note that Crystal is saying “Apologies”. She's not saying “I apologize”... because she doesn't.

“Yet, the fire, as you say, is in his arms. She's the one he holds dearest.

Max is the one who Gene holds dearest because she is, at this moment, the one he is literally holding. The Sidhe can't *lie*, but they can sure as hell play word games.

Note also that “as you say”. Being unable to lie can make metaphors a little difficult.

“My charms are only strongest in the snow,” Faye replied. “Our bickering has brought in every inch of snowfall I could muster. I am not able tonight.”

Because Crystal's powers are always accompanied by snow (the same way that Victoria's powers are always accompanied by wind), if there's not enough snow within range to accompany a given feat, then she can't accomplish that feat.

Yes, this means the Sidhe follow conservation laws.

“But you'd come rescue me if I needed you.” She rubbed her nose on my shoulderblade as she shook her head.

Second mention of Sam's fantasy about being rescued.

“But she always sleeps in her own bed, and doesn't share. I don't know how to make her... be my friend.”

Semiconscious and semicoherent, but meaningful. Given that Sam and Max are roommates, where else could Max sleep other than her own bed? Given that Sam is hugely crushing on Max, what else other than “be my friend” could she want to make Max do? And what could she wish Max shares?

(answers: in Sam’s bed, with Sam; ‘love me’; and ‘my feelings’)

“Um, how close?” Alex chirped. “This close?” She strangled up Max in a tight embrace. I dragged Sam another handful of inches across the bed. “This close?” Alex wrapped a leg around Max’s and snaked her arms under Max’s armpits. She squeezed the redhead’s boobs tight together.

“Almost there,” Max said, and I realized they were riffing on something.

“This close?” Alex stuck two index fingers into Max’s mouth and pulled her friend’s lips wide open in a Joker-ish smile.

“Zackly tha clobe,” Max nodded.

First appearance of the “exactly that close” game. I had originally intended this to be just Alex improvising something ridiculous, to show that she pushes limits and takes Max along with her, but DS said that it’s obviously something *structured*. “I can accept that Alex could improv something like this and convince Max to go along with it. I can’t accept that Max would be able to keep up.” So clearly it has to be them riffing on something they’ve done before. Some private joke, because they’ve been friends since they were kids. And if they’ve done it before, they’ll do it again.

I don’t actually know what the rules to the “exactly that close” game are: Alex won’t tell me.

I’m so glad our heater ran off oil and the pressure was handled by the city.

“Our” in this context can mean either “the building as a whole” or “me and my three girls”.

Max rubbed the hip she had dinged off the lip of the tub

no bruise manifests later: fairy healing.

"I thought I told her to take her stuff when we went to breakfast," I said.

"Did you say 'her stuff', or 'her books'?" Sam asked.

"Well shit," I said, admiring Max's deviousness.

Unreliable narrator time: that's not deviousness, it's just Max taking him literally. She does that sometimes.

Sam just looked at Alex until the theatre student caught a clue and handed me her phone.

Alex immediately told him her passcode, because of course she would; Gene just didn't mention it, because why would he? Because DS and I are insane, we know what the passcode is for Alex's phone, and why (0224, commemorating a historic event that happened on February 24 1918). We also know that Sam's email password is the first letter of each line of the first sonnet she ever wrote, when she was 11. It wasn't a very *good* sonnet, but she still remembers it word for word. (We don't actually know what those letters are. We're not *that* insane.)

"Hey, which one of you moved those boots?"

"Well, *I* didn't!" Sam threw her back up instantly.

"Even if you had, I'm not angry, just curious," I shrugged. "What about--"

"Even if I had? You don't trust me!" Sam barked sharply. Alex, Max, and I looked on in shock.

Alex is *so* shocked, in fact, that she doesn't think to say "Sam, *I* moved the boots, okay?" And then things spin out of control so quickly that saying it wouldn't have helped.

And by the time Gene got back upstairs with Sam, Alex had gotten distracted reading the game instructions, and then it was never the right time.

She does tell Sam eventually. Before chapter 29, in fact. Perhaps someday I'll write about what else happened at that point.

"Not a big deal?! It's a huge deal! The *biggest* deal! I could be in *love* with you!" She was stark white.

"You mean last night? That *was* a huge deal, Sam. That was amazing and important for me too."

“But I--” She had a hand on her chest and she was trying to calm herself down. “Something’s wrong.”

I'm amazed I was able to write this and then do another 15 chapters thinking that Sam was straight.

(The original, pre-gay Sam was going to say something like ‘I barely know you’.)

CHAPTER 10

I looked up to Max. “Do you want to check on Sam?”

She *hmmm*’d. “It’s only been a couple minutes. I think we should let her talk to her mom.”

By this point, you'll have noticed that Max has become subservient and submissive. Gene's phrasing is such that he is *asking her what she wants...* so she seriously considers it, and phrases her answer as an opinion.

“Like a mosquito. A girl mosquito.” Max explained with elaborate hand gestures. I smiled, seeing the awkward nervous girl mixed with the knowledgeable STEM student. I liked it. “A mosquito?”

“I don’t think I like that neologism,” said Sam the English Lit major.

“Yeah, I was playing with how it’s Latino Latina, kinda thing,” Max said meekly.

Like her dad, Max is not the world's best at telling jokes. Note also that Sam is the kind of person who knows how new words are created, and has definite opinions on which ones are good. And if anyone other than Max (or Alex or Gene) had made that comment, Sam would’ve just said “that’s a terrible neologism” instead of hedging.

(Original version mentioned Sam ‘using her English degree’ – but she doesn’t *have* a degree yet.)

“Merr-ow!” The cat belonged to Mrs Rabinovich in apartment Four, and was leaving a trail of pawprints along the flat wooden railing. The cat stopped and eyed me critically; I had almost slapped a shovelful of snow in her face.

This is the other major change that resulted from my working with DS. Originally, the cat only appeared in

Chapter 28: as the building was on the verge of collapsing, Gene carried his elderly neighbor to safety, and she cried “I can’t leave her!”, but then Alex ran into the bedroom and came out holding the old lady’s cat. DS insisted that we give the cat a name, and I agreed it had to be something that the old lady could cry in alarm. So we named her Caylee (I originally wanted “Ceilidh”, but decided that not enough people would know how to pronounce that).

The next day, he asked me the holy shit question: *where’s the third Sidhe in this story?*

He was right, there had to be one, but it was too late to introduce a new character: there was no room. So I had to repurpose someone pre-existing. Some third female character. Who?

Start by figuring out what she’s doing. Victoria is the Commanding Lady, Crystal is the Serving Girl... what’s the third role?

This was the wrong approach, as we accidentally got ‘whore’. So we backed out and tried from a different angle. One at the top, one at the bottom, one in the middle...

Someone who’s uninvolved but has to be there.

A witness.

Caylee.

This is a major aspect of the story, and ***Gene never finds out about any of it.*** It’s all happening in the background. His neighbor’s cat is possessed by a Sidhe, who watches as two other Sidhe use him as a pawn in an internal power struggle, because without an official witness, victory and defeat don’t count.

We worked out a *lot* of details about what the Third Sidhe does. About what the rest of Sidhe society does, and where they are. It was incredibly fun, and perhaps I’ll do something with those details.

The Sidhe possessing Caylee, we decided would be named (for purposes of our conversations) “Agnes” – partly because of “witNESS, agNES”, and also because Agnes → the lamb → sheep, an animal which culturally we think of as meek and harmless, but which can actually do a lot of damage. Agnes is the most dangerous of the three, in part because most of the other Sidhe don’t realize that.

Then we had to decide what her power was. Crystal has snow powers: water vapor freezing into crystals as it comes down through cold air to land on a surface. Victoria has wind powers: cold air. Therefore, Agnes has frost powers: water vapor depositing directly on a surface without falling through the air as crystals.

Patches of frost can look like kitty claw marks.

Remember that conveniently placed patch of ice that Sam slipped on?

Remember that spare key that someone lent to Crystal so she could lock the door to Gene's apartment?

"Three beautiful, adventurous, and intelligent girls?"

They're adventurous in that they're willing to do absolutely anything and everything sexual with this man they just met a few days ago.

She looked like she hadn't slept in weeks.

She hasn't. She hasn't slept in *months*, ever since Victoria possessed her at the fall equinox. Fairy healing means Victoria doesn't have to let Winter sleep.

It also means that once Victoria leaves Winter, Winter's gonna crash *hard*.

CHAPTER 11

"It wasn't going to be Max!" Sam sounded tired.

If it was just a matter of "someone had to do it, why shouldn't it have been me", Sam's argument would be more along the lines of "Max wasn't ready". But Sam needs the boot charge, and so she feels protective - and, although she'd never admit it, possessive - of Max. Right now, the idea of Max fucking anyone else - even Gene - makes Sam a bit uncomfortable.

"I was ordering some supplies. Do you mind if they come here? I'd get all embarrassed if I had to pick them up at the dorm?" she asked.

"Alex buys sex toys for everyone" was always part of the story, from my earliest notes.

"It's still in the package!"

It was very important, for Sidhe reasons, that Sam have *no* sexual experience pre-Gene whatsoever. The more

‘unsullied’ the better.

“It really is,” Max agreed. “One of her classmates gives them out to all her friends on birthdays. According to this, Nancy’s real cheap.”

To be fair, Nancy pays for everything with her own money. As per DS, “people have names”.

We worked out a surprising amount of detail about Nancy, including the fact that she doesn’t give them to *all* her friends – just the ones she’s hoping to seduce. She would resent having what she does described as “grooming” (“Sam’s a legal adult, and she’s clearly gay so this is just to help her realize that, and I’m not even a year older than her, so BACK OFF”) but that’s basically what she’s doing. She actually appears in the story at one point, but Gene has no idea who she is.

Her name is a reference to the old *Nancy* comic strip, because of a feature on Something Awful about making edits of a specific *Nancy* strip where Nancy asks a banker if she can borrow \$2 because the circus is in town. Borrow \$2 from the bank → cheap → buying cheap dildos → Nancy. (She bought them in bulk. On a shelf in the closet of her dorm room, there’s a big stack of boxes of dildos. Her first roommate lasted almost a week before requesting a different room.)

She is going to be *so* angry at Gene when she finds out that Sam’s with him. (She didn’t have a *crush* on Sam, but she definitely *lusted* for Sam, and had all these plans... She’s got enough self-control to not destroy anything that she could get in trouble for destroying, but she tore up her favorite sweater.)

And that dildo is going to stay in its package until the day Sam moves out of the dorm, and then it’ll Somehow Get Misplaced.

(And, unreliable narrator time: despite what Max says, Sam doesn’t consider Nancy a friend.)

“OK, good, I don’t--”

“... don’t need to feel as bad if she finds out I got rid of it, then.” (She *hasn’t* gotten rid of it, but she *intends* to.)

I stopped Sam with a hug around the waist. I looked her in the eye. “I masturbate all the time.”

“What?” Alex popped up her head. “Really? How often is ‘all the time’? Once a day?”

“I try.” I shrugged. “Ten a week? That sounds about right.”

Just in case you were wondering how Gene is able to keep up, sexually, with three 19-year-olds.

“I really don’t think I’m capable of stopping you,” I joked. Alex cocked her head and pursed her lips.

“No, you really aren’t,” she said.

First instance of Gene saying something hyperbolic and one of the girls deciding to take him literally.

“What’s the postal--

I actually know Gene's postal code, because he lives on a real street. The supermarket, the liquor store, the proximity to the university dorms, those are all real.

(No, Gene's address isn't mine.)

How do you say “Your daughter and her two best friends overwhelmed me into sex?”

Unreliable narrator time: Gene thinks Sam is one of Alex’s two best friends, which has really only been the case since the magic started a few days earlier.

“It’s like if Cinderella had the same size feet as her wicked stepsisters,” Alex grinned as I fitted the boot around Sam’s foot.

Just in case the ‘magic boots’ / ‘Cinderella’s glass slippers’ parallel wasn't obvious enough. Also we’re about to see Max and Sam play out the roles of Wicked Stepsisters when interfered with by Victoria.

CHAPTER 12

“There’s some potatoes. Do you girls like mashed potatoes? I do good mashed potatoes.”

“Really?” Sam lit up.

Sam's from PEI. Potatoes are PEI's main crop. Her father loves gardening and feeding his family; he's *great* with potatoes.

"How do you make mashed potatoes?" she asked me.

"You boil them and then you hit them," I said, surprised the concept needed to be explained.

"Oh la la!" Alex squeezed me and hammed up her praise. "Such a knowledgeable and skilled chef!"

"Yes, it's an ancient family recipe

Gene's parents run a restaurant.

"Oh my god!" I reached across her and turned on the faucet. She put the knife down and was holding her left hand where she had cut into her index finger. I hoped I had band-aids. I kissed her ear. "Sorry!"

"It's only a little cut," she said, rinsing it. (...)

"Health first. It doesn't look deep. I'll get you a band-aid."

With all the body fluids that get all over everything later, you'd think that Max would need to replace her band-aid. But she doesn't, because the finger is completely healed within an hour: fairy healing. She doesn't mention this to Gene because it doesn't come up.

"Yes, Mom. Max. My *roommate* Max. What other Maxes are in Halifax? Whatever. Max also likes him! We're all going to try to make it work! I do *too* like him! We're going to try! The three of us. No, the three of us *and* Gene. Max, Al--"

Sam's mom has long since figured out that Sam is gay, and is just waiting for Sam to be ready to admit this. She's also figured out that Sam has a painfully intense crush on Max. As a result, she's more than a little worried about the idea of Sam getting involved with Gene. Think what questions Sam is answering when she says "I do *too* like him! We're going to try!"

“Protect me!” Max pleaded.

“No, I’d like to see where this goes,” I laughed. She lost her frown, and pouted.

“I guess I have to.” And she trudged back around me to Alex.

DS praised this as a *really* subtle demonstration of how magically subservient Max is.

I looked over at the screen. It was clear Sam was masturbating and Max was studying us with a frightening intensity.

And *this* is the last time Sam ever stopped masturbating partway through, because she was too embarrassed to do it behind Max’s back.

“Hey,” morosed Alex’s chubby roommate. She shut the door as she told Alex to finish getting dressed.

Alex’s roommate Kylene (again per DS: people have names!) has been having a lousy night: not only did her boyfriend dump her, but now it looks like Alex has somebody and is going to be all bubbly and cheerful when Kylene is trying to mope. Kylene was the name of a girl who I knew in college, and who lived in Alex’s dorm.

CHAPTER 13

“Who’s she? One of the chicks on your comic book shows? She’d make a hell of an MJ, Tiger.”

Everyone recognizes the Spider-Man, Mary-Jane, “face it, tiger, you just hit the jackpot” allusion? Everyone? OK, good.

Sam’s a brunette with an ass built like the space--

Originally, Gene was interrupted in the middle of saying that Sam had “pipefitter lips”, meaning that she looked like she’d be good at sucking cock. DS found this inappropriate, and said that Gene should be describing Sam in terms that were *sexy* but not *sexual*. So Gene’s about to say that Sam has “an ass built like the space shuttle” –

which is a line from the cartoon *Clone High*.

“Hey, remember when you got that job interview at Stint Engineering, borrowed mom's car to drive all the way out to Truro, and still fucked it up?” my brother added helpfully.

“Yeah, and you bitched about it for three weeks.

Doug bitched about it for three weeks because Gene was sleeping on his couch.

Jean's up the street was always my favorite.

Jean's is another real restaurant, and it's where I was when I first began plotting out the story.

“Dude, hands aren't free and I got Kent in the passenger seat,” he said when he picked up. Kent? What happened to Marty?

Doug's a bit of a slut.

“Nope, that's Storm. She's got *white* hair,” said my brother. “Redhead can rewrite your brain so that you're gay.”

Everyone gets the X-Men reference, right? Good.

“Acquaintance's boyfriend,” she explained. “I'll be home when you close up.”

Super subtle change from the original: deleting the ‘an’ from “An acquaintance's boyfriend”.

The Sidhe do love their word games. Carmine's boyfriend, like Gene, hears “Acquaintance's”, singular. But Gene is also “Acquaintances' boyfriend”, plural. The one boyfriend of Crystal's three acquaintances. She's not *lying*, because it's not her fault that people hear the words differently from how she meant them!

She set her mitten on her chest and took a long breath. “What--”

“What has she done?”

“I had a dream about you two.” I shrugged. The details of the dream were vivid but as I tried to tell Carmine I lost the image. I shut my mouth and it came back.

Another subtle display of magic. DS described this as “backsplash from a ‘confidentiality/NDA’ spell, which Victoria would have cast as a matter of course in all such incidents, just in case someone wakes up”.

Gene takes strength from the girls’ presence. That’s why he’s able to be semi-awake: to keep watch over the girls, and protect them. Since the girls are not in this scene, he’s not able to resist the presence of the Sidhe. I originally planned for this to be Gene’s *own* magic giving him strength – I had considered giving *everyone* a little bit of magic, and Gene just by sheer fluke happened to have way more of it than Crystal and Victoria expected – but the story works better if it’s more the result of personal growth and strength of character.

(DS asks: is it *entirely* the result of personal growth and strength of character, with no magic involved?

I’m not saying.)

“What about your boots? Do you want them back?”

“If I didn’t think you should have them, I’d have taken them back. Anyway, they belonged to Gretchen.”

Eventually, Alex’ll realize Gretchen never got her boots back. She’ll buy what she hopes is a close enough replacement on Etsy for \$600, then go to Tara’s, where she’ll learn that Gretchen doesn’t work there any more.

A week after that, she’ll have traced Gretchen to a restaurant on the other side of town.

“Hi! Gretchen!”

“I’m sorry, do I know you?”

“You used to work at Tara’s over by the Dal campus! I’ve been trying to find you!”

“Uh. What’s this about?”

“You had these really, really sexy thigh-high leather boots, really really hot and slutty, and then they disappeared, right?”

“... yes?”

“I got you a new pair!”

“... this is really very flattering, but I’m already in a relationship.”

A sly smile spread across her lips. “Besides, better she didn’t know you had anything of mine.”

Crystal fully expected that her extravagant gift would get her in trouble with Victoria, even if Gene had only chosen *one* girl instead of all three. She even expected that Victoria would try to cancel or twist the spell.

The purpose of the boots is not just to reinstall Crystal’s changes as needed, but to add spice to the game by sneaking an extra piece onto the board without Victoria knowing.

DS: “It’s amazing how creatures who are physically unable to lie, are able to deceive each other.”

“They’re the only things that house *my* power in your home,” she said, falling to a stop. “You have to keep them.”

Interesting that she doesn’t consider the armchair to be another instance of her power, hm? Since she made him a king, the throne holds *his* power.

You *did* realize that she made him a king, yes?

Remember: magic is stupid.

[CHAPTER 14](#)

DS: do you have a favorite part of the story

Me: Peter and Gene talking in The Sapphire, I find terrifyingly uncomfortable.

DS: why’s that

Me: Gene’s forced to look his flaws in the face. That’s always incredibly difficult.

Me: Second is trying to take Max out on a date.

DS: the actual date, or the part where he goes to the dorm and realizes that, oh shit, all these people think he’s a creepy old perverted fuck?

Me: The dorm, but that undercurrent is secondary. Just how Max misses cue after cue. I find that adorable.

We stepped off on her floor. An overweight young woman in only a towel left the shower room and crossed the hall to her room. I looked away.

Hello, Nancy. Goodbye, Nancy. Nancy has zero body modesty issues.

(no, I hadn't originally intended for this to be the same person as the girl who gave Sam the dildo. DS has some damn good ideas.)

"That slut!" Sam gasped. I turned and looked at her, confused. "Who would she go out with besides you?!"

If Sam hadn't needed a fresh boot charge by this point, she would have said "What?!" instead of "That slut!" She'd still have been *confused*... but not *hostile*.

"What would you have named your Chinese restaurant?" I asked with a smirk.

"Something about a moon or a dragon," she said.

"Well, I'm looking forward to the dumplings at Something About a Moon or a Dragon.

Sam was bothered enough by "Something About A Moon Or Dragon" that after Gene and Max left, she spent ten minutes fussing over a Chinese Restaurant Name Generator website, before giving up because she didn't know enough about the culture to make it feel authentic.

I looked down at Sam's screen just as she alt-tabbed over to Word. She was typing a report. The music still blared out of the headphones on her lap. She crossed her legs and I noticed her jeans were unzipped.

Sam is not yet comfortable with letting Gene know that she was reading porn while she was supposed to be working on an assignment.

Sorry, reading *erotica*.

Sam's browser history would show that her tastes in erotica have abruptly changed: from "college roommates first time" to "college girl / older man".

I can't cut a couple hours out of every day for this shit.

One of the differences between porn and erotica is that, in erotica, people have feelings.

Another difference is that in erotica, people have schedules and other things they need to be doing.

"What kind of flowers should I get you?"

"Haagen-Dazs," she said.

There's actually a very specific reason Sam isn't crazy about flowers. Perhaps I'll do something with that reason eventually.

"What the fuck does 'Team Girlfriend' mean?" that same kid who called me Max's dad asked as we left. The door had been closed.

"It means don't be a stalker creep and eavesdrop," I answered. Max's face had said she was going to answer the question without hesitation

What Max was about to say: "It's me, Sam, and Alex. You remember Alex, right Tim?" She then would squeeze Gene's hand.

Because Max doesn't lie. (She's not like the Fae and *unable* to say anything that's not literally true. She's just uncomfortable lying.)

"Specials are on the board. Flag me or Symone down when you're ready." She gestured to the girl at the counter. "Anything to drink?"

One of my early beta-readers was "b0b". He fell out of contact with me for several months, and I worried about him, because he's in Kashmir, and there was a lot of governmental unpleasantness there, along with restrictions on Internet access.

When I explained this to DS, he told me about his friend Symone in Hong Kong – he hasn't heard from her in months, and he'll probably never find out what happened to her.

If you're a young Chinese woman from Hong Kong, and you used the English name "Symone", then this young Chinese-Canadian woman in *Blizzard* is probably named for you. (And it's good to see that you survived.)

She turned stone-faced.

"Something wrong?" I asked while chewing (...)

"Don't talk with your mouth full, you'll choke," she growled at me with genuine concern. "Yeah, something *does* feel wrong. It felt wrong like it felt before we shoveled your walk yesterday morning.

This, I'm particularly pleased with. Gene completely misinterprets what's happening.

Max is the most mindful of the three girls, the most self-analytical, the most aware of her own feelings. She knows herself best.

Max - a girl who has, through shyness, loyalty to Alex, and her own obliviousness to social cues, never discovered that she's someone who falls in love *very* deeply and *very* fast - has just realized that (like she did when they were shoveling) she is feeling *real* love for Gene.

And that it feels different from when she puts the magic boots on.

There's a lot of potential in a story that examines this from the girls' perspectives.

"I mean, I'm glad you're thinking about things sexually more than me. It makes me wanna catch up."

That's literally what's happening. Max and Sam and Alex have been synched to Gene, emotionally. At a very basic level, what he wants is what they want.

This is why they wouldn't leave when he told them to: because despite what he had consciously decided, he still wanted them.

I flirted with her some more as we walked to my place. She gave back, but she fell into quiet more than once.

Unreliable narrator time: Gene saw it as flirting; Max considered "I'm on the Pill, so you can cum in my pussy all you want" to be important health information. (Remember when she consciously switched from 'penis' to 'dick' and 'orgasm' to 'cum' ? Same with 'vagina' and 'pussy'.)

There's enough information in the story to infer that Max is on the Pill: with Sam, he used a condom; with Alex, he pulled out; with Max, he came in her, and neither of them panicked.

Max produced a key.

"That's a bit much, Max."

"Well, after everything," she said, and she unlocked the door, "We got worried. It was only a matter of time before you were locked out. So Alex grabbed the key from the kitchen and we went and got these made. You can't just wake up Mrs Rabinovich for the spare if it's the middle of the night, right?"

"When did you meet--"

"Of course, Dad got involved. 'Maxie, there's a hardware store a couple blocks from you. I talked to a guy named Mike. He'll cut new keys for you,'" Max said with a flat unimpressed stare. "Thanks, Dad. I really needed that 15 seconds I saved not saying 'Hey Google' *myself*."

A few different reasons for this change from the original: first, *most* hardware stores can cut keys on short notice; they have machines for it. So there's no need for Wayne to find a place that can do it on short notice. Also, this is where we learn that Gene's elderly neighbor has a spare key (explaining how Crystal locked up after herself in Chapter 1). And the fact that it's *Alex* who grabbed the key from the kitchen shows the dynamic between the girls, just like how Max's exasperation with her dad's insistence on helping her with something super simple is an indicator of what their relationship is like.

As for when they met Mrs. Rabinovich: earlier that day. They came over to Gene's place after class; he wasn't there, but Mrs. Rabinovich was. She asked them questions until she was satisfied that they were legit, then invited them in for a cup of tea, and that was a pleasant half-hour. Afterward, they went to the hardware store.

Mrs. Rabinovich was worried about Gene being all alone. She rather hoped he'd end up with Alex (so polite and friendly, and so nice to the cat!) instead of Max (stiff and uncomfortable) or Sam (very obviously crushing on Max), but has no trouble with the notion that he's with more than one girl at a time. She's an old hippie, very pro-free-love. She's seen a lot of threeway relationships in her time (and they all eventually fell apart).

I know enough about what happened to her in the '70s that it could be the basis for a prequel.

There's 9 keys on Gene's key ring, not all of which are still useful. He should get rid of them but... meh, inertia. (his apartment, his mailbox, his previous apartment, the building where he works, his parents' house, his parents' restaurant, his mom's previous car, Mrs. Rabinovich's spare, and the dumpster to his parents' restaurant). Alex tested the keys first; the apartment key was (of course) the third one she tried.

buy me several hundred dollars worth of groceries

Three hundred dollars worth, in fact.

big flamboyant *A/lexa* signature.

Alex has practiced her signature in case someday someone wants her autograph.

CHAPTER 15

Sam left her fuzzy winter boots on the third step above my soaked sneakers and Max's steel-toed giants

If you remember chapter 5, Max has “white winter galoshes”. Those are the cute ones, the ones she wears to stop Alex from hassling her about wearing plain boring clothes. These are her preferred pair, since she knew Alex wasn't going to be here.

I tried to appreciate the generous, flamboyant, *expensive* gesture.

There are details in *Blizzard* that nobody would *ever* notice unless I pointed them out. For instance, here, those three three-syllable adjectives are Deliberately Consecutive Backward Alphabetical.

Ouch.” I frowned. “I would've done whatever it took to keep you from that misery.”

She considered that seriously, then nodded. “Yeah, you literally would.”

Second instance of Gene saying something hyperbolic and it being taken seriously.

“Like... guys like lesbians, right?” She flicked her eyes at Sam but dropped them when she looked back to my face.

Max's brain is starting to put the pieces together. Really, she's been sort of aware for quite a while – you can't be around Sam Richardson for more than a month without starting to realize that she likes girls – but this is Max's first “wait a minute, does that mean...” moment.

Also, Max is starting to realize that what makes *Gene* happy and/or horny, makes *her* happy and/or horny.

"I don't want you to be uncomfortable. I volunteer as tribute."

Everyone gets the *Hunger Games* allusion, right?

"So we just need to buy more bedclothes?" Sam asked.

"No, we're good, actually. We've got more sets of sheets and stuff than you'd think in the closet," Max answered for me.

As part of Gene's attempt to fix himself up post-Crystal's visit, he bought several sets of sheets (7, increasing his collection to 9), and he and the girls have been going through them a *lot* faster than he ever expected would happen. A trip to the laundromat is (or would have been) in his near future.

(And of *course* Sam knows the word "bedclothes".)

"Pretty sure you're not gay," I suggested.

"Definitely into at least one guy!" Sam grinned.

I can't believe that I wrote this and then continued thinking Sam was straight.

"Yeah, Max," Sam agreed as I let go of Max's jaw. "Alex and I figured you'd need a bit more of a firm hand to overcome your neuroses and get down to business."

"And then the boots." Max waved that off. "Me and you are going to need a recharge every day or so

Max has correctly inferred that Alex doesn't need the boot recharge.

"I'll be in the computer chair in case you ask me to join you."

"Look, I thought we--"

".... were going to do this together." Sam is as nervous as Max is here – is this too good to be true?

(Subtle change: originally, Sam said “*until* you ask me to join you”; DS correctly pointed out that this was too presumptuous for a bottom girl who likes to let other people make those decisions.)

"Can I film it?" Sam interrupted Max.

Max froze. "... Uh." (...) She looked back to Sam. "I... I guess? Get my... my good side?"

Max has no idea what “get my good side” means except that it’s something people in pop culture say.

“No, I’m not!” Sam declared. “A voyeur is male. Female is a voyeuse.”

Sam speaks fluent French. (Her mom is from France. Jared met her when he was touring Europe.)

One afternoon, DS messaged me and said “I was halfway to the dentist when it occurred to me that Sam’s mom’s name is Lorraine. I don’t know why,” and I told him “because she’s from France.”

Remember back in Chapter 12, where Sam was talking to her mom and getting agitated?

“Yes, Mom. Max. My *roommate* Max. What other Maxes are in Halifax?

Sam calling her mother “Mom” instead of “Maman” is always a bad sign.

I laughed and Max joined in.

I find it funny that Sam is objecting, not to being caught masturbating, but to the wrong form of the word being used. *DS* finds it funny. *Gene* finds it funny. Max... not so much. She’s laughing because Gene is laughing.

Will this continue after she’s no longer subservient?

“You take me, you have to keep me,” she threatened.

“I’d like to see anyone try and stop me,” I growled.

“Not me, they should just leave us alone,” she said with a bit of anger and fear.

Third instance of Gene saying something hyperbolic and one of the girls taking him literally.

She had spasmed from the intrusion. Our connection flooded in warm wetness.

Max squirted.

The first thing she did was punch me.

Punch. Her right fist into my chest. Punch. Her left hand into my shoulder. Punch. She finally breathed. Punch. Punch. Punch

I was once with a girl who did this during sex. She wasn't angry, and neither is Max. It's just her being out of control.

You'd expect Gene to get some bruises from this, wouldn't you – and yet, he didn't. Almost like there was some kind of magical healing going on.

She liked to bite my lip when her breath caught. I was going to have a sore lip for days.

And yet, this didn't happen. Almost like there was some kind of magical healing going on.

"Gene, uh..." The sex was intense. "Max, uh..." I heard Sam's entreaties amidst her rising and falling breaths.

Sam moaning 'Gene' *and* 'Max' during orgasm, we added *after* deciding she was gay.

And yes, this – the third time Sam masturbates in the story – is the first time she masturbates *to orgasm*.

CHAPTER 16

"Mornin' Ralph." Sam nuzzled the back of my neck.

“Mornin’ Sam,” I replied with a grin.

Everyone’s familiar with “Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog”, right?

Oh. Well, they’re on Wikipedia. They’d always greet each other with “Mornin’, Ralph” and “Mornin’, Sam”.

“You want to join us,” I said. Wait! Shit -- my voice didn’t go up at the end. That wasn’t a question, it was a statement. Would she agree to anything I said like that? Was that how this worked? I took a breath. Don’t fuck up. When you ask the girls something, don’t rig the outcome, fuckwit.

“I do,” she nodded. “But I also want to be this too.”

My original wording for this was awkward, and looked like Gene was proud of having altered Max’s mind.

Incidentally: no. He didn’t control her mind here. He did put the idea of showering with him and Sam in the forefront of her thoughts, but that’s what language *does*.

Bacon in the oven? Dad would not allow that in his kitchen

As mentioned before, Gene’s parents have a restaurant. Also, I cook bacon in the oven and an old roommate of mine who was a chef always produced better bacon frying it than I can baking it.

I don’t know how I did it, sliding out on one knee and catching Sam’s slick naked body. Her hip collided with the rim of the tub but most of her body fell across my chest.

“Fuck! Fuck! Ow!” she whimpered.

“I’ve got you.” (...)

“Yeah. Again,” she said with a heart-melting smile

Again, Sam loves being rescued.

She came out of the shower and looked to see her back in the mirror. “There’s going to be a bruise...”

And this is why there's fairy healing.

"I never liked pink," she said. I shrugged and swapped mine with hers.

"Grab whatever goes on your skin, because I want to make you shine." I grinned with the pink one in hand.

"Oh! But can you use a different color?"

I chuckled in her face. She laughed back, but she clearly wasn't thrilled I had kept the pink puff. I kissed her nose, pitched the pink, and grabbed Alex's white. She smiled but the colors were long forgotten once I had my hands on her.

DS fussed about this scene, because in the original, Gene used the pink puff anyway. "It's just using the wrong color loofah," I told him. "It's not even borderline borderline rapey, it's teasing that didn't fly".

His problem was that Sam had expressed a specific preference, and Gene was ignoring that.

"In a story where the narrator wasn't so worried about accidentally overwriting the girls' wants with his own, I would smirk at this and continue. It's super minor. It's not even 1%. But it's also not 0.

I feel as ridiculous for fussing about this point as Sam feels for fussing about not liking pink.

But she *doesn't* like pink. And I *don't* like this point."

Easy fix: Gene takes a moment to respect Sam's feelings, and then gets her to forget about colors.

Her mouth noises were muffled as she chewed her lip to keep from saying whatever was running through her head.

Remember – Sam is still closeted, and as a result of last chapter, she knows that she'll sometimes moan Max's name while in the throes of orgasm. So she's desperately trying to not do that.

I have no idea what she would have been trying to keep herself from saying *before* I made her gay. Maybe my subconscious was steering me in that direction already.

I could tell the rush over my jaw wasn't from the shower.

And Gene is 3 for 3 on making his girls squirt – and he did each of them in a different way.

I could see confusion, hopefulness, but mostly questions burning from her face.

Another one of those *holy shit of COURSE she's gay, that's the only way this makes sense* lines.

Alex texted me a selfie from her bed. She had her makeup done and looked incredible. She had a handle on all of the ins and outs of lighting and presentation

Alex doesn't send nudes. Ever. Not even to Gene.

Her first exposure to porn was when boys she knew from school were giggling over the Fappening leaked pictures. Alex was, and is, a huge Jennifer Lawrence fan.

I spun around her, weaved about an incoming Purolator guy, and hurried off to work.

Purolator is a Canadian delivery service. He's delivering Alex's order.

[CHAPTER 17](#)

There's no such thing as fairies. Die Tinkerbell.

Gene doesn't actually know that Crystal is Sidhe, he's just using 'fairy' as a generic. He also calls her a demon, a yuki-onna, and other things.

"Don't," Wayne said with a laugh. "That fishhooks Joker thing is kinda cute when *our girls* do it. Touch my face, Peter, and I'm having finger sandwiches. Get it, Gene? It's a pun; we're in a sandwich shop."

Another allusion to the "Exactly That Close" game. DS and I argued over Wayne's comment: he kept wanting to make it *clever* and *funny*. But that's not Wayne.

And no, Peter would not have actually stuck his fingers in Wayne's mouth. Unless he thought it was funny, which it wouldn't be in a restaurant full of strangers. Despite how grim and serious he was during his earlier interactions with Gene, Peter Stint is actually pretty damn silly most of the time. He can turn it on and off. When it's off, it's like it was never there. But when it's on, it is *on*.

"No, I get wealthy helping a girl with a twisted ankle during a snowstorm." I sat up taller. "*Real* wealthy."

Wayne's face darkened. Peter's expression gave me a moment to clarify. It was not going to be a long moment.

Unreliable narrator time: Gene nearly gets himself killed here, because Peter and Wayne are fully aware of just how "*real* wealthy" Sam is. Note the difference between "real" as an intensifier ("real big") and "real" as an indicator of genuineness ("real cocoa").

"Wealth isn't just money," I pointed out, speaking much faster. "My parents aren't rich, but I know what it's like when I head back home. *That's* wealthy. Max and Sam might not be as well off as Alex is, but they make me *better*."

Wayne and Peter were both clearly taken aback by this statement. They studied me. Wayne and I ate in silence for another minute.

They're taken aback not just by the morality and emotion Gene shows here, but by his ignorance in saying that Sam isn't as well off as Alex.

Sam's family is maybe 30 to 50 times wealthier than Alex's. (The Carlsens are pretty well off too – Wayne has some very lucrative patents – but not as much as the Stints.)

You've got Maxie and Alex eating out of your hand.

Maxie's roommate? I find her frustrating.

I think I still want to tell Max to break up with you

I tell Max that you're the wrong guy, she won't just be in over her head, she'll dive in

I'm always going to take Max's side

I actually worked out the rules about when Wayne says "Max" as opposed to "Maxie". "Maxie" is affectionate – to her or her friends (which he doesn't 100% consider Gene to be, yet). "Max" to people who don't really know her – or for when he's being very, very serious.

He almost never says “Maxine”.

“Enjoying the show?” I asked Winter as I brushed the step clear. (...) “More than I expected I would,” Winter commented.

Literally true: Victoria has possessed a ton of mortals (several tons, by weight), and so she’s used to feeling mortal bodies get horny... but she had no way of knowing that Gene was Winter’s type until she saw his butt moving while he was shoveling snow.

I thrust the last blade over the railing and into my unused parking space.

Not only does Gene live on a real street, he lives in a real building, which really has a shitty little parking lot.

“The Girl?” she asked. “Same hometown, same cliques, same same same.

Technically true.

You want a cup of coffee? I have a whole pot.”

Never take food or drink from the Sidhe.

Max's chagrin shadowed her face. She took a deep breath to school her features. She shook her head at me and then turned to Sam.

Notice that Subservient Max doesn’t chastise Gene.

Sam shrugged. “We live next to a library

They really do. The dorm Sam and Max live in, Gerard Hall, is a real place, and it really is next to Halifax Central Library.

CHAPTER 18

I'm ashamed to admit this... The hell I am! I was flying high in my wildest dream

Another reason DS said my writing reminded him slightly of Gene Wolfe was that, in the original version of this chapter, Gene mentioned that he was writing this document. That conflation between author and narrator, that “false document” feeling, can make for some interesting literary tricks – Sam would love it – but I hadn't realized that I'd done it, and it's not what I wanted here.

“Please, the only thing we've ever done when we drink is complain, leave early, and go to sleep.”

All the girls have been drinking since they were in high school... technically. Max and Alex were 17 (well, Max was 17, Alex was 16) when they went to their first high school party and drank. They didn't have a great time, and went home early (Max does *not* like tequila). Sam's mom started giving her small glasses of wine with meals when she was 14 – it's a French thing.

“Alex and I were the fellatrices. You didn't even help,” Sam laughed.

In the original version, Gene narrated that Sam was his fellatrix (in part because I wanted to avoid using their names too often). DS refused to let me do this, saying that even though it was an accurate description, it was grotesque – like calling her an “animate sack of carbon compounds”.

I think it's an amazing word. Fortunately, Sam loves obscure and amazing words, so that's a perfect excuse to have it in the story – and for Gene and Alex to be weirded out by it.

She learned the word earlier that afternoon, and was hoping she'd have the chance to use it – something like “I love being your fellatrix, Gene!” – because she has a little game that she plays with herself, to see if she can use these super-obscure words in naturalistic contexts. If she's ever able to say “boustrophedon” in a conversation, she'll award herself 500 points.

Max knew the word already, as the result of an incident in grade 10 math class, where a discussion about matrices and vertices led to the boy next to her asking about dominatrices and fellatrices. She had no idea Allen was trying to flirt with her.

(I had that very conversation with a girl in grade 10 English after the Math class where we learned the word ‘vertices’. Ten years later, I met her again, and discovered that she'd been a bit offended I didn't ask her out. Oops!)

Oh, and it's "feh-LAY-truh-sees".

Gene? Call me a cocksucker, please?"

"Of course, cocksucker," I said. "Since you asked so nicely!"

Alternate:

"You're not a cocksucker, Alex."

"I'm not?"

"You're *my* cocksucker!"

"Yeah," Sam scoffed. "Of course it is. Haven't you ever rubbed yourself on a pillow or stuffed bear?"

This was subtle. In the original, Sam asked about "rubbing yourself *off* on a pillow or stuffed bear". DS pointed out that Sam never actually achieved orgasm. She rubbed herself, but did not rub herself off.

Alex's face scrunched up. Her gaze moved to my computer monitor, then to the window outside.

"Cool," she said dismissively, and tossed the box to the far side of the pile. "I'll pick something else."

Alex, not unreasonably, categorizes "being a camgirl" with "sending nudes". There are only three people in the world who will ever get sexualized nudity from her, and they're all in the room with her.

(The notion of Gene controlling the toy inside her with his cellphone is something that will appeal to her very strongly once it occurs to her. She's absolutely not going to use it in public, though, because she can very easily fake having an orgasm, but she can't fake *not* having an orgasm. Especially when she squirts.)

CHAPTER 19

"This isn't what I was thinking of picking."

"It's my pick, Alex," I said. Her face lit up with excitement.

DS describes this as “Gene blatantly ignores the girl’s desires and preferences, done *right*.”

“It’s like follow the leader,” Max told Sam. They kissed.

This is *not* what Sam had hoped her first kiss with Max would be like - in particular, she never expected that she and Max would have sucked on each other’s tits, and watched each other being fucked, *before* they ever kissed - but at least she’s having a wonderful time. And it’s better than having her nose in Max’s mouth (chapter 15).

“Straighten your neck,” Max said. Sam reached for another kiss. “Sam... sweetheart...”

Sam obeyed.

Second instance of Sam obeying when Max says “Sweetheart”.

“Holy crap it doesn’t stop inside of me.” She finally spoke a sentence.

There is no missing comma in this sentence.

Max, who was scratching her head and looking confused

Max is confused because her emotional response to Alex has just been qualitatively changed, as a result of Alex sitting in the chair and being released from half of the spell (the other half being, of course, the boots).

“Rum and co--Rum and store-brand cola,” Alex said.

Remember how Sam was fussy about “Rum and Coke” versus “Rum and Diet Pepsi” in chapter 1? Alex does.

“Why do you have fake eyelashes!” Sam flinched back.

DS *insisted* that since Gene said “all three” to rum, sodomy, and the lash, there had to be a ‘the lash’ joke. This was a long journey in figuring out where to put it and how to make it work, not least because I find touching people’s eyes really weird.

As for why Alex brought her makeup kit to the orgy – “same reason I brought clean clothes.”

Luckily, Max was ready with the towel.

And after Gene fell asleep (which was very quickly), Max went to the bathroom and took a shower, because she still had cum in her hair.

Yes, this means she didn’t actually *need* to shower with Gene at the beginning of chapter 20. What’s your point?

CHAPTER 20

She shouted, “I don’t wanna wake up Sam!”

“I’m up, you noisy psycho! Learn about irony!

Originally “psycho slut”. Sam crushing on Max wouldn’t ever call her a ‘slut’.

Alex was collapsed in my armchair and Sam was on her lap. They were laughing about something

Alex asked Sam what anal feels like. Sam explained in detail. Alex then repeated it back in a variety of styles and accents.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! That’s still sore!” I heard Sam exclaim.

“Aw... princess...” Alex teased.

(...)

“Hey!” Alex giggled.

“That’s what you get!” Sam yelled.

“So you’ll do it again?” Alex said, brightly.

We had to rewrite Sam-and-Alex-in-the-shower to make it clear that they’re *not* having sex. It’s very important that, by the end of chapter 28, the girls have only had sex with each other when Gene was directly involved.

As for how Sam’s butt can still be sore despite fairy healing: healing a sprained ankle or cut finger doesn’t rob someone of their sexual experience, but healing a butt does. The Sidhe have a very rigid definition of what counts as ‘sexual experience’. For instance, when Sam pinched Alex’s tit *hard*, that didn’t count as sexual activity even though normally it’s the sort of thing Sam would love as foreplay, so the bruise never formed.

(That is, Sam loves *being* pinched. Alex is willing to try it – she’s willing to try *most* sexual things – but it’s not her favorite.)

“I can’t believe you don’t want someone else to wash your tits,” Alex said.

Note that in chapter 26, Max is washing Sam’s tits while they’re in the tub with Gene.

“She seems grumpy,” Max said, squeezing my fingers. As soon as the words came out of her mouth, the wind kicked up from all directions.

Does this make it clear enough that the wind is the result of a conscious, malign entity? Every use of Victoria’s powers creates wind.

She said, ‘I know overcoming your airheadedness is difficult, but Gene deserves the best. The best that you’ll never be able to give him.’”

Note that Alex, who has to learn scripts, is very good at remembering exactly what other people have said.

DS suggested that Sam use the word “vacuity” when insulting Alex, but “airheadedness” has the extra insult of talking down to Alex.

CHAPTER 21

She's pretty, maybe a little flaky

Alex has no idea she just made a 'snowflake' pun.

"I'm keeping you for the penis. Though... We do have those strap-ons now, don't we?" She steepled her fingers and looked deep into my eyes. "Can you dance?"

"Sure we can go dancing." From the sour twist of Alex's lips, I got the feeling I missed a joke somewhere.

Just in case, the joke is: since we don't need you for the penis, maybe we'll keep you if you're good at dancing.

"Oh, baby!" Sam clicked across the apartment and grabbed me. "We – that is, Max and I – were talking about taking you out tonight." I put my arms around her.

If it's occurred to you that, had Gene gone out with Sam and Max when Sam suggested it (instead of spending all that time on the forced booting and the hour-long board game and the bit where Gene went downstairs to argue with Winter), they wouldn't have been home when Jared arrived... seriously, Sam would've just texted Jared and told him where to meet them.

"I'm not easy!" Alex huffed. "Why do you have to be mean?"

A short gust banged my door against the wall.

Not only can the wind push things around, it can affect the girls' emotions.

"Oh, sorry." She kicked off her heels and I lifted feet from the ground. I kept her aloft. She had to bend her toes down now to touch the floor. I grinned evilly.

"Only boots," I whispered. Sam frowned.

This scene is important, because it shows that the boots can be forcibly applied. DS finds it very uncomfortable, in terms of how non-consensual it feels. Even though Sam keeps insisting that she belongs to Gene and wants to be with him.

Ultimately, Sam sees this as Gene rescuing her again. He won't learn that for a while, though, and it'll take him even longer to accept it.

“Sam...” Max said, and her lips blossomed into a gentle smile. “Sweetheart. Let me do this. For us.”

Third instance of Max getting Sam to obey by saying “Sweetheart” to Sam. Notice also that the tension ramps up: first, it’s to get her to stop making noise; second, it’s to get her to stop hurting herself; third, it’s to get her to stop fighting.

“Alex isn’t ‘your stuff’, she’s ‘Hot Stuff’.” Max oversold the pun as she airquoted.

Like her dad, Max sucks at telling jokes. (Her mom is much better at it.)

“Cool, when they win, I’ll be sucking Gene’s cock?” Max beamed. She rolled over the computer chair while Sam and I got the floor at the long ends of the coffee table. She licked her lips. “What’s the quickest way to lose?”

Compare the original wording – “Cool, when they win, I only have to suck a cock.”

Given how strong the theme of consent is in this story, how much Gene tries to not impose anything on the girls, how much he keeps telling them that they don’t *have* to do anything they don’t want to... DS was *very* fussy about there not being anything that could be read as any of the girls *having* to do anything sexual.

“What?” Sam raised an eyebrow.

“I won, we had a bet,” Alex singsonged.

The original version of this scene was a little broken, for several reasons (DS says that in comparison to the current version, it felt like cardboard). One of them was that Alex and Max both expected that Sam was going to eat them out, and Sam offered to instead “think something nice and sexy about you”. This was pre-gay Sam, but even so.

And then Gene suggested he cut open Max’s skull and poke electrodes into the pleasure centers of her brain. Which I think is a decent punchline, but it’s not really attached to any joke.

And then Alex said “OK, obviously we’re trying to get the sex going again. So let’s fuck! Please!” And Sam agreed, because Alex said “please”.

So we wrote a new version, which is much more emotional (and, not coincidentally, so much longer that it's effectively an entire extra scene). It's more authentic to who Sam, Alex, and Max are, and it advances their character arcs a lot more. "The characters feel more like people now. And, better, they feel like the specific people they're supposed to."

Note that Sam has three *excuses* to not eat Alex out, which she mentions, and three *reasons*, which she does not.

Sam's excuses: the bet wasn't fair; performing cunnilingus will ruin her makeup; and she doesn't know how to do it properly (she hates having to say this, because it's an admission of ignorance).

Sam's reasons: she had her heart set on her first time being with Max, not Alex; she doesn't like the idea of doing it as the result of a bet because then you can't tell whether it was of out of genuine desire or just a sense of obligation; and her dad will be arriving soon (when she says "And my – uh...", she was about to say "And my dad'll be here in 20 minutes", and then remembered that it's supposed to be a surprise).

Remember how, in chapter 17, Sam asked about making "some absolutely evil bets"? She hadn't considered what it would feel like to be on the losing end of such a bet. Because she's nineteen, and nineteen-year-olds do stupid shit sometimes. (She'd read stories where such bets were made, and everything in the stories worked out wonderfully, so...)

If Sam had won the bet, she would have realized how uncomfortable it made her (even though she's as in love with Alex as she is with Gene and Max), then pointed out that the bet didn't specify *when* this was to happen.

"You said *will*. Future tense. You didn't say *tonight* or *tomorrow night* or anything specific."

"Sam, if you--" and she cut me off before I could say 'don't want to, you don't have to'.

"No! I mean, no. This is my bet, my responsibility. I should do it.

The Richardson ethos is *very* big on responsibility. It's part of why Sam doesn't walk away from a fight. And it plays a major role in some other elements of Sam's backstory that I might do something with someday.

"Alex, I love you. Gene, I love you. Max, I..." Sam closed her eyes. "I love you too. I'm sorry."

This is *not* what Sam had hoped her first time saying "I love you too" to Max would be like.

"Me either," said Alex, and took off her top and bra. "I promise to give you twenty or thirty tries to get it right."

In chapter 15, Max correctly inferred that Alex didn't need the boot recharge... but that's to rebalance her emotionally towards *Gene*. The boots also help her with her emotional awareness of Sam and Max; here, she's been unbooted for so long that she pushes Sam to the brink of tears before realizing that, oh shit, she's *serious* about this. (Yes, Sam did most of the pushing herself, but still.)

She lifted Sam's chin to look the brunette in the eyes, then kissed her. "You 'have to'? I think I want better than your 'have to', Sam. I'm letting you off until you're ready."

If Alex had insisted, then Sam would have gone ahead and done it. As mentioned before: responsibility is *VERY* big in the Richardson ethos. But then, if Alex had insisted, she wouldn't have been the Alex who I was writing.

The kiss is to show that Alex is doing this not just for the pragmatic reason that a reluctant miserable Sam probably won't eat pussy that well, but also because she genuinely is in love with Sam and doesn't want to hurt her – and also is emotionally aware of Sam enough to understand the importance of saving face.

"But, um, how is this all that different from when we got you into butt stuff?"

Just in case: 'butt stuff' was different because it was with Gene.

CHAPTER 22

The tiny one-bedroom was decorated in antiques. The beautiful Persian rug spread over the shitty and uneven hardwood floor was beautiful. (...) There was a bookshelf, decorated with silver and full of thick leatherback tomes.

Victoria's been collecting those for centuries. Her collection is worth more than the building and the land it's on, combined.

Someone's going to buy that plot of land and comb through it for every salvageable scrap.

There was a silver tray out with a steaming pot of tea and a plate of cookies. Smelled good, but I had overeaten with Alex so I ignored them

NEVER take food or drink from the Sidhe.

What do you have that is what I want that is what I have that is what you want?

DS *loves* this sentence.

“Consider an allegory. Imagine you checked your bank account and discovered there was a million dollars more than was supposed to be there. (...) “OK, a better allegory,” she said. “Imagine you’re sitting at a table. Other players come to this table and start dealing out the cards.

Victoria *has* to specify that these are allegories – otherwise she’d be saying something that’s not literally true. If the Sidhe can use metaphors and allegories without specifying that they’re doing so, then they can say *anything*, and the restriction evaporates. Same reason she has to pause after the allegory is done: to indicate that she’s switching back to her normal constrained mode of speech.

I once heard a story about a man who found an extra \$980 000 in his bank account and immediately went out to dinner. When I mentioned this to a friend, he said “Bank error in your favor, collect \$200.” That remark was the genesis of **Blizzard**: the notion of a magical reward being audited.

DS’s incessant fussing about detail led me to research the case some more so Victoria could reference a historical event without having to say it was an allegory. Turns out, it didn’t actually happen, and was invented for a financial law exam at Yale.

By doing what’s right, you’re richer for it, and no one’s fucked over

I considered “It’s the right thing to do”, but Victoria can’t say that, because she wouldn’t consider it right herself: she’d keep the money, bury the trail, and find a patsy to corrupt and blame. Using “You” in the allegory means that it can be interpreted to be about Gene, so “what’s right” is in the context of someone as moral as him.

DS called this “a particularly Sidhe trick: present an allegory, describe something as the right thing to do within the allegory, and then let the listener assume it’s also the right thing to do in the real world.”

“Wow, now *there’s* a metaphor!” She grinned. “Politics! You can have no interest in us, while we have a deadly interest in you.”

This part *is* literally true.

“Bank error in your favor, collect \$200.” I smiled harder. (...) You were a Community Chest card and now you’re in the discard pile.”

Everyone gets the “Monopoly” allusion, right?

I pulled the door open and stepped into the deathly still night. I looked back. She was approaching me. I almost didn’t register the clicking *beep beep* of a car door remote-locking.

Winter magically spied on the girls, and knew Jared was on his way.

“I’ve never loved a man like you,” she hissed breathily. (...) “Enjoy those college girl playthings of yours, lover, and you can tell me all the tales tonight when we’re in bed.”

First part is literally true: she’s never loved a man like him. She still doesn’t.

Second part is literally true because she’s *willing* to fuck Gene if he comes to her that night. And although Gene’s not *her* lover, he’s *a* lover.

It took us quite a while to figure out how she could insult the girls in a way that was literally true.

The neighbor’s cat had been resting on the railing

Remember, Agnes’s role is to witness.

I rushed to the railing instead, watching Sam’s silhouette drive off through the frosted side window.

Remember, Agnes has frost powers.

“Yeah, but it’s *magic*. The boots do fix our feelings.” Alex poked Max.

Max hates this explanation.

"Mine, yeah, mine definitely. Yours... dunno. And Sam's?" Max said, tilting her head and shrugging.

"Well, yeah, Sam. Obviously," Alex nodded. "And I dunno about me either. But you don't seem different. How're you different?"

This scene originally went straight from Max saying "Mine, *maybe*" to the mention of Alex's date-that-never-was with David Peng (a reference to the Peng-Robinson equation that I used in engineering school). But DS pointed out that Max is the most mindful, and knows herself the best, and therefore she should be absolutely clear on the fact that she's been rewired. He also pointed out that she should be aware that she's been rewired in more than one way. And the best way to convince Alex of this is by showing her. And so, two lines became three and a half pages. (And, arguably, *Blizzard* now passes the Bechdel test.)

Note that by this point, both Alex and Max have realized that Sam is gay. They've known her longer than Gene has, it's been getting more and more obvious, and Sam's post-bet freakout was the final piece of the puzzle. If Gene had asked "wait, what was that about Sam?", they would have told him, flat out, "Sam's gay. You didn't realize that?" But he didn't ask.

Oh, and Alex's rewiring was minimal: "be hugely attracted to this random 12-years-older-than-you schlub, long enough to realize that you and he are amazingly compatible; also decide to be part of this exclusive foursome where the other two participants are girls you were already really attracted to."

If David Peng hadn't canceled his date with Alex (because he thought she thought it was just a Friend thing), he would have discovered that he was more compatible with Max than with Alex, and they would have dated for a little over a year, and been each other's first. And when Max got to university, she would have been familiar enough with the signs of romantic interest to recognize right away that Sam was crushing on her... and she then would have dealt with it on day 3.

"This is really flattering, I've never had a girl attracted to me before, but I'm straight, and I don't want to lead you on."

"....oh. Uh. I... wrote a poem about you? Do you want to see?"

"Um. Probably not a good idea."

"I'm ecstatic that I get to love you, Gene, and Sam. Something I don't think I was capable of in high school, or even two weeks ago,"

It was very important that we leave no room for the interpretation that Max is being victimized by this.

Max probably wouldn't have realized she was in love with Sam if it hadn't been for how painful the idea of losing Sam (when Jared took her) was.

"And we only tried for like three minutes, because your parents were coming home."

"Not for another hour they weren't. I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

I like that Max didn't actually *lie* to Alex.

Alex smirked for clearly not being forgiven. They faced off again. Alex's shoulders hopped as she thought. "I guess... I mean obviously, Leyla and Stephanie."

Stephanie is named for the girl I had a crush on when I was in fourth grade; Leyla is named for the girl DS had a crush on when *he* was in fourth grade.

Note how much *tamer* the Sam/Alex fantasy is, compared to the Stephanie/Leyla fantasy. And note how Alex is initially nervous about a new type of performance, but then dives right in.

(Several years down the road, to the surprise of a great many people, Stephanie and Leyla hook up.)

OK, I got it. Sam is out on that big bench swing in your mom's garden

If (if!!!) I write a sequel, there'll be a scene at the Carlsen house in Antigonish (the Nova Scotia town where Max and Alex are from). The foursome are sleeping in Max's old bedroom. Gene and Max wake up at dawn and can't find Sam and Alex... because they're out on the big bench swing in the garden.

"I want to hold her, to fuck her, to make her feel welcome and loved. I want to do the same for Alex and you. I want you to push me to be the woman who can do that."

"Push" is what Max says because she's still subservient. If she wasn't, she'd say 'motivate'.

"Are you going to murder Winter?" Max asked.

“Oh my god!” Alex’s eyes went wide. She looked up to me. “No! No murder!” (...)

“Besides, if we’re going to kill her we should take weeks to prepare the ambush and body disposal,” Max said. “You don’t even have any power tools.”

I nodded. “Yeah, and the last thing you want to do in the days before a grisly murder is rack up a bunch of murder paraphernalia receipts.”

“No murder!” Alex poked me again. She was laughing along with us now, but also looked mildly scared of us.

Alex loves bad guys *as characters in fiction*. There’s a big difference between that and seeing two of the people she loves most in the world calmly discuss the practicalities of body disposal.

And Max doesn’t really have any ideas about how to defeat someone magic other than killing them.

“Don’t text her until she’s in class next. You’ll make things worse for her.”

Alex tried texting Sam a few times, but Sam was not in the mood to look at texts from anyone but Gene.

Max skipped over and kissed me too, then ran into the bathroom for a quick shower.

DS insisted that there needed to be at least a mention of showering between the sex and the getting dressed to go out, because I’d gone to the trouble of describing how “filthy and fluid-encrusted” they were.

“Yeah, save a piece of that pie for later!” Alex said in a Greasy Frat Bro voice. Max and I looked at her. Alex leered at Max’s tits. “Now wrap that sweetness up before I lick the filling out of you.”

The original version of Alex doing Greasy Frat Bro was a lot more rapey. And while Peter takes a few jokes too far, rapey wasn’t just too far for a Stint, it was too far for *Blizzard*.

"OK, but dibs on prima nocta."

"What?" Max asks. "Isn't that where the king fucks the bride on her wedding night?"

I know, I know: ‘prima nocta’ wasn’t a real thing. I know that, you know that, Sam definitely knows that, probably Alex knows that as well but couldn’t resist the joke. A fragment of a scene that DS and I worked out:

Sam: Yeah, it’s a hot idea, but it’s *not historically accurate*, so could you stop fucking her until I think of a different reason?

Gene: OK, OK – how about... instead of being actual medieval people... we’re misinformed historical re-enactors?

Sam: You *are*.

Gene: No, I mean, that’s who we’re roleplaying as. My motivation for fucking Alex is that I *think* I have jus prima nocta.

Sam: ... I suppose I can live with that.

Gene: Great! So –

Alex: No, wait, if you’ve seriously got a problem with this –

Sam: Honestly, I kinda do.

Alex: OK then, let’s talk about the premise. Gene, could you get off me? Thanks. So we’ve got the medieval costumes, so those have to be part of the scenario, at least, so what about –

Max: Gene, let’s you and me be misinformed historical re-enactors until they get their stage directions right. Now can we *please* fuck?

Oh, and note that again Gene is being referred to as a king.

We grabbed slices of pizza at Alexandria’s on Queen Street.

A real place, until they closed down in February 2020. So I guess that sets the story no later than 2019. Although this *is* an alternate timeline to the extent that they have Richardson’s instead of Sobeys (and The Sapphire instead of The Onyx, and...), so maybe their Alexandria’s is doing better than ours.

The curse of the red hand became the blessing of the white knight.

Credit where it’s due: this amusingly poetic description of traffic light pedestrian symbols was something my buddy Joe used to say all the time.

"She's not here."

"No," Max pointed to the dresser and desk the school had provided for them. "And neither is her laptop or suitcase."

The dresser is still full of her clothes, though. Sam only took enough to wear for three days. Jared hasn't thought about how this is going to work in the long term, which is fair since he didn't plan any of it.

"Cool!" Alex said. "I'll ambush her in the morning. Wanna fuck Max in her bed?"

"Yeah, that'll be fun, but we'll have to be quick," Max agreed, pulling back her covers.

"No," Alex said, and shook her head. "I meant in *Sam's* bed."

(...)

"When Sam gets back and smells the fucking, she'll come for us, and we'll have a great story for her!" Alex said, and broke out into a bright grin.

Unreliable narrator time: as Gene admits a few chapters later, he still doesn't know these girls *that* well. If he did, he'd recognize that's not a *bright* smile... it's a *brittle* smile. Alex is a terrific actress. However, Max has known her for over a decade and can tell something's wrong.

What's wrong is that Alex desperately misses Sam, because she's in love with her. She hopes that, by having sex with Gene and Max in Sam's bed, it will sort of feel like Sam is there with them.

(It wouldn't have worked.)

By the epilogue, Gene is able to tell the difference between *genuinely* happy Alex and *theatrically* happy Alex. But this scene takes place barely a week after they first met.

Note that Handmaiden Max can refuse to go along with Alex because Alex's desire was phrased as a *question*. "Do you *want* to do this?" "No." If she'd been *told* "we're gonna have a threesome in Sam's bed", she would have complied – and felt bad about it, until and unless Sam was okay with that. She's in love with and desperately misses Sam too, but approaches it differently.

I don't like having a room to myself

If (if!!!) I ever do a sequel to *Blizzard*, it will include Oscar, Max's border collie. She (yes, Oscar is a girl dog) liked to sleep in Max's childhood bedroom.

We worked out a *lot* of detail about Max's family history. And Alex's. And Sam's.

CHAPTER 23

you'd be lying there all bloated and stupid like the rats in Mom's compost heap.

Remember – Gene's parents have a restaurant, and thus a lot more kitchen waste than a house. Rats in the compost heap is also a reference to *Fraggle Rock*.

"Who is she to you anyways? Not one of your co-workers?"

"No," I scoffed. "No one here'd be interested in me."

Unreliable narrator time: an earlier version had Gene commenting that, on a better day, he'd have noticed that Issa, the coworker who made the Tim Horton's run, was flirting with him. She wasn't so interested in Gene when he was Comfortably Mediocre, but now that he's started improving himself, he's on her radar.

(And for the international readers, "Tim Horton's" is a Canadian coffee-and-donuts chain.)

The senses of Spider-Man combined with the psychiatry of Lucy... Hey, what's Lucy's last name?"

"Lucy? From Charlie Brown? Fucked if I know."

"Van Pelt".

"Y'know? I've dated Sams, Alexes, and a Max myself," he said.

Finally someone notices that the girls all have androgynous names. I was watching *Totally Spies* when I was making characters.

She saw my face twist in questions. Her eyes widened.

The question Gene wants to ask: what happens if I *already* made one of the girls sit in the chair?

“Fuck. Not Max! Don’t say Max...” she worried.

Notice: not only does she say three sentences... the sentences are one word, two words, and three words (and, even better, the first sentence ends with a one-part punctuation symbol, the second with a two-part punctuation symbol, and the third with a three-part punctuation symbol!)

“Winter’s correction was to make Sam your bride and Alex her handmaiden

Crystal is able to say this, even though it’s not true, because she *honestly believes* it. There’s a difference between ‘dishonest’ and ‘factually wrong’.

“I don’t believe you,” I said. She frowned.

The Sidhe do not lie. So telling one “I don’t believe you” is more of an insult than saying this to a human. But she likes Gene (somewhat), and she’s too low in the hierarchy to be thin-skinned.

And Max *could* leave Gene if there wasn’t magic on her. *Would* she, no, because she’s in love with him. But without the magic, the possibility would no longer be closed off.

“Oh, sorry. Boy from class wanted to talk about Thermo. I don’t even take Thermo ’til next year.”

Just to emphasize how oblivious Max is to romantic interest.

“Do you have Sam’s dad’s number?” I asked. “And maybe his name?”

I had everything as fast as a 19-year-old girl’s motormouth could deliver it.

Max has Jared's number because she and Sam traded emergency contact details back in September. Because it was the sensible thing to do.

"Yes. Who's calling?" he asked.

"My name is Gene--"

"The predatory little shit who I just rescued my daughter from? Good, I've been looking forward to ripping you a new asshole," he said.

Originally, Jared threatened "I'm going to hang up." DS pointed out that if Jared wasn't willing to listen to Gene at all, he'd just hang up without saying "I'm going to hang up" first.

Jared *loves* a good fight.

"You're saying a lot," he said. "Drinks. Not coffee."

Sam is like her dad in a lot of ways. One is that she's a fighter. Another is that she doesn't like coffee.

CHAPTER 24

The Jared/Gene conversation in the bar was the most difficult for me to write.

"Middle management?" he asked scornfully.

Normally Jared has quite a lot of respect for middle managers. They keep his stores running.

Faye wouldn't be looking in on us. She couldn't make it worse. I was on my own.

I'm pleased with how the sentence "She couldn't make it worse" can be parsed in two completely opposite ways.

“Maybe, maybe not. I don’t know your home life. Sam hasn’t talked about you,” I answered.

“She hasn’t?”

Jared is honestly rather surprised by this: normally, Sam is willing to talk about her family history at great length (because she’s nineteen and she hasn’t yet totally learned to recognize when enough is enough). The opportunity for her to talk family histories with Gene just hasn’t come up yet; by the week after the end of Chapter 28, she’ll have told him absolutely everything, and a week after that, she’ll have mastered which questions get Gene to open up. She’ll eventually know more about the McArthur family history than Gene does himself.

“You and I know Sam was fighting with her girlfriend yesterday. Alex,” he said.

No, Jared doesn’t know that Sam and Alex are ‘girlfriends’ in anything more than the platonic sense. Like Max at the beginning, he has all the pieces to figure out that Sam’s gay, but hasn’t put them together. It’s occurred to him that maybe Sam has a crush on Alex and/or Max, but he hasn’t followed that to its logical conclusion.

Kick down the door to the tower, defeat the evil wizard

Consider what happens in chapter 28.

I returned home to find Max encircled in Alex’s arms, apologizing nonstop but for the hitches in her breath.

This is one of the last details we added to the novel. DS realized that there were scenes where Sam and Alex were so emotional that they were on the verge of tears, with their voices breaking. He insisted there had to be a scene where the same thing happened to Max. It came out well, so he was right.

Furthermore, Alex was emotional because of Sam, and Sam was emotional because of Max, so Max had to be emotional because of Alex.

(DS wanted to give Max something to be saying here, but a constant repetition of “I’m so sorry, I can’t believe I said that, I’m sorry, I love you so much, I’m sorry, I’m sorry” doesn’t advance the plot or her character arc.)

“And I felt I had to slack off at some things to fit in, and then I felt bad that I was being a bad kid or disrespecting Mrs Bates.”

“Bates” was a friend’s maiden name. She’s a teacher.

“I’ve got my parents. And dad’s brother, my uncle Aleksander. He’s really, really gay. Flaming,” Alex said, and laughed. “Grandma just says he’s,” and she hunched her shoulders and effected an old witch’s voice, “not a wife-and-kids kind of man’.”

I first noticed the surname “Stint” in the end credits to some movie somewhere, and decided I wanted to use it in a story.

DS researched it, and found some indications that it’s an *Estonian* name. He told me this, and the Stint family history fell into place: Alex’s grandparents were Soviet refugees who came to Canada in the early 60s or so. We worked out a ton of detail, and perhaps I’ll do something with it. (I know who her maternal grandparents are, too.)

The Stints gave their first son a name with English spelling to help him fit in, but for their second son they decided to be a bit more traditional. Yes, Alex is named for her uncle.

Gene is going to be so embarrassed when he meets Grandma Stint and realizes that wasn’t an “old witch’s” voice.

“Christ! Why’s she fucking here!” Sam stomped onto the tiles at the top of the stairs.

We’d been working on this scene for over a month before DS was able to stop visualizing Sam as still wearing her fancy-night-out clothes from Chapter 22. There’s no reason for Gene to mention that Sam is wearing her ordinary normal clothes, just like there’s no reason for him to mention that he put on pajamas before going downstairs to put Alex in her cab.

“Once we got tired of fighting with each other, I finally made him drop me off at the dorms. Like I was going to go to class from a hotel! He never admits it when he’s in the wrong! Then, I ran here the moment he pulled out of the parking lot.”

Jared knew that Sam was going to go running back to Gene’s. He dropped her at the dorm instead of at Gene’s place because it’s a way of asserting his authority. Her suitcase and laptop are still at the hotel, she’ll go back for them later.

She didn't leave the hotel while Jared was meeting with Gene because she promised she wouldn't, and she keeps her promises. (And because if she did, that'd be running away from the argument.)

There's one other reason that Sam is so frustrated: she had *just* learned to properly masturbate, and was intent on doing it a whole hell of a lot, but now there's all this mess with her dad going on, he's in the *next room ARGH*.

"I don't want to be all grumpy and mean and *gah!* (...) Her eyes are just... *gah!*"

As with the scene at the end of chapter 22 where Gene doesn't know Alex well enough to recognize when she's faking happiness, Gene doesn't know Sam well enough to be stunned that she's at a loss for words, *twice*. This felt really right to me when I was writing it; it's only when I reread it that I realized how amazing it is.

I want to like Alex the way I always liked Alex.

By the beginning of chapter 1, Sam had admitted to herself that she a) was crushing *hard* on Max and b) had no romantic or sexual interest in guys whatsoever. She hadn't entirely admitted to herself that this meant she was gay, but she knew there was *something* there.

This is her first admission that she'd been starting to have pretty strong feelings for Alex too.

"I might be a little gay," she said. She looked away twice, then met my gaze. "*A lot* gay."

"Might be a little gay" is a reference to an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in which Buffy's friend Willow says that her alternate-timeline counterpart "might be a little gay".

Except DS hadn't seen that episode, and said it felt like Sam trying to downplay her own gayness. "Sam is telling this to the man she's insanely in love with, it doesn't feel right that she's hedging."

We went back and forth on her wording a few times, until he realized that I could re-use the structure from Sam's first time with Gene:

"I'm a little excited," (...) She looked away twice, then met my gaze. "*A lot* excited."

"Gene, I'm sorry, I wasn't finished." She looked at me and I nodded.

Sam is still magically subservient here. Realize how much willpower it takes for her to interrupt him, to say "I wasn't finished". Realize how important this issue is to her.

Now realize that she still has to precede it with “I’m sorry”, and wait for his approval before she continues.

(Also: one word, then two, then three!)

“Oh crap! I mean, you’re being too reasonable! I mean... I can’t.”

Original version had “Stop being reasonable!”... but subservient Sam *can’t tell Gene to stop something*.

She looked confused with herself. I lowered. Sat down across from her and took her hands and set them on her knees. “Maybe you could tell Alex, and then *she* tells Max?” she said with a smile.

Notice: it’s only *after* she’s been chaired that Sam tells Gene what she’d like him to do.

CHAPTER 25

I put down my phone and took the papers from her. “Listen, make sure everyone knows I appreciate you guys being here on a Saturday.”

Remember how, at the end of chapter 1, I admitted that I’d lost track of the timeline and written 10 days worth of events within what was supposed to be a 9-day interval, so I had to redefine when “day 1” began?

This scene was originally supposed to be on Friday.

“Those snow days kicked our asses,” Issa smirked. “If you didn’t step up we’d never have gotten back on track.”

“Yeah, like it was me!” I scoffed. “Seriously, you’ve been awesome. Tell everyone to take Monday off -- I’ll need you at your best, and you guys earned the break.”

“OK, but what about--”

“We’ve caught up to the days we missed and got ahead of schedule. Take the day off. / won’t be here.”

Why would Gene bring his people in to work on Saturday? Conveniently, I had already given them not one but *two* snow days off work (the first one is the day at the very beginning, where Crystal enters his stairwell), so obviously they'd need to catch up. And because Gene has become so much more competent a leader (a king!), he can get his people to complete three days of work in only one day.

As for why he's giving them Monday off – when DS and I realized that the timeline was off, we miscalculated (again!) and briefly thought that the party at Doug's was on *Sunday* night. We devised a reason for Doug to not have work Monday morning (his job is Tuesday through Saturday), and a reason for the girls to not go to class Monday morning (Dalhousie's spring break, or 'reading week', is actually *earlier* in February, but this is kind of an alternate timeline insofar as they have Richardson's instead of Sobeys, so maybe the university schedule is different too?), so this is the reason for Gene to not have work Monday morning. And even after we realized that, no, the party at Doug's was definitely on *Saturday*, it still made sense for Gene to give his people that Monday off.

Doug still works Tuesday through Saturday. The university schedule is unchanged. The girls all skip class on Monday anyway: in the afternoon, they take Gene out to buy him new clothes (because he's lost everything except the clothes he's wearing and the wallet that was in his pocket).

Alex: Gene, we're going to buy you new clothes.

Gene: Sweetie, I'm not *broke*, and I do still have my bank card. I can afford to –

Sam: No, she means *nice* new clothes.

Gene: Is this really the best time to be talking about this?

Max: <slurping noises>

As for what they did in the morning... DS has actually written some short stories about that. Since I've approved them, that makes them canon, and I'll be posting them as further Patreon-only bonuses in the near future.

--and it doesn't stop." I winced when I realized that Sam was still talking: she hadn't noticed when I put the phone down.

That sounds like Sam is complaining about something, doesn't it. And from context, you (like Gene) might assume that Sam is complaining about *Alex*. (In fact, the original line was "– and it just doesn't stop with her"... until DS asked me what Sam had been saying that Gene missed, and we realized that it absolutely didn't match).

And if you assumed that, then you (like Gene) would be wrong.

Gene missed almost two minutes of Sam saying important emotional stuff. For instance, she's worried that the fairy mindfuck will give her mood swings and turn her against Max and/or Gene.

“Honestly, this whole thing with the magic affecting our emotions – it's scaring me. There's not supposed to be any such thing as magic! The boots helped pull me back from wanting to hurt Alex, but we got onto that so quickly. What about you and Max? What if the magic pushes me into hating Alex again and it doesn't stop?”

She's so intent on having the right words that she's not actually paying attention to what she's saying, and thus doesn't realize that she'd said it was the magic making her be anti-Alex. If Gene had been listening when she'd said that, he would have been able to point that out to her and rebalance her emotionally, but he wasn't.

And (this is getting *really* deep now) about that missing question mark... when we were polishing the bit in chapter 16 where Gene is worried about having rewritten Max's mind by using a statement instead of a question... DS researched *the ways in which the English language uses tone to denote questions*. Did you know that questions only end in a rising tone when they're yes/no questions? Otherwise the rising tone is somewhere in the middle, which means that if you don't hear the opening words indicating that the sentence is a question, you can perceive the end of the sentence as a statement.

“Magic.” Alex blew on her mug. “Sam, come with me to the counter thingy.”

She gestured to the self-serve cream and sugar thingy by the door.

It's called a 'station', and, as someone whose parents have a restaurant, Gene knows that. But he's using Alex's terminology because he loves her.

I sipped my coffee black. I was three quarters done when they sat back down. Alex looked good and Sam looked worried.

The second time DS asked me what Alex told Sam, I couldn't remember exactly what I'd said the first time, so I came up with a new answer. I've since dug through the chat logs, and found both answers.

1: basically “Please, put the emotions on hold until we talk to Gene and work out what needs to be done. I want this to work. I love you.” Sam knows how she *can* feel, and she knows it's worth the effort to feel like that.

2: Alex was hurt by what Sam said but believes the best thing for herself, Gene, Sam, and Max is Sam's involvement in the quartad. She told Sam the most important thing was to love, and that Alex would love her, even when Sam found it hard to love Alex back.

I think those go together pretty well, don't you?

"I feel... the same as I did yesterday but I'm not... raw. It doesn't feel... sharp to be around Alex. Or squicky, either. I don't need to scare her off."

Sam always says what she means, even if she has to pause (three times!) to find the right words. It frustrates the hell out of her to not be able to properly verbalize her feelings.

A few days after this scene, she's gonna pick through a thesaurus to see if she can find a better way of saying those things. The words she used weren't *wrong*, but they weren't necessarily the *best*.

(And the reason that her reaction has changed is that Gene sat her in the throne.)

"She turns her phone off for classes," Alex said. "I called her on the first day and interrupted the first professor she ever had in the first class she ever took. She was mortified."

"But she's not in class, she's in study group."

And, again: this scene was originally set on Friday, so Max was in class.

"The armchair?" Alex and Sam looked at each other. Something clicked and they looked at me.

"I didn't *want* to sit in it!" they said in unison, then tripped over each other on "I swear I didn't" and "I promise I didn't".

Sam is the one who says "swear", because it's more *correct*. Alex is the one who says "promise", because it's more *emotive*.

(Max would've been "I know I didn't".)

"So, Sam's never going to like me the way *I*...?" Alex trailed off, her voice breaking. Her eyes glistened as the first tears trickled to her cheeks. Trembling, she looked to Sam.

This is a major moment for Alex. She *wants* this foursome all the way down to the bottom of her soul.

Alex was wearing a pale blue dress and flesh-colored hose. (...) Max had a tight green sweater and a black skirt. (...) Sam had opted for lurid red.

Red, green, and blue are the additive primary colors. Red light, green light, and blue light combine to make white light.

What color is snow?

Oh, and Alex's choker went from having "black sapphire(s)" to "dark blue stones", because there's no way Gene could have recognized black sapphires on sight.

Okay, if I'm not here to let you in when you arrive, buzz 8100 to get through the front door. The apartment will be unlocked

Doug, like Gene, leaves his apartment unlocked.

Notice that buzzer code: 81 is $3*3*3*3$

"Don't call them prostitutes, even obliquely." I smiled for my brother. "Alright, the one charging you for a hug, that's Alex."

Sam flicked my ear, and smirked. "Not even obliquely?"

Just in case: double meaning on 'charging'.

"And it turns out Alex's vagina is named Me Time." I chose the winner from our Cards Against Humanity. Sometimes I made up my own categories.

"Me Time" is my favorite CAH card. Get me talking and I'll tell you all about the CAH precursor that my friend and I designed, but never tried to monetize, in 2006.

(DS points out that CAH only succeeded because of Kickstarter, and Kickstarter only launched in 2009. But now we're getting into *Neal* annotations, not *Blizzard* annotations.)

"Supersex, indeed. I stand in awe, Gene." Under his begrudging praise, I recalled his name: Kent.

If you really need me to explain why the word "Super" reminds Gene of the name "Kent", I'm not sure you're part of my target readership.

And yes, Kent heard the Gene/Doug phone conversation about the three girls, but he didn't really believe it.

"Yeah, ask the guy with the answer key, Sam." The window rattled. Max draped her arm over her chair and leaned back, thrusting her tits upward and out. She lidded her eyes as sexily as she possibly could. Her voice turned low and eager. "Not like you'd ever have *anything* you wanted without his permission."

Notice how, just before Max said that particularly cruel and hurtful thing to Sam, the window rattled? As if it was being shaken by a particularly strong wind?

Now realize that the fairy mindfuck is only responsible for the *very last* nasty thing Max said: the first three were all her. And although Victoria gave Max the impulse to be hurtful and cruel, Max is the one who thought of what to say.

Getting to the worst, meanest, nastiest comment Max could say was a trip into the cruelest parts of my brain. But pulling her comment out of that darkness might have been one of the most satisfying moments to write in the entire novel. And one of the most exhausting.

"He-ey!" Kent smirked at us and waved. "Come have another drink! The cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems."

Kent's a bartender. It's how he and Doug met. And "Alcohol, the cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems" is probably the most memorable Simpsons quote to me.

CHAPTER 26

He gazed down at Max, who was laughing with Doug, then leaned down and whispered in her ear. Even though Max had rebooted herself less than 10 minutes ago, her face went vicious. She rose, turned, and slapped Kent hard. (...)

"What did he say?" Sam asked.

"You don't want to know," Max said

It was hard enough having to think of *one* Worst Possible Thing To Say; this way I didn't have to do *two*.

It was definitely something about Sam being gay, though, because he figured that out based on Max's nastiness.

"Damn!" Alex giggled. "I guess that means you'll have to marry him or something, then."

It's been amazingly fun to figure out what happens to Gene and the girls years down the road – who marries who, who gets pregnant (I doubt you'll be surprised to learn that they *all* do – the interesting part is when, and how many times, and in what order), what their jobs are... but I was worried that if I lowered the stakes too much, eliminated the conflict, it would feel like I was just playing house with the characters.

Gene doesn't marry Sam. Gene marries *Alex*. *Max* marries Sam. In the eyes of the government, they're two separate married couples – one of whom is same-sex – who just happen to live in the same house and sleep in the same bed.

So they have (of course) three weddings: two standard and one quadruple.

"And how do you know the happy couple?" "I'm the groom's girlfriend. And the bride's girlfriend. And this is my wife, and she's *also* the groom's girlfriend and the bride's girlfriend!"

The wind started blowing in our faces. Our banter was dying as our bodies grew cold (...)

The wind kicked again. Max's coat was rippling. There was practically a gale fighting us home.

This scene becomes a *lot* more active once you remember that the wind is literally attacking them.

Alex kissed her back, harder. "It's OK," she said, and squeezed Sam tight. "I'm OK with you loving Gene. Love him. Really. Hard."

In another timeline, Alex discovers that she really enjoys watching Gene fuck other women *in general*, not just Sam and Max. In this one, she's monogamous (for a large value of '1').

"Try to stop me," Sam said.

Have you ever noticed that most people say "try and" when, technically, they should be saying "try to"? Sam has, and it annoys the fuck out of her.

“Then I’ll Prince Charming your ass, Sleeping Beauty,” she said. “Oh wait. Prince Charming your ass, *Snow White*.”

Alex the Disney fan knows the names of the characters in the movies. Sleeping Beauty was woken not by Prince Charming, but by Prince *Philip*, and the original version of the line referred to him instead: “Prince Charming your ass, Sleeping Beauty. Oh wait. Prince *Philip* your ass, Sleeping Beauty”.

DS pointed out that if anyone read this and *wasn’t* as obsessive a Disney fan as Alex was, the more likely interpretation of “Prince Philip” is “the elderly husband of Queen Elizabeth II”.

“Cold water!” Max said. “You might have frostbite. We need to warm it up slowly.”

Of *course* Max knows first aid.

I was so tired, so drunk, so at home, that I was drifting off even in the steaming shower.

Third instance of Gene being awake while women discussing important things think he’s asleep.

“I know I was straight a couple of weeks ago,” Max said.

The last time she masturbated. (Well, the last time prior to meeting Gene and having her sexuality rewired. She’s been doing it three times a day since then.)

To be clear, Max is now *almost* straight. As shown in Chapter 22 (which Sam is going to LOVE finding out about), Max isn’t attracted to any women *except* Sam and Alex. She’s still attracted to men in general, just like Sam is still attracted to other women in general. But neither one will ever act on that.

“You don’t sound like *you* when you aren’t making sure everyone has the right words. My middle name’s not ‘Drop Dead Gorgeous’, it’s Sophia.”

“Sophia”, meaning ‘wisdom/intelligence’. Remember, Max’s parents are a doctor and a physics professor.

Sam's middle name is "Lorraine", for her mom.

Alex's is "Marigold", because her mom likes marigolds and thought it was a pretty name.

CHAPTER 27

DS refused to edit this chapter until he'd received chapter 28, because he was too worried about the characters. Even though I'd told him that a story this fairy-taleish *had* to have a happy ending. I take pride in that.

Where were their hangovers?

Fairy healing!

"I still have chem and calculus assignments, actually, and Alex has homework.

Of *course* Max knows what homework Alex has. Within a week she'll know what homework Sam has, too.

Also note that Max calls her own stuff "assignments", but Alex's stuff "homework". That's a deliberate choice, because she doesn't see Alex's theatre work as being at the same level as her own STEM work.

"I mean it," Max continued. "Me. Not the boots. I wanted to say it last night but I had to wait until I knew that I was saying sorry because I loved you

As mentioned before, Max is the most mindful. She knows herself the best, and she can tell the difference between love that's boot-induced and love that isn't. Given a good night's sleep, she's sure that she really is in love with Sam (and Gene and Alex) - because, as mentioned before, Max is someone who falls deeply in love, really fast. Given a nudge from the boots to point her in this direction, and the emotional synching to Gene, and a detail I'll explain in chapter 28, Max has genuinely fallen deeply in love with Sam and Alex and Gene.

Look, if I could explain everything about how the magic works, it wouldn't be magic.

“You don’t have to,” Sam shook her head. “I know that--”

“...that you’re straight.”

She grabbed the zippers and pulled them up the back of Max’s calves. The apartment rattled the moment the boots were on.

Notice that in chapter 28, Winter/Victoria doesn’t know what the boots are at first. She rattles the window here not because Max is Wearing the Boots, but because her connection to Max has just been weakened For Some Strange Reason, and she’s trying to re-establish it. The wind cannot see; Victoria intuits rather than perceives.

“Alex just kissed my butt,” Max laughed. She squealed and pushed back Sam’s face. “So did Sam!”

The difference between making Max laugh and making her squeal is whether you use your tongue.

I caught her shoulder.

“Make sure she doesn’t squirm out of the way,” I told Sam and Alex. They rushed around and grabbed Max’s arms.

The only reason Max stopped kicking was because she had hit me in the shoulder. She apologized, giving me my opportunity. I kissed her. She kissed me back eagerly. She smiled blissfully with bright eyes as I broke off from the kiss.

DS’s comment: “it is amazing how happy and friendly this use of coercion and force is.”

It is *crucial* that Max is still on a ‘giggles and kisses’ vector when they put her in the chair.

And, at some point down the road, Alex is going to ask to roleplay “being forced to sit in the armchair”, because it looked so incredibly fun when they did it to Max.

“I can’t assemble this paradox without caffeine and I can’t... I need coffee.

The mangled version of this joke is better than the intact version.

The sun was out. The sidewalks weren't icy. The wind hardly tickled our faces.

As before: each instance of the wind is a direct physical attack on the girls, rewriting their emotions.

Victoria isn't affecting anyone *else's* emotions because Crystal defined the game as involving the manipulation of these three humans and nobody else. (That's why Victoria bribed the landlord, back in chapter 9, instead of mind-controlling him.)

"I feel like... these are my own feelings."

That's a tricky issue – the girls' emotional balances have been permanently altered by both Crystal and Victoria.

"I guess," Sam said, looking off towards the library, towards her dorm.

Sam is thinking about going back to her dorm room so she can call her mom in private. Yes, Sam talks to her mom a *lot*. Not about *everything*... but about most things.

"Max, what's wrong?" I asked.

"What?" Sam said. "Why ask her?"

"She's got a handle on this," I said.

"Yeah, until she blows up and says nasty shit."

Gene means "Max understands this", but Sam parses it as "Max has this under control". Very different.

"I get love or I get hurt," I said. "It's never been easy. You're worth the hard."

"Yeah, you are!" Alex pumped her fist sexually. "Real hard."

DS's comment on this: "for fuck's sake, Alex, read the room."

But in fact she can't: like how Victoria pushed Sam to attack Alex, or Max to snipe at Sam, Alex is affected by the wind too. She doesn't have it in her to be a Mean Girl, but she gets absolutely blinded to reading the other girls. Her version of 'tearing everyone apart' is 'fucking up being together'. This is also why she says "Oh, I love her" at a totally inappropriate moment.

Sam hurried off through the crowd (...) Alex took off at a run (...) I grabbed Max's hand to keep her from walking off. She shook her head. I let go.

Hurried off, took off, walked off.

I set her bags on the counter, exchanged waves, and closed the door behind me.

Just like how Gene doesn't lock his own door, he didn't lock Mrs Rabinovich's door either. Good thing, too, or he wouldn't have been able to save her life.

"What the hell are you doing in my home?" I demanded.

That said, leaving his apartment unlocked was a *very* bad idea. Especially after he sat Max in the chair and broke the spell on her.

Winter's been up there ever since Gene and the girls were far enough from the building that they wouldn't be able to see her go in.

"For every castle, a throne." She picked a piece of lint off the arm of my chair. "For every throne, a king." She locked her eyes on mine. "For every king, a kingdom." She laughed.

When possible, instances of three are in *order*. A castle is bigger than a throne... a throne is bigger than a king... and a king is bigger than a kingdom. Because a kingdom is an *idea*.

"If you had any sense, you would have kept Samantha, dallied with Alexa, and lived well."

As before – her intent was for Alex to be handmaiden to Sam, and for Max to be left out. Except the fight with Crystal threw her aim off, so Max became handmaiden to Alex.

Know this: there is nothing *making* them come here anymore.” The apartment rattled. “And *everything* holding them off.”

Yeah, things are supposed to be in *threes*.

So having only *two* items sets up an unresolved tension.

Which is exactly what we want for the cliffhanger.

CHAPTER 28

"Aren't you going to offer me a drink?" Winter asked. She looked innocently into her mug, then discarded it with a negligent toss onto my bed; the teabag flew free and oozed itself down my wall and onto my coverlet. A rivulet of tea dripped out of the mouth of the cup and slowly pooled at the base of my pillows. "Another drink?" she corrected herself.

What's one more wet spot, eh?

Winter/Victoria is going all out in her attempts to violate Gene's privacy and disrespect his home. Perhaps there's some magical reason for it.

She picked up a novel from the arm of the chair. I hadn't read that one in years, why wasn't it on the shelf? She flipped through it and sighed, then flung it idly onto my coffee table. *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming* skidded out of its jacket and fell to the floor.

Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming, by Roger Zelazny and Robert Sheckley (1991). DS says it's nowhere near as good as a Zelazny/Sheckley collaboration should have been.

Gene found a first edition hardcover in a used bookstore and bought it because the concept seemed interesting, because it was a Zelazny/Sheckley collaboration, and because it was only (of course) \$3.

He read enough of it to decide he wasn't interested in finishing it, and then put it on his shelf. His dad told him "you don't let a good book gather dust," so he typically gives his used books to Doug or Doug's friends. But they weren't interested in this one. He could have returned it to the used bookstore, but... meh, inertia, and so he's left with a bookshelf full of books he doesn't really like.

(Sam's going to break him of this habit.)

First version of this scene had Terry Goodkind's *Wizard's First Rule*, because I wanted a book whose title had some reference to the scene. The wizard's first rule is 'people will prefer a pleasant lie to an unpleasant truth' often shortened to "People are stupid." I love WFR, and it is a crying shame that he never wrote a sequel.

Other possibilities included ~~*Faust*~~ *Eric* by Terry Pratchett, *They'd Rather Be Right* by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley, and *Set This House in Order*, by Matt Ruff.

"I would like a cup of tea."

It would be to Victoria's advantage if she could get Gene to formally be her host. Making tea for her would be enough.

Does she expect he'll do it, not really, but it's worth a try.

"81 grand a year, dental, and 6 weeks paid vacation every year,"

As with the entry code for Doug's building, $81 = 3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3$. I originally had "85 grand", but DS suggested we screw Gene out of four thousand dollars a year for the sake of the reference. Sorry, Gene! Blame him, not me!

"Sam and Max were freaking out. Alex went to go check in on them. She could use the backup,"

No, that's not *quite* what happened, but under the circumstances it's close enough.

"Stop ignoring me!" Winter growled. (...)

"It wasn't luck," Winter corrected. (...)

"War it is," Winter said, her voice cold once again.

Notice: she speaks three times, and each time says three words.

Further notice the order of who speaks: each time, it's Peter, Gene, Peter, Gene, Winter.

(Yes, we had to add an extra line to make it work)

I just couldn't bring myself to attack a woman. (...) I yanked my lapel out of her grip (...) I lifted her by her shoulders and deposited her out of my path (...) She stamped her foot down on my shoulder (...) I slapped away her foot

Remember what I mentioned earlier, about willpower depletion?

And notice that, even now, he only uses the bare minimum of force against her.

"You misunderstand. I give you Winter Miranda Fitzpatrick," she said, and gestured to herself.

The realization that of *course* Winter has a full name like other humans was one of the last details we added to the story.

"Miranda" is one of the moons of Uranus. Victoria is (as my sister says) being a butt.

Also, "Miranda" is a character in *The Tempest* – secretly a princess, and placed into a magical sleep.

The prefix "Fitz-" has historically (although far from exclusively) been used to denote illegitimate children of royalty. Victoria is being quite a bastard.

I ripped the cover off one of the bins. (...) Everything shuffled through. Nothing where I had left it.

She's *touching and rearranging all his stuff*.

I ignored that my work emails were open at home.

She's *reading his emails*.

"Tell me what you want from your wife and I'll leave her mind as you like."

This is literally true: if Gene had described what he wanted from a woman... if he had been garbage, and specified exactly how he wanted Victoria to alter Winter's mind, adding and subtracting traits like he was designing an RPG character...

Victoria would have made Winter a broken terrified confused wreck, and then *left Winter's mind*.

Gene told her to get out. She knows he doesn't want her around. She knows he would *like* for her to be gone.

The Sidhe *love* their word games.

That said, since this particular trick didn't grab him, she abandoned it. If he'd taken her up on the customized personality she described, she would have given it to him.

"Not an option, even now. If you *must* indulge your hedonism, allow Winter to be the center of your love. A simple pure unwavering devotion. Submissive, eager, and loyal -- and a hunter of naive waifs. Each year she'll procure a young, sensual, pliant beauty befitting of your station. She'll share in your lusts as you use up, wear out, and throw away the prize at your whim. Imagine new face after new face after new face, fresh as Alex is today, gazing up at you adoringly until the day you die."

Of course, the customized personality would have been a trap. Notice what Victoria *isn't* saying.

"Allow her to be the center of your love" is not the same as "she will love you".

"Simple pure unwavering devotion" is not the sort of thing you want from a sexual predator.

"Submissive" is Sam, "eager" is Alex, "loyal" is Max.

"Each year" implies, but does not state, that fairy mindfuck powers would be involved. They wouldn't be.

"Sensual" and "pliant" are subjective.

"Befitting of your station"-- Victoria's already considering which homeless shelters and detox centers would make the best hunting grounds.

"Share in your lusts" is not the same as "share with you". Gullible mortal doesn't get his threesomes.

"Imagine new face after new face" doesn't say that's what he'd actually get. She's just telling him to imagine it.

We worked out a disturbing amount of detail about the timeline where Gene takes her up on her offer, before deciding that it was (in DS's words) "bad path, do not follow".

"You need to stop thinking of your desires. This is about what you *deserve*." She settled back into my armchair. She crossed her legs and sat with perfect posture. "Now we can hash out the details.

desires, deserve, details. And again, these sentences are *literally true*.

You know the small scrapings you have made over the last nine days are nothing. You know those girls are princesses.

The word ‘princess’ has enough different meanings that this can be considered literally true.

Now, show your guest hospitality, offer her a drink, and heed my words.”

your, her, my.

(Yes, ‘her’ is a bit of a cheat.)

“Why are you in a hurry?” I asked. The wind kicked again and she smiled.

“Oh, this old building? It’s hardly up to code,” she said.

Her statement is a) literally true and b) not actually an answer to his question.

She’s in a hurry because she’s only got a finite amount of power.

“We didn’t hear the phones ringing!” Alex frowned.

They *did* hear the phones ringing (and the ‘new text’ buzz), but fairy mindfuck made them think that the sound was completely uninteresting, so they ignored it. How often do you pay attention to the sound of your own breathing?

But Victoria’s consciousness is centered on the body she’s occupying. She couldn’t keep up the ‘phones ringing are boring’ effect indefinitely without losing track of what was happening around her, so she only did it when she knew that Gene was calling the girls. She had no idea when *Peter* was calling the girls.

“And come get my boot rammed so hard up your rancid frozen cunt that you’ll taste eggs!!” Alex enunciated, and raised her fists, set her feet, and squared her hips in a fighter’s stance

Alex the theater student is trained in improv and clear diction. She's also taken self-defense courses.

(It took us the better part of an hour to come up with that line.)

"The bitch gets *nothing!*" Max snarled under her breath.

Third instance of Max getting angry at another woman for stealing something. Neither of the other two took place within *Blizzard*, but they were referred to: in chapter 18, Sam says that she once stole Max's favorite socks, and Max giggles that she's still pissed about that; and in chapter 25, Alex says that Max is still angry about her having stolen a piece of lemon from Max's plate when they were in grade 9.

This incident is a bit more serious.

"It's *Gene's!*" Alex shrieked.

You know things are intense when *Alex* is overwhelmed by rage.

And although she took self-defense classes, she's not used to being the attacker.

Gene Brian McArthur has rejected my offer," she announced. "You'll take whatever I give you.

And as soon she says this, Caylee the cat begins staring at the ceiling, her head turning back and forth as if to track something happening upstairs from the neighboring apartment.

Full names are *very* important to the Sidhe, possibly because they don't have any of their own. And although Winter/Victoria *could* have learned his middle name in a mundane way (since she was digging through all his belongings), she just magically acquired the knowledge.

"Feel *this!*" Sam pointed Max to Alex's handbag. That gave Sam a full half-turn before her fist connected. She swung a haymaker right into Winter's collarbone.

And Sam takes the initiative, because despite being a bottom, she's also a fighter.

Did you know that if you punch someone in the collarbone hard enough to crack it, you can get a hairline fracture in your ring finger and not realize it until hours later? Sam didn't. (She'd never been in an actual physical fight before.)

There's more stuff that happened in that attack than is apparent at first glance, and the attacker was harmed in the process. Subtext and irony. The literature student.

Max stepped in front of Sam and jabbed a short hard blow under Winter's ribs. She wheezed for air her lungs couldn't inhale.

Very precise punch in the solar plexus, literally *knocking the wind out of her*. The right spot, and no wasted effort. The engineering student.

Alex ducked, and yanked both of Winter's legs up into the air.

Big dramatic sweep. The theater student.

Alex stamped her left foot down on Winter's sternum.

"stamped", not "stomped". "Stomped" would have caused a lot more damage, although she still cracked a rib. Good thing for fairy healing.

I grabbed Winter's foot before she could kick Max in the jaw. I turned and twisted Winter. Her face rubbed across the floor.

He's only acting physically against Winter because it's in direct defence of his girls.

I'll bind them back to you! I'll fix Samantha! I'll give you more!

We had a big debate over how Winter/Victoria should phrase her offers to Gene, so as to maximize her own agency. "I'll let you keep them," for instance, was right out. DS had several less-than-optimal suggestions, which he justified on the basis that Winter/Victoria is unable to think clearly because she's being beaten up. "If she had the time to think, she'd say 'I'll fix Samantha!'"

Which we both realized was perfect.

“I’ll fix Samantha” can mean two different things (well, three, but you have no way of knowing about the third possibility, as it involves backstory details that perhaps I’ll do something with): first, “I’ll fix the emotional fuckery caused by her sitting in the chair when she wasn’t ecstatic and lovey, and make her all happy again!”

and second, “I’ll make her straight!”

You decide which one she intended, or whether it was both.

And which one would be worse.

“Sam is *fine*! And I don’t want anything from *you*!” I snapped.

Nine years later, Gene’s gonna wake up in the middle of the night and realize... Winter made him *three* offers... but he only responded with *two* rejections.

But then he’ll fall asleep again and not remember it in the morning.

I grabbed the other leg, and yanked it straight. I may have yanked too hard: Winter shrieked and kept shrieking.

Gene just dislocated Winter’s hip. Pulled it out of its socket. So, yeah, *much* too hard.

Victoria was expecting to have to deal with the minor aches and pains that come with riding a mortal. She had *no idea* what a dislocated hip would feel like.

I watched the twisted leg straighten itself as I held it.

Fairy healing is getting a real workout here. Good thing, or Gene would’ve had a tough time explaining to the police how his neighbor’s hip got dislocated while he was rescuing her. The cracked rib, the cracked collarbone, all the bruises, those were healing too, and anything that didn’t finish healing before she lost her powers can be blamed on the part where she and Gene collided with the railing and fell on the ground.

Winter’s leg slipped back into a less painful-looking position with an audible *pop*. Sam pulled the second zipper closed.

Winter's dislocated hip reduces itself just in time. (Yes, fixing a dislocated joint is called 'reducing' it. Yes, a hip really does make an audible *pop* when it slips back into its socket. And yes, having it happen by itself is completely impossible.)

And the reason it's just in time is that, with the closing of the zipper, Victoria *loses almost all her power*. Because, among other things, Winter is now literally *held within Crystal's power*.

Remember, magic is stupid.

Winter sat on the floor in her lingerie, looking down at the boots.

There's two reasons she's just sitting on the floor: first, Victoria barely has enough power to make Winter look and speak. Making her get up and walk, not so much.

Second, if you've just had a dislocated hip reduced, you are not gonna be walking on that leg for a while. Fairy healing is fast, but if you want it to be instant, you'll need a lot more magic than Victoria currently has.

Why doesn't she leave Winter's body? She can't. She's *trapped by the boots*.

The boards gave out beneath my weight, and so did my ankle, as I sailed across the frosty porch. We crashed into the railing.

One of the notions presented in this story is that the Sidhe are big on *debt* and *obligation*. If you do something nice for a Sidhe, she owes you a boon. Accounts must be balanced.

And if a Sidhe has done something nice for you, *unprompted*... then you are technically in her debt. Until such time as she does something nasty to you.

Remember that conveniently-placed patch of frost at the beginning of the novel? The one that set off a chain of events that led to Gene having three beautiful princesses as his brides?

Sure is inconvenient that the porch had a patch of frost right where it did.

And if there's any organism that's good at making humans stumble and fall, it's a cat.

Sam took Winter from me. (...) Sam dumped Winter a little too close on my left.

Note Sam being the surrogate rescuer here. She's rescuing Winter *for* Gene.

“No... No...” Winter shook her head and shivered. Tears froze in her eyelashes.

Winter is now *vulnerable to the cold*. She was resistant to its effects earlier in the novel, but wore heavy winter clothes because people get suspicious if you walk through a snowstorm in only a silk robe and lace nightgown.

Guy from Three put his leather jacket over her shoulders.

Gene would be amused to learn that the guy from Three is actually named “Guy”.

We even worked out a bunch of details about *him* – what he does for a living (sells party drugs to college students) and what would have happened if Gretchen/Crystal had gone into *his* stairwell instead (it would not have ended anywhere near as nicely as it did for Gene).

The girls met him earlier, very briefly – he thought they were prospective customers, and started explaining to them that they’re not supposed to come to his place, just text him and he’ll meet them. When he realized that they were going into Gene’s apartment, he said “Oh! You’re the loud ones!”

“You did so much better than I could’ve hoped,” Faye said as she came down the sidewalk from the other side.

How much of this did Crystal have planned in advance? Not all of it – she had no idea what would happen when she first opened the door to Gene’s stairwell, for instance. If Gene had been garbage, she would have fucked him and then abandoned Gretchen’s body at an inconvenient moment. Once it became clear that he was Worthy, she realized he could be useful... maybe *so* useful that it would balance out the amazingly overgenerous gift she was about to give him.

From the moment each of them said “I do”, the girls were as in love with Gene, and with each other, as he was with them *by the end*. They were synched to his *late-stage* emotions.

This was an enormous risk on Crystal’s part – she didn’t just give Gene an overgenerous gift, she *set up a causality loop*. If it hadn’t paid off by the first day of spring, she could have been obliterated.

snowflakes gathering on me and my girls with no wind to blow them away.

Snowflakes represent Crystal’s power. Wind represents Victoria’s power, which can (among other things) alter people’s emotions and destroy their relationships. The snowflakes are gathering on the girls with no wind to blow them away.

Is ‘them’ the snowflakes? Or the girls?

She grabbed Sam’s right hand; Sam yanked it back.

Remember how Sam got a hairline fracture in her ring finger, punching Winter/Victoria in the collarbone? (Yes, this means that Sam had a fractured finger when she carried Winter away from the building. She carried her anyway, because she doesn’t give up. At least one reader thought that this was Crystal ‘fixing Samantha’ the way that Victoria had offered to.)

Crystal is now powerful enough to ride nine humans simultaneously, so healing Sam’s finger instantly is easy. (In a few years, X-rays will show the healed break. But until then, Sam will have no idea.)

And it repays her debt to Sam, which was the result of Sam punching Crystal’s adversary... or rather, it’s part of Crystal’s repayment to *Gene*. Sidhe magic is very, very, very old-fashioned. Debts incurred to (or by) a man’s wives are considered to be his.

(Just how old-fashioned are the Sidhe? Let’s just say, they’re not just older than humanity... they’re older than *mammals*.)

“They’ll never stop loving you.”

“If you change them, I’ll --”

“Oh, I don’t have to. “

DS asked me if this means a) ‘they don’t need changing because their love is real’, or b) ‘they don’t need *more* changing because I just changed them’.

I’m not saying.

Faye squatted in front of Mrs Rabinovich and scratched the back of Caylee’s neck,

Crystal says hello to Agnes, and Agnes makes Crystal’s defeat of Victoria official.

If you noticed that a key part of Crystal’s plot against Victoria involved the participation of Agnes, the supposedly-impartial witness, you’re maybe a little too perceptive for your own good.

“Shit! Her lips are turning blue! She’s not shivering! She’s got hypothermia!” One of the paramedics rushed by to help the distraught nearly-naked woman.

No, hypothermia shouldn’t take effect *that* quickly, but once fairy healing has been completely suppressed, you’re magically vulnerable for a while.

I *assume* you knew that ‘not shivering’ is a very dangerous symptom of hypothermia.

“Motherfucker...” said a cop. “Shit. Excuse my language. Everyone back up, back away. Back up!”

The police will have some questions for Gene. Fortunately, he’s got some reasonable answers.

Cop: so you carried Ms Fitzpatrick out of *your own* apartment? What was she doing there?

Gene: She broke in to harangue me about my having three girlfriends.

Cop: Why didn’t you call the police?

Gene: I figured I’d try to talk her down first. Then she knocked my phone out of my hands.

Cop: Why was she nearly naked?

Gene: Mental illness, I guess? She’s in the psych ward now, right?

Cop: Why didn’t she come down the stairs herself?

Gene: Fucked if I know. When I went back up to get her, she was sitting on the floor and swearing.

DS has written a short story about what happens to Winter several months down the road. I’ll be posting it in the future as another Patreon-only bonus. Does it still count as fanfic if I approve it?

(Winter’s in the psych ward because, as soon as the paramedics took the boots off her, Victoria got the hell out. Could she have left Winter’s mind without causing massive damage, yes, but that would have taken a lot more time and effort than she was willing to invest - especially now that she’s lost almost all her power. Because of how sleep affects the way human minds process memories, Winter remembers everything from those five and a half months as if it all happened in one infinitely long day.)

“What hospital are you taking my boyfriend to?” Max asked.

“QEII,”

For the international readers: Halifax’s main hospital is the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre.

“What? Don’t you know how thin our walls are?”

Apartment Three collapsed into apartment Four. “We do now,” Max said.

Alternate punchline: “ ‘Were’,” Sam said.

nearly three and a half hours in triage

In fact, three and a *third* hours.

“I got you a room at The Westin.”

Real hotel in Halifax. High-class enough for Jared to accept for Sam (so that’s where he was keeping her).

Alex furrowed her brow. “You always stay at The Lord Nelson.”

Another real Halifax hotel. Again, high-class.

Eventually, the fathers drove us down to the hotel. I thanked Peter.

“Gene, a moment?”

“Yeah?”

“I know I joked about you getting all three of them pregnant, but... seriously, Alexa’s still in first year. I’m not ready to be a grandfather yet.

... I’m *not* a grandfather yet, am I?”

“I don’t *think* so. Honestly, it hasn’t even been a week. Even if we hadn’t, uh... *been careful*... it’d be too early to tell.”

“God. Not even a week. I knew Alex’s mother for three years before we had our first date. Someday you’ll have to tell me how the fuck you managed this so quickly.”

[No, Gene hasn’t been as careful as he could have, but they’ve been lucky so far.]

He looked at her, then continued as if she hadn’t spoken. “Sam loves you. From this point on, leave the other woman inside. I did not lose my daughter to you. I will not lose a son.”

Really, the most implausible thing in *Blizzard* (minus our One Impossible Thing, which is the Sidhe and all their powers – weather control, healing, mindfuckery) is how quickly Gene’s fathers-in-law change their minds. DS pointed out that it might have been more plausible if I’d stretched the whole thing out to 27 days (3*3*3) instead of 9 (3+3+3), with the added bonus that it would have ended on the first day of spring – but when I started planning the story, I used a 9-day timetable.

At 9 days, the stakes are higher and the tension is greater. At 27, there probably would have been time skips. Or my patrons’ heads might have exploded.

(Sam thanks me for saying “fathers-in-law” instead of “father-in-laws”, which is an abomination.)

Sam looked over her shoulder at Alex, stuck out her tongue, and said, “Not until I’ve had my turns!”

This scene takes place on Sunday. Remember how, back in Chapter 15, Sam called dibs on Sunday? Sam does.

(No, she’s not going to insist on that, but she thinks it’s funny.)

We took off at a run to the elevators.

DS told me what he sees happening in that elevator.

As the door closes behind the foursome and the elevator begins to rise, Sam drops to her knees, undoes Gene’s zipper, pulls out his cock, and starts sucking (sorry, starts *fellating*).

Then there’s a TING, and the elevator door opens, and a couple of 80-year-olds are staring at them.

3 seconds of silence, then Max reaches out and presses the CLOSE DOOR button.

We can't decide what would be the best thing for the 80-year-olds to do as the door slides shut. Ask "going down?" and laugh hysterically? Give Gene a thumb's-up? Or sigh, and say something like "that sure takes me back" or "why don't *you* do that any more?"

CHAPTER 29

And now it's six months later. A lot of things can happen in six months, and maybe I'll tell you about them someday.

I briefly considered setting the epilogue 27 years in the future, but three 46-year-olds aren't as hot as three 19-year-olds. And DS points out that I'd have had to do a ton more worldbuilding.

Doug kicked off his sneakers. Hank looked around the porch. I had a moment of clarity.

"Right! Shit. Come in, come in. I'll give you the tour."

Note that chapter 1 begins with someone *coming into Gene's home without asking permission*, and chapter 29 begins with guests *waiting to be formally invited in*.

"He told me you were dating three girls, that they were hot, and that one of them plays Mercutio in Shakespeare in The Park, or whatever it's called

I originally had Alex playing Juliet, but DS pointed out that I'd told him Alex refuses any role that involves kissing anyone other than Gene, Sam, or Max.

Alex in an argument with the director:

Director: You're in a polyamorous relationship, right?

Alex: Yes.

Director: So you kiss people other than your husband, right?

Alex: Yes.

Director: So you can kiss Bob.

Alex: No.

Doug put down what I expected was expensive akvavit.

Akvavit is Scandinavian booze, as to be expected from the Carlsens.

Her hair was tied back in a tight bun.

Max's hairstyle is *efficient and functional*.

"Where's our sweetheart?" I asked Max.

By this point, they've figured out what the word 'sweetheart' does to Sam.

(Yes, Jared calls her 'sweetheart' in chapter 28. He's her dad, it's not the same.)

She had tied her hair in pigtails

Alex's hairstyle is *cute and sexualized*.

"Yeah, maybe not, but with all of the toys and tools Sam's daddy sent us," Alex pointed at the shed, "I wanted to play."

Gardening supplies, a barn, seeds... growing your own food. Jared's gift is about responsibility.

"Oh, yeah. Yeah! It's Friday! Yeah!" She lit up, grabbed me, kissed my cheek, and bolted inside

Delivery day for the armchair.

Most of this furniture hadn't been delivered before I left for work, and I had a phone full of selfies from Sam and Alex all over town.

No nudes. Remember, Alex doesn't send nudes. Not even of Sam.

Which isn't to say Sam and Alex didn't have sex in semi-public places all over town. They did, in the back seat of the car Jared bought them (because the house is too far from campus to make walking feasible, and he doesn't trust the Halifax bus system). They just didn't take pictures of that.

Although they had Max on the phone, listening and masturbating while Alex described exactly what Sam was doing to her. It was her only break from all the work.

And yes, since Sam had her romantic First Three Times with Max, the morning after the end of Chapter 28, she is now willing to do anything and everything with Alex too.

"She also tracked down all of the promos," I said. "Full Ascension collection."

I always knew Peter's housewarming gift would be games-related – perhaps "copies of all of Peter's favorites", although Alex wouldn't have liked that. DS suggested 'complete Ascension collection'.

I gave Max back her phone in the kitchen. I waved to Alex who was playing with hers and pacing the length of the living room.

Alex isn't *playing* with her phone, she's using the delivery tracker app.

Sam put down Tickly's tentacles and set the stuffed squid between an orca and a camel.

Remember Tickly, Alex's stuffed squid and early masturbation toy? And Sam's stuffed orca with a "fin in just the right spot"? Max didn't have a stuffed aquatic creature, so getting her a stuffed camel is Ironic And Funny.

Max was using Tickly while she was listening to Sam and Alex. Good thing they're all machine-washable.

(And they've got a *lot* of towels in the car. "If *you* want to explain to my dad that we need to get the car cleaned because you squirted in the back seat, go ahead." "... I'll get the towels.")

Her brown hair rested on her shoulder in a thick French braid.

Sam's hairstyle is *complex and elegant*.

"You must be Hank."

Sam knows about Hank because she's a very family-oriented person, and Doug is now part of her extended family, so she talks to him a lot and found out about how things with Nathan went to shit and now Doug is with Hank. She *did* tell Alex and Max, but they were both... distracted.

And no, they weren't distracted because they were having sex with each other, Gene, and/or her. There's a time and place for telling Alex and Max about the latest developments in Doug's romantic life, and "while they're in a daisy chain, Max eagerly licking Gene's cum out of Alex, while Alex licked it out of Sam and Sam licked it out of Max" isn't it. Alex was studying the script for *Twelve Angry Men* (rehearsals started the week after chapter 29. She played Juror #3 – her first Antagonist role, she was so proud!), and Max was reading *Teach Yourself PHP*.

The daisy chain was later that evening.

(Alex based the mannerisms of Juror #3, "the angry one", on Sam. Sam wasn't sure whether to be flattered or upset; 'flattered' won. If Alex'd been Juror #4, "the analytical one", she would've based them on Max.)

"Oh, muscles *and* brains!" Sam smiled. "Keep this one," she mouthed at Doug.

To Sam's disappointment, Doug and Hank are an on-again/off-again thing for the better part of a decade. What *really* disappoints her is when Hank doesn't come to her and Max's wedding because it's during an 'off' time.

"We got meat for Gene and Doug, a works for Sam and me, and vegetarian for Max."

Max isn't vegetarian (she *loves* spicy chicken wings), but she doesn't like factory farming. She'll eat and enjoy meat if it's given to her, but if it's her option, she'll avoid it. Unless it's cruelty-free, free-range, or wild game hunted by someone she trusts.

Will all these details ever make it into a story? I'm not saying they will, but I'm not saying they won't.

"Pfft!" Alex rolled her eyes. "Do you know how many times I got this girl?"

“Do you want a real answer to that question?” Max said, grinning. I could almost see her doing the math in her head. There was no way. No way...

“It’s a big number. I’m really not that hard to get,” Sam said to Alex.

DS estimated upwards of 120 times in a 6-month interval (their periods were out of synch at first, plus they did have academic stuff), but he admits that’s probably way too conservative.

And that’s just how many times Sam and Alex had sex without Gene and/or Max being involved.

DS wanted to show his work here, but there are limits to what I’m willing to make you put up with. Wouldn’t you rather learn about how, when Sam was 9, she spent three days drawing a new logo for Richardson’s? Jared told her how impressed he was, and even put it on the wall in his office, and didn’t use it for the stores because she was 9 and he spent good money on professional graphic designers. Sam’s absolutely not upset about that incident. Not in the slightest. It was ten years ago, it would be ridiculous for her to still resent that. Stop asking.

“You’ll be here for the housewarming party?”

They will, along with four sets of parents, and Sam’s two brothers, and Max’s dog Oscar. *We*, however, will not.

If you’ve read this far, then you love the characters of ***Blizzard***, which is understandable. But, in the words of Neil Gaiman... stories *have* to end. It’s what gives them meaning. Keep scrolling down, we’re not done!

(And it took an hour to get the armchair clean. They used a towel next time.)

Thank you to my beta readers. Thank you to everyone on my Patreon, especially those of you who voted for me to continue with ***Blizzard*** after that first sample chapter. I thought it would be 9 chapters. I’m so, so, so glad it wasn’t. Keep scrolling.

Thanks to DS, without whom the story of ***Blizzard*** would not have been anywhere near the level of quality it currently is. He also suggested these annotations, and actually wrote most of them for me after picking through 3+ months of chat logs. I corrected and added bits here and there, but he does a surprisingly good job of emulating my voice. I’m not paying him as much as he deserves.