Covetous (Part 3)

After an indeterminate amount of time, Victoria woke up. Every bone in her body hurt. Her face, breasts and hips felt like they were stretching. So did her toes and nails. She realized she still had the flashlight. In fact, she had held on to it so tight that the metal had been crushed into the shape of her hands. She flicked it on, happy to see it still worked.

She stood up, balancing carefully on her boot's high heels. As she did so, she had the strangest feeling that something was wrong. She shined the flashlight on herself to see what it was. First, she checked her body. Her dress, boots and bracelets had been blackened and had changed texture. Her skin had stopped being waxy, but had turned from a pale white to a slightly orange color. However, she felt like something else was wrong...

She shrugged off the feeling and looked around. There were two more doors and more disenfectant sprayers. However, these sprayers were hooked up to a variety of different markings from biomed companies and health care organizations like the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization. However, none of these canisters seemed like they came from a religious source.

That's weird, Victoria thought. *Why are there so many different canisters? If they got disinfetctant from the Vatican, why couldn't they get discounts from them? It's not like there's some disease or condition only the Vatican knows about and can cure.* As soon as she thought it, an idea rose up in her mind, one she quickly suppressed before it could pass through her subconscious and into conscious thought.

Before exiting through the door marked by a non-functioning exit sign, she quickly disabled the decontamination sprayers. There was no way she'd go through something like that again.

To her surprise, the next door opened easily. She wanted to put it down to the fact that toxic chemicals weren't spraying in her face, but she doubted it. Outside was more pure darkness. Her light showed that their was a map on the wall in front of her. To one side, the darkness seemed to actually take form as smoke. It seemed like it was trying to move around her light. The other side, however, seemed to be a more normal form of pitch black.

When she turned back to the side the black smoke was on, she heard a voice. It was a soft, seductive voice. "Victoria..." it whispered, "come to me..." Victoria stepped into the hallway. "Who's there?" Her question rebounded down the corridor in both directions.

"A... friend," the voice whispered coyly. Shadows tried to flank the flashlight's cone of light. Victoria shook the flashlight to drive them back. "Someone who knows about you."

At this point, Victoria began to back down the hall, still moving the light to stop the

advancing darkness. “I’m sorry,” she said, “but I’m going to have to call stranger danger on this.” It seemed to Victoria that the comment produced a shadow’s equivelent to a smile. “For now,” it said with a chuckle. “My friend, you are so much more interesting than my other friends. And we haven’t even met yet!”

Victoria remembered the bloodstain she found the rifle by. “What are your other friends like?” She asked as she backed down the hall. Turning behind her, she saw a light behind her. A faint light, but a light nontheless. “Oh,” the darkness said dismissively, “they’re *so* dull.” Its tone changed back to its seductive purr. “Not like you, Victoria. You see, you’re someone to talk to. Not like them.” Something moved out of the shadows, a ghastly face that looked like it had been dead. Victoria winced in horror at how it looked liked it had been crushed. It was jerked back so violently Victoria heard a snapping sound.

“Sorry about Dennis,” the darkness said. “He always liked you, and just wanted to get a closer look.” Victoria looked over her shoulder to see the light was just a few steps away. “Dennis liked you so much that before we were friends he gave up much to keep us from meeting earlier.”

“Was that his blood all over the floor in my room, then?” Victoria asked as she stepped into the light. The darkness seemed sad. “Victoria, pleas come back,” it said. “I can’t follow you up there, and would like to know you a little more... intimately.”

Victoria smiled nervously back at the darkness as she walked down the stone. “Maybe some other time,” she said as she walked away. She was able to get a good look at the corridor now. It was a stone corridor, and while brighter than the other corridor, was still almost pitch black. The only light she could see came from her flashlight and something similar to the paint she saw on her body in her prison. Shining her flashlight on the ceiling, she saw that there had been pipes, wires, and lights added on to the stone ceiling. The lights, of course, were dead, and the wires probably didn’t carry electricity anymore. However, the pipes seemed to still be dripping water.

After wandering for a while, she came to a stairway. From up the the stairway, she heard someone belting out a song. *“One hundred bottles of beer on the wall, one hundred bottles of beer....*” She started up the stairs, her feet making a tapping sound. Underneath the singing and her own feet, she heard something else. She continued walking, albeit slower.

“Nintey-five bottles of beer on the wall, ninety five bottles of beer....” She was able to make the sound out as the tap of work or combat boots. In response, Victoria turned off her flashlight.

“Take one down, pass it around...” Victoria managed to get to the top of the stairs and throw herself behind the arch to the hallway just as lights began probing through the darkness. She held her breath, wondering if they could hear her breathing.

“Ninety-four bottles of beer on the wall...” A different voice, also male but with a

Texan accent, said, “Still no living shadows. Hell yeah, that’s got to be another week without retreating.” A British voice responded. “Good thing, mate. That thing down there scares the bleeding crap out of me...”

Say what things, Victoria thought, *say what things are down there...* As if in response, the Texan said, “What thing? There’s more crazy-ass shit down there than you can shake a stick at?” *Yes Mr. Bond,* Victoria thought, *Give Mr. Eastwood specifics... there’s a good guy...*

But before the English-accented man could respond, a new voice, Russian-accented, stepped in. “Wait, friends,” he said, “I am feeling odd pressure on my mind. Are you?”

“No, Arkady,” the Englishman Victoria had dubbed Mr. Bond said cautiously. “Then again, mental inception is your area.” The Texan (also known as Mr. Eastwood) added, also cautiously, “No Eldritch power could get through that barrier without destroying it... Then again, we could have a new problem.”

“If only generator wasn’t next to main problem,” the Russian said, choosing his words carefully, like he *knew* Victoria was listening in, “things would be degree easier.”

“Well,” Mr. Bond said, “We make do with what we’ve got. Let’s make our report to Jack.” Victoria then flashed back to what seemed like an eternity ago when the terrorist leader had unloaded his revolver into the sub-chief's head. As clear as day, she remembered the man saying “The answer is, yes Jack, he would.” Now she knew his name. Now she had a remarkable degree of power over someone who tried his best to keep his identity a secret.

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