

COLONY



GARDENCRAFT



0

For whatever the word of a stranger is worth, you have mine that I recount the following events exactly as they occurred a thousand years from now, or at least as best as I can recollect them.

ACT I

The Choice is Always Yours

Chapter One

I

Sat abreast upon a garden bench hewn of stone, Elijah Porter and Freya Foster reside in silence.

Elijah studies the gravel between his feet, an open letter clasped in his left hand. It arrived two days prior and is penned by Cindy Shultz, *Independent Executrix of the Estate of Frank O-Reilly, Deceased*.

Freya studies Elijah.

The garden belongs to her parents, or more accurately, to her father's parents, who acquired the *Foster Estate* parcel by parcel over several decades of prudent financial decision-making. Elijah has been here a dozen times, and each time he's felt underdressed.

FREYA

Elijah...look at me. Please.

Elijah complies, begrudgingly. Her amber eyes have swelled with tears, just as he suspected. They've been building since dinner.

FREYA (CONT'D)

It's a carpet store...

He squirms in defense.

ELIJAH

Carpet *business*. It's not just – it's more than that...

She grasps his hand with gentle firmness.

FREYA

(delicately)

It's a carpet store.

Elijah's gaze juts upward toward the heavens, and there it remains for several moments as he shakes his head "no". The heavens offer nothing in return, as is their custom.

ELIJAH

It's not that simple.

FREYA

Yes, it is. It really is. Come with me or stay without me, but I won't do long distance. It's not fair. To either of us.

Elijah's gaze finds elsewhere.

FREYA (CONT'D)

If finance is a concern, you know father –

ELIJAH

Absolutely not! No – no – I'm not some charity case, I don't need –

A dove *FLUTTERS* then flees a nearby bush. Freya notices.

FREYA

Okay, okay, I hear you, Elijah. Then sell the business. Just sell the business! You'd have more than enough to find your footing.

ELIJAH

And watch *Frank's Carpet Market* turn into some soulless *Carpet World Emporium*?! Frank never –

FREYA

Frank never had a choice!

Silence hangs in the air again, but for the occasional snuffle.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Elijah. He left you an asset, not an anchor. I know it's scary, but –

ELIJAH

It's his legacy, Freya. It's all that's left of him.

FREYA

You are his legacy. Not some crumbling bricks on the shitty side of Boston. Not some dusty old carpets. *You*. Frank would have wanted –

ELIJAH

You don't know what he wanted...

Freya stiffens at the words.

FREYA

Two years. Down the drain, huh. Just like that.

ELIJAH

I can't leave. I'm sorry.

FREYA

You promised. You said you –

ELIJAH

I'm sorry, Freya. I can't.

Her face melts into resignation.

She nods once, barely.

She looks down at their hands, still clasped, then opens her fingers and lets go.

II

Bundled in a plush bathrobe, Freya sits before a mirror in a ritzy hotel bathroom, central Boston, applying the evening's makeup with zen-like proficiency. The mirror is fogged slightly at the edges.

She hums softly. The bathroom smells expensive and faintly floral.

In the adjacent bedroom, Cranston Patrick dithers about. His mumblings are heard through the connecting door, which rests mostly ajar.

CRANSTON

(slightly muddled)

Is this really all you're wearing?

A spritz of something cedary and medicinal enters the bathroom.

Cranston appears in the mirror already dressed – white dress trousers, impeccably pressed, and a formal British military jacket, red.

He holds a black dress, modestly cut by most standards, pinched between the tips of his thumb and index finger as if it were a sullied diaper.

Freya stops humming but continues applying her makeup.

FREYA

It's a cocktail party, dear. That's a cocktail dress.

CRANSTON

The remnants of one, perhaps. One fed through a paper shredder. You'll be frigid.

FREYA

I'll be fine.

CRANSTON

Won't you at least bring a coat this time? The one I got you for Christmas. The red one.

FREYA

It's a party, dear, not supper with the Queen.

CRANSTON

I know it's – see, you do this every time. And I can predict exactly how the evening will go. You'll catch a chill, then you'll apprehend my jacket, then I'll be chilly for the remainder of the evening.

Freya moves from eye shadow to liner.

FREYA

Seriously?

CRANSTON

Do you deny the allegations?

She sighs to herself, which she's been doing more often lately.

FREYA

Peek in the closet and tell me what you see hanging prominently on the left.

Cranston hesitates for a moment but relents. He saunters toward the closet and peeks his head inside.

CRANSTON

A shawl...the blue one I acquired for your birthday!

FREYA

Yes. The cerulean shawl you acquired for my birthday. Cashmere. It's quite warm and complements the dress splendidly. It was a lovely gift, thank you.

CRANSTON

You know, it wasn't an easy prize to come by...

FREYA

...I know, dear...

CRANSTON

...and it will look damn stunning draped atop your shoulders. Damn stunning! This much is assured...

FREYA

...thank you, dear...

CRANSTON

...and yet, well, and yet that's the thing of it, really, it only covers your shoulders, doesn't it? But your neck, your neck will be cold.

Perhaps –

Freya *SNAPS* the eye liner down upon the vanity.

FREYA

Then I'll find another means to keep my neck warm!

Cranston measures her words and their implication carefully. He opts for tactical retreat.

CRANSTON

Apologies, my love. I just want so badly for your comfort.

Arisen now, Freya glides toward Cranston with practiced ease.

The cedar and medicine are typically able guardsmen, but she moves right past without hesitation.

FREYA

I know you do, and I love that about you. But I'll be fine. It's my choice and I want to wear the shawl.

She speaks softer now, hardly more than a whisper.

FREYA (CONT'D)

And besides...

She grabs Cranston by the groin; a slight, unbecoming groan escapes him.

FREYA (CONT'D)

...I don't intend to linger any longer than I must. Couple drinks. Couple quick hellos...

...and quicker goodbyes...

She leans in closer. Her perfume, just now noticeable over the cedar and medicine, ensures he meets her halfway.

FREYA (CONT'D)

...then we head back to the hotel and you fuck my brains out.

His pressed white trousers can spare no quarter.

CRANSTON

I'm a privileged man, indeed...

FREYA

Honey, the privilege is all mine...

She pushes him away with a force found at the aggressive end of the playfulness scale.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Now let me finish dressing. We shouldn't be late.

III

Frank's Carpet Market has cleared of the day's clientele, scant though they were, except for one who lingers.

The store smells like wool and the slight chemical sweetness of carpet backing adhesive, which Elijah stops noticing five minutes into each day.

ELIJAH

It's getting late, Ms. McGuire. And I really do have someplace to be. Have we made a decision?

MS. MCGUIRE

The Saxony and the Frieze...they're the same pile...but different texture? I can't tell the difference...I'm so damn confused.

ELIJAH

Run your hand across them. The Saxony is smooth, more formal. The one that says this is a serious foyer. See? The Frieze has more twist to it. More casual. Both are beautiful. But you are no ordinary Frieze woman, Ms. McGuire. Go with the Saxony.

Ms. McGuire runs her hand across the Frieze then the Saxony.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Should I ring it up?

MS. MCGUIRE

I – I just don't know. Too many damn choices!
I need more time to mull it over...

ELIJAH

Okay, Ms. McGuire.

Elijah guides Ms. McGuire to the shop's front door, which is composed of heavy, graffitied glass with wrought iron bars spanning its length.

He opens it. The bell above it *RINGS*.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Have a good night, Ms. McGuire. I'll see you
next week.

Ms. McGuire steps out but pauses atop the front step and turns.

MS. MCGUIRE

One of these days, I'm gonna walk in here and
just pull the trigger.

She goes. Elijah monitors her departure for a moment, ensuring to his satisfaction that she arrives safely in her vehicle.

A stray cat sits atop the front step just outside the shop. Elijah grabs a tin of cat food from a small cabinet just inside the door, which is heavy, and sets it down. The cat eats without particular gratitude, same as always.

RING.

He reenters the shop and reaches toward a heavy iron latch, which *CLACKS* behind him. He assesses the shop's showroom.

Neat.

Orderly.

He exhales, deeply, then makes way toward the back office, collecting a stray carpet sample from the ground in passing.

Then, noting the clock, he picks up the pace.

* * *

Elijah retreats to his office desk and slumps into a peeling, faux-leathern chair behind it. The adhesive smell is more pungent back here in the confined space of an office.

His desk is chaotic, covered in documents and carpet samples and swatches without a clear pattern of organization.

He grabs a stack of mail and flips through: Credit Card Offer. Overdue Bill. Overdue Bill. Credit Card Offer. Credit Card Offer.

He sets the stack down. Not tonight.

From beneath another stack, he grabs a pamphlet. *Colony Genome Project: Dare to Dream Bigger*. The smiling faces on the front seem genuine and foreign to him.

Several times he taps the pamphlet upon the cluttered desk, then visits the clock with weary eyes.

ELIJAH

Shit.

Chapter Two

I

DRIP.

Sat atop a carven pubstool aboard the *Gildenstern Resort & Casino*, Elijah watches a leaking faucet drip. Currently docked in Boston Harbor, the *Stern* is a near perfect replica of the grand British galleons that once soared these very waters 300 years past.

Originally constructed as a somewhat gimmicky everyman's casino, over time the *Stern* found itself a favored jaunting spot of the well-to-do, particularly amongst the British, and so the amenities were revamped to accord more nearly with the whims of its (mostly) posh clientele.

The result is an establishment that takes itself very seriously and half-deserves to.

The pubkeeper, an American poised and well-trained, has issued regrets for the plumbing malfunction on no fewer than four occasions, each successive apology more profusely offered than the last, and he assures all within earshot that defects of this nature rarely find their way aboard an otherwise supreme and seaworthy vessel.

Elijah empathizes deeply with the faucet – something leaking that shouldn't be, making a sound nobody wants to hear, unable to stop of its own volition.

He sips another dry gin martini, which came highly recommended by the pubkeeper who presumably knows well enough his craft; and although Elijah's never much cared for martinis, or gin, or olives, who was he to know better than a professional?

He finishes it, olives and all.

ELIJAH

That was good, I'll have another.

Elijah employs the martinis to steady his nerves, for tonight aboard the *Stern* he will rendezvous with an old friend with whom he has not spoken in just over a year but for in dreams every night.

He's not sure why he came tonight. That's not true. He is sure, but he finds the reason unnerving, and those he needs steady.

Between *DRIPS* and despite concerted effort, Elijah overhears the older British couple beside him bicker in a way only the British a few deep can.

MR. BEAUREGARD

...oh, come off it, Cathy, you continue to miss the point. Technically, the *Stern* is British territory!

MRS. BEAUREGARD

I've quite well gathered your point, Nigel, *my* point is that you're a wretched miser of a man if you cannot spare a few quid for the poor barkeep. The service has been exemplary!

MR. BEAUREGARD

Ah ah ah, excepting that damned faucet! Might as well be aboard the Titanic the way this hunk of rubbish takes on water...

MRS. BEAUREGARD

...oh, were it so...

MR. BEAUREGARD

...and I cannot in good conscience reward half-arsed accommodation! I won't have it. No, a gentleman must have a code. British territory. British customs. Come now, let us try our hand at blackjack. God save the Queen, I feel lucky tonight!

The bickering exits with the Beauregards. Left behind is a prominently displayed receipt with a not so insignificant tab and an oversized Ø in the tip column.

Elijah removes a crumpled \$20 bill from the breast pocket of a boxy, white tuxedo jacket (which appears, incidentally, similar to that of the bartender's in color but not fit) and places the bill atop the receipt as covertly as one can in a casino.

His mind wanders elsewhere. Terrain it knows well, especially of late.

LAFAYETTE

Damn decent of you, monsieur.

To Elijah's immediate left, on the pubstool formerly occupied by Mrs. Beauregard, sits a svelte Frenchman in a well-crafted navy suit – Lafayette.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

But tell me. Why serve your overlords?

ELIJAH

I'm sorry?

LAFAYETTE

Your overlords. Why serve them? It is a very curious thing.

ELIJAH

The British couple? Oh no, they're not my overlords. Never met them.

LAFAYETTE

That was Nigel Beauregard the Fifth, Duke of Canterbury. He's bought up half of Boston proper. It appears the redcoats want their city back.

ELIJAH

Well, unless he's buying up carpet stores on the shitty side of town, I doubt I'll notice.

Lafayette chuckles then leans in closer.

LAFAYETTE

If I may be so bold, what brings you aboard the *Stern* this lovely evening?

The space between the two has diminished quicker than Elijah realized.

He pulls back.

ELIJAH

Can I help you with something, pal?

LAFAYETTE

Yes. You seem a kindly man. I'd like to read your fortune. Free of charge.

ELIJAH

Read my fortune?

LAFAYETTE

That's right.

Lafayette removes a deck of well-worn tarot cards from his breast pocket and shuffles them with casual proficiency.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

I'm best in the cosmos.

Elijah pauses for a moment as Lafayette continues to shuffle. He should probably temper the martinis moving forward, but for now they have risen to the occasion.

ELIJAH

Sure, why not. What does my future hold?

Lafayette *SNAPS* a card down upon the bar top.

LAFAYETTE

Your past.

It is the High Priestess card, reversed.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

Ahh yes, now I see why you're here. What's her name?

Elijah squirms defensively.

ELIJAH

Thought you were reading my future?

LAFAYETTE

To know the past is to know the future.

Silence. The faucet *DRIPS*.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

Very well...your present.

Lafayette *SNAPS* down a second card. It is the Fool.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

Fitting, indeed. Most fitting. Don't look down,
monsieur.

He chuckles as he taps the card with a single finger.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

And finally...your future.

A third card is revealed. It is the World.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

Yes, yes, I see it all now.

Elijah awaits elaboration, but it never arrives.

ELIJAH

So...what's my future hold?

LAFAYETTE

That depends. Two paths present themselves. One you know well, for you have travelled it many times. The other...the other though is wont of tread, wild and dangerous. And at its terminus lies that which you desire most.

ELIJAH

Ugh huh.

The barkeep places another martini before Elijah then retrieves the Beauregards' receipt and the crumpled \$20 bill. He can be heard bitching of *cheap ass limeys*.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Well, thanks for the predictably vague read, pal. Enjoy your night.

Lafayette arises, replaces the deck in his breast pocket, then straightens his jacket.

LAFAYETTE

I always do. The world is big and our time here small, monsieur. Adieu.

He walks away but halts midstride and pivots back.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

By the way. She's moved on. You'd be wise to do the same.

He exits, leaving Elijah with unpalatable food for thought and another martini he didn't ask for.

The faucet *DRIPS*.

II

The harbor air is salty and diesely and cold, and it moves with pace along the boardwalk beneath the *Stern*. Freya's dress covers less underneath than it normally does; she pulls her shawl tighter.

Despite the cold, Freya's mind attends another, more pressing matter.

FREYA

Best behavior tonight. I mean it.

CRANSTON

The only kind I know.

It's not, and Freya's directive is not for want of good reason.

Truth be told, she's been looking forward to this reunion with Elijah for just over a year, and her boyfriend, of about the same width of time, has proven himself...unreliable, behaviorally. No man is without fault (she tells herself, more often these days than a year ago) and Cranston is but a man. Imperfect as all others.

CRANSTON

Chilly?

FREYA

No.

The imperfection she worries of most in the immediate moment is jealousy, followed closely by pride. She must remain poised, subdued, hardly interested in conversing with Elijah other than as a platonic nicety,

but she fears Cranston will see through the guise right away and cause a scene, or worse.

CRANSTON

You look stunning tonight. Have I mentioned?

FREYA

Twice in the cab.

CRANSTON

Well. It bears repeating. I'm excited to meet your old running mates! Are Marie and Sarah to be here?

FREYA

Yes.

CRANSTON

Excellent! Perhaps I can pry away a secret or two about your life in the states. Jessica?

FREYA

Yes.

CRANSTON

And Elijah?

FREYA

I – I'm actually not sure. I don't know. Maybe.

They ascend a well-lit boardwalk toward the *Stern's* interior cabin and an uncommonly leaky faucet.

III

Cranston guides Freya into the *Stern's* inner cabin, his hand adhered to the small of her back. Elijah, still seated at the bar, spots them enter from across the cabin.

Freya greets old acquaintances with a smile. Marie. Sarah. Small talk and compliments and casual gossip.

The cabin smells of warm wood and spirits and the collective perfume of a hundred people dressed for an occasion. The lighting is amber and intimate.

She spots Elijah across the cabin and waves with genuine excitement then excuses herself and makes her way toward him.

FREYA

Hey there, stranger!

ELIJAH

Freya Foster. How the hell are you?

The two embrace in a hug that appears like more than a platonic nicety. They have time to catch up for a few moments before Cranston realizes his girlfriend has become unmoored.

He spots her and approaches.

CRANSTON

(interjecting)

I've got it, babe. Two dry gin martinis.
Bombay.

He endeavors to hand Elijah a black credit card; it's the same one handed to him once or twice before in the shop, always by customers who didn't ask the price of their purchase.

FREYA

(through clenched teeth)

Cranston, this is Elijah.

Cranston laughs from a place of sincere bemusement, the guffaws echoing about the cabin with embarrassing volume, in Freya's opinion.

CRANSTON

You're Elijah? Oh! Oh, my word, apologies ol' chap, I confused you for service. No offense.

ELIJAH

Why would that be offensive?

Cranston has been outflanked and now finds his rearguard vulnerable.

He opts for tactical retreat.

CRANSTON

I – no, no, of course not, I didn't mean...I wouldn't –

Cranston shoots a glance toward the nearby bartender to gauge whether he's overheard the exchange. He has, and Freya must congress all her willpower to prevent a fast-forming smile from extending fully ear to ear.

CRANSTON

In any event, pleasure to meet you at long last. Freya speaks of you highly. And often! But please, if you'll excuse me for a moment.

He exits the conversation as abruptly as he joined and approaches the bartender.

CRANSTON

(slightly muddled)

My good man. You may have been privy to a poor choice in wording on my part. If it caused offense, that was not my intent. I woouuuld, however, like those martinis, Bombay, so if [indecipherable].

Seizing the opportunity, Freya grasps Elijah's arm. It seems bigger than a year ago.

FREYA

Come, let us step out for a moment. I must hear everything new in the life of Elijah Porter!

She removes her hand from Elijah's arm in a downward brushing stroke, allowing her index finger to linger in contact a moment longer than it should from someone spoken for.

She peeks at Cranston.

CRANSTON

(slightly muddled)

Out of gin?! I find that very hard to believe, and if I may be so bold [indecipherable].

She clasps Elijah's hand and guides him toward the *Stern's* outer deck.

Whether Cranston ever got those martinis remains a mystery, for what transpires next will render the answer mostly irrelevant in the cosmic scheme.

IV

The *Stern's* outer deck, awash in the moon's borrowed light, is imbued with the sound of stringed instruments and seagulls harmonizing.

The deck is notably less crowded than the inner cabin, either because the outdoor air is a tad saltine and nipping, which does a thing to hair that most of the present patronage doesn't care for, or because the deck has only one bar top and not several in contrast to the cabin.

In either event, Elijah and Freya advance toward the tip of the ship's bow then peer out over the railing across the harbor.

Elijah wobbles.

FREYA

Don't worry, I got you.

ELIJAH

I don't know what you mean.

FREYA

(chuckling)

Some things never change...

ELIJAH

Yeah.

Cranston seems nice.

Freya thinks to say one thing but says another.

FREYA

He is. He can be. Treats me well enough at least. Obnoxiously charming when he wants to be.

ELIJAH

Picked up on that...

Her shawl matches his tie in color exactly: cerulean. She wonders whether the oddity is just that or some divine wink of the eye.

FREYA

But I don't want to talk about Cranston, I want to talk about *you*! What's new? How's the business? Any lucky ladies? Spare no detail.

The answer to that last question Freya has no right to care about one way or the other, but she does.

ELIJAH

No ladies. Too busy with the shop. It's great. Really great. Hard work, you know? But, just like any job, really, some aspects suck, but some can feel pretty damn rewarding sometimes.

FREYA

That's really great. I'm happy for you. Truly, I am.

ELIJAH

And how about you? How's London? Queen of England yet?

Freya giggles.

FREYA

Soon enough.

A thousand years of silence are compressed into a single second.

ELIJAH

You look great by the way. That dress is working for you.

FREYA

Ahh, you're sweet, thank you. It's a little more revealing than befits the future Queen of England. But I thought – I just...I don't know what I thought.

She glances at him briefly then returns her gaze to the harbor.

FREYA (CONT'D)

And now I'm having second thoughts, and I feel a tad self-conscious.

ELIJAH

You? That's a first.

FREYA

You'd be surprised.

ELIJAH

(thoughtfully)

Well, if you saw yourself through my eyes, you wouldn't feel self-conscious about a thing.

Freya exhales sharply. He does this; says something kind with such complete lack of pretense that it makes everything inside her right below the navel light up with electricity. It has an effect on her upper body too, but that might just be the cold air and her lack of defense against it.

FREYA

Goddamnet, Elijah.

ELIJAH

What?

FREYA

You can't just – you shouldn't say things like that.

ELIJAH

Sorry.

A shiver runs the length of Freya's spine. Elijah notices.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Here.

He removes his boxy, white tuxedo jacket and drapes it atop Freya's shoulders.

She looks at him in a way she knows she shouldn't.

ELIJAH

Oh, almost forgot. I do have some news. I've been invited to participate in this research program. It's called the *Colony Genome Project* –

FREYA

(interjecting)

The Colony?

The seagulls have quit the band.

ELIJAH

Yeah, it's in West Virginia –

FREYA

I know where it is.

ELIJAH

Well, I submitted a DNA sample couple years back. Ancestry test. Thought maybe I could learn about my parents. No luck. But apparently I have something interesting in my genes and they want to study me.

Discreetly, Freya scans the deck for something unknown.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

They keep sending me letters, asking me to participate. But I don't know. The busy season is just –

POP! POP POP POP! POP POP!

Elijah, having grown up on the shitty side of town, is familiar with the sound.

ELIJAH

Get down.

V

Panicked patrons spill out of the *Stern's* inner cabin and onto the outer deck. Screaming. Chaos.

PANICKED PATRON #1

He's got a gun!

POP! POP!

Amidst the chaos, Elijah and Freya seek cover behind the deck's only bartop. Several patrons have leapt overboard into the frigid water waiting below.

ELIJAH

Oh my god. Shit! Fuck!

FREYA

What do we do?

ELIJAH

I – I don't know.

POP!

FREYA

We gotta jump...

ELIJAH

What?

FREYA

We gotta jump, Elijah!

ELIJAH

I – I –

Her hand finds his arm.

FREYA

I'll swim you to shore –

POP POP POP!

FREYA

Elijah, we gotta go!!

But Elijah is frozen in place.

The deck is cold and damp beneath his palms.

Gunpowder, sharp and acrid, scents the air now.

The amber light from the cabin spills across the deck, shifting shapes en route. Somewhere below, the frigid water receives another guest; a graceless splash echoes off the water.

The deck has grown silent now, but for the muddled whimpers of the poorly hidden.

A pair of boots with a measured gait *CLOP* toward Elijah and Freya.

CLOP.

CLOP.

CLOP.

ELIJAH

Ya – you?

LAFAYETTE

Fear not, my American friend. My quarrel is not with you.

Lafayette raises his barrel and aims it at Freya’s head. His face is too calm.

LAFAYETTE (CONT'D)

Forgive me, mon ange. But it’s time to go home. Au revoir.

POP POP!

Lafayette crumples to the ground, dead.

Cranston limps toward Freya, Elijah, and the corpse of Lafayette then kicks the assailant’s gun away. His impeccably pressed trousers are no longer white around the right knee.

CRANSTON

Are you alright, my love?

FREYA

(tearfully)

Yes...

They embrace. Over Cranston’s shoulder, Freya’s eyes find Elijah. She closes them.

CRANSTON

And you, Elijah, are you injured?

Elijah shakes his head “no”.

Somewhere in the cabin a leaking faucet continues to drip, unaware of the carnage around it.

Chapter Three

I

The shop's front doorbell RINGS.

ELIJAH

Have a good night, Ms. McGuire, I'll see you next week. Stay safe.

Elijah stands outside the shop with a bowl of cat food in his hand, but there is no cat to receive it. He leaves the food out anyway.

RING.

He reenters the shop and assesses the showroom.

After exhaling, deeply, he heads toward the back office. A stray carpet sample evades his detection.

Again, the front doorbell *RINGS*.

ELIJAH

Hey, sorry, we're closed.

Persephone, a notably buxom woman with olive skin and a fair visage, glides toward him as a runway model might. Her suit is well-cut and baring.

She runs her hand across hung carpets as she approaches Elijah.

PERSEPHONE

Door was open.

ELIJAH

Oh. Ugh, hi. Can I help you?

PERSEPHONE

Forgive the late hour, Mr. Porter, but I was hoping for a word.

[Insert]

ELIJAH

(skeptically)

Whatever you're selling, I'm not –

PERSEPHONE

I'm more interested in buying than selling.

May we speak?

Elijah relents for the same reason most would. He extends a clammy hand.

ELIJAH

Elijah Porter. How can I help you?

PERSEPHONE

I know who you are, Mr. Porter. You're a difficult man to grab hold of. I'm Persephone. Allow me to cut straight to my purpose. I'm a representative of the Colony. Have you received our correspondence? We've sent quite a bit.

ELIJAH

Yes...yeah...sorry about that.

Elijah detects the stray carpet sample and bends down to retrieve it. Her perfume is exotic and inviting and doing its job.

ELIJAH

I've been pretty busy lately...

Persephone gathers her surroundings.

PERSEPHONE

I bet.

She runs a finger along the serpentine pattern of a nearby rug.

PERSEPHONE (CONT'D)

As we noted in our correspondence, Mr. Porter, the DNA sample you submitted several years prior has proven of interest to my colleagues. You possess an atypical genomic expression. One we'd like to study further. Tell me, are you familiar with a man called James Harrison?

Elijah consults his memory to no avail.

ELIJAH

No, sorry.

PERSEPHONE

He's known as the Man with the Golden Arm. Mr. Harrison had a specific antibody in his blood developed after receiving a transfusion at age 14.

Starting at age 18, he donated blood or plasma every two weeks for 60 years, providing the necessary antibodies to expectant mothers with incompatible blood types.

It's estimated that he saved over 2.4 million babies during that time, including his own grandchildren.

ELIJAH

That's great. Really great. What does it have to do with me?

PERSEPHONE

We believe your genome could prove as beneficial to the species as Mr. Harrison's blood. Your genetic code has embedded within it what we call an unlocked Lumen Sequence.

It's exceedingly rare. Honestly, we don't know much about it yet. Which is why we'd like you to join our little research program. Six weeks, all expenses paid.

ELIJAH

Yeah. That's what your letters said. Look, I'd love to help, but I have a business to run, and I can't just take two months off.

PERSEPHONE

Of course. I understand.

Persephone moves toward a particularly expensive piece of inventory and examines it closer.

PERSEPHONE (CONT'D)

Speaking of business, I stopped by the bank on my way here. You may consider your debts

cancelled, should you complete the research program.

ELIJAH

What?

PERSEPHONE

You are indebted to the Colony now, Mr. Porter. And all will be forgiven, in full, should you help us.

ELIJAH

Help you?! What? You – you're – this is blackmail!

PERSEPHONE

This is business, Elijah. Listen. As a representative of the Colony, I'm obliged to wield the stick, and for that I'm truly sorry. You seem like a sweet guy. But don't overthink this. The Colony is paradise!

And we're paying you to vacation with us for a few weeks. That's it. A Tourist's Visa alone would cost you more than the value of this store...

Elijah considers her words.

PERSEPHONE (CONT'D)

Join us for a few weeks and save your business. After that, you may return to your busy life

here. Or to any other life you choose. The choice is always yours.

She hands him a dossier.

PERSEPHONE (CONT'D)

All the information you need. We hope to see you soon. Cheers.

Elijah watches her leave, a stray carpet sample in one hand, a dossier in the other.

II

The foyer at *Foster Manor* implies old money: highly polished dark wood, leather, books about war, Graeco-Roman figurines, and paintings of galleons and men on horseback, all of which being requisites of British décor when you have money to spend.

Elijah sits in waiting at the edge of a *Chesterfield* with his hands clasped safely in his lap and away from anything that might tip over, having learned once that the things in Foster Manor are irreplaceable. Or at least irreplaceable by him.

The television is on as it always is in the Foster household, the news running constantly as ambient wallpaper.

Elijah's not particularly watching it; he's waiting for Freya, and thinking about Persephone, and the dossier, and whether the stray cat has found a new spot to eat dinner. He's glad he never gave it a name.

That's when the story comes on.

TELEVISION ANCHOR

...More on last week's mass shooting aboard the *Gildenstern Resort & Casino*. A seventh victim has tragically passed away. Mrs. Catherine Abigail Beauregard died of her wounds at Massachusetts General Hospital early this morning. The police are investigating the shooting as an act of terrorism targeting British individuals. The assailant's identity remains unknown...

He unclenches his hands, looks at them briefly, then clasps them again.

The anchor moves on to the next story. Something about a rich guy defrauding the poor and receiving a light sentence. The world proceeds.

Upstairs, a floorboard *CREAKS*. A door opens. Unhurried footsteps descend a staircase.

A butler, Dmitri, enters the foyer.

DMITRI

The Lady Foster will see you now.

ELIJAH

Thanks, Dmitri.

DMITRI

Let's keep our hands to ourselves this time,
shall we?

Elijah rises, carefully, then follows Dmitri out of one minefield and into another.

* * *

Elijah enters the kitchen and is greeted enthusiastically by Colonel Waffles, a fluffy-cloud-white *King Charles* with a golden collar and a black patch of fur surrounding one eye that looks like a monocle.

ELIJAH

Colonel Waffles, my friend, how are you! It's
been a while, buddy.

FREYA

He hasn't forgotten you, it seems.

They share a platonic hug. Freya opens a cabinet, retrieves a bottle of red, then sets two glasses upon the counter.

ELIJAH

Where are they off to this time?

FREYA

Oslo. Some trade summit father couldn't possibly miss. The gears of commerce continue to grind...

Freya pours two glasses. Elijah takes one and settles on his side of the kitchen island. Freya settles on hers.

ELIJAH

How's Cranston?

FREYA

Recovering. There were complications with the surgery though. I fly out tomorrow.

ELIJAH

Damn. Sorry.

Freya nods then reaches into her pocket and produces a small, white pill. She takes it with a sip of wine. Elijah raises an eyebrow.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

You good?

FREYA

Oh, shut up. I'm fine. Sleep has been a tad difficult to come by. But I'm fine, truly.

ELIJAH

Sorry, again...about Marie and Sarah.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Yeah. Me too. Fucking bastard...

ELIJAH

They'll find out who he is.

They drink.

FREYA

Can I ask you something?

Her eyes look tired.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Are you happy? In Boston, I mean.

Elijah takes a long sip as he considers the inquiry.

ELIJAH

I'm not unhappy.

FREYA

That's not what I asked.

Elijah nods. Freya downs what remains in her glass then pours another.

ELIJAH

Are you happy? In London?

She turns the glass slowly on the counter.

FREYA

Come, walk with me. I could use some fresh air.

* * *

Freya leads Elijah into an expansive backyard. Colonel Waffles pads out behind them, sniffs the night air once, then decides better of it and retreats back through the doggie door.

They arrive at a familiar garden bench and sit abreast.

ELIJAH

...the incident though...well, it's got me thinking. Maybe I should see the world a bit before –

He doesn't finish the thought.

FREYA

(quietly)

You're going.

ELIJAH

I think so. It's just six weeks. And the research could save a lot of lives.

FREYA

You should go then. It's an extraordinary thing, and you –

She pauses.

FREYA (CONT'D)

You deserve something extraordinary.

The garden is perfectly still, the elements having agreed not to intrude on the moment.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Here. I have something for you.

She produces a sealed, pink envelope from her jacket pocket and holds it out guardedly. It smells expensive and faintly floral. Elijah looks at it, then at her.

ELIJAH

What is it?

FREYA

Something I've owed you for a while now.

She examines the envelope one last time. The decision is made.

FREYA (CONT'D)

An explanation.

He takes it, turning it over in his hands.

FREYA (CONT'D)

But don't open it until you've returned safely.

Elijah raises an eyebrow; her words have begun to slur, which is a first for Freya to his recollection.

FREYA (CONT'D)

If you read it now, it will sound like...just don't open it yet.

He places the envelope in his jacket pocket. They sit in silence for a long moment before Freya breaks it.

FREYA (CONT'D)

When I turned 21, just before we met, I wanted a specific cake for my birthday. It was a croquembouche. I'd seen it in a book somewhere. Father had one made specially, exactly the one I wanted.

It looked exactly like the picture. Better, actually.

FREYA (CONT'D)

The night before my birthday, father forgot to close the back door. Next morning, I walked into the kitchen to find mother and father stood before a half-eaten cake. A possum had snuck in and done what possums do when they encounter baked goods.

She chuckles mildly before turning serious.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Half the cake, though, remained untouched. I begged, pleaded with father to salvage what we could. He refused. The entire cake was now unfit for consumption.

Elijah agrees with Mr. Foster's rationale. Making someone happy is often not in their best interest. He keeps this to himself.

FREYA (CONT'D)

And that...that was the first time I felt hatred. The actual kind, that corrupts the soul. I'm

ashamed to admit it, but I hated that stupid, gluttonous rodent for ruining my birthday. I hated father for not salvaging the unfucked portion of the cake, and mother for not soliciting on my behalf.

Freya takes a long sip.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Hatred. Over a silly cake.

She shakes her head at the thought of it.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Father said we could afford another. It was just a cake...

Elijah nods in agreement.

FREYA (CONT'D)

But it was *my* cake.

She lifts glass to lips and finishes what remains.

ELIJAH

I never got cake for my birthday either.

She sets the glass down and looks at him.

FREYA

Right. It was silly, my reaction that is. Such a bratty thing. I'm embarrassed by hindsight.

ELIJAH

Hey, welcome to being human.

She smiles. They sit in silence for a good while, both reticent to make the next move because the next move is departure.

FREYA

I have an early flight tomorrow, you should probably go.

ELIJAH

Alright. Let's get you inside.

FREYA

I'll sit a moment longer, thank you.

Elijah hesitates.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Dmitri knows where I am.

He nods once, then rises to exit.

FREYA (CONT'D)

I hope you find what you're looking for, Elijah.
Truly, I do.

Elijah ambles down a gravel pathway back toward the big house.

Moments later, Freya raises her hand and waves back.

