



Dark Visions (Strange Gifts #1)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Aislinn Carter has lived with pain for so many years she doesn't know anything else.

Until one day her pain brings Kane Jackson into her life.

Her unusual gifts seem to enhance Kane's own and together they discover their strengths.

Stopping a killer is their number one priority.

But that's easier said than done.

Kane and Aislinn will need help from a few strange friends with some strange gifts of their own and along the way, love will help them both to see the beauty of their gifts.

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Aislinn cursed herself for forgetting her umbrella as she ducked beneath one shop awning and then another, dodging the bone-chilling rain that pelted her face without mercy. She was already twenty minutes late for work, and to top it off, the barista had left her lid slightly askew, causing her to spill the too-expensive latte down the front of her new sweater. A sweater still unpaid for on her American Express card.

The headache, which inevitably came to her a few times a month, was slowly making its way to her frontal cortex. The pain undeniable. Having already been out three times this month for the same issue, she dared not call in, or Mr. Lewis would most certainly terminate her.

Since she was a child, Aislinn Carter found herself plagued by the inexplicable headaches, preparing herself at the first sign of onset. Her parents took her to see the finest neurologists in the country, and when they had no explanations, they took her to every other specialty known to man. The worst were the psychiatrists who were determined to find some deep hidden meaning or secret to the headaches that crippled her body.

Aislinn learned early on that telling anyone about the visions that came with the headaches would only label her, ostracizing her from others, or worse. The mental hospital when she was twelve was a turning point in her ability to cope with the episodes. It was simple. Don't tell anyone.

The first vision occurred at the tender age of six. She was too young to understand its meaning and too afraid to tell anyone. Curled in the center of her small twin bed, she rocked back and forth with Mr. Bunny, praying for the images to stop. Images of blood and pain and death.

Her tiny brain couldn't understand the horrific pictures that flashed through her brain, but as she matured, her understanding of the visions and their meaning became clear. Aislinn learned that she was seeing events in the near future, events she could stop if she remembered who she had touched or who had touched her during the day.

The sequence was the same each time. A weakness and dizziness followed a few hours later by the earliest signs of the headache and then the gripping terror of images she couldn't control. Always death, always. Not once in her thirty-one years did she have visions graced with images of happiness or beauty. Only death.

Opening the door of the large office building housing Lewis you show up and actually work. That's how this business arrangement works."

"Yes, sir, I know. I'm sorry, it's just with the rain today, and I spilled my coffee, and my headache..." she trailed off, cringing at the stabbing sensations coming quicker.

"Again?! Really, Miss Carter, get your female issues under control, or you'll need to find another job." His condescending tone hit her in all the wrong places. Standing, she gripped his sleeve, turning him around as he tried to walk away.

"Mr. Lewis," she said through gritted teeth, "I assure you this is not a female problem. This is a constant mind-fuck of a headache. Now, I would appreciate it if you would not be so ignorant in your claims, or I may have to... have to..." Aislinn gripped his sleeve tighter, knowing what was coming.

"Miss Carter? Miss Carter?" Mr. Lewis's face showed the first signs of compassion and concern as she fell to the floor. To Aislinn, it felt as though it were happening in slow motion. It always felt like slow motion.

The pain intensified. The shortness of breath came quickly. The loss of feeling in her legs overwhelmed her, and then it came as it always did. Without warning, without

provocation, the images of death and blood, so much blood, and then blackness.

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The tingling sensation in his arm notified him that the perp was close. He felt it when he touched him the first time and then lingered until he found the cause. Sensations had saved his life for the last twenty years, hell, probably more than that. He moved further into the dark alley and waited for the man to appear. Calvin Wall was a minor criminal with big aspirations. Those aspirations would end here and now.

His rap sheet showed multiple small crimes. Petty theft, peeping Tom, one count of possession, nothing to write home about if you were hoping to get into the bad-guy hall of fame. That all changed when Calvin decided he would beat the shit out of his girlfriend and then stalk her roommate.

The zapping, tingling sensations became stronger, and he stopped, waiting patiently for Calvin to come out the side door of the old brick building. Any minute now, any second...

He held his breath with anticipation, the weapon poised at his hip. Sure enough, Calvin Wall, a short, stocky bald man with ham-sized fists covered in blood, exited the door, rain immediately pelting his bare head.

He waited patiently for him to move closer, not giving him any time to react. When Calvin was just a few feet away, he stepped from behind the large metal dumpster, his weapon drawn and aimed directly at the shorter man's head.

"Hello, Calvin," he said, grinning, "you've been a bad boy."

"Fuck! What the hell do you want, Kane?" he said, pretending innocence.

“Me? I don’t want anything. Laura’s brother, however, well, he wants your hide, and I’m going to give it to him.”

“No! No, you can’t do that. You’re the law. You can’t turn me over to him!”

The fear in his eyes told Kane all he needed to know. Calvin Wall was well aware of his girlfriend’s family and still chose to beat the shit out of her. Not smart to beat up the sister of one of the leading mob bosses on the East Coast and then stalk her friend and, from the looks of his hands, beat her too.

“I can, and I will,” he said, smiling. “You see, whether you’re dead or alive, I get paid. So, either I can kill you myself, which wouldn’t be as much fun, or I can just turn you over to Carlos.”

Kane saw the shadowy figures behind Calvin and smiled. The man in front of him knew. He sensed their presence almost immediately and turned slightly to see Carlos Battaglia and three of his goons.

“Please, please, Kane, you can’t let them take me!” he pleaded.

“Oh, you see, I can, and I will. Slime balls like you get arrested and go into the system and then get lost somehow. You end up going out and fucking up some other poor, unsuspecting woman, and the cycle repeats itself. Carlos is just going to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“We appreciate your help, Kane,” said the deep baritone voice of Carlos. A large golf umbrella covered his head, the rain not daring to lay a drop on his expensive suit. “The money will be in your account by this evening. It’s a pleasure, as always.”

“The pleasure is mine, Mr. Battaglia,” he said, grinning at Calvin. “Next time, Calvin, you might want to rethink your strategy for wooing women.”

Kane Jackson turned and walked down the long alleyway toward the street, the sounds of shuffling feet and grunts of pain behind him. As he reached the sidewalk, he heard the telltale signs of a silencer fired three times. He told himself not to look back. If he looked back, he would be a witness to a murder, albeit a murder that needed to happen.

Calvin Wall was the lowest form of scum, in Kane's opinion. He was the kind of man who took pleasure in beating women and forcing himself on them against their will. Laura Battaglia would never be the same again. Her face, a mashed version of its former self, would have to be entirely reconstructed. Even then, her mental faculties, forever altered, left her with the mind of a six-year-old. All because a man like Calvin Wall was allowed to walk the earth.

Turning left, he walked down the darkened, rain-soaked street toward his loft. He passed the usual mid-morning crowd of downtown pedestrians, their lattes in hand, oversized umbrellas protecting their designer suits and handbags. Approaching the turn for his building, he spotted an ambulance in front of the office building around the corner from his home. A small crowd gathered to view what was happening.

Kane stopped, with no other option due to the crowd blocking the sidewalk, and waited to see what was so entertaining. Two paramedics pushed the glass doors open, a gurney crashing through the opening. Lying on the stark white sheets covered to her chin was a dark-haired woman with an expression of pain and terror filling her face. Long black lashes kissed her cheeks, her eyes closed to the dim light of the miserable day.

Kane looked at the woman, and his stomach did a funny twist and then righted itself, only for him to feel the familiar tingling in his arm. Being tall had its advantages. He looked over the heads of the crowd in front of him and down into the face of the woman as the paramedics rolled her past him. Her skin was ashen, void of any color at all; lines etched her forehead showed significant pain; her fists gripped the sheets at

her side.

He followed the paramedics as they opened the back of the ambulance and loaded her into the vehicle.

“Miss Carter, I’m so sorry. Take as much time as you need,” said the panicked voice of a middle-aged man in a tweed blazer.

Kane’s instincts went on high alert. He didn’t like this man, and if he was apologizing, he must have done something to the young woman. Maneuvering around the crowd, he touched the arm of one of the paramedics.

“Where are you taking her?” he asked, completely uncertain of what was driving his curiosity.

“You family?” said the younger man.

“Yea, I’m her boyfriend,” he lied.

“County General. She ever passed out from headaches like this before?” asked the paramedic.

“I… I think so,” he said instinctively.

“Well, it would be helpful if you could tell the doctors more at the hospital,” said the paramedic, walking around him. He closed the door of the ambulance, and Kane found himself watching the departing vehicle, the zapping and tingling in his arm more pronounced.

Fuck!

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Aislinn heard the familiar beeping of the heart monitor attached to her body. Her head was heavy and thick with a drug-induced fog. Her limbs were weak, tingling from the awakening and something inexplicable in the room.

This wasn't her first rodeo. And no doubt, it wouldn't be her last. She tried to remember the events of the past few hours. The coffee. The coffee that had ruined her sweater, a sweater she loved. Then she saw Willy, and he let her through. Then, then it was the elevator. She remembered being at work and setting her things down. Then Mr. Lewis walked up to her cubicle.

Oh God! I cursed him out! I'm going to be unemployed.

"You won't lose your job," said the rich, velvety voice. Aislinn wondered if it were her imagination or real. She tried to open her eyes, but the heaviness prohibited even one eyelash from moving. "Don't even try. The doctor said it would be a while before you could probably open your eyes."

"I... who are you?" she asked in a cracking voice.

"We don't really know each other. Although, I did lie and tell them I was your boyfriend," he said, grinning. He knew it was stupid. She couldn't see his grin, see the face that might make her turn away and scream in horror or laugh.

"You... you told them... why?" she asked again, her lashes fluttering with another attempt at opening them.

"They wouldn't have let me in otherwise." He said it so matter-of-factly, she almost

didn't question him.

"But, I don't know you..." she said quietly.

"How do you know? You haven't opened your eyes yet," he said, smiling down at her.

"I-I know. I know I would recognize your voice."

He couldn't argue with that logic. She most likely would have recognized his voice. It was definitely distinguishable from others. The raspy velvet undertones hadn't always been there. His new voice was courtesy of a Taliban leader.

"I don't mean to scare you," he said apologetically. "I'm Kane Jackson. I was passing by your office building when they were taking you out. I'm not sure why I followed, but something told me I should. I promise I'm not a psycho or a stalker."

"So, you just decided to come along for the ride?" she asked.

"Something like that," he said quietly.

Aislinn felt the last of the pain slip away and knew it would be okay for her to open her eyes now.

"Is the light out?" she asked.

"Yes, I thought it might be easier for you," he said quietly. His face was something most women needed to get used to gradually. He stepped back a few steps from the bed and watched as she carefully let her eyes flutter open. He knew that she was trying to focus, trying to see his image.

“Hello,” she said quietly in the sweetest voice he’d ever heard. His breath caught in his chest, and his stomach flipped.

“Hello.”

“Can you step closer for me?” she asked.

He was hesitant, wary, and she wanted to know why. He took a small step forward, and she more clearly saw his size. He was dressed in dark jeans and a sweatshirt. His hair was shoulder-length, rich shades of wavy brown tresses kissing the broad muscles tight beneath the sweatshirt.

“Closer.”

He took another tentative step closer. She looked directly at him, directly into his face, and he held his breath. Waiting with bated breath, he prepared himself for the inevitable gasp.

“Thank you. You said your name is Kane? Do we know one another?” she asked calmly. His eyes went wide with shock. She showed no reaction at all, no signs of disgust or fear.

“Y-yes, my name is Kane. No, we don’t know one another. As I said, I saw you coming out of that building and just felt like maybe you could use someone by your side.”

“I see. And you’re used to rescuing damsels in distress?” she said with a small grin.

“Not hardly.” His lips were tight, and he watched her face. She was joking with him, actually joking with him.

“Well, I do appreciate you being here,” she said, trying to sit up. She pushed the button on the bed and raised the head, her body now upright and woozy. She waited to gain her equilibrium. “I need to leave now.”

“You can’t leave,” he said calmly.

“Why not?”

“The doctors are doing a bunch of tests on you. They said you would most likely be here at least twenty-four hours, if not more.”

“I don’t need a bunch of tests. I know what it was. It was a headache. A bad one.”

“Lady...”

“Aislinn,” she countered.

“Aislinn, that’s beautiful. Aislinn, I’ve seen my fair share of headaches, had a few of my own,” he said, rubbing the side of his face, “but I’ve never seen a headache that caused so much pain.”

“Mine are... unusual. But I’ve had them since I was a little girl. Believe me. There is nothing that anyone can do for them.”

Aislinn pushed up and swung her legs over the side of the bed. The glass partitions that separated her from the other emergency room patients were slightly ajar. She looked out at the nurses’ station. The back of a tall doctor leaned over the desk, made her suddenly sit up straight. As he turned, she could see his profile clearly and knew that her vision was real.

“What’s wrong? Are you in pain? Should I call the doctor?” asked Kane.

“I need you to get me out of here. It’s a matter of life and death.”

“Life and... look, Aislinn, I think you need help,” he said, shaking his head.

“No, you look, Kane, I don’t know you, and you don’t know me, but I promise you this is a matter of life and death. I need to get out of here.”

“Okay, okay,” he said, raising his hands in self-defense. “But I need more context.”

“More context? You don’t need more context. You can’t help me. I just need to get out of here. Can you help me do that? Can you help me get home?”

“I can do that, but you need to give me an explanation, and then I can help you,” he said firmly.

Kane recognized fear when he saw it, and something had spooked Aislinn. He wasn’t sure what, but he knew that something put fear in her eyes, and he desperately wanted to be the man to remove it.

Aislinn eyed the tall, dark man. At five-foot-five, she was average. Her curves were athletic and firm but still curves. Some men liked them. Some didn’t. It didn’t matter to her. A relationship would never be in the cards for Aislinn. Her eyes traveled up his body. He was well over six feet, his defined muscles etched beneath the tight-fitting sweatshirt. His brown hair was shaggy and still wet, touched his shoulders, the green of his eyes stared into her soul.

Aislinn let her eyes follow the scars along his face. Ugly, raised scars that appeared to be burns from his cheekbone to his neckline and below the sweatshirt.

“Tell me something honest and real about yourself. And don’t lie,” she said, “I’ll know.”

“I never lie.” He crossed his arms, flexing purposefully. “I was in the Army for almost twenty years.” He stared at her, his arms folded, waiting for her response. He watched her eyeing his scars and knew she was curious.

“Thank you for that.” She started to stand and reach for her clothes, but he grabbed the stack of damp garments and held them out of reach.

“Not so fast. Something honest about you.” Aislinn eyed the man again, her rich brown eyes penetrating his own.

“Fine, but remember you asked,” she said, taking a deep breath. She wasn’t sure why she was willing to risk everything to tell this man, but she knew in her heart it was the right thing to do. Her only prayer was that he wouldn’t judge her, or worse, he wouldn’t call for the doctors. “My headaches aren’t just headaches. They’re visions. Visions of murder, and that doctor out there is going to murder someone tonight.”

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Kane stared into the rich chocolate eyes that held his gaze. He gave no signs of disbelief, although if he were being honest, he wasn't sure that Aislinn was truly recovered from her headache. He knew when people were lying as well, and this woman was telling the truth, or at least what she believed was the truth.

"What do you mean he's going to murder someone?" asked Kane quietly.

"Listen, I can't explain it, not here. Please, Kane, if you truly want to help me, get me out of this hospital and somewhere safe." Aislinn watched the expressions pass like a movie over his face. She recognized each frame. Disbelief. Fear. Crazy. Honesty. But the last one, trust. Trust was not one she normally received.

"How do you know it's him?" asked Kane. "Have you met him before?"

"Yes. No. I mean, yes, sort of. Please, Kane, please, just get me out of here," she whispered.

He could see the fear and concern in her face, something that normally he could compartmentalize and ignore. Aislinn was not someone he could ignore, and damned if he could figure out why.

"Alright, we play it your way. But you're coming to my apartment," he said, waiting for the argument.

"Fine, just now, please," she stood, shaking and unsteady. He held out his hand to her, and she gripped it firmly, reaching for her pile of clothes still held tightly in his other arm. "I... I need help with my clothes."

He nodded and released her hand. Aislinn turned, untying the gown as she did, letting it drop to the floor. Kane knew he should look away, but she stood with her smooth, milky-white skin beckoning him to touch. Her chocolate brown waves of hair fell to the middle of her back, and she pulled it forward as she reached a hand behind her.

“Ummm, my bra, please,” she said quietly. He said nothing but handed her the soft, white cotton bra.

Kane couldn’t help but notice the full, molded cups as she took the garment from his long fingers. He watched as she expertly hooked the bra and then reached back again for her shirt. He handed her the coffee-stained sweater, the scent still pungent. She shrugged her head and shoulders into the sweater and turned, pulling the hem down as she did. Standing in only the sweater and her white cotton bikini bottoms, he swallowed hard.

“Sorry,” she said calmly, “I’m not a very modest person. I’ve had episodes before where I wake up and don’t know where I am. I’m almost always fully clothed, but there have been a few times when I’ve been half-dressed. I just can’t get worked up about showing a little skin. I’m sure you’ve seen a lot better.”

“Not really,” he said under his breath.

She jerked her head up as if to say something, a quick retort, but thought better of it. He was going to help her, or at least help her get the hell out of this hospital. If she stayed any longer, inevitably, the doctor would touch her, and the visions would come back full force. Aislinn could survive one brush with a vision maker, but two? Two might kill her.

Pulling on the slacks, she winced at the dampness of them as chills chased up her legs to her spine. Slipping into her pumps, she looked around Kane’s large body as if trying to hide from the nurses.

“We should get you signed out,” he said.

“No!” He stopped and looked back at her, the fear more evident now. “Please, Kane, just get me out of here.”

He nodded at her, eyeing her cautiously. Kane peered out into the circular nurses’ station. Two nurses were trying to hold down a crying child so that they could draw blood. A third was assisting the doctor that Aislinn had pointed out to him. He held out his hand to her and nodded.

Lacing her fingers with his, playing the part of girlfriend to the end, they casually strode from the emergency room into the evening light. Rain still fell in a steady beat, and Aislinn shivered, pulling her purse tighter to her body.

“My truck is over there,” he said, guiding her across the parking lot.

She nodded and stumbled. Kane noticed for the first time the depth of her agony and pain, the toll it took on her body, and stopped, lifting her into his arms. Her form molded against his perfectly, and she wound her arms around his neck and nestled closer to his warmth.

“Th-thank you,” she whispered against his neck.

He felt the hot flash of breath against his mangled skin. No one had ever touched him there, ever. Not since leaving the hospital. Opening the door to the truck, he sat her inside and buckled the seat belt. Stepping to the other side, he opened the driver’s side door and then heard someone yelling.

“Hey! Hey, you! She needs to be signed out!” The doctor that had so terrified Aislinn was walking towards them, his long strides moving fluidly across the parking lot.

“She just wants to go home. I’ll come back tomorrow and sign anything you want,” said Kane.

“This is highly irregular! You need to come back inside right now and sign the release papers,” he demanded.

“Look, doctor...”

“Dr. Krauss.”

“Krauss. Dr. Krauss, my girlfriend just wants to be in her own bed. I know that you can note that she left without a doctor’s permission or approval. So do it.”

Kane stared the other man down hard. He could see the other man squirming under his scrutiny. He wasn’t as tall or wide as Kane, but he was easily six feet and well-built. His dark hair, now plastered to his head, his blue eyes glaring into the truck, he tugged on his white coat and nodded.

Kane noticed that Aislinn had turned her face away from the doctor, her eyes closed in pain once again.

“We’re leaving. Here’s my card if you need me,” said Kane. He handed the doctor the business card. The tips of their fingers touched briefly, and Kane felt the familiar zing up his arm. It was so startling, so unexpected, he nearly pulled his weapon right in the parking lot. Instead, he stepped back and got into the truck driving away.

“I’m-I’m hurting,” said Aislinn quietly.

“Tell me what to do, Aislinn. What do you need?”

“Quiet, quiet and dark. Soft, soft music... anything soft...”

“Soft? Like classical?” he asked as he turned on the car radio.

“No. Like spa or yoga...”

Spa or yoga? Yea, he threw those CDs away years ago.

“My purse, on my player...” she whispered.

He reached for her music player and plugged it into the USB port of his truck. Soft sounds of nature came through his speakers. He watched her face as she concentrated on the music around her. The hard lines on her forehead began to relax, and the tightness around her mouth softened.

Weaving through traffic, Kane tried to avoid the busier streets where there might be traffic jams or honking of horns. As he pulled into the dark garage of his apartment building, Aislinn slowly opened her eyes.

“Are we here?” she asked.

“Yes, we’re at my home,” he said, opening his door. When he opened Aislinn’s door, she nearly fell into his arms. Lifting her once more, he carried her to the elevator and pushed the button for his floor.

The building was a refurbished industrial building that was once a garment factory. Each floor was a loft of its own. The only way to reach his floor was with a key code and handprint. Opening the wide dock-like doors, the interior of his apartment filled Aislinn with a sense of security and warmth.

Concrete walls and floors with exposed industrial ductwork and piping caught her eye. The enormous gray sectional sofa with iron legs matched the scene and somehow matched the man holding her. A large flat-screen television covered one

wall, the massive king-sized bed against another. The floor plan was completely open, allowing the occupants to see every room except the bathroom and closet.

Kane carried her further into the apartment, pushing open the door to the large master bath.

“You need to get warm, Aislinn,” he said, holding her against his body. She nodded. “Can you shower alone?”

A single tear slid down her face, and she shook her head.

“It’s okay. I’m going to set you on the counter and take my shoes and socks off. Then I’m going to get you undressed and help you shower. Okay?” She nodded, the tears falling silently down her cheeks.

The visions had never attacked her so severely. Usually, she could gather her strength and be relatively normal within a few hours. This had been working on twelve hours now, and she felt no better than she did only a few hours before.

She watched as Kane removed his boots and socks, then unbuckling his pants, he slid the long leather belt from its loops and pulled the sweatshirt over his head. In the darkness, she couldn’t see his body clearly, but she knew before even touching him that the scars covered his torso as well.

“Okay, honey, now you,” he said softly.

He gently pulled the sweater over her head and tossed it to the floor, then unhooked her bra. Her breasts were full and soft, falling gently against her chest. He unzipped her dress pants and lifted her from the counter easily, sliding them over her hips with the panties. He turned to start the shower and then grabbed a few towels.

When the steam rose from behind the glass, he carried Aislinn's nearly limp body into the shower, holding her against his own warm, hard body. He felt her tremble against him, knowing it was tears and cold combined.

"Sshhhh, honey, it's okay. I'm not going anywhere, Aislinn," he soothed as he washed her back.

She nodded against his chest, her arms wrapped around his waist, pressing her further into his skin. Kane tried not to react to her naked body against his, but he couldn't help it. All the soft curves pressed against his ugly scars. It was almost more than he could bare.

Aislinn let her hands lay flat against his chest and felt the rough edges of scars beneath her fingers. She moved her hands in slow circles, feeling the pain that hid beneath. She knew pain, and this man had experienced more than she could comprehend. Her hands glided to his shoulders and rested there, just waiting.

"Are you warm?" he asked in a husky voice.

She nodded and looked up at him. Kane wanted to take her right there in the shower. He was an asshole when it came to women but not completely. He knew that most were only interested in a quick ride with him. Something different, something to tell the girls about. Aislinn didn't want or need anything from him other than strength. Strength was definitely something he could give her.

Lifting her from the shower, he wrapped her in the large, plush towels and then wrapped her hair. Carrying her once more, he lay her on the bed and then turned back toward the bathroom.

Aislinn heard him remove the wet clothes and toss them in the shower. A few moments later, he walked out with a towel wrapped around his waist. The wide chest

she felt beneath her fingertips looked smoother in the dim light of the bedroom. There were a few raised scars, but most of the scarring was on the left side of his shoulder, neck, and face.

“Let me get you something warm to wear,” he said. Stepping toward the large mahogany dresser, he removed a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt. “Can you put this on yourself?”

She nodded and sat up on the bed.

“I’ll put your clothes in the washer,” he said, walking across the cold concrete floor. He stopped in front of the fireplace and turned on the gas-burning logs, the flames licking the room with instant warmth.

Aislinn stood and pulled on the drawstring pants, which were easily four sizes too big for her. Nevertheless, she was grateful for the warmth. Holding the sweatshirt to her face, she smelled Kane. Spice and something else, something she couldn’t name.

When her head poked through the hole of the sweatshirt, he was standing in front of her.

“Do you need to lie down?” he asked quietly.

“No, actually, I’m really hungry. I can cook, or I can order something for us,” she said shyly.

“No need,” he said with a grin. “I’ll order some Chinese if that works for you.” She nodded her head and moved toward the beckoning warmth of the fireplace.

“I’ll be out in a minute. I just want to get some clothes on,” he said.

She nodded without turning, knowing that he would be naked directly behind her. Aislinn heard the muffled sounds of fabric against skin. She could see his long, strong body moving in her mind, his limbs deftly moving through the openings of the garments. Touching his skin in the shower, she felt his pain and knew that, in time, he would tell her where the scars came from.

The soft sounds of music filled the apartment, and Aislinn let out a long, slow breath, sinking further into the sofa. She heard the low tones of Kane's voice on the phone ordering the food and then felt rather than heard his presence beside her. Despite the size of the sectional, he was only a few inches away from her.

"Are you ready to tell me everything?" he asked.

"If you are."

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Kane watched her features as she spoke. The pain that filled her face when she mentioned the headaches was nearly his undoing.

“So, when did this happen? I mean this time. When did you meet the doctor?” he asked.

“I didn’t meet him,” she said, staring up at him. “I think, I think I bumped into him at the coffee shop yesterday. It usually takes twenty-four hours for the vision to come on full force. It happens so casually I never know what I will see. I try to avoid touching people altogether, but it’s nearly impossible. I’ve even tried wearing gloves, but that’s no good.”

“I see,” he said, looking into the fire.

“You don’t believe me,” she said, staring at him. “It’s okay. I wouldn’t believe me either. I wish I could tell you it isn’t the truth, but unfortunately, my track record is pretty spot on. I used to call the police and report that a crime was about to take place . You can imagine how well that went over. Then when the murder happened, they knocked on my door.”

“Jesus! That must suck,” he said with a sideways grin.

“Oh yea, especially when three of them happened out of state. The thing is, Kane, the thing is, I think this guy has done it before. This vision was beyond what I normally see. It was so painful, so violent. I thought I would die.”

“Could that happen?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I honestly don’t know. I’ve always only seen one murder. Usually, a husband kills his wife or another man. Once, I had a woman who killed her mother-in-law. But as far as I know, they’re all one-time murders. This one, this one had flashes of others. Other people than the one I know will be killed tonight.”

He nodded at her and stared at the fire once more. He didn’t move, didn’t try to make her leave, didn’t look at her as though she were crazy.

“You don’t believe me.”

“Actually, Aislinn, I do believe you. I believe every word of what you’re saying.”

“You do?” she said with a shocked expression.

“I do,” he said.

The doorbell broke the moment, and Kane stood to ring the deliveryman up. Aislinn watched his every move. He was so large yet moved like a cat, slow and lazy, sleek and smooth. It occurred to her that she knew nothing of the man who brought her home. All she knew was that when he touched her, the visions lessened. She would pay a million dollars for that blessing. No one had ever found a way to lessen the severity of her headaches.

“Hungry?” he asked, setting out the boxes of food. She nodded and immediately started in on a box of lo mein.

“Tell me about you,” she said between bites. “How were you burned?”

He stopped mid-bite and looked up at her. He had to give her credit; she had courage. Most men didn’t dare ask him about his scars, let alone a small woman.

“Afghanistan. Courtesy of a Taliban leader that didn’t like the fact that my unit took out his weapons cache. It was my sixth tour.”

“Six? Wow! That’s impressive and awful at the same time. Thank you for your service, though, sincerely, I mean that.”

He looked up at her and smiled, nodding his head ever so slightly.

“Thank you. We were just about out of that shithole when our Humvee was attacked. Three guys in my vehicle were killed. Me? I was the lucky one,” he said with a dark laugh. “He decided to torture me for a few days before killing me. He broke a few bones, tried to... well, he tried to make sure my manhood was inoperable, and then the burning started. First, it was just hot poker against my skin. Then they got creative. Anything they could heat up and lay against me was used.”

“Oh, God,” she said quietly, holding her stomach. It was the pain she felt when she touched him, the agony of those burns.

“I was in and out of it for a while. Then I woke up one morning staring up at fluorescent lights in a hospital room. Some SEAL team saved my ass and got me to Germany and then home to D.C.”

“I’m so sorry, Kane. I wish I could have been there for you, I mean, at the hospital.” She said the words without thinking, but the pit in his stomach grew wide, and somehow he knew that Aislinn meant the words.

“I wish you could have been there as well, Aislinn. I needed someone at that point in my life. I honestly didn’t think I would live. I didn’t want to live. I dreamed of ways to kill myself every night.”

“Please don’t do that. Please don’t ever...” she held tight to his fingers, searching his

face.

“I would never, Aislinn, I promise.” She let out a long, slow sigh of relief and nodded.

“My mother killed herself,” she said quietly.

Shit! Way to go, asshole! He winced and looked down at her, still holding his large hand in her own.

“It’s okay, Kane. You couldn’t have known. I don’t know why she killed herself. My father just said she was always sad. I think she had dreams like mine and didn’t know how to control them, but she never told me, and neither did my father.”

“Can you control them?” he asked with a raised eyebrow. Aislinn laughed, a soft, beautiful lilting laugh.

“No, I can’t.” He nodded and grinned at her. “Believe me. I’ve tried everything. Meditation, anxiety medication, marijuana, anything, and everything. Nothing works.”

“So, the doctor?”

“Right, the doctor. The visions happen when I touch someone. You know that already. But it’s not usually about past acts. It’s about what will occur in the near future. These are pre-meditated murders. Thought out, planned, and ready to execute. My vision with the doctor, it was... it was the worst I’ve ever experienced. It had several people in it. Two women and one man that I could see.”

“Could you tell where they were?” he asked.

“No. I only saw, I only saw his eyes. He was happy. He was enjoying what he was doing. The victims, the way they looked, the way they looked at him, I think they knew him.”

“What makes you think that?”

“I-I don’t know. They were looking at him the way you would if you had a relationship with someone. I tend to see visions from the view of the victim. It’s as if I’m inside their heads, like I’m looking through their eyes.” She looked at his face once more, their fingers still linked. “You believe me, don’t you?”

“I believe you, Aislinn.”

“Why? Why do you believe me? No one, and I do mean no one, has ever believed me. I can tell when people lie, and everything you’ve told me has been the truth.”

He looked down at her face, the full red lips, the smooth creamy white of her skin, flush with color, the deep rich chocolate of her eyes, her hair matching almost identically. Everything about this woman made him want to be a good man.

“I believe you because I felt it, too.”

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Aislinn's fork stilled inside the Chinese food box. She set the box on the table and scooted a little further away from Kane, turning to look directly into his eyes.

"That's cruel, Kane. I can't help what happens to me. It's not nice to make fun of me or commiserate by trying to pretend that you see, too."

"Aislinn, I swear to fuck, I'm not teasing you. Believe me. I would give anything if I could joke about this, but I can't. I wish to fuck I could."

"You-you get visions?" she asked.

"No. I don't get visions. It's different for me."

She stared at him, waiting patiently for the words to come. Kane let out a long slow breath and leaned back against the sofa, running his long fingers through the tangled mess that was his hair.

"This is so fucked up, but here goes. I joined the military when I was seventeen because I thought I was going crazy and just needed discipline. Every time I touched someone evil, there would be this harsh zap up my arm, like a stun gun or an electrical shock or something. At first, I couldn't control it. I would literally scream at the suddenness."

"Jesus," she whispered.

"Yea, it's kind of funny you say that. The first person it happened with was the family priest. I knew the bastard was no good. When he touched my arm, my whole

body shook with an electrical jolt. I tried to tell my parents, but they punished me for not wanting to go to church. I was seven. It got worse when puberty really set things in motion for me. I don't remember feeling a whole lot of anything before then, but after? After was a fucking nightmare."

Aislinn nodded, remembering that her visions came more frequently and clearer as she got older.

"Then, when I was seventeen, it was my old man. I'd never felt it before with him. He was an angry asshole of a drunk and rarely touched me anyway, but he grabbed my arm. I knew he was planning something. I knew he was going to do something. I just didn't know what. I didn't really understand what I was experiencing back then. I left the next day for boot camp. A week later, I got word that he killed my mother and then killed himself."

"I'm so sorry, Kane," she said, reaching for his hand.

She moved closer to the heat of his body and laid her head against his shoulder. It was so easy, so natural, to seek his warmth and strength, and yet she barely knew this man. Something about Kane Jackson made Aislinn want to be in his presence. Being in the presence of any man, any human, was difficult for her. So, the question in her mind was why it was so easy to be around Kane Jackson.

"In the Army, I learned to really hone the skill, to understand it and use it to my advantage. Many of the men I served with weren't exactly choir boys, but you can weed those out. The guys that just fuck every woman they lay their hands on, cheat on them, cheat at cards, drink too much, that sort of thing." She nodded.

"When the zap, as I call it, is nearly electrifying, I know that something, or someone, is really going to be shitty. That's how I knew the Taliban leader was so evil. He tried to pass himself off as being an ally. When I shook his hand, I knew. He was pure evil.

I could feel it if I was within twenty feet of him.”

“Did you, did you shake the doctor’s hand?” she asked.

“No. But our fingers touched when he took my business card. Just a small touch, and I thought my arm would burn off. That’s why I believe you, Aislinn. I believe you because it happens to me but without the vision. I know that someone is evil and can pretty much tell you what level of evil they are. I just can’t predict what they will do or when.” Kane took a long breath and let it out.

“Although I know your gift must be a burden, and you probably don’t see it as a gift, I actually wish I had visions. Maybe then I could have prevented the deaths of some of my teammates.”

“I would never want to lay this gift on you, Kane. It’s a horrible thing. I’ve never been able to control it, and I have no way of knowing when the next vision will happen. They are all violent and uncontrollable, blood and terror. There’s this horror in the victim’s faces. We’re a sorry pair, aren’t we?” she said, smiling up at him with a sad smile.

“I guess we are,” he grinned. “Aislinn, I want you to stay here tonight. You can have the bed, but I get this feeling that the doctor... I don’t know. I just get this feeling.”

She nodded at him, a sad look crossing her face. Looking around the loft, she felt the warmth flood through her body once again. The empty Chinese take-out containers cluttered the coffee table.

“Your home is beautiful. I didn’t get to tell you that earlier, but when we walked in, I can’t explain it, but I immediately felt at home here.”

It was an odd sensation to experience, considering the space was mostly concrete and

steel, no warm, homey touches to it. Just Kane. Everything felt like Kane, smelled like Kane. That's what made her feel at home.

"You don't feel at home in your own place?" he asked.

"It's not that really. I have to sterilize an apartment before I enter it. Anything, I mean anything, can trigger the nightmares. When I moved into my current place, I forgot to wipe down the knobs on the cabinets. It was awful. I was sick for days."

"I never thought about that," he said, staring down at her.

"Kane? Why did you help me? I mean, I am completely and totally grateful, but why? And, don't you have a job to go to?" She turned her body slightly, tucking one leg beneath the other.

"I do have a job. I'm a bit of a freelance security specialist. I offer protection services and, well, on occasion, I find individuals."

"Like a bounty hunter?" she asked innocently.

"Sort of," he grinned. "As for why I helped you? I don't know, Aislinn. I really don't. I'm not the sweep in on the white horse kind of guy. I mean, my face doesn't exactly say, 'hop on, baby, and I'll save you.' I just saw you, and something... it was as if something called to me and demanded me to go with you to the hospital."

"Well, I'm very glad you did. And for the record, Kane, I like your face. I like every inch of it. It's strong and carries wisdom beyond its years. I look at your face and see courage, honor, and a survivor." She reached up and laid her hand against his burned cheek, her fingers feather-light. "I like this face a lot."

That's when Aislinn Carter did something she never did. She leaned forward and

touched her lips, her skin to another's. Tentatively, easing forward, she stared into Kane's eyes, hoping he wouldn't push her away. With each breath, she waited until she was so close she could feel the heat from his mouth. Gently touching her lips to his, she kissed him softly at first, waiting for the visions to assail her, but when none came, she wound her arms around his neck and pleaded for more.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Kane couldn't believe it. This beautiful woman was touching him, touching his face, his neck, his lips, and she was practically crawling over him, begging for more. He let his thoughts briefly think evil thoughts. She wanted something. She needed something. But the honest desire and passion emanating from her body were more than even his logical brain could argue with.

"Aislinn, baby, you taste so good," he whispered against her lips.

"So do you," she smiled. "Like eggrolls and something totally decadent."

"Decadent?" he laughed.

"Yes, decadent. You taste like you. No nightmares, no visions, nothing except kindness, goodness. It's, well, it's refreshing."

"Aislinn, honey, how many men have you kissed?" He looked down at her waiting for her answer. In his head, he knew that she must have risked a great deal to allow a man to kiss her or touch her.

"Four, counting you. Two were... two were evil. They didn't murder anyone, but I saw the visions just the same. They were planning to rape me. I ended both relationships immediately."

“Who are they?” he asked in a low growl. His alpha male instincts went on high alert, and he couldn’t help his own reaction.

“They live in another city,” she said, kissing him again.

“And the third?” he asked.

“The third man I dated for a while, but there was nothing there. No spark, no passion. He wanted to move the relationship along, but I knew it was only because he was safe, and that wouldn’t have been fair to him.”

Kane looked into her rich brown eyes, melting into their sweetness. She was an innocent.

“You’ve never been with a man.” He made it a statement, not a question.

Aislinn looked at him as if he were stating the obvious. Speaking of such things had never bothered her. When you see visions of violence as she did, something as natural as sex wasn’t exactly off-limits for her.

“No. I’ve never been with a man.”

Kane let out a long breath and leaned his head back on the sofa. Being with a woman like Aislinn was something he never dreamed would happen for him. She was beautiful, intelligent, sexy as all fuck, and the best part was, she didn’t even know it.

“Is that a problem? My not having been with a man? I mean, I would think it would be a good thing.”

“It is a good thing, Aislinn,” he said, grinning at her. “I just want to be sure we take this slow. I also want to be sure that we’re both not doing this for anything other than

the right reasons. You're recovering from the visions, the headaches. I don't want to take advantage of you."

"The right reasons? You mean you want to be sure I'm not a willing partner only because touching you doesn't send me into nightmares?" She gave him a sly grin, and at first, he felt the need to defend his statement, then he understood that she was teasing.

"It's more than that, Aislinn. I haven't had a significant relationship since my injuries. I won't lie to you. I've had my fair share of one-night stands. Women that thought it was their duty to make a wounded warrior have a good time or had some perverse need to help the guy with the mangled face. But I haven't had a true relationship where I truly cared about another person."

"That's awful!" she said, sitting up straight.

"I can't claim innocence in that, Aislinn. I took advantage of that, having my own needs to think of. I was a typical male, and I regret doing it." She nodded again, tugging on her bottom lip between her teeth. "I guess what I'm saying is I feel something for you, Aislinn. Something different, something foreign to me, and I want to be sure I do this right. That I do right by you."

"I'm a grown woman, Kane. I know what I'm doing."

"You are a grown woman, Aislinn, but you've never been with a man, in a full-on relationship with a man. I want to do this right."

She nodded again, staring into his eyes. For the first time, Aislinn noticed the green of his eyes, the thick covering of black lashes draped around them. He really was a beautiful man. Beyond the scars, because of the scars, he was a beautiful man.

“Kane? What do we do about my vision? I mean, I can’t call the police. We both know how that turns out. I can’t just sit here knowing that he is going to murder someone or several someones tonight.”

Kane nodded and pulled Aislinn closer, hoping just to have her near him for a while longer. Instead, she crawled onto his lap, the growing bulge in his sweatpants becoming more difficult to hide. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, laid her soft, smooth cheek against the crook of his neck, the skin rough and textured from the skin grafts.

No woman had ever sought out his touch, the feel of him. At least not since his injuries. She made him feel as though the world didn’t exist. He was the only person that mattered to her.

“I want you to stay here and wait for me. I’m going to go back to the hospital and see if I can follow him.”

“Why don’t we call and see if his shift has ended? If not, then you could catch him. If it has ended, we may not be able to find him tonight.”

“That’s actually a great idea,” he said, grinning at her. “We make quite a team, don’t we?”

“I think so,” she said, staring up at him. She kissed his lips once more, and he gripped her hips, stilling her movement against him. Aislinn might be innocent, but she was more than aware of how a man reacted to a woman he was attracted to.

“Aislinn, baby,” he said, moving, slightly hoping she wouldn’t feel his growing attraction.

Instead, she felt the full-on heat and hardness he was sporting. The little vixen had the

audacity to smile at him. “Let me call the hospital,” he said breathlessly.

She nodded and moved to the sofa again. The butterflies in her stomach were swarming back and forth. Aislinn had avoided men for so long she wasn’t entirely sure she was doing anything right with Kane. What she did know was that he was a good, decent man. She watched his tall, muscled figure reach for his cell phone, his forearms flexing with the simple movement of picking up his phone.

“Yes, I was wondering if Dr. Krauss is still available,” he asked. “I see. No, no message. Thank you.” He turned toward Aislinn, the bulge slightly less noticeable now.

“He’s gone?”

“Yea, he left about an hour ago.” Kane walked toward the large metal desk in the corner of the loft. Tapping on his keyboard, he pulled up a directory. Seven Dr. Krauss’s popped up on the screen. “Damn! Who would have thought there were seven with the same name?”

“That is unusual, but maybe they’re related. I mean, sometimes sons and fathers work together.”

“True. These two are related, but they work in endocrinology on the West Side. They wouldn’t have been working emergency medicine.” She nodded, looking over his shoulder, her long brown hair brushing against his face. He gritted his teeth, trying not to be distracted by her every movement. She reached over his shoulder and pointed at the screen.

“This one and this one, they work together downtown, but it’s oncology. Again, I’m not sure they would have been in the emergency room.”

“None of them are emergency medicine. It doesn’t make sense at all.”

“Could he have been a fake?”

“Geez, that would be seriously fucked up, wouldn’t it?” She nodded, a frown crossing her face, the lines on her forehead deep with concern. “I don’t think we can do anything except wait.”

“I hate this. This is the worst part for me. I wait for hours, days, sometimes weeks before I know that the vision was real. I’ve never had a vision that wasn’t real, but this could be the first. God! I hope it’s the first.” She stood and pulled her hair away from her face, twisting it into a long ponytail.

“You’re exhausted and it’s late. Why don’t you take the bed, and we’ll just wait and see what happens in the morning?”

“I can take the sofa. I’m smaller.”

“Aislinn, I’m not letting you take the sofa. Besides, it’s huge. It’s why I bought it so that it could accommodate my size or the size of some of my former teammates. For a while, they would come into town once a month to check on me.”

“That’s really nice to have friends like that.”

He stared at her and wondered if she had friends that she could confide in, friends that would have her back. As if she sent a message to his brain, he knew the answer.

“Why don’t you have a friend to rely on, Aislinn?” he asked with compassion.

“I-I just... It’s easier. Women aren’t nice sometimes, Kane. When I would get my headaches, I was so sick sometimes that their boyfriends or husbands would offer to

take me home. The women, well, they thought it was all a ploy to get their men. I seriously didn't understand it. The last roommate I had was six years ago. I decided to move out when I got this vision of her. She wasn't killing anyone, but it was anger and so hate-filled it made me choke. I realized later the vision was about me."

"Fucking hell! Dudes certainly have their shit with each other, but we usually just punch it out and move on."

"Yea," she laughed, "well, I would have been happy to do that, but it didn't seem she was a willing participant."

Aislinn stood and moved toward the big bed. It was larger than a normal king-sized bed. It seemed longer and wider, maybe to suit his larger body. Sliding the sweatpants down, she wore only her plain white panties and the sweatshirt.

Kane couldn't look away. He knew he should. He should give her some privacy, but she had no inhibitions about stripping in front of him at all. She was innocent as to the effect she had on him. She never even looked up. Her long hair spread across his pillows, and he thought he would never wash those sheets again. Sitting up, she stared across the room at him.

Busted!

"Kane? Sleep in the bed with me. Not to, I mean not to do anything, just..."

"Aislinn, are you sure? I won't do anything you're not ready for, but this is all very fast."

"I know it is. I can't explain it, Kane. I've never met anyone like you before. Certainly, never met anyone that understood what was happening with me. I just, I just can't lie here alone tonight. Not when I know that you're only a few feet away."

The sweet, sexy tones of her voice glided over his body, enveloping him in a warmth and peace he hadn't experienced in his lifetime. He nodded his head and slid between the sheets, his sweats and t-shirt still on. Unlike Aislinn, he wore no boxers or briefs beneath his sweats.

Her eyes closed immediately, and she rolled to her side, facing him. He did the same, staring into her beautiful, perfect face. He noticed every inch of her. The small dimple in her left cheek. The thick black lashes that lay against the contrasting white of her cheeks. She had a tiny pair of diamond earrings glittering from each lobe. Her lips were red and slightly swollen from their simple kisses, another sure sign that she was as innocent as he suspected.

Aislinn's hands lay in prayer on the pillow, and Kane mimicked her. Closing his eyes, he felt her reach for him, lying her small hand between his two larger ones and then the other on top. It was such a sweet, simple gesture. But for Kane Jackson, it was something he never dreamed he would have.

Drifting off to sleep, he felt the familiar zing in his dreams but let the euphoria that was Aislinn Carter take him away.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Aislinn felt the beat of her heart pounding against her rib cage, the banging so loud, so harsh she thought her ribs would crack. Blood. There was so much blood. The face of the blonde woman appeared to be smiling. No, she wasn't smiling; she was laughing. Her body was covered in blood, and she was laughing. Another woman lay beside her. Her short black hair matted to her head with the same blood, her own. Her chest was split open, the hands of a man wrapped around her throat.

Kane saw the faces. He saw the blood, but he couldn't break away from it. He couldn't stop the madness before him. The amount of blood was overwhelming, even

for a battle-hardened warrior like himself. He could feel Aislinn's presence, but not in the dream. Somewhere else. He could feel her heartbeat, her panic. His only concern was getting to her, finding Aislinn, and leaving this hell.

Aislinn knew that Kane was there, he was close to her, but she couldn't find him. She couldn't see him. Her eyes scanned the room, and all she saw were the two women covered in blood, one lifeless, one laughing. Dr. Krauss's face flashed before her, and she gasped for air.

She felt Kane near her and gripped what she believed to be his hand tighter. He was holding her hand. She knew he was, and he was reaching for her. Squeezing his fingers tighter, she dared not let go, or the vision would consume her. The laughter of the blonde woman was making her sick. Something in her tone was more than Aislinn could stand. She felt the bile rise in her throat but instead searched for Kane.

Aislinn! Aislinn! Wake up, baby. Wake up!

Aislinn sat up with a start. Her body drenched in sweat. The long stray hairs matted against her forehead, the sweatshirt completely soaked. Kane sat beside her, gripping her shoulders as he pulled her closer, enveloping her in his warmth.

"Christ, Aislinn! Honey, look at me. Aislinn, is that what it's like? Is that what it's like, baby? Is that what you experience?"

She nodded and let the tears fall down her face. She'd never shared a vision with anyone before, and she certainly never had a recurring vision. It was as if her connection to Kane allowed her to release the dream to him.

"God, baby! That was terrible. Aislinn, honey, I can't, I can't imagine... All these years, seeing things like that. It was all so clear, so fucking horrifically clear."

“I’ve never... I never shared. I didn’t know I could share. I don’t know how that happened, Kane. I’m so sorry,” she sobbed, “I’m so, so sorry.”

Kane lifted her onto his lap and held her tight. Not caring anymore about sensibilities, he pulled the wet sweatshirt from her body and then immediately felt her shake from the cool night air against her damp skin.

Pulling the blankets higher, he wrapped her in their warmth and sunk deeper into the bed. Kane had suffered his fair share of nightmares, but what Aislinn experienced was on an entirely different level. It was real, more than real. It was real-time. He knew it without question. The nightmares, the visions, whatever she wanted to call them, were like experiencing the horror in real-time.

“I’m sorry, K-Kane. I didn’t mean for you to see that,” she sobbed against his chest.

“Baby, it’s not your fault. I think... I think maybe because we were touching our hands, our hands linked. I don’t know, Aislinn. This is so far beyond my expertise.”

“What do w-we do?” she choked out.

“We stay together. I think we are supposed to be together, honey. I can’t explain it, but I’m pretty damn sure we’re supposed to be together.” She nodded and wiped her nose on the back of her hand. “Tomorrow, we need to figure this out. Maybe find someone that has experience in this.”

“The university has a paranormal department that studies things like this. I was going to see them a few months back and chickened out.”

“Then that’s where we’ll start. I have no fucking clue what’s happening here, but we will make sure we figure this out together, Aislinn.” She nodded again.

“M-my job... I just know Mr. Lewis is going to fire me.”

“What do you do for them, baby?” he asked. He wanted to tell her to just quit the fucking job, and he’d beat the shit out of Lewis.

“I’m a paralegal. I was going to attend law school, but the idea of having to shake hands with criminals wasn’t exactly high on my list. So, I got through paralegal school and stopped.” He nodded and kissed the top of her head.

“What sort of cases do you handle?”

“Mostly corporate law, some discrimination or harassment cases, but it’s all to do with corporate work environments.”

“Can you take a leave of absence?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I mean, technically, they should allow that, but I’ve taken a lot of sick leave in the last year.”

“Aislinn, I think you need to quit if they don’t give you the leave of absence.” She started to protest, and he held up a hand. “Listen to me, honey. There is something happening between you and me that I can’t figure out. I also want to be able to watch and help you, but I can’t do that if you’re at work, potentially finding your next nightmare. If you have to quit, I have plenty of savings that will hold us over.”

“Kane, it’s not that. I don’t need to work. My mother left me a sizeable estate when she died. She was born in Ireland County Wicklow and left a nice trust and a small house there. I’ve never been there because it’s so hard for me to travel, all the touching and stuff. I don’t have to work. I choose to work, Kane. But what about your work? You can’t just stop doing what you do to watch over me. That’s not fair. And let’s not even get started on the fact that we barely know one another.”

“You let me worry about my work, okay? And us? We’ll figure that out as we go. Then the next question is, do you like your work?”

“Like my work?” she said, staring at him. “I-I don’t know. I mean, no, no, I don’t like my work. I’m not even sure why I went to school for law.” She started laughing and stared at his concerned expression. “I’m sorry, Kane. I promise you I’m not losing my mind. You just may have asked the million-dollar question. I honestly have no idea why I chose my career path. I hate what I do. The law never seems to be on the side of the victims, but on the side of corporations or big dollars.”

“Well, then, I guess we know what you should do.”

“But what will I do to make a living? I can’t live off my trust forever.”

“All in good time, baby. For now, let’s get some sleep and hold hands while we do it.”

He grinned down at her, kissing her sweetly. Her bare breasts pressed against the heat of his t-shirt, and Kane cursed himself for not getting her something else to wear. Not that he minded her being nearly naked next to him, but it would damn sure interfere with his sleep.

Kane’s mind drifted back to the nightmare, the vision, whatever it was. He saw every detail, every drop of blood. He heard the laughter of the woman and the excitement in Krauss’s eyes as he strangled the butchered woman. It was like something from a horror film.

The soft breathing sounds emanating from Aislinn indicated that she had finally fallen back to sleep. Kane was reluctant to close his eyes, unsure if the visions would return. He admired Aislinn even more after seeing the images in her mind.

His time in the service had exposed him to humanity's worst. Yet somehow, the images projected in Aislinn's mind were nearly his undoing. Maybe because he felt her fear and panic as well. Either way, Kane was going to make sure that they figured out what was happening to them both.

Drifting off to sleep, his eyes fluttered at the still-falling rain outside the massive windows. The blackness of night covered the city in its veil of secrets and lies.

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Kane couldn't believe it. This beautiful woman was touching him, touching his face, his neck, his lips, and she was practically crawling over him, begging for more. He let his thoughts briefly think evil thoughts. She wanted something. She needed something. But the honest desire and passion emanating from her body were more than even his logical brain could argue with.

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"So do you," she smiled. "Like eggrolls and something totally decadent."

"Decadent?" he laughed.

"Yes, decadent. You taste like you. No nightmares, no visions, nothing except kindness, goodness. It's, well, it's refreshing."

"Aislinn, honey, how many men have you kissed?" He looked down at her waiting for her answer. In his head, he knew that she must have risked a great deal to allow a man to kiss her or touch her.

"Four, counting you. Two were... two were evil. They didn't murder anyone, but I saw the visions just the same. They were planning to rape me. I ended both relationships immediately."

"Who are they?" he asked in a low growl. His alpha male instincts went on high alert, and he couldn't help his own reaction.

"They live in another city," she said, kissing him again.

“And the third?” he asked.

“The third man I dated for a while, but there was nothing there. No spark, no passion. He wanted to move the relationship along, but I knew it was only because he was safe, and that wouldn’t have been fair to him.”

Kane looked into her rich brown eyes, melting into their sweetness. She was an innocent.

“You’ve never been with a man.” He made it a statement, not a question.

Aislinn looked at him as if he were stating the obvious. Speaking of such things had never bothered her. When you see visions of violence as she did, something as natural as sex wasn’t exactly off-limits for her.

“No. I’ve never been with a man.”

Kane let out a long breath and leaned his head back on the sofa. Being with a woman like Aislinn was something he never dreamed would happen for him. She was beautiful, intelligent, sexy as all fuck, and the best part was, she didn’t even know it.

“Is that a problem? My not having been with a man? I mean, I would think it would be a good thing.”

“It is a good thing, Aislinn,” he said, grinning at her. “I just want to be sure we take this slow. I also want to be sure that we’re both not doing this for anything other than the right reasons. You’re recovering from the visions, the headaches. I don’t want to take advantage of you.”

“The right reasons? You mean you want to be sure I’m not a willing partner only because touching you doesn’t send me into nightmares?” She gave him a sly grin, and

at first, he felt the need to defend his statement, then he understood that she was teasing.

“It’s more than that, Aislinn. I haven’t had a significant relationship since my injuries. I won’t lie to you. I’ve had my fair share of one-night stands. Women that thought it was their duty to make a wounded warrior have a good time or had some perverse need to help the guy with the mangled face. But I haven’t had a true relationship where I truly cared about another person.”

“That’s awful!” she said, sitting up straight.

“I can’t claim innocence in that, Aislinn. I took advantage of that, having my own needs to think of. I was a typical male, and I regret doing it.” She nodded again, tugging on her bottom lip between her teeth. “I guess what I’m saying is I feel something for you, Aislinn. Something different, something foreign to me, and I want to be sure I do this right. That I do right by you.”

“I’m a grown woman, Kane. I know what I’m doing.”

“You are a grown woman, Aislinn, but you’ve never been with a man, in a full-on relationship with a man. I want to do this right.”

She nodded again, staring into his eyes. For the first time, Aislinn noticed the green of his eyes, the thick covering of black lashes draped around them. He really was a beautiful man. Beyond the scars, because of the scars, he was a beautiful man.

“Kane? What do we do about my vision? I mean, I can’t call the police. We both know how that turns out. I can’t just sit here knowing that he is going to murder someone or several someones tonight.”

Kane nodded and pulled Aislinn closer, hoping just to have her near him for a while

longer. Instead, she crawled onto his lap, the growing bulge in his sweatpants becoming more difficult to hide. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, laid her soft, smooth cheek against the crook of his neck, the skin rough and textured from the skin grafts.

No woman had ever sought out his touch, the feel of him. At least not since his injuries. She made him feel as though the world didn't exist. He was the only person that mattered to her.

"I want you to stay here and wait for me. I'm going to go back to the hospital and see if I can follow him."

"Why don't we call and see if his shift has ended? If not, then you could catch him. If it has ended, we may not be able to find him tonight."

"That's actually a great idea," he said, grinning at her. "We make quite a team, don't we?"

"I think so," she said, staring up at him. She kissed his lips once more, and he gripped her hips, stilling her movement against him. Aislinn might be innocent, but she was more than aware of how a man reacted to a woman he was attracted to.

"Aislinn, baby," he said, moving, slightly hoping she wouldn't feel his growing attraction.

Instead, she felt the full-on heat and hardness he was sporting. The little vixen had the audacity to smile at him. "Let me call the hospital," he said breathlessly.

She nodded and moved to the sofa again. The butterflies in her stomach were swarming back and forth. Aislinn had avoided men for so long she wasn't entirely sure she was doing anything right with Kane. What she did know was that he was a

good, decent man. She watched his tall, muscled figure reach for his cell phone, his forearms flexing with the simple movement of picking up his phone.

“Yes, I was wondering if Dr. Krauss is still available,” he asked. “I see. No, no message. Thank you.” He turned toward Aislinn, the bulge slightly less noticeable now.

“He’s gone?”

“Yea, he left about an hour ago.” Kane walked toward the large metal desk in the corner of the loft. Tapping on his keyboard, he pulled up a directory. Seven Dr. Krauss’s popped up on the screen. “Damn! Who would have thought there were seven with the same name?”

“That is unusual, but maybe they’re related. I mean, sometimes sons and fathers work together.”

“True. These two are related, but they work in endocrinology on the West Side. They wouldn’t have been working emergency medicine.” She nodded, looking over his shoulder, her long brown hair brushing against his face. He gritted his teeth, trying not to be distracted by her every movement. She reached over his shoulder and pointed at the screen.

“This one and this one, they work together downtown, but it’s oncology. Again, I’m not sure they would have been in the emergency room.”

“None of them are emergency medicine. It doesn’t make sense at all.”

“Could he have been a fake?”

“Geez, that would be seriously fucked up, wouldn’t it?” She nodded, a frown crossing

her face, the lines on her forehead deep with concern. “I don’t think we can do anything except wait.”

“I hate this. This is the worst part for me. I wait for hours, days, sometimes weeks before I know that the vision was real. I’ve never had a vision that wasn’t real, but this could be the first. God! I hope it’s the first.” She stood and pulled her hair away from her face, twisting it into a long ponytail.

“You’re exhausted and it’s late. Why don’t you take the bed, and we’ll just wait and see what happens in the morning?”

“I can take the sofa. I’m smaller.”

“Aislinn, I’m not letting you take the sofa. Besides, it’s huge. It’s why I bought it so that it could accommodate my size or the size of some of my former teammates. For a while, they would come into town once a month to check on me.”

“That’s really nice to have friends like that.”

He stared at her and wondered if she had friends that she could confide in, friends that would have her back. As if she sent a message to his brain, he knew the answer.

“Why don’t you have a friend to rely on, Aislinn?” he asked with compassion.

“I-I just... It’s easier. Women aren’t nice sometimes, Kane. When I would get my headaches, I was so sick sometimes that their boyfriends or husbands would offer to take me home. The women, well, they thought it was all a ploy to get their men. I seriously didn’t understand it. The last roommate I had was six years ago. I decided to move out when I got this vision of her. She wasn’t killing anyone, but it was anger and so hate-filled it made me choke. I realized later the vision was about me.”

“Fucking hell! Dudes certainly have their shit with each other, but we usually just punch it out and move on.”

“Yea,” she laughed, “well, I would have been happy to do that, but it didn’t seem she was a willing participant.”

Aislinn stood and moved toward the big bed. It was larger than a normal king-sized bed. It seemed longer and wider, maybe to suit his larger body. Sliding the sweatpants down, she wore only her plain white panties and the sweatshirt.

Kane couldn’t look away. He knew he should. He should give her some privacy, but she had no inhibitions about stripping in front of him at all. She was innocent as to the effect she had on him. She never even looked up. Her long hair spread across his pillows, and he thought he would never wash those sheets again. Sitting up, she stared across the room at him.

Busted!

“Kane? Sleep in the bed with me. Not to, I mean not to do anything, just...”

“Aislinn, are you sure? I won’t do anything you’re not ready for, but this is all very fast.”

“I know it is. I can’t explain it, Kane. I’ve never met anyone like you before. Certainly, never met anyone that understood what was happening with me. I just, I just can’t lie here alone tonight. Not when I know that you’re only a few feet away.”

The sweet, sexy tones of her voice glided over his body, enveloping him in a warmth and peace he hadn’t experienced in his lifetime. He nodded his head and slid between the sheets, his sweats and t-shirt still on. Unlike Aislinn, he wore no boxers or briefs beneath his sweats.

Her eyes closed immediately, and she rolled to her side, facing him. He did the same, staring into her beautiful, perfect face. He noticed every inch of her. The small dimple in her left cheek. The thick black lashes that lay against the contrasting white of her cheeks. She had a tiny pair of diamond earrings glittering from each lobe. Her lips were red and slightly swollen from their simple kisses, another sure sign that she was as innocent as he suspected.

Aislinn's hands lay in prayer on the pillow, and Kane mimicked her. Closing his eyes, he felt her reach for him, lying her small hand between his two larger ones and then the other on top. It was such a sweet, simple gesture. But for Kane Jackson, it was something he never dreamed he would have.

Drifting off to sleep, he felt the familiar zing in his dreams but let the euphoria that was Aislinn Carter take him away.

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Aislinn felt the beat of her heart pounding against her rib cage, the banging so loud, so harsh she thought her ribs would crack. Blood. There was so much blood. The face of the blonde woman appeared to be smiling. No, she wasn't smiling; she was laughing. Her body was covered in blood, and she was laughing. Another woman lay beside her. Her short black hair matted to her head with the same blood, her own. Her chest was split open, the hands of a man wrapped around her throat.

Kane saw the faces. He saw the blood, but he couldn't break away from it. He couldn't stop the madness before him. The amount of blood was overwhelming, even for a battle-hardened warrior like himself. He could feel Aislinn's presence, but not in the dream. Somewhere else. He could feel her heartbeat, her panic. His only concern was getting to her, finding Aislinn, and leaving this hell.

Aislinn knew that Kane was there, he was close to her, but she couldn't find him. She couldn't see him. Her eyes scanned the room, and all she saw were the two women covered in blood, one lifeless, one laughing. Dr. Krauss's face flashed before her, and she gasped for air.

She felt Kane near her and gripped what she believed to be his hand tighter. He was holding her hand. She knew he was, and he was reaching for her. Squeezing his fingers tighter, she dared not let go, or the vision would consume her. The laughter of the blonde woman was making her sick. Something in her tone was more than Aislinn could stand. She felt the bile rise in her throat but instead searched for Kane.

Aislinn! Aislinn! Wake up, baby. Wake up!

Aislinn sat up with a start. Her body drenched in sweat. The long stray hairs matted

against her forehead, the sweatshirt completely soaked. Kane sat beside her, gripping her shoulders as he pulled her closer, enveloping her in his warmth.

“Christ, Aislinn! Honey, look at me. Aislinn, is that what it’s like? Is that what it’s like, baby? Is that what you experience?”

She nodded and let the tears fall down her face. She’d never shared a vision with anyone before, and she certainly never had a recurring vision. It was as if her connection to Kane allowed her to release the dream to him.

“God, baby! That was terrible. Aislinn, honey, I can’t, I can’t imagine... All these years, seeing things like that. It was all so clear, so fucking horrifically clear.”

“I’ve never... I never shared. I didn’t know I could share. I don’t know how that happened, Kane. I’m so sorry,” she sobbed, “I’m so, so sorry.”

Kane lifted her onto his lap and held her tight. Not caring anymore about sensibilities, he pulled the wet sweatshirt from her body and then immediately felt her shake from the cool night air against her damp skin.

Pulling the blankets higher, he wrapped her in their warmth and sunk deeper into the bed. Kane had suffered his fair share of nightmares, but what Aislinn experienced was on an entirely different level. It was real, more than real. It was real-time. He knew it without question. The nightmares, the visions, whatever she wanted to call them, were like experiencing the horror in real-time.

“I’m sorry, K-Kane. I didn’t mean for you to see that,” she sobbed against his chest.

“Baby, it’s not your fault. I think... I think maybe because we were touching our hands, our hands linked. I don’t know, Aislinn. This is so far beyond my expertise.”

“What do w-we do?” she choked out.

“We stay together. I think we are supposed to be together, honey. I can’t explain it, but I’m pretty damn sure we’re supposed to be together.” She nodded and wiped her nose on the back of her hand. “Tomorrow, we need to figure this out. Maybe find someone that has experience in this.”

“The university has a paranormal department that studies things like this. I was going to see them a few months back and chickened out.”

“Then that’s where we’ll start. I have no fucking clue what’s happening here, but we will make sure we figure this out together, Aislinn.” She nodded again.

“M-my job... I just know Mr. Lewis is going to fire me.”

“What do you do for them, baby?” he asked. He wanted to tell her to just quit the fucking job, and he’d beat the shit out of Lewis.

“I’m a paralegal. I was going to attend law school, but the idea of having to shake hands with criminals wasn’t exactly high on my list. So, I got through paralegal school and stopped.” He nodded and kissed the top of her head.

“What sort of cases do you handle?”

“Mostly corporate law, some discrimination or harassment cases, but it’s all to do with corporate work environments.”

“Can you take a leave of absence?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I mean, technically, they should allow that, but I’ve taken a lot of sick leave in the last year.”

“Aislinn, I think you need to quit if they don’t give you the leave of absence.” She started to protest, and he held up a hand. “Listen to me, honey. There is something happening between you and me that I can’t figure out. I also want to be able to watch and help you, but I can’t do that if you’re at work, potentially finding your next nightmare. If you have to quit, I have plenty of savings that will hold us over.”

“Kane, it’s not that. I don’t need to work. My mother left me a sizeable estate when she died. She was born in Ireland County Wicklow and left a nice trust and a small house there. I’ve never been there because it’s so hard for me to travel, all the touching and stuff. I don’t have to work. I choose to work, Kane. But what about your work? You can’t just stop doing what you do to watch over me. That’s not fair. And let’s not even get started on the fact that we barely know one another.”

“You let me worry about my work, okay? And us? We’ll figure that out as we go. Then the next question is, do you like your work?”

“Like my work?” she said, staring at him. “I-I don’t know. I mean, no, no, I don’t like my work. I’m not even sure why I went to school for law.” She started laughing and stared at his concerned expression. “I’m sorry, Kane. I promise you I’m not losing my mind. You just may have asked the million-dollar question. I honestly have no idea why I chose my career path. I hate what I do. The law never seems to be on the side of the victims, but on the side of corporations or big dollars.”

“Well, then, I guess we know what you should do.”

“But what will I do to make a living? I can’t live off my trust forever.”

“All in good time, baby. For now, let’s get some sleep and hold hands while we do it.”

He grinned down at her, kissing her sweetly. Her bare breasts pressed against the heat

of his t-shirt, and Kane cursed himself for not getting her something else to wear. Not that he minded her being nearly naked next to him, but it would damn sure interfere with his sleep.

Kane's mind drifted back to the nightmare, the vision, whatever it was. He saw every detail, every drop of blood. He heard the laughter of the woman and the excitement in Krauss's eyes as he strangled the butchered woman. It was like something from a horror film.

The soft breathing sounds emanating from Aislinn indicated that she had finally fallen back to sleep. Kane was reluctant to close his eyes, unsure if the visions would return. He admired Aislinn even more after seeing the images in her mind.

His time in the service had exposed him to humanity's worst. Yet somehow, the images projected in Aislinn's mind were nearly his undoing. Maybe because he felt her fear and panic as well. Either way, Kane was going to make sure that they figured out what was happening to them both.

Drifting off to sleep, his eyes fluttered at the still-falling rain outside the massive windows. The blackness of night covered the city in its veil of secrets and lies.

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Aislinn woke to a warmth unlike anything she'd felt in her entire life. In nothing but her panties, cocooned in heat and comfort, she smiled. Opening her eyes, she stared out the windows to the early morning light. The clouds were heavy with more rain, but the day dawned as always.

Looking down, she saw the big, muscled arms wrapped around her waist. One large hand lay flat against her stomach, the other curved perfectly over her breast. Aislinn smiled again, looking at the odd sight. Kane's hands were so manly, so perfectly formed. The veins protruded from the back of his rough, callused paws. The nails short and manicured, yet not manicured by a professional.

She let her finger trail down his forearm to the scar just at the bend of his elbow. She snuggled down further into his hold and laid a soft kiss to the palm of his hand.

"You keep moving like that, and I won't be able to leave this bed, and neither will you," he said in a gravelly voice. Kane always had a raspy quality to his voice, but mornings apparently made his vocal cords even harsher. Aislinn found it sexy and unsettling in a panty-melting sort of way. She giggled and turned to face him.

"Good morning," she said, kissing the tip of his nose. In the light of day, she could see more clearly the vivid green of his eyes set off by the dark brown of his hair. She traced the long scar on his face and kissed the rough edge. "Does it bother you?"

"It doesn't hurt anymore if that's what you're asking."

"I'm glad of that, but I was wondering if it bothered you that I touch it, that I kiss it. I like the way you look, Kane. I like everything about you, and I like touching you. I

love that you survived.”

He stared into her eyes, brushing a long strand of hair from her face. He kissed her lips sweetly.

“No, honey, it doesn’t bother me at all. You can touch me wherever, whenever you like.”

“Careful what you ask for,” she said with a wicked grin.

“For a woman who has never experienced true intimacy with a man, you sure know all the right things to say,” he smiled.

“I may be a virgin, Kane, but I’m still a woman and know what I should say and do. With you, it’s not about what I should say. It’s what I have to say. It’s like I can’t not say it. I know that sounds so awful, but my mind sort of just takes over, and my mouth can’t control itself.”

Kane laughed a full deep laugh. His head rolled back against the pillow.

“Aislinn, baby, you can always be honest with me. Do we risk turning on the news?” he asked cautiously.

“We have to, eventually,” she said, sitting up, pulling the sheet tight around her breasts. He clicked the television remote, and the screen came to life. “Don’t be shocked if it’s not on the news this morning. It may be several days before we see it.”

“Once again, our top story comes from Forest Gate, the exclusive gated community on the upper West Side, where this morning police are investigating a double murder.”

“That’s right, Jim. I’m here at Forest Gate outside the home of Andrea and Mark Wascom. The Wascoms found brutally murdered by their maid early this morning around six a.m. were native to this area. According to the maid, the house was locked as usual, and the alarm was engaged. She immediately suspected something when she noticed footprints of what she described as blood on the kitchen floor. Police say she found the couple on their bed in what can only be described as a gruesome scene akin to Jack the Ripper.

Mark Wascom is CEO of Wascom Enterprises, a computer software company that develops programs for the government, universities, and hospitals. The couple have no children, and it’s unclear at this time what the possible motive was. This is Allison Harvey reporting for KGTV. Back to you, Jim.”

“Shit!” said Kane.

“Well, at least this time, if I had reported it, you would have been my alibi. I didn’t see the man last night. I only saw Krauss and a blonde woman.”

Kane nodded. The scenarios running through his head were wide and varied. This could be a case of kinky sex gone wrong. Wife swapping, swinging, bondage, anything could have happened. Somewhere in his mind, though, he knew that this was premeditated murder. Something Krauss had done before and would do again.

“Let’s get dressed and get you over to your office. See what your boss says.” Aislinn nodded and stood from the bed, her bare chest exposed for him to see perfectly in the morning light. Turning, she smiled at him.

“We-we could take a shower,” she said sweetly.

“Aislinn, baby, I want nothing more than to take a shower with you, but don’t you think we should...”

“I know, I know, take it slow. Actually, Kane, I don’t want to take things slow. If last night proved nothing else to you, it’s that life is too fragile. We have to take what we want now.” She moved slowly to the other side of the bed and stood in front of him, only her white panties serving as a barrier between them. “I want you, Kane.”

Aislinn laid her head against his bare chest, wrapping her arms around his waist. Never, in all his years, had a woman made him feel so wanted, so desired before. Everything in his body screamed for Aislinn.

“I want you too, Aislinn. God help me. I shouldn’t want you. I shouldn’t curse you with the demons in my head, but I want you more than any woman I’ve ever known.” She smiled up at him, waiting. “Alright, baby, we shower together, but I’m keeping this slow,” he said, kissing her.

Aislinn nodded, turning and sliding her panties down her well-muscled legs. Her bare ass swayed from side to side as she made her way to the shower.

Kane blew out a long slow breath and looked down at his rigid cock.

Down, boy. Be gentle.

By the time he made it into the shower, the steam covered the entire room, and only a faint outline of Aislinn’s milky white breasts could be seen through the glass. Stepping into the shower, she turned to see Kane’s naked body towering above her. His green eyes glowed in the steamy confines, lust and desire filling the space.

“You’re so beautiful, Kane,” she whispered.

“Honey,” he chuckled, “men are not beautiful, and if they are, I certainly am not. You need to look in the mirror, Aislinn. You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.” He stepped closer to her, the steam disappearing between them. Aislinn caught her

gasp as she saw Kane in all his glory.

She knew Kane was a big man, but his cock proved he was big everywhere. Although she had no comparison, she knew enough about anatomy to know that he was beyond average. Staring down at the rigid member, the purple head slick with precum, she couldn't resist touching him.

Her fingers glided down his length. He sucked in a breath through gritted teeth and held her wrist still.

"Baby, if you want this to last at all, you'll let me handle this," he said.

She nodded, licking her lips, and he nearly exploded at the sight of her. Gripping her hair in his hands, he pressed her body against the shower wall, his other hand reaching for the beautiful breasts begging for his attention.

Aislinn let out a gasp of surprise and pleasure as Kane tweaked her nipple and squeezed her breast. How something so simple could be so erotic, she had no idea, but she was grateful he had experience and obvious skill.

"Open for me, Aislinn. Let me feel you, baby," he said against her mouth.

Unsure what he was asking, but going on instinct, Aislinn opened her thighs slightly. Kane lifted one leg, settling it over his own thigh. Reaching between their slick bodies, he felt her wetness and nearly spilled his seed on her stomach.

Touching her soft folds, the thatch of soft brown curls wet with desire, he slid a finger slowly inside her. She was so incredibly tight. He didn't think she would ever stretch enough for him. Knowing he needed to take it slow with her, he eased inside her, back and forth, easy strokes as he rubbed her rock-hard nub.

Aislinn let out a low moan and bucked her hips against his hand.

“That’s it, baby. Let it go, Aislinn,” he said into her ear.

“But...”

“No buts, baby, just let go. We have time for more. Let me hear you, Aislinn,” he said, pressing further into her. He pulled out and she gasped. Kane smiled down at her. His little innocent was greedy and needy at the same time. Sliding two fingers in, he stretched her further. Aislinn was so fucking tight. He ground his hard cock against her stomach as he finger-fucked her.

Aislinn had no clue what she was doing, but she needed to touch Kane, to feel him. Sliding her hand between them, she gripped his cock and moved her fingers up and down the rigid velvety smooth shaft. The groan from his body was one of agony and ecstasy. She smiled against his mouth as his tongue met hers.

Aislinn instinctively moved her hands quicker against the rigid member between her fingers. With each stroke, he moved more forcefully inside her, stretching her, the sting of his long, wide fingers disappearing into utter bliss.

“Fuck, Aislinn! Baby, you’re gonna make me cum...”

“Please, Kane, please, I’m... I’m so ready... please...” she pleaded against his mouth as he drove deeper inside her.

Aislinn screamed her release against his mouth, and Kane could not control it any longer. The hot squirt of his seed spilled all over her stomach and fingers, and Aislinn found it incredibly erotic.

Kane’s heavy breaths made his chest heave up and down, gasping for air. Her cheek

rested against him, rising and falling with his own breath. Her legs were shaking like gelatin. The satisfaction of her orgasm unlike anything she had ever been able to give herself, and yet Kane still had not penetrated her fully. She shivered at the thought, wondering if she would be able to accommodate his size.

“You didn’t... we didn’t...” she said.

“We didn’t, baby. You were so tight, so fucking beautifully tight. I needed to get you ready for me, honey,” he said, kissing her face apologetically.

“Don’t misunderstand me, Kane. It was beautiful. It was the most beautiful experience I’ve ever had. Were you? I mean, did you? I mean...”

“I loved every second of it, Aislinn. I’m sorry I spilled all over you, but that’s what you do to me, baby. That’s what you make me feel like I’m out of control, and I’m never out of control, Aislinn. This is definitely not what I expected when I was walking home in the rain yesterday.”

She laughed and turned to rinse away his passion from her stomach. Kane gently massaged her shoulders, the smell of the soap and Aislinn mixing into an intoxicating scent. By the time they finished, Aislinn wanted to touch Kane again but felt the burning between her thighs and knew she should wait.

“I need clothes,” she said, smiling at him.

“They’re in the dryer. I’ll get them.” Kane removed her clothing and started to walk back toward the bathroom when something on the television caught his attention.

“At this time, we are unsure of the weapon used, but according to good friends and local physician Christopher Krauss, the Wascoms were a picture-perfect couple who had everything.”

Fuck! He knew them. Krauss knew the victims. This changes everything.

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

The clouds were heavy with water, waiting to release the deluge on the unsuspecting pedestrians crowding the streets below. The wind whipped around them, the cold air sending shivers down Aislinn's spine. Her only winter coat was still at the office, one more reason to return.

"This is it," she said, stopping in front of the building.

"Do you want me to come up with you?" he asked. She looked inside the building, Willy's smiling face greeting the morning rush.

"I shouldn't want you to, I guess. I'm sure it's unprofessional, but yes. Will you come up?" she said shyly.

"You know I will, Aislinn."

Pressing the button for twenty-three, Aislinn felt the warm hand of Kane against her lower back, reassuring her that all would be well. Three people stepped off on fifteen, and Kane turned Aislinn toward him to give a kiss of reassurance.

"I'm right here, honey," he said, guiding her off the elevator as the doors opened. Aislinn walked toward her cubicle, eyeing Mr. Lewis's head sitting at his desk. His steely eyes caught her gaze and then the glare of the giant of a man behind her.

"Miss Carter, so nice of you to join us," he said in a sarcastic tone.

"Mr. Lewis, I'm truly sorry about yesterday."

“Yes, well, I heard from the hospital that you left without physician authority. That’s highly irregular, Miss Carter.”

“Yes, sir, I know it is. It’s just that I-I wanted to...”

“She wanted to be home in her own bed, and so I took her out of the hospital,” said Kane. “It’s more than legal, and it’s certainly the patient’s right to do so.”

“And you are?”

“Kane Jackson, I’m Aislinn’s boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend? You’ve never mentioned a boyfriend before, but no matter. We tried to reach you yesterday at your home. You weren’t there.” His tone was accusing and suspicious, and Kane was ready to punch the asshole in the face.

“She came to my home,” he growled. “And as an attorney, Mr. Lewis, you should know that Aislinn has the right to sign herself out of the hospital at any time – without doctor’s authority. You should also know that she doesn’t have to tell you about any personal relationships.”

“Be that as it may, I’m sorry to tell you that we’ll no longer need your services, Miss Carter. As of today, we will be releasing you.”

“On what grounds?” she asked calmly.

“No grounds, Miss Carter. We’re an at-will state, as you well know. Here is your paperwork. We’ve given you a generous severance package and will continue your health benefits for the next six months. I’m sorry this didn’t work out, but we wish you the best.”

Aislinn reached for the envelope gingerly, afraid of who may have touched the material. Kane saw her hesitation and took the packet from Mr. Lewis, his eyes widening at the big man's abruptness.

"I really am sorry this didn't work out, Miss Carter. I hope that your health improves in the future." Lewis eyed the big man standing protectively over Aislinn. There was something dangerous about him, and it wasn't just the scars and burns on his face and neck. This man had seen things, seen war.

Aislinn nodded at Mr. Lewis. She wasn't angry at the man. She understood his need to have consistency in the office, and unfortunately, she had been unable to provide that to the firm. It wasn't the first time, and it wouldn't be the last time she'd have to leave an employer due to her headaches. She gathered her few belongings into a large tote bag she kept in her desk drawer and straightened the company files on her desk. Grabbing her coat, she left her cubicle for the last time.

Kane laid his hand on her back and began to guide her out of the office.

"Oh, Miss Carter, one more thing. The emergency room doctor, Dr. Krauss? He called here looking for you. Something about papers needing to be signed." Aislinn paled, her stomach dropping into her shoes. She swayed against Kane as he gripped her waist, holding her firmly to his body.

"It's not a problem," said Kane. "We were headed there from here."

Lewis eyed the two suspiciously and nodded. He was fond of Aislinn, but her constant absences from the mysterious headaches interrupted his flow of business.

By the time they reached the sidewalk again, Aislinn sucked in a deep breath of fresh air and leaned against Kane.

“I don’t think I can go back there,” she said.

“I’ll be with you, Aislinn. We have to go back, honey. We have to find out if he knows anything.”

“Oh God! You don’t think? You know, think that he knows? He couldn’t know, could he?”

“I don’t know, baby,” he said, pulling her in for a hug. “Let’s go get my car. We’re not far.”

A few blocks away, in the underground garage of his apartment, they retrieved his truck and headed toward the hospital.

“Can we stop at my place first? I need clothes and toiletries and things if I’m staying with you again.”

Her statement was quiet and shy. Kane realized she was unsure of where their relationship was going. Hell, he was unsure! He hadn’t experienced a relationship that lasted more than three days in twenty years. Yet he knew in his heart that Aislinn belonged with him.

Kane nodded and followed her directions to the small efficiency apartment. It wasn’t run-down, but it wasn’t exactly in the best neighborhood in the city. Kane wondered why she hadn’t used some of her trust money to buy a better place but decided against asking her. He was sure that Aislinn had her reasons, and they were exactly that, her reasons.

He watched Aislinn move around the tiny space packing two large suitcases with what appeared to be everything she owned. The furniture was sparse and worn but clean.

“I-I don’t own any of this. It came furnished. I never know when I have to leave somewhere quickly, so I don’t buy anything really, other than necessities.”

Kane nodded, watching her nervously straighten the apartment. The pit in his stomach grew wider at the thought of Aislinn returning to this place. She belonged with him. They belonged together.

“Drop the key at the landlord’s.” It was a statement. No, it was a command, and Aislinn looked up at him, shocked.

“What? I-I can’t, Kane. We...”

“You can. You and I... you and I are real, and we’ll figure it out, but you’re not coming back here. It’s not safe, and it’s certainly not where you belong.”

“Kane,” she said softly, “I appreciate this, all of this, but you don’t owe me anything. I want to see what happens with you and me too, but not at the expense of your privacy.”

“Fuck my privacy,” he growled, “this isn’t about my privacy, Aislinn. This is about how I feel about you, what’s between the two of us. Now, if you don’t feel the same way, then just tell me. But me? I know that this is real.” His insecurities and doubts were creeping into his thoughts, all the failed relationships, all the women he hoped would love him for him.

“I do feel the same way,” she said, moving closer to him. She placed her head on his chest, wrapping her arms around his waist. “I don’t understand it either, but I know that I’ve never felt safer or more at home than when I’m with you.”

She looked up to see a strange look on his face and knew the words weren’t exactly what he wanted to hear.

“Kane, I have never allowed a man to touch me as you did. You know that. That should tell you how I feel about you and where I’m willing to go with this, with us. I just didn’t want you to do anything out of obligation.”

“This isn’t about fucking obligation, Aislinn!” he yelled. He dragged his hand through his shaggy hair and stepped back from her, taking a long shuddering breath. “I care for you. I-I can’t explain any of this, but you’re mine, Aislinn. Mine.”

She stared into the rich emerald depths of his eyes, searching for something, waiting to feel something that would send a memory or a nightmare to warn her, waiting for the other shoe to drop as it always did. But there was nothing except calm, peaceful waves of warmth and desire.

“I am yours. And you, you, Kane Jackson, are mine.” He stared at her for a moment and then grinned, a mischievous victorious grin.

“Damn straight.”

Kissing her nose, he grabbed the two large bags and opened the door. Aislinn turned and looked around the tiny space. There was no sadness in leaving this place. This would be the end of a chapter and, hopefully, the beginning of her book.

She knocked on the superintendent’s door and handed him the key and her notice. Her rent was paid through the end of the month, so wouldn’t be a factor, and he was certain he could rent the place quickly. The older man liked Aislinn and was always kind to her. Kane loaded her bags, and when he slid into the truck, he reached across the seat and grabbed Aislinn’s hand.

“Are you ready, baby?”

“Ready,” she smiled.

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Two hours later, Aislinn had taken over half of Kane's closet and three drawers in his dresser. She changed into jeans and boots, a snug plum-colored sweater hugged her body, and Kane couldn't help but feel his libido kick in every time she moved. Her curves were made for a man's exploration, had his mouth watering, and if he had anything to say about it, he would be the only explorer where Aislinn was concerned.

"You ready to head to the hospital?" he asked.

"I guess so," she said, holding her hand against her stomach. The butterflies were in overdrive, and she felt certain she would let breakfast fly if she didn't get control.

"Let's get this done and then head up to the university." She nodded and followed Kane back down to the garage. Twenty minutes later, they pulled into the emergency room parking lot and headed inside. Kane stood at the nurses' station while Aislinn stood behind him, terrified to touch anything.

"We're here to sign some paperwork for Aislinn Carter. Dr. Krauss contacted her employer about it."

"Oh, yes, Miss Carter," said the woman. "Here you go. I just need you to sign here and here, stating that you left without doctor's authority. How are you feeling? How is the headache?"

"It's-it's gone now, thank you."

The nurse held out a pen to Aislinn, and she cringed, shaking her head. She reached inside her purse and pulled out her own. Careful not to touch the paperwork, Aislinn

quickly signed her name where indicated and stepped back from the desk.

She felt the sharp stab in her head before she felt the warmth of someone's hand on her back. Her vision turned blood red, the entire scene before her changing instantly. Her legs shook, and before she knew what was happening, Kane had pulled her to his side, the vision gone.

"I'm sorry I startled you," said Dr. Krauss. "I don't believe I've ever had a woman react quite that way to my touch." He smiled at Aislinn and winked at Kane. A wink that Kane wanted to knock off his face.

"I just wanted to make sure you were feeling alright, Miss Carter. You left the other night before I could complete my exam."

"I... I'm fine. Really, I'm doing much better. I see my own doctor this afternoon." Krauss eyed her suspiciously and then looked at the large man standing next to her.

"I see. And who is your regular physician? I'd like to make note of it in the records." He eyed the young woman questionably, testing her.

Aislinn fumbled to find the right words. She didn't have a regular doctor because she couldn't dare see one that would touch her and send visions her way. Before she could completely make a fool of herself, Kane took over.

"She's seeing Dr. Adam Thorn."

"Thorn. I've heard of him. He was an Army surgeon, wasn't he?" asked Krauss.

"He was. We were in the same unit together."

Krauss nodded again, his eyes traveling to the wounds on Kane's neck. There was a

flash of empathy and interest, medical interest, no doubt, thought Kane.

“I see. Well, if you should need anything else, Miss Carter, please let me know.”

He held out his hand, and Aislinn looked horrified. She looked up at Kane pleadingly, and he reached for the doctor’s hand and squeezed.

“Sorry, she’s quite a germaphobe.” Kane pulled Aislinn tight against his body and led them back into the parking lot. Taking a bottle of antiseptic cleaner from his emergency medical kit, he squeezed the gel into his hands and wiped vigorously. Seeing Aislinn watch him, he stopped.

“Will this help?” he asked.

“I-I don’t know. I think so. Did you feel it again?” she asked.

“Oddly, no. I’ve never felt it so strongly and then not felt it when I met someone a second time. It’s really strange, but something was different today, and I don’t know what.”

“I know what you mean. I saw the visions. I felt them, but I didn’t have the headache as strongly. Once you touched me, the world seemed right again.” Kane gave a small grin to her and nodded.

“Do you think you can handle the university today?” he asked.

“I need to get this under control, and we need to figure out what’s happening with Krauss. Let’s do it.”

“Together, baby, together.”

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Krauss looked down at his shaking hands and cursed his fate once more. A surgeon, a skilled mind of the finest quality, and he was reduced to emergency room medicine. His abilities were the best of anyone the city had ever known. Renowned for his calm demeanor, even during the most traumatic events, his skill was sought after by presidents!

Everything changed a few years ago. One horrible night that turned his world upside down and sent the trajectory of his life down all the wrong paths.

He looked at the blonde lying face down on his bed. Her bare ass tempted him to stay. She was always a willing participant in his games, her bloodlust and violent nature far outmatched his own. Last night, she was particularly adventurous, which only made him harder. Their little excursions would catch someone's attention soon, though. He would need to remind her to use some discretion in their games.

He looked down at his hands once more, the slight trembling becoming more in control since taking the medication. His face was still young and handsome, his body still lean and fit. He was too young for this, too skilled for this tragedy. The phone buzzed against the counter, and the blonde-haired woman squirmed at the noise disturbing her sleep. She opened her legs wide, and he grinned as he picked up the cell phone.

“Yes, brother,” he said in a condescending attitude.

“Good morning to you too,” said his brother on the other end of the line. “Are you going to be able to go to work tonight?”

“I’m getting ready now,” he said as he moved toward the bed. His finger glided down the crack of her ass, finding the wetness he knew would be there. She only moaned her enjoyment, and he shoved the digit hard into her. She opened wider, pushing herself onto her knees, her face still planted against the soft sheets.

“Good, you need to be at work. It will make you feel better,” he said.

“I appreciate your concern, dear brother, but I’m fine. Truly.”

“I know you are. I love you. You know that, right?”

The pit in his stomach opened up, and for a moment, the guilt assailed him. His brother did love him. He knew that. But if he found out about his side entertainment, there would be no pride or no love left for him.

“I know. I love you too. I’ll speak with you later.”

He closed the phone and turned his attention back to the blonde, who was moaning, humping his finger. He stood and unzipped his pants. This would be fast, but he needed relief before heading into the hospital.

“Open up,” he commanded.

She did as she was told. She always did as told, spreading her knees wider, the pink juice of her pussy filling his senses. He gripped her hips and pulled her to the edge of the bed, mercilessly driving his cock inside her, pumping with madness and fury. Feeling the need to release his anger this afternoon, he pulled out and shoved his cock inside her ass.

She cried out in pain from the lack of lubricant, but he ignored her, yanking her head back with a fist full of hair.

“Shut up, you bitch! You love this. You love this, don’t you? Say it! Say you love it!” She cried out again at the intense invasion.

“Y-yes-yes, I love it... harder... harder...” she said between sobs.

He continued to drive into her, his balls slapping against the slickness of her pussy. He cried out like a wounded animal as he released inside her anus. The thick creamy essence of his anger was evident on her ass. He slapped her bare cheek hard, leaving a fine red handprint.

Zippering his pants, he headed toward the door.

“Will you be back tonight?” she asked, turning over and smiling at him. The little whore loved it. She acted as if she was hurt, wounded, but the bitch loved it all – the pain, the violence.

“Maybe, maybe not. Just be here when I get home.”

She nodded like the good little girl she was. He closed the door behind him and stepped inside the sleek new sports car he had purchased for himself, revving the engine as he pulled away.

I will get my revenge. No one will question me!

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Dr. Angela Brennan, PhD – Department of Paranormal, Parapsychology, and Dream Study

“This is her?” asked Kane.

“Yes. I spoke to her a while ago, and she was very interested in speaking with me. She sounded nice, but I just couldn’t force myself to come alone.”

“Well, you’re not alone now. I’m here.” Kane knocked on the door, and the soft lilting voice called from behind the oak.

“Come in now.”

Kane opened the door slowly to see a small white-haired woman hidden behind stacks of books and papers. In fact, the entire office was filled with stacks of books and papers. The utter chaos of the room sent his need for order into overdrive.

“Dr. Brennan?” he asked.

“That’s right, and you are?” she said, smiling up at him.

“My name is Kane Jackson, and this is my girlfriend, Aislinn Carter.”

“Aislinn? We spoke a few months ago, yes?” she said with a hint of an Irish accent.

“Come in, come in, child. Aislinn. That’s a fine Irish name if ever there was one.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Aislinn, smiling at her. “My mother was born in County

Wicklow.”

“Wicklow! Is that a fact now? Well, Wicklow is a magical place indeed. Please, sit, sit.” She looked at the two leather chairs piled high with folders and books. Grinning, she lifted the stacks and set them on the floor. “Sorry for the mess, my grad student left me, and I haven’t had any help in a while. Now then, what can I do for you?”

“When we spoke, you said you might be able to help me, Dr. Brennan,” said Aislinn.

“Remind me, dear. I’m old.” She smiled at the couple, and Aislinn smiled back.

“Sorry, of course. I have dreams, more like visions. I touch someone and…”

“Oh, yes! Of course, of course! I was very interested in speaking with you when last we talked. Your gift is rare, rare indeed. Wicklow? You said your mother was from Wicklow, is that right?”

“Yes, ma’am, that’s right.”

“Was she fae?” Kane’s brows furrowed in confusion, and he looked at Aislinn, who shrugged her shoulders.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what that means.”

“Fae. Like the magic fairy people,” she said, smiling at them.

Confusion filled their faces, and then concern that perhaps Dr. Brennan wasn’t all there. The old woman giggled, her blue eyes laughing at them.

“Fairy people? Dr. Brennan…”

“Angela, dear, just call me Angela.”

“Alright, Angela. Fairy people don’t exist. I can assure you my mother was not a fairy.”

“Ahhh, that’s right. You Americans only believe in what you see and touch. The Irish, well, the Irish people know there is more to the world than what is in front of us.”

“Forgive me, doctor, Angela,” said Kane, “but I’m a soldier. I was trained to believe in what I see and feel.”

“And were you not trained on your other senses as well, Kane? Were you not trained to look for what you couldn’t see? What you couldn’t feel?”

“I was trained to look for things that weren’t visible, yes.” He said it in the most unconfirming way he possibly could. This woman was bat-shit crazy, but for Aislinn, he would sit through it.

“Listen to me, child. Your mother was most likely from a long line of people who were able to see visions. You can call them fae or psychic or whatever you like, but it’s an inherited trait for sure. Many of the old folks in Ireland believe in fae, and they believe in fairy hills, leaving them undisturbed.”

“That sounds magical, Angela, but my visions are violent, filled with blood and murder. There is nothing magical about it.”

“I see,” she said, looking at Aislinn with concern. “And do you ever see happy visions? Visions that don’t have blood?”

“Never.”

“And your mother?”

“My mother, my mother never spoke to me about it, but I believe she had visions as well. I think they led her to kill herself.”

“I’m terribly sorry to hear that. I am, for sure. But I believe I can help you, Aislinn. You see, someone, perhaps your grandmother, didn’t teach your mother how to manage her visions. When properly taught, you can control what you see, both the good and bad.”

“You can be taught?” asked Kane, reaching for Aislinn’s hand. She laid her fingers on top of his forearm, gripping the tight rope of muscles. Angela looked down and frowned.

“You have visions as well, Kane?”

“No. I-I get this sort of electrical shock when I touch someone who is evil. I only met Aislinn a few days ago. It was this instant pull. This distinct connection that I can’t explain. The other night we held hands as we slept, and I shared her vision. It was the most awful thing I’ve ever seen, and that’s saying a lot.” He tilted his head slightly, giving Angela a better view of the burns.

“Yes, yes, I can see that,” she said softly. “I think you were meant to find one another, Kane. I believe you are the missing piece for Aislinn and can help her change the trajectory of her visions.”

“I don’t understand,” said Aislinn, frowning.

“When Kane touches you, do you have any visions?”

“No, just the other night when we held hands.”

“Exactly. Your fingers linked; your hands together allow you both to see the vision as if it were sending signals from one of you to the other. When he is around you, he is the conduit between the vision and you. He will be able to move the vision away from your mind without knowing it.”

“Wait? You’re telling me that there is some sort of invisible thread between us that allows me to get into her mind and detour a vision?”

“Well, that’s simplifying things a bit, but in a manner of speaking. Yes.” Their faces filled with disbelief, and Angela knew that she had her work cut out for her. “Listen, both of you. The mind is a miraculous, mysterious place. We use less than ten percent of our brain’s capacity. Ten percent! Think about all of that ability out there we haven’t tapped into.”

“I think your mother had uncontrollable visions that most likely drove her mad,” said Angela. She saw the horror on Aislinn’s face and immediately held up a hand. “I’m not saying you will go mad. You’ve made it this far, and my guess is you did it by avoiding touch, correct?”

“Yes, how did you know that?”

“Child, there is so much to learn. When we are children, we learn that touching something hot is dangerous. It will burn us. We don’t know what that looks like right away. But we learn it’s the burner of a stove or the flames of a fireplace. As we age, we know when we see those things that they are hot, so we avoid them. You’ve been doing that with people. You know in your mind, you know that there is something there. Something you shouldn’t touch.

“People, like animals, leave their mark. It doesn’t last forever, but it does last, and someone with an ability such as yours is highly attuned to that mark.” She paused, scanning their faces, allowing them to take in the information. “Kane? You said you

feel things as well.”

“Yes. When I touch something evil, a zap, an electrical current hits my arm. Sometimes it’s minor, but if the evil is big, it nearly knocks me on my ass.” She chuckled, nodding her head.

“And when you touch something good? When you touched Aislinn, what did you feel?”

“I-I didn’t think of it at the time, but it was warmth. My whole body became warm and filled with... I can’t explain it. But I also felt the pain of what she was feeling, what she was seeing.”

“Interesting.”

“How can I control this? How do I learn more about this?” asked Aislinn.

“Well, I have a class to teach in about twenty minutes, but why don’t we set aside some time tomorrow? I can come to you if you’d rather.”

“No, here is fine.”

Kane didn’t want anyone to know where Aislinn was staying, and although he doubted the good professor meant any harm, she was a bit strange.

“Here,” she said, grabbing a book. “This book was written by my sister. She still lives in Ireland and studies people who have visions or dreams. I think it may help you to start controlling them.”

“Thank you, Angela,” said Aislinn, taking the book. She held it in her hands for a moment and felt nothing except a lightness in her heart.

“No evil there, child,” she said, grinning. Aislinn smiled back at her, looking at the cover of the book.

“Dreams, Visions, and Futures Told: Our Gifts from the Fae” by Dr. Caroline Brennan

“Read the book together, and I think you’ll find some tips in there that may help the two of you tap into more than just the bad visions. It’s something your mother should have taught you, but it sounds like no one taught her.”

“I seriously doubt it. My grandmother died when my mother was a little girl, so she probably didn’t have the time. Mom was an orphan, adopted by a family here in the U.S., and never returned to Ireland, that I’m aware of. She did leave me a house there, but I’ve never been.”

“Oh! You must go back! You must!”

“Once we figure all this out, it will definitely be on my list of things to do.” Aislinn smiled at the older woman, and they agreed on a good time to visit the next day.

Kane opened the door and then turned, taking Angela’s hand. The same warmth he felt with Aislinn filled his arm all the way to his chest. He let out a sigh of relief, and Angela winked at him.

“It’s a good skill to know, isn’t it, lad?” she giggled. The little white-haired woman giggled, and for just a moment, Kane blinked away the vision of Angela Brennan with wings flitting around a garden.

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Kane and Aislinn sat on the floor of his loft, empty pizza boxes littering the coffee table. They flipped through the book that Angela had provided them. The shrill of the doorbell made Aislinn jump in surprise, and Kane smiled at her.

“Yea,” he said into the system on his phone.

“It’s me, asshole!” said the deep voice.

Kane grinned and pushed a button. Aislinn looked nervous and moved to sit on the sofa, her legs carefully tucked beneath her.

“It’s okay, baby. It’s my friend Adam Thorn .”

“The doctor? He’s real?” Kane chuckled.

“Yes, he’s definitely real. I asked him to come by and make sure you were okay. No medical reasons for the headaches.”

She nodded and watched as he moved the pizza boxes to the countertops in the kitchen. When the elevator door opened, a tall, lean man stepped out. His coal black hair cut close to his head, strands of silver filtered throughout. His face was lean with hard angles, blue eyes gazing into the room, his nose long and narrow, leading to a strong mouth.

“Hey ass... oh, hello,” he said, averting his gaze to Aislinn.

“Hello,” she said tentatively.

He walked around Kane and held out a hand. Aislinn looked at the hand as if it were poison and then looked pleadingly at Kane.

“Brother, she probably shouldn’t do that right now.”

“No worries. I catch all kinds of stuff at the hospital, but I wash my hands every time.” He continued to hold out his hand, but Aislinn moved further into the cushions of the sofa.

“Adam, later, brother. I’ll explain everything.” Adam nodded, unsure if he liked Aislinn at that moment. Kane was his best friend, and he knew better than anyone did what he’d been through to survive.

“I’m sorry. I’m just...” Aislinn struggled for the words, tears filling her eyes, and Adam’s heart melted just a bit. She was frightened, and that pissed him off as a soldier, but there was something about her that made his skills as a doctor go on high alert.

“Adam, Aislinn has dreams. Dreams that are true.” He waited for his friend’s mind to catch up.

“You mean visions? Like you dream something, and it happens?” Aislinn nodded. “I see. And these visions, have you had one recently?” She nodded again. “What happens afterwards?”

“Debilitating headaches. I’m laid up for at least twenty-four hours, but sometimes longer. They occur usually within twenty-four to forty-eight hours after I touch someone or they touch me. I try to avoid touch,” she said with a blush.

“I see,” he said, grinning at her. He sat on the sofa near Aislinn but far enough away not to frighten her. “You wouldn’t happen to have your medical records with you?”

“No, sorry, I didn’t even think about that. I’ve had every test known to man done, though. No one has ever been able to find anything physically wrong.”

“I’m sure they haven’t, but my guess is you have a fracture.”

“A fracture? As in a broken bone?”

“Not exactly,” he said. “It’s more of a fracture in the psyche. When we look at people in dream states during scans in the lab, we often see a split that happens during violent dreams. We call it a fracture. It’s nearly invisible, but I would suspect that if this has been happening to you for a long time, the fracture would be highly visible.”

“I see,” she said quietly. “Well, I can tell you that I’ve had scans as early as just three years ago, and it was never seen.” Adam nodded, concern filling his face.

“I don’t really care about the nightmares right now, Adam,” said Kane. “I’m worried about the toll the headaches are taking on her body. It’s horrible to see, to feel.” He knew his friend was aware of his own ability and stared at his stern face.

“You felt it?” Kane nodded. “You two are definitely a pair.” He grinned at Kane and then at Aislinn, who looked pale and frail. “Are you experiencing anything right now, Aislinn?”

“No, I just, I’m worried that I will. We had to go back to the hospital today, and I worry that I touched something, someone that will make me have the vision again.”

“Hospital? Okay, explain.”

Kane proceeded to tell the whole story of how he and Aislinn had met. He left no detail out and even told him of their visit with Professor Brennan. Adam took copious notes, tapping away on his tablet. He asked Aislinn her date of birth and was

surprised to learn that she was thirty-one. He would have guessed much younger. But the look in his friend's eyes when she spoke told him all he needed to know.

Having spent eighteen months in rehab and more than twenty surgeries to get where he was today, Kane had endured enough pain. The joy that was filling the space between he and Aislinn was palpable, and Adam grinned to himself, knowing that his friend had fallen.

"So, this doctor killed the two people I heard about on the news? What were their names?"

"Wascom."

"Yea, the Wascoms. Shit! You saw that?" Aislinn nodded. "Jesus, Aislinn, I'm so sorry. I read the reports, and the injuries were brutal."

"I need to learn to control it, and for some reason, Kane seems to be able to help me. The headache subsided more quickly when he was near me. I was able to recover faster with him here."

Adam nodded again, letting out a long slow breath.

"Well, I'm going to try and get all your medical records and tests, see what's been done, and what I can use before we subject you to something else. You won't have to go to a hospital. I have equipment at my practice. I'll make sure it's all sterilized and wiped down well before you come."

Aislinn nodded again at him and graced him with a small, grateful smile.

"I guess, in all fairness, I should tell you that I'm different as well, Aislinn," he said, grinning at his friend. Kane smiled back and nodded, sitting beside Aislinn, pulling

her into his body.

“Different? Different how?”

“I wish I could explain it, but I’ve been this way for as long as I can remember. I first noticed it as a child when a car hit my dog. I carried him all the way home but knew he was going to die. I saw the bleeding. I saw the trauma... on the inside.

“When someone is injured, when I’m working on a patient, surgery or no surgery, it’s as if I can see every function of their body. I know if their blood pressure is going to crash. I know if they’re going to bleed out. I know if the benign tumor they have will turn cancerous. I see everything in their body. I’m like my own fucking diagnosis machine.”

“Oh my, God! That’s awful!” Aislinn covered her mouth in horror and fear for Adam. She knew the burden it must be for him to carry the weight of his gift.

“Awful? Baby, he can diagnose people instantly,” said Kane.

“Yes, and tell them they’re going to die, know they’re going to die. He has to endure that pain without being able to scream it! I can’t imagine having that burden. I’m so sorry, Adam,” she said, reaching for his hand. It surprised both Kane and Adam that she allowed the physical connection to happen.

“Thank you, Aislinn. That’s exactly how I feel. I often have to step back from a patient and think about what’s best or not. I did it with this idiot,” he said, jerking a thumb toward Kane. “He was such a fucking mess when he got to the base hospital. I wasn’t sure what to attack first. I had to step away and then quickly step back.”

“Yea, but you saved my ass,” said Kane, grinning at him.

“I did, but not for your lack of trying.”

Kane laughed, and Aislinn could feel the camaraderie between the two men. It was good to see Kane laugh like this. She could imagine him with his hair shorter in that tight military cut. His uniform hugging his broad shoulders, joking with his men. She could see it so clearly.

“Okay, so you’ll take a look at her records and let us know what to do next?”

“Sure thing. Hey, also, I thought you should know I saw Flip the other day.”

“No shit! What the hell is he doing now?” asked Kane.

“I don’t know. I saw him on the street. He looked like death warmed over. His clothes were dirty, his hair greasy, looked like he’d lost a lot of weight. I couldn’t get him to respond to me. I called out to him like three times.”

“Maybe it wasn’t him,” said Kane.

“Dude, I know fucking Flip when I see him. It was him.” Kane nodded, making a mental note to keep an eye out for their friend. “Don’t forget to let me know when that loft becomes available.”

“It should be open in another month. You’re still interested?”

“Didn’t I just say that, asshole?” He looked at Aislinn and shook his head. “The guy is annoying as fuck, Aislinn. Good luck with that.” She giggled and reached for his hand again.

“Goodbye, Adam. It was great meeting you.”

He looked down at her hand touching his, and he smiled. Her heart was beating steady and sure, her organs functioning perfectly. He found no signs of any life-threatening injuries, and he breathed a quiet sigh of relief.

“I’ll see you soon, Aislinn. See you later, asshat!”

“See ya,” laughed Kane. Adam disappeared in the elevator, and Kane shook his head, turning to see Aislinn staring at him.

“You like your friend,” she said.

“I do. He’s more than a friend. He’s a brother. He saved my life in Afghanistan more than once. He’s pretty remarkable.”

“Who is this person Flip?”

“Ahhh, well, Flip is actually Phillip Cho . He was in our unit as well. I’m a little shocked that Adam saw him in such bad shape. He was always together, you know? He was the guy that his uniform was just right, never a hair out of place. His dad was Chinese, but his mother was from the Pacific Islands or something. When we first heard he was joining the unit, we expected this tiny little Chinese guy. Instead, we got someone that looked like a Samoan warrior. The dude is huge!”

“He sounds interesting. I wonder why he was so out of it when Adam saw him.”

Kane smiled at the genuine concern in Aislinn’s voice for a man she didn’t even know. Yet she cared simply because he was friends with Kane.

“I don’t know. He was always a little different as well. Maybe that’s why we all tended to be drawn to one another.”

“Different how?”

“I can’t really explain it. Shit just happened when he was around.”

Aislinn nodded her head and wondered how four people, one of which the others didn’t know existed a few days ago, could all be drawn together with such odd abilities.

“I’m exhausted,” he said, standing and reaching for Aislinn. “Ready for bed?”

“I am. Only tonight, no clothes, Kane. I want to feel you against me, all of you.” Kane growled, pulling Aislinn closer.

“You don’t have to tell me twice.” He bent and easily lifted her over his shoulder, her squeal of delight making him smile. Tonight would be a better night. A much better night.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Krauss left the emergency room, the need to get to his woman so strong he nearly ran over an orderly in the hallway. He didn't care. He just needed to get to where she was. She'd found another couple, and they were primed and ready. The energy was building. His need, his desire, was so strong he couldn't contain it. This would be the couple. These two people would end his search.

He zipped through traffic, pulling onto the freeway. His GPS coordinates told him he was only a few miles away, but it felt like a hundred. He took the exit and followed the directions down the long tree-lined street filled with historic brownstones.

Pulling up to the three-story structure, he parked his car, cleared his GPS coordinates, and nearly ran up the steps. When he knocked, a tall, voluptuous redhead answered the door in a skin-tight black skirt and white silk blouse, the buttons nearly bursting.

"Well, hello, you must be the doctor we ordered," she said, smiling at him through crooked teeth.

"I am, ma'am. What can I help you with?" he said, nearly ready to tear off her clothes right there on the front steps.

"I feel a pain, here," she said, touching between her legs. "And here." She squeezed her large breasts, and Krauss grinned.

Stepping inside the brownstone, to the right was a living room where his beautiful partner sat next to an older man, his gray hair and weathered skin a contrast to her perfect features. He was naked, his cock in the hands of his beautiful vixen.

“Hi, baby, come join us. We’re having fun,” she said, smiling at the older man who grinned a lascivious grin. She continued to stroke his cock and then fell to her knees, taking him in her mouth. The redhead removed Krauss’s lab coat, and he pulled his shirt over his head, revealing a lean upper body. He yanked the woman toward him and ripped the cream silk blouse open, buttons flying everywhere.

Her breasts were spilling from a bra that was easily two sizes too small. He took the scalpel from his scrub pants and gently ran it down the center of the bra. Her breasts burst free, and he sighed at the large rosy nipples. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her husband smiling at them. The sick fuck was enjoying the little show.

She started to kneel before him, but he gripped her hair and pulled her toward the sofa. Leaning her over the back, giving her husband the full view of his wife’s luscious breasts dangling over the thick cushions. Krauss gripped the edges of her skirt and ripped the garment free of her body. She squealed in surprise, and he slapped her ass hard.

The husband looked up, surprised by the act, and then smiled a little nod at Krauss. His cock was being sucked, so he didn’t really give a fuck what the stranger did to his wife. Without warning, he slammed into the redhead, his dick buried, balls deep into her wet pussy. Reaching around her body, he gripped her tits hard and squeezed with all his might as she cried out in pain.

“Shut the fuck up!” he yelled.

She nodded, and he moved harder against her as he watched the blonde suck off her husband. He howled his release in the blonde’s mouth, her plump red lips slick with his juice. She allowed her tongue to glide across her mouth in a seductive grin. It was all the motivation Krauss needed as he released inside the man’s wife.

“Now, you two,” he said, staring at the redhead and pointing to his beautiful blonde.

“You two on the floor now. I want to see you go down on her.”

The redhead smiled at the man. She didn't know his name, didn't need to know his name. They were part of an elite club. Every member vetted, and every person knew what might wait for him or her.

The blonde sprawled out on the plush rug of the living room floor, her legs wide, revealing a slick, shaved pussy. She was much thinner than the redhead, her hip bones protruding, her pert fake breasts mounted on her chest. The redhead knelt between her legs and opened her wide, running her tongue up her wet slit. She tasted sweet, and the blonde woman smiled down at her, fisting her hair in her hands.

Krauss gripped his cock and stroked while watching, noting that the husband was doing the same. He didn't want anything to do with the old man, but if he wanted to play that game, Krauss would play until he got what he wanted. He'd get his outcome no matter. Sure enough, the old man stood and walked toward him. Setting a hand on his shoulder, he continued to pump his cock looking between the women and Krauss.

Disgusting old bastard, thought Krauss. It didn't matter. He watched the women go at it with each other, and when they both lay spent from their encounter, Krauss walked toward them and ordered them on their knees in front of him. His fist gripped tighter and pumped harder, the hot liquid spraying on their faces.

He would need to make sure he cleaned it up later. Anything left behind might be used against him.

“Let's take this upstairs,” said the redhead. “We have a room all prepared for whatever mess we want to create.”

She smiled at the other couple and swung her hips up the stairs, her husband obediently following. Krauss grinned at the blonde. In their world, that would mean

they had a playroom with plastic covering everything. No mess. No clean up.

Perfect.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Kane took his time with Aislinn, enjoying the exploration of every inch of her body. She had the soft curves that he adored. Her voluptuous breasts beckoned for his touch. Her legs were well-toned from hours of yoga to help her relax. Her stomach had the smallest of curves, indicating how much she loved food but didn't over-indulge.

Everything about her made Kane hard and protective. Three days, more or less, and he already felt as if she belonged to him. There would never be another. The realization hit him like a ton of bricks. He knew it would hit him sooner or later. He just never figured that the woman would actually reciprocate the feelings.

Once the poster boy for the all-American, good-looking Army officer, Kane spent months in the hospital and then in rehab looking at himself in the mirror. The ugly raised scars, the multiple skin grafts, the pain, every day hoping that someone would see beyond it all or just put him out of his fucking misery. Every time he tried, every time he attempted to date someone, their reactions varied from pity to absolute repulsion. Until he finally gave up on dating altogether and succumbed to the 'satisfy thyself' method.

His hand skimmed over the smooth, soft skin of Aislinn's breasts, and his rigid cock dug into her hip. She moaned, her hips rising, begging him for more.

"Please, Kane, please," she whispered.

"Tell me what you want, Aislinn. Say it, baby. I won't do it without your okay," he said in a husky voice.

“I want you. I want you inside me, Kane. Please, make me yours.”

Fuck! That was all he needed to hear. She was his. His and his alone, but this would ensure that she was his. He reached into the bedside table and pulled out a condom, praying it wasn't too old. He opened the package, rolling it onto his long throbbing cock. Aislinn watched his every move, like a student studying the master.

“Open for me, baby,” he said, balancing himself on his elbows above her. Aislinn opened her thighs wide, her knees high, one foot rubbing the back of Kane's thigh. He touched her opening. So fucking tight, he grimaced. She gasped, biting her lip, and he stilled.

“Please, Kane, don't stop,” she said seductively.

Kane gently pushed forward a little at a time. He had his fair share of virgins in his day, but Aislinn was something beyond his dreams. She was beautiful, almost angelic, tight as fuck, and so sweet and innocent. He inched further, and the pained expression on her face made him still once more.

“Kane, if you don't move forward, I'm going to move from this bed and handle it myself,” she said sweetly.

He grinned down at his little wildcat and kissed her sweetly, then took her mouth with such force she could barely breathe. That's when Kane drove into her hard, fast, and furious. She felt the sting, the stretch, the burning that she knew was inevitable and cried into his mouth. He stopped, kissing her face sweetly, and she took in deep breaths.

“I'm sorry, baby. I was trying to make it easier for you. I'm sorry. It will be better next time,” he cooed.

“Don’t you dare say you’re sorry! This is the most beautiful thing that’s ever happened to me, Kane. This is perfect. You’re perfect.”

He kissed her again and felt her hips begin to move. He was about to lose his shit. She was made for him. His perfect fit, his perfect woman.

Aislinn bucked her hips against Kane. Every inch of him was hitting her in all the right spots, making her beg for more, want more. She felt the waves coming, the ebbing and flowing of a tide she couldn’t control. Her stomach began to quiver. Her breasts ached for his touch. It was as if he knew exactly when and how as he plunged into her. She cried out a release unlike anything she had ever felt before.

Aislinn read of women who experienced stars, lightning, and thunder, but she was experiencing the whole fucking hurricane.

Kane growled like a wounded animal, his need so great and his release so strong it was uncontrollable. Their sweat-slicked bodies glistened in the light, a trickle of his own sweat making its way down one of her plump mounds. He followed the trail, licking it from her body, and she shivered, smiling up at him. Kane kissed her sweetly and stood, tying off the condom and throwing it in the trash.

He wet a washcloth and knelt beside her, wiping her clean, the small hints of blood verifying what he already knew. Aislinn was his. He slid between the sheets and pulled her close.

“You okay, baby?” he asked.

“Perfect, Kane, absolutely perfect. If you had told me three days ago this is where I would be, in bed with the man, a man I just met, I wouldn’t have believed you.”

“You were going to say something else, Aislinn. What was it?” She was quiet, and he

looked down at her sweet face, her brown eyes glowing with satisfaction and lust. “You said with the man I... what?”

“With the man I love,” she whispered.

“You love me?” Kane pulled back, staring directly into her eyes.

“I-I do, Kane. I’m sorry if that scares you, but I knew it the minute I saw you in my hospital room. I’ve never felt this way about a man, never! And it’s not just that I can touch you, and you can touch me. It’s more. I feel like we’re connected in some mysterious way. It’s okay if you’re not ready...”

“Woman! Can you be quiet for two seconds?” he said, smiling down at her. Aislinn closed her mouth and stared up at his beautiful green eyes. “I love you too, Aislinn. I’ve never said those words to any woman before. Never! I knew that there was something about you, something I needed to discover when I saw you on that stretcher.”

Aislinn took in a slow, shuddering breath, the acknowledgement filling her heart with joy and comfort.

“I love you, Aislinn. You’re mine, baby, mine.”

“Yours,” she said against his lips, taking his mouth in a greedy hunger.

Kane took her again, this time taking care of her aching body, filling her with his love and passion. It was after midnight when they finally curled into one another, sleeping soundly, their hands linked.

Kane felt her tense up in his sleep, but he couldn’t wake. It was as if he were trapped, trapped in the nightmare that was filling her vision. He saw the face of Krauss again,

the blonde-haired woman who had been in the dream previously. The blood. The massive amounts of blood covering the vision were staggering. No one could survive whatever this was, no one. The woman laughed. She was gripping something in her hand. Dear God, it was a penis. She was gripping a penis laughing, but it wasn't attached to anyone.

He could hear Aislinn's cries but couldn't rouse himself. He tried. He fought to wake, but the vision gripped him. Dr. Brennan had said he could help her control the visions. He needed to reach her inside the dream. Kane focused on Aislinn.

Aislinn, baby, hear me. Listen to me, Aislinn.

Kane? I can't see you! Kane...

Aislinn, just listen to me. It's you and me, baby. You and me. We're here in my loft, just you and me.

Just you and me.

That's right, baby. We're laughing. We're eating pizza. Adam is coming over, and we're going to watch a movie together.

A movie and pizza.

That's it, baby. Come to me, Aislinn. Do you see me?

I-I see you, Kane.

He saw her face, and the red started to disappear, the image of his loft coming into view. Aislinn was in his t-shirt, walking toward him. Her hair was wet with sweat.

I see you, baby girl. Come give me some love, Aislinn. I need your love.

Love, I love you, Kane. I love you.

Kane woke with a start, Aislinn's body wrapped around his, her face peaceful in sleep. He kissed her nose, and her eyes opened in the early morning light.

"W-was that real?" she said.

"It was real, baby. Too real. I remembered what Dr. Brennan said, and I tried to get you to focus on me."

"Well, it worked. All I could see was the blood and the bodies. That woman... that woman is horrible. I think she's worse than Krauss." Kane nodded and pulled her tight against his chest. "I heard you. I heard your voice, and the images disappeared."

"It was the same for me, baby," he whispered.

"I think Dr. Brennan will want to hear about this," she said.

"Later. It's still early, baby. Sleep. We'll have breakfast later and then go back to the university."

Aislinn nodded and closed her eyes, no longer afraid of what might happen in the darkness. Kane was her light. Kane would always bring her into the light.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Phillip 'Flip' Cho was a mountain of a man. He'd always been bigger than the other children. Taller, wider, heavier. It was no different now, even though he was easily thirty pounds lighter than his normal weight. He couldn't eat. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't focus on anything.

As a child, Flip had been a precocious, curious boy. Athletic and articulate, he was popular in school with both teachers and girls. What no one knew was that at home, he was hiding a terrible secret that his strict parents punished him for every day. Every day until his sixteenth birthday. It was the day he realized he was too big for beatings. The day he knew he was able to care for himself.

Flip's secret wasn't one he could share with anyone. It wasn't the kind of thing you told a school counselor or a buddy. That kind of secret would get you locked away in a nut house somewhere. The first time it happened, he was just a few years old. He didn't even know why they spanked him. He only knew that he would never allow them to see it again.

The big event happened when he was twelve. It was his baseball team's championship game, and he was the final hitter in a tie game with bases loaded. Swinging at a fastball, he hit with all his might and watched the ball as it went high. He knew instantly that it wouldn't go over the fence. It was going to fall short, and the kid beneath it would be the hero of the game.

Flip remembered concentrating on the ball, wishing for it to go farther. He focused so hard his head began to throb, all within milliseconds of his thoughts. As if by his command, the ball took off and flew over the fence line. The stands were silent for a moment and then cheered wildly as he rounded the bases.

Afterwards, the umpires looked at the ball and bat carefully, trying to determine if something foul was amiss. Nothing discovered, Flip was the hero of the game. Somehow, his parents knew what he had done. Taking him home, they grounded him for a week, telling him he should never use his ability again. They knew, and yet he still had no knowledge of what he was capable.

Over the years, he practiced in the privacy of an empty field or condemned building. All he had to do was focus on an object, and he could make it move wherever he wanted. He vowed never to use it during his athletic events. It wouldn't be fair. He wanted to win fair and square, and he always did.

After college, he joined the Army and thought he could escape his gift. However, the world has a way of saying 'fuck you' when you least expect it. Deployed to an elite unit, he couldn't let his teammates die. More than a dozen times, he was able to move a weapon within reach of his men or move a weapon out of reach of the enemy. He made a brick wall cave in, a door slam shut, or a motorcycle fall over.

No one noticed. No one suspected. In the heat of battle, things happen so fast, and memories clouded by smoke and sound become war stories. Until he made an entire person move. It nearly killed him, but he couldn't let his friend die.

The enemy pounded towards them. Outnumbered and fast running out of ammunition, Flip knew that they needed help. He was able to move items several times to block the path of the onslaught. Just as they heard the sound of the approaching helicopters, their ride home, an enemy soldier rounded the corner with a grenade in hand. He was headed for his buddy.

Flip didn't hesitate. Concentrating on the soldier's entire body, he pushed his mind further than ever before, his anger, fear, and hatred fueling his ability. The man suddenly airborne flew backwards and into a small building. Seconds later, the grenade exploded, killing him and giving Flip and his buddy time to get to the

chopper.

On the bird, his nose began to bleed, his chest felt as if a thousand-pound weight was sitting on him. The medics quickly evaluated and thought he was having a panic attack, but looking at his buddy, he knew. Just by staring at him, he knew that someone knew his secret.

It was several days later before his friend approached.

“I don’t know what the fuck kind of juju that was but don’t ever fucking come near me again,” he said calmly and quietly.

“What are you talking about?” asked Flip.

“You know what I’m talking about. I’ve run that scene through my head a million times. Every scene I’ve ever been in with you. I don’t know what or who you are but keep that shit away from me.”

“So, I guess a thank you for saving your sorry ass is out of the question?” he asked flippantly.

“If it was my time, it was my time. You fucked with God, dude. I’m transferring.” He stared at Flip, and he could see the fear in his eyes. “Don’t worry. I won’t tell your little secret. They’d all think I’m crazy anyway. Just stay the fuck away from me.”

He walked from the hut, and Flip let out a sigh of relief, but the sadness of losing his battle buddy was overwhelming for him. When his tour ended, he returned stateside and tried to live a normal life. His parents, now dead, had left him enough money to survive. Although, survive was a relative term for him. Traveling the country in a small motor home with only the necessities, he never stayed longer than he needed to.

Seeing Adam on the street had thrown his world into a spiral. He called out to him on the street, and Flip knew the voice, knew the sound of his friend, but couldn't turn. He wouldn't expose him to his curse. Walking out of the small diner, he turned toward the river, where he would follow it for the six miles toward the campground where he parked. It was his daily exercise routine.

"Flip! Flip!" he heard the call and tried to ignore it, but something about the voice made him turn. Fucking hell. Kane.

"Jesus! It's really you! Adam said he saw you," he said excitedly, pulling him in for a manly hug. "How are you, brother?"

"I'm okay," he said quietly, looking at the small woman at Kane's side.

"Oh, this is Aislinn, my girlfriend," he said proudly.

Flip couldn't help but let a small grin slip. Kane was so fucked up the last time he saw him that he never suspected he would find anyone that would make him settle down.

"Hi," he said shyly.

She didn't reach for his hand, and he was grateful but also curious as to why. Something about this woman put his senses on alert. It wasn't an evil alert but something more protective.

"Dude, it's so fucking good to see you. You've lost some weight. You look great!"

Flip looked down at his loose-fitting jeans and the baggy sweatshirt and shrugged. He knew that he wasn't the man that Kane remembered. His usually close-cropped black hair was long, held tight in a ponytail at his neck. The sparse beard made his face

look older, slivers of gray filtered throughout.

“I didn’t mean anything, Flip. You really look great. Why don’t you join us for breakfast?” he said.

“I just ate, but thanks. I really need to get back.”

“Where are you staying?” Kane reached for his arm and held tightly.

“I-I have a motor home, and I’m parked at the campground off Westfield and 30.”

“Jesus! That’s like seven miles from here. Why don’t you let me drive you back?”

“No, it’s okay. I like the walk, and it helps me clear my head,” he said quietly.

Aislinn eyed the big man, looking up into his dark eyes. Kane was tall, at least six-foot-three, but Flip was easily two or three inches taller and a good forty pounds heavier. She didn’t sense evil from him, but she did sense sadness. Uncharacteristically, she reached out and gripped his hand.

Kane was so surprised his mouth literally opened and formed a perfect ‘O.’ Aislinn held his hand and smiled up at the big man.

“It’s okay, you know,” she said quietly, smiling. “I’m different, too.”

Flip stepped back, jerking his hand away from the woman. She couldn’t know. How could she ever know he was different?

“I have to go.”

“Flip, brother, please. Here, take my card. I’d like to stay in touch. I might need some

help here soon.”

Fuck! You never refused a brother in need. Flip nodded and took the card.

“I’ll give you my number,” he said solemnly, “but I have to tell you I rarely answer my phone.”

“Fair enough, brother,” said Kane. “I just want to be able to get in touch with you if I need to.” Flip nodded and started to walk away. Aislinn called out to him, forcing him to stop in his tracks.

“I like the tribal tattoos. I know they have significance for you. They’re beautiful.” He frowned at her, nodding as they turned and entered the café.

Aislinn was indeed a strange woman, but what really had Flip perplexed was that his tattoos, hidden beneath his sweatshirt, covering his chest and arms, were invisible to her.

What the fuck!?

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Krauss looked at the scene of the playroom they had occupied for the last several hours. Hardly a speck of the room wasn't covered in blood. The mutilated bodies of the couple were literally scattered around the room. His stomach churned, and he knew that things were getting out of hand. His little vixen's blood lust was out of control. This was not what he signed up for.

Still lying on the floor, her legs spread wide, blood covering her body, she gripped the dead man's penis in her hand. The agony the man felt when she sliced his still-hard dick from his body must have been unimaginable. She danced around the room swinging the appendage in the air and then did unspeakable things with it. Even for him, it was more than he could handle.

His phone vibrated, and he looked down at the number.

Shit!

"Hello," he said quietly.

"You left work early last night. Are you okay?" asked his brother.

"I'm fine. Stop being such a worrywart, will you? It was slow last night, and they had it covered. I wasn't far away if they needed me. I was just tired." He looked around the room and started to smile but couldn't. Last night had really gotten out of hand, and he knew that if he didn't stop soon, it would kill him.

"You're my brother. Of course, I'm going to worry about you. I love you."

“I know you do, and I love you too,” he sighed.

“Well, I’ll be working all day, but if you need anything, just call. I’ll answer. You know I will. Are you off tonight?” he asked.

“Yea, I’m off for the next two nights.”

“Okay, maybe we can have dinner tomorrow night?”

“That sounds great,” he said, smiling into the phone. “I’ll see you then.”

He hit the end button and pocketed his phone. Walking toward the blonde-haired woman, he kicked the bottom of her bloody foot, and she moaned, turning to stare up at him.

“You’re showered? You don’t want to play together anymore?” she asked.

“I have to get to work,” he lied. “Can you handle this?”

“You know I can, baby,” she purred, sitting up. “Want me to give you something to remember me by?”

“No,” he laughed. “I won’t forget you. You can be assured of that. Besides, you’ll get me all bloody. You need to get cleaned up and then do your thing.” He waved his arm around the room and started to back out.

“What about tonight?” she asked.

“I can’t,” he said, not turning to face her. “I have a family obligation tonight.”

“But I want to play tonight,” she pouted.

“I know you do, but I just can’t. Besides, things are starting to heat up. Don’t you think we should cool down for a while?”

“You losing your nerve, doctor?” she said in a cold tone.

“No. And don’t fucking speak to me that way. Clean this shit up and get home. I’ll talk to you in a few days.” He left the playroom, his scrubs as clean as when he walked in the night before.

Downstairs, he grabbed his lab coat and shrugged it over his shoulders. As he cautiously opened the front door of the brownstone, he heard the laughter of the blonde upstairs. Laughter that would haunt his thoughts for a lifetime.

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Driving toward the university once again, Kane held tight to Aislinn's hand as if she might disappear at any moment.

"Your friend seemed jumpy this morning," she said quietly.

"Yea, I've been thinking about that. Adam said he was always different, and I knew that too. Things just seemed to happen when he was around. Unexplainable things. We were in the same unit my first few tours, and then he moved into an elite unit."

"What do you mean unexplainable things?" asked Aislinn.

"I don't even really know. It was more as if he was the good luck charm for our unit. When the odds seemed against us, suddenly, they turned in our favor. A weapon that was out of reach was suddenly within reach. It sounds crazy."

"It's not crazy at all. If my life has taught me nothing else, it's taught me that anything is possible and that crazy may be the biggest possibility of all." Kane nodded at her as he parked the vehicle outside of Dr. Brennan's building.

They found her in her office, still hidden behind the stacks of books and papers. She looked up from her computer and smiled at them.

"Well, good mornin' to you!" she said, standing to greet them. "I was hoping I would see the two of you this morning."

"Good morning, Angela," said Aislinn.

“So, how was your night?” she asked with a glint in her eyes.

“Actually, we read parts of your sister’s book, and it helped,” said Kane. “Aislinn had another vision, and I was touching her. I saw it too. I was able to call to her, and she came out of it. It was the most surreal thing I’ve ever experienced.”

“You are her anchor!” cried the little woman, clapping her hands. “I knew it! You’re able to pull her from the vision.”

“The vision was still horrible,” said Aislinn. “Nothing about that changed.”

“You can’t change what is real, child. But the fact that Kane can pull you from the depths of such horrible scenes will help you tremendously.” Aislinn nodded, and Kane reached for her hand, linking their fingers. Dr. Brennan smiled at them. An improvement.

Aislinn explained the scene from the night before and how Kane had called out to her. He said all the right things and pulled her toward him, the blood disappearing. Dr. Brennan took notes and nodded.

“What do we do now? We seem to be on the right path of helping Aislinn control the visions, but how do we help stop these heinous crimes?”

“That, my dear, is an entirely different matter. In order to do that, you would need to have the visions days in advance and identify the faces, track the criminal, and catch them in the act. A difficult task by any account. However, to expect that Aislinn should attempt to have the visions earlier could be detrimental to her health.”

Kane nodded, and Aislinn paled slightly. She wanted the visions to stop, not to speed up. There had to be a way to have a compromise.

“I want you to try to have positive visions, Aislinn,” she said. “Read the chapter on dream memory, and focus on the things it suggests tonight. I believe you have the ability to access positive visions, but you haven’t had the practice as yet. If you focus on positive things, beautiful things, I think your visions may change for you.”

“That would certainly be a change of events,” she said, grinning.

“Don’t worry, love. It will all work out for you, I promise. Now, when will you go to Ireland?” she asked. “I’d love for you to meet my sister.”

“Well, I haven’t really had time to think that far ahead,” said Aislinn, smiling at the older woman. “We have some things to figure out here first.”

“Yes,” said Dr. Brennan, nodding her head solemnly, “I suppose you do at that. Well, I’m here if you need anything at all. Don’t hesitate to call me. Just know this, Aislinn. You are normal, just better than normal. There is nothing wrong with you at all. Learn to control the visions, and you will be able to change the world.”

Aislinn nodded at the woman and hugged her, stepping back and smiling. Kane shook her delicate hand and felt the warmth seep into his body. Taking Aislinn’s hand, he led her from the building and back toward his truck.

“How do you feel about stopping at the mall?” she asked. Kane’s face scrunched up, and she laughed. “I need a few things, Kane. I don’t have a lot of clothes, and I’m going to need to start interviewing sooner or later.”

“Okay, for you, anything,” he said with a forced smile. Aislinn could only laugh, and Kane thought it might be the sweetest sound he’d ever heard.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Christopher Krauss waited for his brother patiently. They were close as children, so close that most people thought they were the same person. In recent years, since the murder of his wife and son, his brother Michael had distanced himself from Christopher. It was painful for him, and he missed him dearly. When Michael learned of their deaths, he plunged his fist through a wall, suffering irreparable nerve and tendon damage, forcing him to leave the world of an elite surgeon and serve in the less glamorous life of an emergency room doctor.

Christopher felt tremendous guilt, even after all these years, thinking of that night. Had he been with his brother, perhaps he could have stopped him from punching the wall and ruining his career.

The restaurant was busy with a Wednesday evening dinner crowd, and he took a slow sip of the Chardonnay in front of him. He was used to his brother's tardiness and didn't really mind it any more. Even as children, Michael was always late for school, the last to get dressed or eat breakfast. Seeing his brother walk in the front door, he stood to greet him.

"Michael," he said, pulling him into a hug, "it's so good to see you! I've missed you."

"It's only been a few weeks, Christopher," he laughed. Secretly, he loved that his brother held him tight and wanted to see him more. If he could just tell him the things in his mind, the things that made him sleep less and worry more.

"I know that, but still, I miss your company, Michael. You need to come around more often."

“I promise I’ll try,” he said, sitting across from his brother. The waitress held up the bottle of wine, and Michael nodded. Pouring the glass, she set the bottle back in the bucket of ice and handed him the menu.

“Why don’t you and I take a trip together? We could go to Vegas or Paris! We both have vacation time due to us. Let’s do this!” he said excitedly.

“Christopher, you’re getting ahead of yourself. I’m needed at the hospital.”

“I know your work is important to you, Michael. Mine is important to me as well. We need this, though, you and me.” He pleaded with his brother, and Michael nearly gave in. Not yet. Not quite yet. He wasn’t done with his mission.

“I’ll think about it, okay? Let’s just enjoy a wonderful dinner.” Christopher nodded, and they gave their orders, chatting casually.

Two hours later, Michael stepped into the chilly night air, exhausted. Keeping up the ruse with his brother was proving far more difficult than anticipated. Just a little longer. Just a little while longer, and he would finish his task.

He pulled the collar of his coat up around his neck and hugged his brother, waving as he walked toward his car. Feeling the vibrating phone in his pocket, he looked down and saw the number.

Not tonight. I just can’t do this tonight.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Adam sat in the leather chair across from Aislinn and Kane, listening to what had transpired over the last few days. He was glad that she was feeling better, and he was very happy that Kane had run into Flip. He worried about his friend and hoped that he would reach out soon.

“Why don’t you send an anonymous e-mail to the police?” he asked.

“That’s actually a good idea,” said Kane. “The only problem is that they can trace everything these days. We would really need to have a computer whiz that could set up a dummy account and bounce off several servers. Even then, I’m not sure they would believe it. I mean, a respected emergency room doctor killing people sounds crazy, even to me.”

Aislinn nodded and stood to grab a bottle of water from the refrigerator. Walking back toward the sofa, she stopped cold in her tracks staring at the television. Kane turned to see her ghostly white face and followed her eyes to the screen.

“Turn it up!” he yelled at Adam. Adam grabbed the television remote and turned up the volume.

Once again, police are faced with a gruesome and grizzly double homicide, this time in the upscale neighborhood of Hidden Cove. Carla and George Stuart, both retired, were found in an upstairs bedroom, butchered and mutilated. The couple had a private room that leads detectives to believe they were into an S&M, bondage-type of lifestyle, but it’s unclear if that has any bearing on the murders.

Neighbors say the couple lived in the townhome for nearly ten years. They were

quiet, friendly, and kept to themselves. Mr. Stuart is a retired government official, having previously been with the Internal Revenue Service. Mrs. Stuart is a retired high school principal. The victims have one son in San Francisco, who we are told is on his way to identify the bodies.

Carol, back to you.

“It happened. What we saw, it actually happened,” she whispered, gripping the back of the sofa.

“Aislinn, baby, look at me,” said Kane. Aislinn looked up from the television and stared into Kane’s green eyes. “There is nothing we can do now. Nothing. It’s going to be okay.” She nodded and fell into his arms.

Adam watched the scene, turning the volume down but following the story. It was unbelievable that she was able to see the visions days before they would happen. No one would ever believe her, no one. They had to stop this madness, though.

“I think we need to find someone to send the anonymous note,” he said, looking at Kane and Aislinn.

“I think you’re right, but I have an idea. I want to call and see if Dr. Krauss was working the night of the murders.” Adam nodded at his friend, watching him dial his cell phone.

“Yes, could you tell me if Dr. Krauss was on duty Monday evening?” He waited, staring at Adam over the top of Aislinn’s head. “I see. Right. Okay, thank you.”

“He was working until three a.m. when his shift ended. We need to wait to find out the time of death.” Adam nodded again.

“I can find that out pretty quick. I’m friends with the coroner. Let me call Spook about the e-mail.”

“Spook? Our Spook?” said Kane with a grin.

“One and the same, brother. He set up the security system and computer systems in my office. The dude is amazing.” Kane nodded as Adam dialed the phone.

“Brother! Yea, I’m good, man. Hey, I need a favor, and it’s going to take some explaining. Are you good to listen now?”

Adam explained what was happening, and even Kane could hear the expletives coming from the phone line. Spook had been their comms wizard in the field and was now working as consultant for a tech company. He lived a quiet, unassuming life in one of the trendier neighborhoods downtown, keeping to himself. Adam hung up his phone.

“He’ll do it. He’s going to make a fake account and route it so that no one will ever know where it came from, delaying the delivery just a bit. He said the police should receive the e-mail by sometime tomorrow morning. Now, all we do is wait.”

“Wait,” whispered Aislinn. “What if we wait too long and someone else dies? I mean, why is this guy killing people? Isn’t that what we should find out?”

“We will, baby, I promise. But we need to stop him or at least put a scare in him.”

“What if he runs?” she asked.

Adam pecked away at the computer and looked up from the screen, suddenly aware that Aislinn could be right. Krauss might frighten and leave the city or even the country.

“I’m going to head down to the coroner’s and see if my friend can give me any information about how these two died. If we can link anything to the previous murders, we can start to gather theory and help the cops do their jobs.”

“I think we need to go to the emergency room,” said Aislinn.

“What? Why? Are you sick?” said Kane, touching her arms and head.

“No. No, I’m not sick, but if I touch him again, maybe we can see more. Maybe, we can see something else,” she said softly.

“No! No fucking way! Aislinn, are you crazy, honey? That shit made you so sick you couldn’t lift your head!”

“I know, Kane, but if we don’t do this and someone else dies, I’ll feel even worse. Please, we can just say we need him to check something, vision problems because of my headaches, anything. I just need him to touch me.”

“Christ! Woman, you’re asking a lot of me!”

“Kane,” said Adam calmly, “I think she’s right. I could go with you and maybe tell him I wanted a second opinion or something.”

“No, we aren’t going to involve you anymore than I already have!”

“Brother, I’m in this to the end. You know that.”

“I know,” he said, grimacing. “There has to be another way.”

He pulled Aislinn into his arms and held her tight. Touching Krauss again meant she would expose herself to all his demented torture once more. What would happen if

she couldn't find her way out of this vision? What would happen if he couldn't help her find her way out?

"Alright, we'll go if he's working this evening. But I do the talking, not you. Adam? Can you wait for us in the car? If we don't come out in twenty minutes, you come in."

"Done. I could call Flip," he said hesitantly.

"I don't think he'd come," said Kane. "We need to give him some space to figure out what's going on with him."

Adam nodded as they finished their meal. A few hours and they would be right back where this nightmare began. In the hands of Krauss.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

The emergency room was slow but with steady streams of people filtering through. The male nurse behind the desk lifted his head to see the couple that looked somewhat familiar approach.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Aislinn softly. “I was here about a week ago and saw Dr. Krauss. I was wondering if he’s in tonight. I’m having some residual headaches.”

“You’re in luck. He’s in the lounge. I’ll go get him. Why don’t you two have a seat right here,” he said, walking them into a curtained area.

Aislinn nodded at the nurse and hopped onto the table, her hands shaking with fear. She shivered, not from the cold but from terror. The terror of what might come tonight.

“I’m right here, honey,” said Kane, standing at her back. “Nothing will happen to you.”

“Hello, I’m Dr. Krauss,” he said, extending his hand.

“Y-yes,” said Aislinn, slowly raising her hand, “we met last week. I had a severe headache.” He eyed the young woman up and down and then stared at Kane.

“Right, yes, of course! Sorry, I see a lot of people here.” He shook her hand solidly and then shook Kane’s hand. “Tell me about these headaches.”

“Well, they have plagued me for years. I get them suddenly, and they are quite debilitating. I just want to be sure there’s nothing serious happening.”

“Have you had an MRI? CT Scan?” He listed off a dozen other procedures, and Aislinn nodded at them all, eyeing him cautiously. “Unfortunately, that’s about all we have in our medical hands at this time. I can give you something for the pain and something that may stop the headache at onset, but that’s about it. Do you need a referral to a neurologist?”

“No, no, that won’t be necessary. I just wanted to be sure,” she said sweetly.

“Well, you look as though you’re in great hands,” he said, grinning at Kane. Kane nodded at the doctor but didn’t smile. “No charge for today. We’re slow tonight anyway, but don’t tell administration. They’d hang me.” He winked at the two and left the exam room.

Kane grasped Aislinn’s hand, and they strode out the sliding doors into the parking lot, where Adam waited anxiously by Kane’s truck.

“Well?” he asked expectantly.

“It was different,” said Kane. “I didn’t feel the zing. I’ve never felt something so different before. It was more...”

“Sadness,” said Aislinn.

“Yes.”

“I didn’t get a sick, evil feeling. I got sadness. I wonder if he’s feeling remorse.”

“God, I have no clue,” said Adam. “The mind is an amazing thing. He could have

split personality disorder. His mind could give off two people's psyche."

"Could that really happen?" asked Kane.

"I honestly don't know, brother, but we'll know in the next forty-eight hours. If Aislinn has another vision, we'll know more about the good doctor."

Adam rode back to Kane's home and then took his car home. He hoped that Aislinn wouldn't suffer with another vision, and yet hoped she would see something that could help them stop the murders.

He turned his car onto 30 and spotted the campground off in the distance, the very one that Flip was staying at. Pulling off at the exit, he took the long dirt road back into the campground. Campers of various sizes and shapes filled the spots. He knew that many people lived here year-round and wondered how someone could survive in such a small space. His own house was too large for just him, but he was a man that needed room.

Taking the big loop around the park, he spotted Flip sitting near a burning fire pit in front of a large motor home. The big awning stretched out over a few folding chairs and a picnic table, his dark face lost in thought as he stared at the fire.

Adam parked his car and walked toward the campsite. Flip never looked up as if not hearing him at all. Yet Adam knew his friend heard everything. He was trained to hear everything, and Phillip 'Flip' Cho would never allow anyone to sneak up on him.

"Why are you here?" he asked coldly.

"Well, hello to you too, asshole," he replied.

“Hello.”

“Flip? What the fuck, dude! We’re brothers. I’m worried about you and your sorry ass. I want to help you if I can.”

“You can’t help me, Doc. No one can,” he said, still staring into the flames.

“Flip, I know you’re different.” His head snapped up, and a flash of anger filled his face, making Adam take a step back. “It’s okay, Flip. I’m different too. You know that.”

“I don’t know fuck! You’re not different, not like me.”

“Really? You wanna compare dick sizes? Look, I don’t know what your issue is, but I know that I carry my own burden, Flip. Didn’t you ever wonder how I saved Gilman? Thomas? Did that not ever occur to you?”

Flip stared at his old friend across the flames. His face flickered in the red and orange of the flames, his blue eyes bright and intelligent as always. He had wondered how Doc saved the two men. The others said it was impossible, the internal bleeding, the damage done to limbs, beyond repair. Yet somehow, Doc saved them both.

“So, what, you’re saying you got fucking super doctor powers?” he asked.

“Something like that,” he grimaced, shifting from one foot to another, kicking at the gravel.

Flip stared at him and reached beside him, grabbing a beer. He gestured for Adam to take the cold bottle, jerking his head to the seat beside him. Adam took the beer and sat in the flimsy chair.

“So... talk,” said Flip. “How did you save Gilman and Thomas? Let’s not forget Folger, too.”

“Folger, yea, I forgot about her.” He stared at the dark sky for a moment and then leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees. “I see everything when I’m working on their bodies. Everything.”

“What do you mean? Like their thoughts?” he asked.

“No. I see their injuries without even opening them up. I know what’s bleeding and where. I see it. I see the heart pumping or not. I see the bullet. I see the artery. I see everything, and I know what I have to do to fix it. I saw the bullet that ripped through Gilman’s spleen. I saw the artery bleeding out in Thomas’s leg, and I knew that Folger’s brain was swelling and hemorrhaging at the same time. And I never even picked up the scalpel to see that.”

Flip stared at his friend, his dark gaze intimidating and uncertain. Could that be what happened? Is that how he saved their friends?

“If you were to touch me... If you touch me, you can see if I’m sick?” he asked quietly.

“Are you sick?” Flip didn’t answer but just stared straight ahead. “Yes. If I touch you, I can see if there are any life-threatening illnesses.”

Flip stood and turned toward Adam, his huge frame looking down at his friend. Adam rose to meet his stare, although he did have to look up a few inches. He waited and realized Flip wanted him to touch him. Adam nodded and reached out, touching the side of his friend’s neck, the only bare spot accessible.

He closed his eyes and focused. The heartbeat was faster than normal, but not

unusually so. Blood pressure was solid, pulse solid. Organs were intact and functioning well. His brain was an interesting picture. An entire section was generating energy at an alarming speed, but there was no indication of a tumor.

“You have no life-threatening illnesses, Flip.” His friend nodded, letting out a long slow breath. “Your brain, however, is functioning at an alarming speed in one particular area.”

Flip plopped back into his seat, taking a long swig of his beer.

“Now, are you going to tell me why you thought you were sick?”

“I didn’t think I was sick. I wanted to see if it was something... curable.” Adam sat next to his friend again and stared at him, waiting patiently.

“Fuck! Are you going to talk to me or not?”

“Shut the fuck up,” he said through clenched teeth. “Yes. Just give me a minute.”

Adam waited patiently for his friend to gather his thoughts. When Flip started to speak, Adam didn’t think he would ever stop. The words flowed so freely, and without pause, he knew that he had been holding this in for a long time.

“So, you can move objects at will?” he asked. Flip nodded.

“See that chair?” He pointed to the chair across the fire pit, and Adam nodded. Without flinching, he flung the chair across the road. Adam didn’t move, didn’t let out a sound. Thinking he needed more convincing, Flip pointed to his motorcycle. He leaned forward and stared at the vehicle.

Adam watched, mesmerized by the palpable energy coming from his friend. The

motorcycle lifted off the ground, seemingly floating on air, and moved a dozen feet to the left, and then settled carefully back on its kickstand. Flip sat back in the chair and looked down at his feet.

“That convince you?” he said with a sarcastic tone.

“That’s fucking cool, dude,” he said, smiling. “I know you don’t think so, and I get it, but it’s fucking cool. You know, I know that you saw Kane the other day. He’s different too.”

“Kane is? I mean, I sensed something about his woman. She was nice, kind of sweet in a way. She wasn’t anything I would have pictured Kane with, but she was different.”

“She’s definitely different. We all should sit down and compare stories,” he said with a grin. “Look, Flip. I know this is hard for you, brother, but we’re here for you. We’re always here for you. If we’re freaks, then by God, let’s be freaks together.”

Flip laughed for the first time in forever. His mind relaxed just a bit. He nodded and clinked the neck of his beer bottle to Adam’s.

“Alright, man, I’ll think about it.”

“Promise me you won’t up and leave anytime soon?”

“Promise,” he said, smiling at his friend.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Kane was lost in a dream with Aislinn that was slowly swallowing her, consuming her in its gray images of sadness and despair. There was no blood, no horror, just a profound and weighted agony of loss and tragedy. He held tight to her hand as they slept, wandering through a house that neither knew. Crying from another room turned her attention, and he followed her through the large archway.

Krauss sat on a sofa, two women beside him, consoling him. His face was red with grief and sorrow, tears flowing freely down his face. The black suit he wore was well-made, the starched dark blue shirt and tie matching the fog of pain that filled the room.

Aislinn felt the sorrow and loss so heavily she thought she might drown in it. Someone he loved was gone. His pain was excruciating, the loss devastating.

It's okay, baby. I'm right here. It's only sadness.

It's more than sadness. It's despair.

Kane watched the scene, Krauss glassy-eyed, staring straight ahead. People offered him food and drink, and he refused. He stood and moved toward another part of the house. No, not a house, a funeral parlor. He entered a room filled with people seated on rows of chairs. Looking up, he spotted the two caskets, one large and one small.

Oh, God, no!

Krauss walked slowly down the aisle, all eyes turning to see him. His eyes focused ahead on the caskets. Peering over the edge, Kane saw them, a woman and child. The

woman was probably forty, pretty, with light brown hair. Her body was still, hands crossed on her chest, a rosary wrapped in her fingers.

The child was a boy, perhaps twelve. His dark suit fit loosely, his dark hair much like his father's. Krauss let out a gut-wrenching sob and leaned over the caskets. His body convulsed, shaking violently over the bodies, pleading for the nightmare to end.

I can't watch this.

I'm here, Aislinn. Come to me, baby.

Aislinn moved toward Kane's voice. The last image she saw was a man's hand resting on the back of Krauss's black suit, comforting him.

Aislinn sat up with a gasp of air. Her body was cold and filled with sadness. This was unlike any vision she had experienced before. It wasn't the happy vision that Dr. Brennan had hoped for, but it was something other than murder. She was seeing the sadness through someone's eyes. Perhaps through Krauss's eyes.

Kane woke abruptly and stared at Aislinn.

"You felt it too? Sadness, loss," he said.

"Yes. It was terrible. I-I don't understand."

"I don't either," he said, pulling her into his arms. "It's completely different than what we felt before. The hatred, the anger, the violence before were overwhelming. This was more. More... human."

She nodded and relaxed against his shoulder.

“It was something else too, Kane. It wasn’t a vision of the future. I can’t explain how I know that, but I just know it was a vision of the past.”

“I felt that too,” he said. “It’s part of what made it different. Like I was reliving a nightmare of someone else. Krauss, I suppose. It gives us something to go on. If we can find a death that is related to him, we may be onto something.”

She nodded again and yawned. Kane pulled her tight against his body, her breasts pressing against his side and chest. The feel of her made the tension and anxiety slip away. The sadness in the vision was so overwhelming he felt it to the bone. He knew that he would feel the same sadness if something were to happen to Aislinn.

It was all so confusing to him. A few short weeks ago, he was rounding up bail jumpers, embezzlers, mob crossers, and the scum of the earth. Now, all he wanted to do was lie in bed with Aislinn all day.

Kane realized in that same thought that he hadn’t checked his work e-mail in over a week. Although he was comfortable, eventually, he would have to go back to work for a paycheck. Right now, he didn’t care. He only wanted Aislinn.

He tilted her chin up toward his face and kissed her sweet, red lips. She moaned into his mouth, and Kane smiled. She truly loved him. Her fingers danced lightly over the rough skin of his face and neck, her pelvis grinding into his now rigid cock. He smelled her sex, and it took every ounce of his control not to plow into her.

“Aislinn, my sweet, sweet Aislinn,” he said against her mouth. “I love you so very much.”

“I love you too, Kane. Please, don’t ever let me go,” she said with a tear.

“Hey,” he said, looking down at wiping the tear away with his thumb, “what’s the

tear for? I'm not going anywhere."

"Promise," she whispered against his mouth.

"Aislinn, look at me, baby. Look at me." She looked up into his eyes, the green pools filled with desire and love. "Baby, I'm not going anywhere, and neither are you. I know this was all whirlwind fast, but we both know it's something special. Hell, it's magical, and that's the fucking truth of it. I don't understand it any more than you do, but I'm yours, and you are definitely mine. Understood?"

"Understood, sir," she smiled, giving him a small salute.

"Sir? I think I like that," he grinned. He pushed her knees apart, his fingers finding the wetness waiting for him. The moan of pleasure from Aislinn made him smile. Sucking her nipple, she gripped his hair, holding his head to her chest.

Plying her knees further apart, Kane settled between her legs and let his tip slide in, slowly, agonizingly slow. Inch by inch, he filled Aislinn, her body rising to meet his, her pulse quickening with his. Their movements were like a perfect dance on the sheets, perfect harmony and rhythm. When she gasped with delight and satisfaction, Kane released his own.

He kissed her face, pressing his forehead to hers, and then lifted his eyes, suddenly aware of something very important.

"Baby, we didn't use protection," he said calmly.

"Oh... oh, wow... I... oh..." she repeated. "I can try to get on the pill as soon as possible, but until we know what happened here, I could do the morning-after pill?"

"No," he said resolutely. "If you're pregnant, I'll be happy as fuck. If not, that's okay,

too. You good with that?” he asked.

“I’m good with that, Kane,” she smiled. “Better than good with that. Can you imagine? A little boy with my hair and your eyes running around making us crazy.”

Kane could imagine that. He’d seen it in his mind a hundred times since he’d met Aislinn. A little boy and a little girl, one of each following them around in a big house, a big dog trailing the kids, and Aislinn happy. Yea, he’d imagined it. He’d actually dared to imagine a future.

How fucking great was that?

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

“So, he’s doing okay?” asked Kane, looking across the table at his friend.

“Yea, man,” said Adam. “He’s got some special shit happening in his brain like the rest of us, but he’s doing okay. He said he’d be around if we needed him. I have to say. It was pretty impressive. His ability, his power, or whatever you want to call it, is pretty fucking impressive.”

“Flip. It’s hard to imagine and yet easy to imagine. The dude was fucking amazing in the field. He was the strongest fucker I’d ever been around in the gym. Massive son-of-a-bitch. I hope we see more of him.” Adam nodded, seated across from Kane at the diner. Aislinn was across the street buying groceries.

“Spook sent the e-mail last night. We’ll see if it gets any attention today.”

“We can only hope,” said Kane. “Aislinn had another vision last night, but it was different. Like seriously different. I think Krauss lost someone he loved to violence.”

“Well, that’s easy to check,” said Adam, pulling out his laptop. He punched in a few keys and brought up obituaries from the last year.

“Hmmm, nothing in the last twelve months. Let me check further back. Bingo!” he said, turning the laptop. “Elizabeth Krauss and Thomas Krauss, wife and son of Dr. Michael Krauss, were killed in a hit-and-run accident.”

“Damn! That’s pretty fucked up. Did they ever catch the driver?” asked Kane.

“I’m looking,” he said, tapping away on the keys once more. “Jesus, no, but the car

was pulling out of a club known as a swingers' club. The club doesn't have security cameras for obvious reasons, so nothing was caught on tape. Elizabeth and Thomas were walking home from his piano lessons."

"That would make any man crazy," said Kane under his breath.

"I can't even imagine, dude. But it makes sense now. He's killing people who are in that lifestyle."

"What about the blonde?" asked Kane, more to himself than to Adam. Adam shrugged his shoulder. "Maybe she's just someone who was willing to help. In the dreams, man, in the dreams, she is one fucked-up bitch."

"Well, it makes a bit more sense now, but we still have to find a way to prove it."

"We? Adam, I don't want you involved in this. It could ruin your career," said Kane.

"Fuck you, asshole! We're brothers first. You hear me? I'm involved whether you like it or not."

Kane smiled up at his friend and nodded one more time. Catching a glimpse of something familiar in the window, Kane looked across the street to see Aislinn with two shopping totes filled with food. She looked up and smiled, then looked both ways and stepped into the street.

Without warning, without so much as a screeching tire, a garbage truck sped around the corner headed straight for her. Kane's heart stopped in that moment. He knew he would never make it in time. He was going to lose her.

Aislinn stopped. She felt the terror gripping her chest and knew that it was Kane's terror as well. Standing stock still, she waited for the impact of the truck. Except it

never came. At the last moment, the truck swerved to a stop, turning crossways in the street. The crowds of people stared, unsure of what had just occurred.

Kane, followed by Adam, stormed out of the café, racing towards Aislinn. She fell into his open arms, shaking from the shock of what almost occurred. Looking around the street, she knew he was there. She could feel it. Standing outside the café, just to the right of the windows in a small opening where he was unseen, Flip.

Aislinn ran across the street, dropping the bags on the sidewalk. She stopped in front of Flip and then hugged his waist, her face buried in his huge chest.

“I knew you were here. I could feel you,” she said, crying.

“Hey, hey, don’t cry, Aislinn. It’s okay,” he said quietly. Flip wasn’t sure what to do. He looked over her head at Kane and Adam, their shock-filled grins telling him that it really was okay. He placed one large hand on Aislinn’s back and rubbed small circles. “It’s okay.”

“You saved me,” she whispered.

Flip couldn’t help but smile at the little woman hugging him. She was so small, and Kane was nearly as big him. Kane reached out a hand, and Flip gripped his friend’s palm.

“Thank you, Flip. Thank you. I...” Kane swallowed.

“What the fuck?!” said Adam. “How did you know?”

“I didn’t know, not really,” he said shyly. “I just felt something. I don’t know. I felt like I should be at this spot this morning. I don’t know why.”

“Well, I, for one, am eternally grateful, brother,” said Kane. The garbage truck had already moved along, the crowds dispersing at the spectacle that none could believe. “Let us at least buy you breakfast, brother.” Flip nodded.

“Okay. I think we need to talk anyway,” he said softly. “I think you all might be in trouble.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The desk clerk was busy trying to enter the data of an elderly patient, his head scanning the messy handwriting when five police officers in uniform and one in a suit walked into the emergency room. It wasn't unusual, but it also wasn't necessarily a daily occurrence.

The suit stepped up to the desk, flashing a very official badge and identification.

“I'm Detective Barnes. I'd like to speak with Dr. Krauss,” he said calmly.

“Dr. Krauss is up on the third floor in radiology,” said the desk agent.

“Would you please page him to come down? Unless you'd prefer we go up to the third floor,” grinned the detective.

“No, no, that won't be necessary. I'll page him.”

A few moments later, the desk clerk's voice could be heard on the paging system. He led the officers and detective to a patient conference room, where they waited patiently.

The door opened and a tall, dark-haired man entered the room. Flashes of silver could be seen mixed with the darkness, his skin color was good, but he was starting to show

signs of age. Fine lines around his eyes and mouth, just a hint of wrinkles across his forehead. He appeared to be in good physical condition, other than just the hint of a small belly.

“Dr. Krauss? I’m Detective Barnes,” he said, offering his hand.

“Detective,” he said, shaking the hand. “To what do I owe this entourage from our city’s finest?”

“Dr. Krauss, we received an anonymous tip this morning that you may know something about the grisly murders of the Wascoms and the Stuarts.”

“The couples who were killed in their homes?” he asked. “Why would I know anything about those people? They weren’t even brought to the hospital, that I’m aware.” Confusion filled his face, his heart beating faster, small beads of sweat lining his forehead.

“No, sir, they weren’t. The letter indicated that you might, in fact, be the murderer.” He waited, watching the doctor’s reaction. Twenty years in law enforcement taught you a few things about people and their ability to lie. The first was there was always something that would give them away. A twitch, a movement in their eyes, a shift of their feet, something. The second was unless you were a psychopath, no one could keep up the lies forever.

“That’s preposterous! I’m a physician, for God’s sake! I try to help people, not kill them!” he yelled.

“Doctor, let’s not make a scene here. If you would just agree to come down to the police station with us, we’d like to ask you a few questions. It can all be cleared up easily.”

“Fine, but I’m calling my lawyer,” he barked.

“Do you need a lawyer, Dr. Krauss?” smiled the detective.

“Don’t give me your television cop psycho-babble detective. I know my rights, and I’m calling my attorney to have him present during questioning. I’ll answer your questions and prove how absurd this whole thing is.”

Krauss made the call and then followed the detectives out of the hospital. They agreed to forego the handcuffs in light of his cooperation, for which he was eternally grateful. By the time they reached the station, his attorney was waiting dutifully on the steps.

Led to a small conference room with a two-way mirror, Krauss sat next to his attorney while Detective Barnes and two other officers asked him questions. Their original ploy of trying to shock him with photos of the victims proved useless.

“I’m a doctor, detective. I’ve seen bodies in worse condition than this.” Barnes frowned and nodded, putting the photos back into their folder.

“Detective, this entire line of questioning is absurd. My client was working at the hospital on the evening of both murders. If you’d just check the records, you’ll see that he was on duty and seeing patients.”

“Alright, Dr. Krauss, we’re done for now. Please don’t leave town. I may need to ask you a few more questions before we’re through.” Krauss nodded and pushed back in his chair. Leaving the building, he stepped into the cool afternoon air. Rain was coming again, always rain.

Page 25

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

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Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

“They released him,” said Adam.

“Damn! It was a long shot, but I really hoped they were able to get him off the street,” said Kane.

“The police were able to verify that he was on duty the night of both murders. The records indicated that he was seeing patients while the murders were taking place. It was airtight.”

“This can’t be,” whispered Aislinn. “I know what I saw, and I’m never wrong about this. Never.” Kane pulled her in for a hug, kissing the top of her head. He knew what he saw as well, and he knew that Krauss was a murderer.

“What do we do now?” asked Adam.

“I-I don’t know,” said Aislinn. “I’ve actually never been able to get anyone to listen to me. This is all new to me from the perspective of trying to stop the killer. Just the fact that all of you listened to me, believe me, is remarkable for me. I don’t know where to go from here. What I do know is that if he kills again or plans to kill again, I’ll see it.”

“Maybe we try again. Going to the police, I mean,” said Adam.

Flip sat quietly on the big sofa, his massive frame taking up enough space for three people. His worn jeans torn at the knees, his large bear-like paws resting on his thighs. He said nothing but watched the group interact, his mind racing.

“There is something odd happening here,” he said quietly.

“No shit, a psycho is murdering couples left and right, and we can’t get anyone to listen to us,” said Adam.

“Not that, Captain Obvious,” Flip said sarcastically. Adam and Kane smiled. It was the first sign of the old Flip, the Flip that they knew from the Army. Sarcastic, witty, fun. He was still in there. “Doesn’t it seem odd to anyone that we’ve been thrown together after all this time of being apart?”

“What do you mean?” asked Kane.

“None of us knew that the others were special when we were serving together. We suspected maybe but didn’t really know. Do you really think it’s a coincidence that you were thrust into Aislinn’s life and then Adam and then me? I think there is more at play here, but I don’t know what.”

They all looked at Flip with a mix of curiosity and confusion. There was something happening between their little band, but they were unsure what to call it or if they should call it anything for fear it would be real.

“Look,” he said, standing to his full height, “I’ve been able to do what I do for as long as I can remember. All of you have had your... gifts as well. So, why now? Why now do we find one another here and now?”

“I think he’s right,” said Aislinn softly. “It was no accident that Kane saw me coming out of the office building that day. And it was no accident that he felt compelled to follow me. I also don’t believe it was an accident that Adam got involved, or Flip, for that matter. I mean, think of it. Flip is moving around the country, going from one location to another, and then he suddenly decides to make this his home for a while. Here and now. Why? I think all of this is happening as it should.”

“What do you mean? Like a calling of the Avengers or something?” smiled Kane.

“Call it what you want, but it’s obvious that we’re all stronger when we’re together. These gifts, or whatever you want to call them, could change the world.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” said Adam. “I think if the world knew, we would be picked up by the government and dissected for fun.” Aislinn winced, and Flip gave a low growl of disapproval.

“What if there are others like us out there?” asked Kane. “I mean, if there are four of us, there has to be more.”

“That’s true, but where do we start?” asked Aislinn.

“I don’t know,” said Kane, “first we need to figure out what’s happening here with Krauss, and then we address everything else.”

“Okay, so we know that Krauss killed those people, but we can’t prove it. What happens now?” asked Adam.

“Now, we wait until I get another dream. All we can do is hope that it will be in time to stop him. I have to find a way not to turn away from the dream as it’s happening. If I stay in the dream, follow it all the way through, I may be able to find a clue as to where the next murder will take place.”

“Don’t you think that could be dangerous?” asked Kane.

“I don’t know. I’m not sure I know anything anymore, but I do know that we have to find a way to stop this man. Maybe we should all go see Dr. Brennan together?” said Aislinn.

“Who is Dr. Brennan?” asked Flip nervously.

“She’s a professor of Paranormal, Parapsychology, and Dream Study. She’s helped me to understand what’s happening and for Kane to learn how to help while I’m in the dream.”

“Wait, you mean you see what she sees? You’re in her dream, in her head? Dude, that’s fucked up,” said Flip. Aislinn smiled at the big man.

“It’s not fucked up,” said Kane, laughing.

“Maybe you’re a dream walker,” said Flip. All eyes turned to him, their expressions telling him that they didn’t understand the term. “Dream walkers are common in many cultures. Native American, Egyptian, Japanese, and Samoan cultures have some version of dream walkers in their history. True dream walkers can find their way into anyone’s dreams and follow them. Is that what it’s like for you? Are you following her through the dream?”

“Yea, that’s exactly what it’s like. It’s like I’m standing behind her, following her from room to room, from scene to scene. I have no control other than to follow, and then when I need to, I call out to her, pull her back. But that has nothing to do with my ability to feel the ‘zap’ when I touch a bad guy.”

“I think that’s separate, but as for the dream, you can’t do that for the next one,” said Aislinn. “You have to let me see the dream all the way through.”

“Okay, okay,” said Adam. “Let’s get back to Dr. Brennan. Do you think she can see us today?”

“Only one way to find out,” said Aislinn, picking up the phone. Ten minutes later, they left Kane’s apartment and headed toward the university.

“This should be fun,” said Flip under his breath, all eyes turning toward him. “A professor is going to tell us what we all already know. We’re fucked up.”

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Dr. Brennan felt the rain approaching deep in her bones. At sixty-one, there were days that arthritis seemed to ravage her body, leaving her barely able to move. She carried the large stack of papers down the long corridor toward her office, feeling them slide precariously from one side to the other.

“Let me help you, Dr. Brennan,” said the sweet voice of a woman behind her.

“Oh, Deborah! Thank you, dear, you’re such a love.” She gladly released the papers to the young woman as they walked toward her office. Opening the door, she stepped behind her desk and cleared a spot for the new stack that awaited her. The young woman set the papers down and smiled at the older woman.

“I was hoping to speak with you about a potential opportunity as a graduate assistant with you, Dr. Brennan. I know your last one graduated,” she said, smiling.

“Oh yes, yes, he did. I’ve been scattered, as you can see from my office, since then.” She waved her arms at the stacks of books and papers, her small arms flailing around the office. The younger woman looked around the small space and smiled.

“Well, perhaps we could do it on a trial basis. Let me work with you for a few weeks, and if it works out, you could bring me on full-time,” she said, smiling.

“I’ll tell you what, dear, you submit your transcripts and a resume, and I’ll review it with the department chair. If all is well, we’ll get you on board as quick as possible. Lord knows I need it!”

“Thank you, Dr. Brennan! You won’t regret it!” The younger woman reached for Dr.

Brennan and pulled her into a hug. Dr. Brennan froze. The feelings coming off the woman were beyond anything she'd ever experienced before. The emotion was almost crippling. Visions of blackness, pure blackness, and something else. Something more terrifying and more evil.

She released the older woman and turned with a wave to head out the door, but not before slamming into a large male body.

"Oh, excuse me," she said, smiling up at the big man.

She pushed her blonde hair from her face as they watched her walk down the hallway. Aislinn's face was pale, completely void of color. Kane rubbed his arm, his whole-body sizzling with nerve endings. They stepped inside the tiny, cluttered office to see Dr. Brennan staring at the doorway.

"Th-that was her, wasn't it, child?" she said. Aislinn nodded her head, barely perceptible nod.

"What do you mean?" asked Adam.

"That was the woman in the dreams, the one with Krauss, the blonde."

"Holy shit! Should we stop her?" said Adam.

"And say what?" said Kane. "Hey, you don't know us, but we see your evil in our dreams. Would you mind coming with us? Don't think that would fly, brother."

"I felt it," said Dr. Brennan. "I felt the evil when she hugged me. It was like I was choking on cotton. My whole head filled with images. She was thinking of it. She was thinking of killing again and running the details through her head."

“Why was she in here?” asked Aislinn.

“She wanted to know if she could be my new graduate assistant. I told her I would review her application, but honestly, I don’t think my old body can handle being around her energy. I think it would eventually kill me.” Seemingly from nowhere, Flip handed the older woman a glass of water. “Well, thank you, dear. My, aren’t you a big one!”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, smiling at the older woman. “My name is Flip... Philip Cho. I’m friends with Kane and Aislinn and that big ugly one back there.”

“Hello, dear, and you are?”

“I’m Adam Thorn, ma’am. Dr. Adam Thorn.”

“Doctor? Oh, how lovely. Well, take a seat.”

She looked around her office and realized not only did she not have enough seats for the group, but that in a matter of no time, the air would be completely sucked out of the space by the three large men filling the room now.

“Perhaps we should go to a coffee shop?” said Adam.

“Let’s go down to the faculty cafeteria. It should be relatively quiet at this time of day.”

She led them back down the long corridor and down a flight of stairs to another corridor. The building was “L-shaped,” the second, extended hallways on both floors shorter than the first. Once inside the cafeteria, Aislinn noticed that the three men took in everything within their view. It was as if they were making tick marks on a checklist.

“Would you care for some tea or coffee? Anything?” she asked.

“I’ll grab us some drinks,” said Adam. Dr. Brennan tried to speak casually about the weather until Adam returned, and the whole group focused directly on her.

“Alright then, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? I mean, I love seeing you both, but now I suspect your friends are here for a reason as well.”

“Dr. Brennan, we need to address what happened with that girl.”

“Deborah, dear.”

“Yes, Deborah.” Aislinn could barely spit out the name, the vile taste of blood and vomit on every syllable. “But first, we’re here to ask you some questions.”

“Alright, dear, I’ll do my best. You know that.”

“Dr. Brennan,” said Adam.

“Angela, dear, I’m just Angela.”

“Angela,” he smiled, “you already know about the gifts that Aislinn and Kane possess, but it seems that Flip and I have our own set of gifts we’ve been able to keep hidden for a while.”

“Yes, child, I know,” she said, casually touching a small, wrinkled hand to the huge forearm of Flip. “The big adorable teddy bear has an incredibly rare gift. You can move things, can’t you, love?”

Flip stared at the older woman, unsure of what to say at first, but then gave a small nod and grin.

“It’s alright, dear. It’s a wonderful gift you’ve been given.” Her small hand continued to set on his forearm, the warmth comforting and reassuring to Flip. “You’ve saved many of your friends with your gift, some who didn’t appreciate it. But you’re loved, my dear, loved by all here.”

Flip looked around the table, his friends smiling at him. He nodded again, smiling down at the tiny little woman. A few flecks of her once strawberry-blonde hair were still visible through her gray, and Flip knew that she once would have been quite beautiful.

“And you, doctor, your gift is the most extraordinary, I believe,” she said, smiling at Adam. Aislinn looked at Kane and then Adam. Somehow, Dr. Brennan was able to pick up on the energy of all four at the table. “The ability to diagnose and heal is not one I’ve ever come across.”

She spoke the words casually as if she were discussing the weather.

“My sister came across it once. It was many years ago. An old woman on one of the outer islands of Scotland. The story was that she had been on the island for more than a hundred years curing people. It seemed impossible, of course, but when my sister arrived, she found a woman that looked to be in her eighties. She had a small cottage on the north end of the island and saw all the sick, both on the island as well as neighboring islands.”

“But she couldn’t be over one hundred,” said Aislinn in a questioning tone.

“Why not, child? Just because we’ve never encountered those that have lived that long, doesn’t mean there isn’t someone. The world is full of strange and unusual things. Things that we don’t understand. Things that boggle our minds. It doesn’t make them any less real.” Aislinn smiled at the other woman and nodded her head.

“Doctor, Angela, is it possible that Kane is a dream walker? I... we thought perhaps since he can follow me in my dreams, that perhaps...” Dr. Brennan shook her head.

“It’s unlikely,” she said calmly. “Dream walkers can travel into everyone’s dreams. It’s my understanding that you’ve only been able to see into Aislinn’s dreams, correct?” Kane nodded.

“I think you are more of a conduit for her, as we discussed before. You have a similar ability. Kane, you feel evil when you touch someone. You know whether it’s a great evil or a small evil, if there is such a thing. Aislinn doesn’t feel the evil. She sees it. When you’re together, you’re able to draw on one another’s gifts.”

“I see,” said Kane, frowning. “So, if we weren’t together?”

“If you weren’t together, your gifts would be overwhelming and perhaps even... Well, gifts such as yours have been known to drive men mad.”

Kane nodded again. There had been moments in his lifetime where he did indeed believe he was going mad, losing his sanity. Since meeting Aislinn, things seemed more in control, clearer.

“And you, my big friend,” she said, smiling up at Flip. “You’ve been fighting your gift for many years, haven’t you? Stop fighting it, child. It’s an extraordinary gift. One that can be used for good or evil. You have used it for good, and that says a great deal about your character. Stop. Fighting. It.”

“It’s hard,” said Flip quietly. “People find out, and they...”

“They leave? Well, then, what a wonderful way of identifying true friends,” she said, smiling. “And you, good doctor, you’ve done exactly what you should. Taking your gift to its fullest potential and helping others. It’s remarkable, truly.”

“Angela,” Aislinn interrupted, “is it possible that we are all better with our gifts when we’re around one another? We seem to have some sort of symmetry.”

“It is quite possible,” said Angela, “but not necessarily because you enhance one another. More because you accept one another. You are less concerned about revealing your gifts or discussing them.”

The entire group smiled at one another. It was nice to have others who understood what it was like to be different.

“Alright then,” said Kane, “it looks like we should stick together then.” Flip and Adam nodded with a small smile.

“We still have to find a way to stop Krauss,” said Aislinn, “and that odious woman.”

“Yes,” said Angela, “well, that’s something I don’t think I can help with other than to keep an eye on Deborah if you need me to. Although, I must tell you that being around her would be emotionally draining for me.”

“No, that’s too dangerous,” said Kane. “We need to find another way.”

“I could follow her,” said Flip. The small group walked back toward Angela’s office, crowding into the small space.

“Flip, I love you, buddy. Really, I do, but you’re not exactly easily hidden in the shadows,” said Adam, grinning up at his friend. “What about Spook?”

“We could ask him to track her phone. Angela? Do you have her phone number?”

“I do, dear,” she said, shifting the stacks of paperwork. “I have every student’s cell phone number. Oh, dear, it’s here somewhere. Yes, here it is.” She wrote the number

on a small slip of paper and handed it to Kane.

“Alright, let’s call Spook and see what we find. Thank you, Angela, and please be careful.”

She watched the small band of friends exit her office, each unique, each with their special gift.

Watch over them. They’re special.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Krauss felt the vibration of his cell phone in his pocket but ignored it. He was checking the breath sounds of a two-year-old who was struggling with bronchitis. Her tiny body was hot to the touch, her temperature reading at one hundred and one. She let out a small hoarse cry that nearly broke his heart.

“It’s alright, angel. Everything will be alright,” he cooed.

“She’s just been so sick, and her pediatrician told us to just bring her here. The antibiotics don’t seem to be helping,” said the worried mother. She was young, as was the father, but they both seemed genuinely concerned for their child.

“Well, I’m glad you brought her in when you did. She’s quite sick right now, but we’ll have her fixed up in no time,” he said, smiling down at the little girl, “won’t we, sweetheart?” She gave a weak, faint smile, and his heart nearly melted.

“Thank you, Dr. Krauss,” said the father, reaching for his hand.

“Andrew will get you all set. We’ll admit her for a few days, pump some heavy-duty antibiotics into her and get some breathing treatments started. Once we’re able to get her temperature down, she’ll feel more like eating, and that should help.” The grateful parents nodded again, her mother picking up the child and hugging her close to her chest.

Krauss handed Andrew the set of orders and walked toward the lounge, where he sat to check his phone. Three missed calls from Deborah and one from his brother. He hit redial and heard the exhausted voice of his brother.

“Hello.”

“Hey, I saw you called. What’s up?” he asked.

“I was arrested.”

“What?!” he said, shocked. A large pit formed in his stomach.

“Yea, it’s nuts. Someone, someone gave an anonymous tip that I killed these people. It was, shit, it was awful.” He could hear the strain and confusion in his brother’s voice, and his stomach bottomed out.

“That’s crazy! You’d never hurt anyone!”

“Says my brother,” he grinned on the other end of the phone.

“Do you want to meet for dinner tonight?” he asked.

“That would be great,” he breathed with a sigh of relief. “I could really use your support tonight.”

“Of course,” he said, standing as the nurse entered the room, indicating he had another patient. “The usual place?”

“Sounds good,” he said. “And Michael? Thank you. I know things have been strained for a while, maybe the word is different for us, but I miss my big brother.”

“I miss you too, Christopher. See you tonight.”

He ended the call and followed the nurse down the corridor to another waiting patient. This one was an adult who had stepped on a piece of lumber with a rusty nail

protruding from it. A simple cleaning of the wound and a tetanus shot was all that was needed. A motor vehicle wreck came in moments later, sending the quiet calm of the emergency room into complete distress.

Three hours later, when he had time to breathe, he hit redial.

“It’s about time you called, baby,” said the seductive voice. “I have some fun planned for tonight.”

“I can’t,” he said resolutely. In fact, he thought, I can’t ever do this again. I won’t risk my brother’s career and life.

“You can,” she said calmly, “and you will.”

“Don’t threaten me, Deborah,” he said casually. “I won’t hesitate to tear you apart.” He had no remorse in his voice at all, no regret.

“But I’m certain this is the couple,” she said sweetly. “I’ve done my research.”

“You haven’t done any research at all, Deborah. You and I both know that. You never do your research. You’re just a sick, twisted human being. Don’t call me again. I’m done.” He ended the call and immediately deleted her number, blocking it as well, from his phone.

Change your life. Change your life.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Aislinn, Kane, Flip, and Adam sat across from one another in a large booth at Martinelli's, their favorite Italian restaurant in the city. It was Flip's first time, but he immediately made himself at home ordering a large order of calamari, an order of bruschetta, and a tomato and mozzarella salad, all as his appetizer.

"I don't think I've ever seen anyone eat so much," said Aislinn, smiling at the big man.

"Oh, this is just for starters," he said, grinning at her. "I seem to consume calories at what my doctor describes as 'an alarming rate.'" He winked at Adam, and he rolled his eyes.

"You might be a big man, but you don't want to be obese!" said Adam.

"I don't have an ounce of fat on me," smiled Flip. "Besides, for some reason, I'm ravenous tonight. I think that visit with the doc made me feel better, and I get really hungry after exerting myself."

"Feel better? Feel better how?" asked Kane.

"I don't know, brother. I can't really explain it. It's like everything she said made me feel normal. Like all the wheels clicked into place, and my mind isn't foggy anymore. I see things clearly, or at least clearer than I did. Does that make sense?"

"It makes perfect sense," said Adam. "I'm able to hide my gift. It just makes me look like this incredibly competent and gifted doctor."

“You are competent and gifted,” smiled Aislinn.

“Thank you, Aislinn, but I guess what I’m saying is I can hide my gift within my profession, and to some extent, so can Kane. But I can see where it would be harder for Flip unless he was alone.”

Aislinn looked toward the front door to see a tall, lean auburn-haired man walk into the restaurant. He possessed intelligent, kind eyes. Dressed in jeans and a sweater that hugged his frame, he looked directly at her and smiled, making her blush and a bit uncomfortable. Kane stood, and for a moment, Aislinn was worried he took the gesture wrong.

“Spook! Over here, brother,” he called.

This was Spook!? This tall, good-looking man was the computer geek they spoke of? Aislinn could definitely get used to being in the company of these men. She felt like the prettiest girl in the room with the first four months of the hunk calendar. Women in the restaurant all looked their way, yet none of the men even noticed.

Spook pulled Kane into a brotherly hug, and then Adam, and finally Flip, slapping his back in a playful gesture.

“You must be the beautiful Aislinn I’ve heard so much about,” he said, smiling at her. She nodded and shook his hand. Aislinn was relieved that she only felt calmness emanating from his body.

“It’s nice to meet you, Sp-Spook?” she said questioningly. “Is there another name I should call you?” The guys laughed and sat down at the table.

“My real name is Van Rogers. You can call me Van or Spook. I answer to both.”

“Okay then, I like Van. It suits you,” she said with a smile.

Kane watched his friend smile at Aislinn, and a stab of jealousy filled his chest. He had no right, he hadn’t put a ring on Aislinn’s finger, but he would remedy that situation soon.

“So, you guys needed my help? What can I do for you?”

Kane detailed the situation as best he could without giving away Aislinn’s, or any of the team’s, secrets. He knew that Spook could be trusted, but he didn’t want to take any chances this early on. He gave every detail of the murders and where they believed they occurred, as well as the young woman and Dr. Krauss being involved.

Spook tapped away on his keyboard, taking notes of everything Kane told him. No detail was unimportant.

“What’s the girl’s full name?” he asked. Kane pulled the sheet of paper from his pocket, handing it to Spook.

“Deborah Cook. She’s in the master’s program for psychology at the university.” Spook nodded and tapped away on his computer.

The waitress came over to the table and asked for their orders, giving a list of specials that made Aislinn’s mouth water.

“I’ll have the grilled Caesar salad and a root beer,” said Aislinn.

“Lasagna for me, and I’ll have a light beer,” said Adam.

“Spaghetti Bolognese and a beer,” said Kane.

“Same for me,” said Spook.

“And you, handsome?” asked the waitress, staring down at Flip. He grinned up at her and winked.

“Are you ready? I’ll have the lasagna with a side of meatballs, but I’ll start with a bowl of minestrone and some cheese bread, and then I’ll top it off with tiramisu.”

“Okay then,” she said, smiling. “I’ll be right back with your drinks.”

“Dude, you seriously are going to have heartburn for days,” said Adam.

“Nah, I’ll be hungry again by the time I get home.”

“I found her,” said Spook. “Deborah Ann Cook. Twenty-five years old, a native of Chicago but moved out here about three years ago after the deaths of her parents and sister.”

“I do not have a good feeling about this,” said Aislinn quietly.

“Trust your instincts,” said Spook in a low voice. “The family was found murdered, mutilated with a butcher knife that was left at the scene. Deborah was the only survivor, claiming she was out all night with friends. Conveniently, none of the friends could say for certain she was with them at the time of the deaths, but video surveillance cameras had her going into a club and not coming out until two a.m.”

“A real peach, that one,” said Adam sarcastically.

“The parents didn’t have a lot of money, a modest life insurance policy, but they owned a large home in a prime real estate market. She immediately sold the home and moved. She had three roommates her first year of college. All requested another

room due to her excessive partying and ‘strange behavior,’ although it doesn’t say what that means.”

“Go on,” said Kane.

“She was arrested for public intoxication her senior year. Nothing strange about that, except it was outside a private club, The Switch .”

“Let me guess, wife swapping?” said Kane.

“That and more. The Switch is known for their underground world of S&M. This isn’t the shit you see in the romantic movies and books of wrist tying and spanking. This is hardcore.”

“What do you mean?” asked Aislinn softly. All eyes turned to her as if they forgot she was even there. Adam blushed, and Flip looked away for a moment. “I’m not a child. What does that mean?”

“Well, they... it’s pretty sick, Aislinn. It’s not just spankings but beatings, intentionally. They use things to make the experience painful.”

“I see,” she said, blushing and swallowing. “And this woman, Deborah, she likes this type of place?”

“It appears so,” said Spook. “She was arrested outside the club, and the police found bruises, redness, and lacerations all over her body. They think she might have been drinking to numb the pain.”

“So, she likes pain but does she like giving pain?” she asked.

“That’s a great question, and I guess that’s the better question to ask, isn’t it?” said

Adam. "Spook? Can you see if the club ever had any complaints against her? Are there any type of records?"

"There are always records, brother. It's just getting into them. Let me do my magic." Spook pecked away at the computer as the waitress came back with steaming bowls of food.

"Got it! She was a member for almost three years. During that time, she was placed on probation twice for misuse of power while in the dominatrix role. It says here the last incident prior to the intoxication charges involved a middle-aged man and his wife. She tied the wife so tight she nearly died from asphyxiation. The husband's cuts were so deep, they required stitches."

"Fuck! Remind me not to date her," said Flip.

"She likes to inflict pain, but she likes to receive it as well. She thinks she deserves it," whispered Aislinn.

"What makes you say that?" asked Kane.

"How did you know that?" asked Spook suspiciously. "It's right here. It's all here, but I haven't said anything yet. How did you know that?"

Aislinn shrugged her shoulders and took a bite of her salad. The others stilled and watched as Spook eyed each of them.

"What the fuck is going on here?" he asked.

"I promise we'll tell you everything, Spook," said Adam. "But not here." He looked around the table, taking in each of his friends, and nodded.

“Aislinn is right. She likes to inflict pain, but she likes to receive it as well, telling all of her ‘daddies’ that she deserves the pain and asks for more pain. One of the incidences where she was placed on probation was because she struck a man in the face who refused to use a cat-o-nine-tails on her. She claimed he wasn’t whipping her hard enough, despite the fact that he had drawn blood.”

“Christ!” said Adam under his breath. “She needs the pain, both giving and receiving. But that still doesn’t tell us about Krauss.”

“Ah,” said Spook with a mouthful of food, “the good Dr. Krauss. Let me see. He, uh, that’s odd. I have that he’s at two different hospitals.”

“Two? Well, that’s not unusual, but I’m not sure how that would work,” said Adam. “He’d have to be authorized at both.”

“Something is wrong. This has him working at both hospitals the night of the murders... at the same time.”

“That’s not possible,” said Adam.

“I’m looking at it, dude. Dr. M.C. Krauss at General and Dr. M.C. Krauss at Memorial.”

“It’s not possible for him to be in two places at one time,” said Adam.

“Yes, it is,” said Aislinn, looking toward the door. Her face was pale, her eyes filled with moisture and fear. Kane reached for her hand, her fingers trembling. Flip followed her eyes toward the door.

“Holy fuck! He’s a twin!”

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

“I’m really glad you came out tonight, Michael,” said Christopher.

“Me too. I’m sorry I’ve been so different,” he said, looking down at his drink. “It’s just been so hard... so...”

“You don’t have to explain it to me. You’re my brother. I love you. You know that. I’d do anything for you, Michael.” He leaned forward in the booth, closer to his brother. “What’s going on, Michael? Was I arrested because of... was I arrested because of something you did?”

Michael looked up at his brother, the face so familiar to him. It was his face. Michael Charles and Matthew Christopher Krauss born six minutes apart. Identical in every way, his brother possessed his face, his body, his voice, everything. They had been inseparable as children. One another’s playmate, best friend, and confidante.

They attended college together and followed the same path, medicine. Both had chosen emergency medicine with an emphasis on trauma. When it came time to choose a hospital, they decided it was best to separate and not confuse staff and patients. He missed his brother every day, but never more than the night his wife and son were killed.

In their urgency to get care for the victims, the paramedics chose a hospital closer to the scene, but one that was woefully prepared for trauma. If they had only taken them to his brother’s hospital, both might be here, safe, unharmed, and alive today.

Instead, the agony of their loss consumed his every waking moment. The only relief had come when the young woman, Deborah, had proposed a little fun and, in the

process, perhaps find the couple responsible for the deaths of his wife and son. He never meant for it to get so far out of control. The visit to the club had been out of curiosity, in the hopes that he would see someone, find someone with guilt written across their forehead. As if they would just jump out from the crowd.

Instead, Deborah had approached him.

At first, it was easy, a little rough play between the two of them. Something that allowed him to release his anger. She liked it. She liked it a lot. It was never enough for her, though. She wanted more. More violence, more violation, more everything.

When she suggested that it might be a way for them to find the killers of his family, he immediately fell in step with her. Until the last couple. He had known the minute he saw them that they weren't guilty. Something in his heart knew. Yet he did it anyway. He killed that poor couple. He was guilty, and now his brother would suffer because of his desire for retribution.

"Michael? Michael, please talk to me," said Christopher, reaching for her brother's hand.

"I'm so sorry, Christopher, so very sorry. I never meant for you..." He choked back a sob, pulling his hand out of his brother's grasp.

"Oh God," whispered Christopher, "you're involved."

"I-I never meant for it to go this far. I thought... I thought if I could find the couple who killed them, I thought I could... I'm so sorry," he sobbed.

"Michael, we have to go to the police. You can't live with the guilt of this. I can't live with this. We have to talk," he whispered to his brother.

He scanned the room quickly to ensure that no one was watching their little interlude. The restaurant was nearly empty at this late hour, except for one table. The woman looked familiar, her long hair and big eyes telling him that he knew her. Combine that with the big man sitting next to her, and he knew that he'd seen them in the emergency room.

"Michael, listen to me. Michael!" he yelled. "We need to leave here, now. Let's go."

"No, no, Christopher, you've done enough. I can't do this anymore."

"Michael," he called, watching his brother stand from the table. "Michael, please, I'll go with you. We'll fix this together."

"It can't be fixed," he said, turning toward his brother.

He looked toward the only other table with people. Four tall men stood, a small woman positioned behind them protectively. He felt an uneasy awareness at their presence. Looking back at his brother, he knew what had to be done. Reaching inside his jacket, he pulled out the small .38 caliber that he carried with him.

"I'm sorry, Christopher," he said, pointing the gun to his temple. "I love you."

"NO!!!" The scream of Christopher Krauss echoed over the gunfire. It was the last thing Aislinn heard as she fell into the arms of Kane Jackson.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Kane crossed paths with a few of the detectives in his business on a regular basis. They were all good people just trying to make it in a job that wasn't appreciated by anyone, was completely underpaid, and forced them to work miserably long hours. The questioning of him and his friends lasted for hours, but the mess left behind by Michael Krauss would be devastating for his brother.

The most difficult part of being a witness to the act was that the police concluded that their killer was found, and everything would go back to business as usual. What Kane and the others couldn't tell them was that Deborah was still out there on the loose.

It was nearly four a.m. by the time the police finished and released each of them, allowing them to leave the scene. Only a few blocks from Kane's house, they all decided to crash at his place for the night. Flip and Adam took opposite ends of the sectional sofa, and Spook slept on an old cot that Kane pulled from the closet.

Aislinn, finally able to breathe normally, was nestled close to Kane's body, curled around him. He wanted desperately to be inside her, but with his friends only a few yards away and the open space of the loft, he wouldn't risk embarrassing her. He finally slipped into slumber, his hand clasped with hers.

Oh no, she's looking. She needs blood. She wants to kill. She's killing again. Kane, help me.

I'm here, Aislinn. I'm here. Don't look, baby. Back out now.

I can't. You know that. She's killing and she's angry. She's angry at Dr. Krauss.

He could feel Aislinn next to him, but he couldn't see her face. He felt her fear, her trepidation with each step she took. She followed the blonde through the group of people. She was looking for someone. Her lithe young body stopped in front of a couple. The body-hugging black dress clinging to every curve, the shape of her breasts spilling from the deep v-neck.

She's chosen them. She's going to take them both. We have to follow her, Kane. We have to see where she takes them.

Aislinn, you don't have to do this. We'll find another way.

Aislinn didn't respond but followed the threesome into a bedroom. It was different. They weren't in the other place any longer. They were in their home. They were in the couple's home. Both appeared to be in their fifties but healthy, attractive, and fit.

The woman laughed at something as her husband tore open her blouse and cut her bra from her body. Linking her hands above her head, he secured them with fleece-lined cuffs hanging from the ceiling. Deborah watched, smiling at the couple as she lifted the hem of her dress and tossed it to the side, her long, lean legs encased in black leather boots. Her ass barely covered with a lacy thong, her breasts bared for the man to see.

His face flushed with excitement, and his wife licked her lips, watching as her husband touched the younger woman. She told him to do something, but Aislinn couldn't hear the wife. Deborah pushed the man to the floor and hiked a leg up over his shoulder, forcing his face into her crotch. She moaned and then slapped his face hard. He looked stunned for a moment. Then smiled up at her, gripping the six-inch spiked heel of her boot. He thrust her legs further apart.

She balanced herself perfectly against him as he continued to work his mouth over her sex. All the while, the wife watched, smiling. When the man finished, Deborah

secured him to a table, his rigid cock begging for her touch. She slapped it playfully, then harder, and he moaned in agony and ecstasy. Taking a ball gag, she shoved it in his mouth and secured it in place.

Moving back toward the wife, Aislinn watched as the evil in her eyes glowed like a beacon in her dream. Using a thin silk tie, she gagged the wife as her husband watched. Deborah moved back toward the husband and mounted him like an animal. She rode him hard, slapping his face and chest as she did. She screamed her release, balancing herself on her stiletto heels. Standing slowly, his cock inching out of her body, his semen falling over his own body, she smiled down at him. Lifting her leg, she slammed the stiletto hard into his chest.

Fear and pain filled his eyes as he attempted to scream.

Aislinn, don't look, baby! Aislinn, come back to me! Aislinn!

I have to see this through. I have to...

She lifted her other leg and jabbed the stiletto into his neck, blood spurting over the table. Deborah laughed a hideous laugh, rubbing her hands through the puddles of blood. She spread it over her body, pinching her own nipples with excitement.

The terror on the wife's face transformed into anger as she struggled against the restraints. Deborah's head whipped around, staring at the woman. She said something to her, but Aislinn couldn't hear her. From her purse, she pulled a large butcher knife and ran the back of the blade along the woman's stomach, nicking her skin.

Deborah kissed the woman's face and neck, squeezing her breast as she did. Without warning, she drew back the blade, slid it deep into her stomach, and pulled. There was no sound, no noise at all, only red. Only blood. Deborah turned in the room, looking around as if looking for something. Then she just stared straight at Aislinn,

straight into her face. She wasn't there, but somehow Deborah sensed her in the room.

Aislinn! Wake up now! Aislinn!

She was drowning, gasping for air. She needed to get to the surface. She needed to breathe.

"Holy fuck, what's happening?" asked Spook, standing over the bed. Flip and Adam were on the other side, closest to Aislinn.

"She was watching her. Deborah. She killed again, or she will kill again."

"I felt it," said Flip.

"I did too," said Adam. "I couldn't see it, but I felt her fear, her sheer terror. It was suffocating." Kane looked over at Spook. His face was ashen.

"I don't know what that was, but it was enough to wake me."

"Aislinn, baby, are you okay?" he asked, pulling her close.

"It was the worst. She was angry because Dr. Krauss wasn't there. She wanted to really inflict harm, and she did. Did you see?"

"I saw, baby, and they felt it."

"You felt it? You felt the anger?" she asked.

"I felt the violence," said Flip. "It was as if I were having a violent dream but couldn't see it."

“I felt your terror,” said Adam. “I wish I could explain it, but I was lying there peacefully on the sofa and suddenly felt your terror. I’ve never...” He stopped and looked at Spook.

“I don’t know what I felt, but you’re all going to explain this to me.”

“We will, but first, let me get Aislinn showered and fed. She’ll sometimes get headaches after these episodes, but it seems less when I’m near her.”

“What do we do about the murders she saw?” asked Adam.

“I don’t know. We don’t know anything right now. They could have happened last night, or they might be yet to happen. Just let me get her showered and dressed.” He lifted Aislinn into his arms. She was limp as a rag doll, falling against his chest.

“I’ll make us some breakfast,” said Flip.

Kane carried Aislinn into the shower, stripping her clothes from her body and holding her securely until she found her legs once more. At first, she shook with shock and fear, and then, as the water heated against her body, she found her balance once more and held tightly to Kane.

“I called for you,” he whispered against her hair. “Why wouldn’t you come to me?”

“I needed to see all of it, to see where she was, what she would do. She felt me. She knew someone else was there,” she said. “It was so awful, so deliberate. The hate was so powerful within her.”

“I know, baby, I know. I felt it too.” He lathered her hair and soaped her body, careful to wash every part of her body. His own body reacted in its traitorous way, stiffening to an uncomfortable stance. She lightly touched her fingers to him, but he stilled her

hand.

“We have company, baby,” he said quietly.

“I’ll be quiet,” she said, staring into his eyes. “Please, Kane, I need this. I need to forget the evil and feel the good... feel you.”

He couldn’t refuse her. Taking her mouth, he devoured her next words. Lifting her easily, he wrapped her legs around his waist and drove hard. He felt her tighten around him, the clenching of her sweet walls squeezing him. Kane suppressed the growl that wanted to surface and plunged deeper until he felt her quiver around him. When he knew she was spent, he finished his own release.

Washing the passion from their bodies, they dressed quickly. Aislinn braided her long wet hair and stepped from the bathroom first. Her shaky legs were starting to feel better.

Adam, Flip, and Spook were shocked at the paleness of Aislinn’s skin. Her eyes seemed too large for her face, her skin almost translucent, devoid of color.

“Are you okay?” asked Adam, touching her forearm. He closed his eyes. Heartbeat steady, solid, pulse good, respirations slightly elevated, everything functioning normally.

“I think you know the answer to that,” she said, smiling.

“Sorry, it’s what I do,” he grinned.

“It’s okay. You could be handy to have around,” she grinned.

“What was that, Aislinn?” asked Spook.

“I wish I knew, Van. I’ve been having dreams like that my whole life. They happen when I touch someone. But up until now, it’s only been evil dreams. People who are committing heinous crimes.”

“Up until now?” he questioned.

“When I met Kane, things started to change. I used to get debilitating headaches afterwards. I wouldn’t be able to function, let alone speak to you. Now, I have a slight twinge of a headache, but for the most part, I’m completely fine. I also started having nice dreams, not just those bathed in blood.”

“Jesus, Aislinn! I felt the evil in the room. I literally thought someone or something was in the room with us,” he said.

“I know. It seems somehow, we are all connected. We don’t understand it fully yet, but you all have the ability to somehow feel what I’m feeling but on varying levels. Each of us has our gifts,” she said, looking at Kane, Adam, and Flip. “What is your gift, Van?”

“Pffft, my gift?” he said, dismissing her question. “I don’t have a gift, Aislinn.”

“Yes, you do,” she said quietly. “I can feel it and so can you. It’s why you felt the presence of the evil in my nightmare. You have a gift. It’s okay if you don’t want to share it with us, but it’s there, and sooner or later, we will need to know what it is.”

Kane raised an eyebrow at Adam, who looked at Flip.

“Breakfast is ready,” he said calmly. “Pancakes and sausage.”

They ate quietly at the bar, no one saying anything to the other. They knew that Aislinn was right. Spook possessed a gift, something that no one else knew about, but

he would have to admit it to himself and the others if they were going to figure out what was happening.

“I have a tracer on Deborah’s phone. I can let you know where she is at any time, day or night, but that’s all I’m doing,” said Spook, standing.

He couldn’t be here. He couldn’t experience what he felt again last night. He’d never told anyone about the way his brain worked, his body. He trusted Kane, Adam, and Flip, and in some ways, he trusted Aislinn as well. He just wasn’t ready.

“Thanks, brother,” said Kane, reaching for his hand.

“Please don’t leave,” said Aislinn, rising quietly. “I need you to be here.”

He looked down at the pretty woman standing by his friend. She had the biggest eyes he’d ever seen, pleading for him to stay.

“I can’t do this, Aislinn,” he whispered.

“I won’t say anything else about it. I promise. Just please don’t leave right now.”

He looked down at her face again and then back up at his friends.

“Alright. I’ll stay here until we catch the woman.” Without warning, Aislinn hugged his waist, pressing her face against his chest. So shocked by the act he nearly passed out.

“Okay, okay, stop hugging my friends, or I’ll have to kidnap you to a remote location,” said Kane, smiling down at Aislinn.

She tilted her head to the side, staring up at Spook, who shifted uncomfortably from

one foot to the other. He was very handsome, but there was something he was hiding from everyone, and she wanted to know what. Like the others, she was connected to Spook.

“It will be nearly impossible to find her now and catch her in the act,” said Flip.

“No, it won’t,” said Aislinn calmly.

“Honey, I know you think it will be easy, but she’s going to run or at least slow down as soon as she hears about Krauss killing himself.”

“Not if he shows up on her doorstep.”

“What?”

“We need to talk to his brother,” she said, taking the last bite of pancake. “We have to make him understand the situation. If we can get him to help, he can convince her that he is Michael, not Christopher.”

“Damn! She’s a keeper!” said Adam. Kane grinned at his friend.

Yea, don’t I fucking know it!

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Aislinn stood at the rear of the funeral home, watching the mourners pass by the closed casket. Christopher Krauss had been quick with the arrangements for his brother, and to their advantage, the services and funeral were taking place some two hundred miles south of where they both lived and worked.

Kane held tightly to Aislinn's hand, Adam standing tall and strong on the opposite side of her. Outside, Flip waited in the large SUV watching for any signs of Deborah.

They were surprised that more people were not attending, although two hundred miles was a great distance for colleagues. It appeared that Michael didn't have a lot of close friends other than his twin.

The minister stood and began with a few words, followed by one hymn. As Christopher made his way to the front of the room, standing by his brother's casket, his grief etched on his face.

"My brother... my brother was more than just a brother to me. He was my best friend, my confidante, my partner in everything we did. I loved him more than life. I felt his happiness when he met his beautiful wife when they had their beautiful son. And I felt his pain when they were both lost to him. These last few years have been difficult for him, and I guess I wasn't aware how difficult. I know that now he is at peace and will finally be reunited with his family."

The tears fell silently down his cheeks, his eyes rimmed in red. The minister stood once more to tell the attendees that there would be a private graveside service for family only, meaning only Christopher.

“Let’s wait until everyone leaves,” said Kane. Aislinn nodded, watching the few mourners leave the funeral parlor. The minister gripped Christopher’s shoulder and turned to leave the room. The weight of his grief sent him to his knees, the agony of his loss finally collapsing down on him. Aislinn stepped forward slowly, turning to nod at Kane that all would be well.

She stood beside him at first, then kneeling, she wrapped her arms around him as he sobbed uncontrollably, collapsing against her body. Aislinn rubbed slow circles on his back, humming softly to him as she rocked him back and forth on the floor. It was several minutes before Christopher raised his head to see the small stranger holding him.

“I-I’m so sorry,” he sniffed.

“There is no need to apologize, Dr. Krauss,” she said with a weak smile.

“Wait, I know you. I treated you in the emergency room, didn’t I?” Aislinn nodded. “How did you know my brother? Why are you here?” Christopher Krauss looked up to see Kane and Adam standing like giants behind Aislinn.

“Dr. Krauss? My name is Kane Jackson, and this is my friend, Dr. Adam Thorn.”

“Hello. I’m sorry. This has been a rough few days. Do I know you?” he asked, staring at Adam.

“You don’t, doctor, but we knew your brother, sort of.”

“I don’t know if I want to hear this,” he said, staring at the threesome. “My brother... my brother wasn’t himself these last few years. He was grieving. Grieving so much for the loss of his wife and son.”

“Dr. Krauss...”

“Christopher, please call me Christopher,” he said to the doe-eyed beauty.

“Christopher, my name is Aislinn Carter. None of this will make sense to you, but I need to try and explain.” He stood and then sat down on the pew in the front row. The others followed suit and watched as he prepared himself for Aislinn’s story.

“I have a rare, unusual gift. When I touch people, I can see the evil that lurks within,” she said quietly. Christopher’s eyes grew wide at first and then turned skeptical. “I know it seems unbelievable, but I touched your brother’s hand a few weeks ago and saw things. He was angry and sad at the same time. He needed justice.”

Aislinn continued with all the details of the story, watching the expressions of Christopher Krauss. He seemed to jump from anger to disbelief and then to sadness, all in the same moment.

“I know this is difficult, Christopher, but we have to find this woman, Deborah. I believe that if we can convince her that you are Michael, we can stop her.”

Christopher Krauss stood and walked up to the casket of his brother, the huge spray of flowers flowing over the edges. He touched his palm to the cold, shiny wood and lowered his head.

“I knew he was in trouble. The police, they came to the hospital and brought me in for questioning. The night he shot himself, I confronted him. Told him that I would help him if he would just tell me what happened. I would have, you know. I would have protected him. He was my other half. My heart just doesn’t beat right unless he’s around. I find myself gasping for air.”

Aislinn felt his pain, even without touching him. She felt it when she was consoling

him, his deep sadness, the pain, the anger, all of it.

“I know you’re hurting, Christopher,” said Kane, “but if we don’t stop this woman, she will kill again. We believe that she pushed your brother to a place he didn’t want to be, but he was in so much pain from his own loss. He wasn’t seeing clearly.”

Christopher nodded again. He turned to face the three individuals in the room and searched their faces for something, anything that would help him make the right decision.

“I’ll do this. I need to do this. I need to make things right, for Michael. I need to make amends,” he said.

“We understand that you need time to grieve, Christopher,” said Adam, “but we believe she will strike again soon. We have her telephone number if you will call her and at least set something up. It may get her to at least wait a day or two before finding her next victims.”

He nodded in sadness and regret and reached for the phone that Adam handed him. It was his brother’s phone, and he shook his head, wondering how the trio had acquired the cell phone.

“What should I say?” he asked.

“Tell her you had a death in the family. It’s the truth and will help you to keep your cover. Let her know that you’ll be back in town tomorrow and would like to meet up. She most likely has someone already scoped out.” He nodded and called the number on the phone, placing the phone on speaker.

Well, well, well, if it isn’t the good doctor finally calling for his taste of pussy and adventure.

Christopher Krauss winced at the words, unprepared for the crass nature of the conversation and the woman on the other end of the phone. She could not have been more different than his sister-in-law.

“I-I’m sorry,” he said.

What’s wrong with you? You don’t sound like yourself.

Christopher cleared his throat and fought back the tears threatening to spill.

“I’ve had a death in the family. That’s why I haven’t called. I’ll be back in town tomorrow. Can we get together then?” he asked.

Sorry about your family. Yea, tomorrow is good. I have the perfect couple, and they have a playroom in their house. We can meet them at the usual spot.

He looked up at Kane, panicked. He had no clue where the usual spot was. What was he supposed to say? Kane shook his head and wrote quickly on a notepad.

“No, not the usual place,” he said casually. “Let’s meet at Rubio’s first.”

Rubio’s? Well, aren’t we fancy? Okay, that’s fine. I can get a bite to eat before we have our fun. And Michael?

His brother’s name spoken from this woman’s lips nearly did him in. He swallowed and shook his head in disbelief.

Tomorrow night, I get what I want, all of it. From you too. I want the body parts for my collection.

“F-fine,” he said, swallowing. He hung up the phone and dropped to the floor again,

his tears flowing faster. “How could this have been my brother’s life, and I not know it? It’s not possible!”

“I know it seems unbelievable, Christopher, but as you’ve pointed out, Michael was in a great deal of pain,” said Aislinn.

“We’ll be with you the whole time, Christopher,” said Kane. “Adam, myself, and another colleague will follow you to where she will have you meet the other couple. I have some friends in the department who will set a sting for the woman. We will do our best to keep your name and your brother’s name out of the papers.”

“Thank you for that,” he said calmly, standing and wiping his hands over the front of his suit.

“We’ll be there, but you won’t see us,” said Adam. He reached forward and handed a small pin to Christopher. “Wear this on your lapel. We’ll be able to hear and see everything that’s happening.”

He nodded again and looked back at the casket of his brother. Walking over to the box, he laid his hand on the smooth wood once more. Leaning his forehead down, he spoke softly and then turned toward Kane.

“I’ll be at Rubio’s at eight.”

Kane and Adam watched as he left the room, his shoulders slumped forward, his head hanging to his chest.

“He’s in so much pain,” said Aislinn, rubbing her temples.

“Are you getting a headache?” asked Kane.

“I-I don’t know. It just feels different, but it may be because you and Adam are here as well. I could feel his pain, his sadness, though. There wasn’t any violence, just... I don’t know.”

“It was a bit overpowering,” said Adam. “I could feel the waves of sadness coming through you. This is the weirdest thing I’ve ever experienced.”

“Me and you both, brother,” said Kane.

He led Aislinn from the room into the parking lot, where Flip waited patiently for them to return. When Aislinn got close, he reached for her hand and held it tightly.

“Are you okay?” he asked. “I felt it. The sadness. You were so overwhelmed.”

“I’m okay,” she said with a small grin. “This is so strange. It’s as if you all are a filter for me, taking some of the emotions from my shoulders.”

“That’s an interesting way of putting it,” said Adam. “Maybe you’re right. Maybe somehow, we are a filter for you. If we all have certain gifts, then maybe it’s why we’re able to help you.”

“Well, no matter why, I’m glad you’re all in my life. Right now, though, I’m tired and hungry,” she said weakly.

“Food it is,” said Flip, smiling.

By the time they were back at Kane’s loft it was nearly midnight, and they were all exhausted. Spook was sound asleep on the cot, lifting his head only to acknowledge their return. Adam and Flip took opposite ends of the sectional once more, and Aislinn and Kane held one another tight in the big bed.

Nightmares didn't invade Aislinn's sleep, only peaceful feelings of joy and happiness. Until the last moment of sleep, a small blip on the radar of her subconscious that woke her.

I'll make this right. I'll make everything alright.

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Flip had taken on cooking duties and made a breakfast big enough for thirty people. Aislinn smiled at the big man, the pride evident as he settled next to her with his heaping plate of food.

“You’re a good cook,” she said, smiling at him.

“Thanks,” he grinned. “I like food, and to prevent me from starving, well, I had to learn to cook.”

“Does it, by ‘it,’ I mean your gift, does your gift make you hungry?” she asked. Flip set his fork down, looked at his plate, and then up at Aislinn.

“I never thought of it before, but yea. It makes me feel as though I haven’t eaten in months. I tend to gorge if I’m not careful after a big incident. Little things, like moving a book or something, feels like nothing, but if I move a large object...”

“...like the garbage truck,” she smiled.

“Yea, like the garbage truck. Well, then I could eat all day and night.”

“Fascinating,” said Adam, staring at them. “I get the same way. If I have a particularly complex surgery that requires me to exude more energy than the average event, I’m ravenous. I tend to go for carbs, lots of junk food like tacos, chips, popcorn, endless amounts of bread. I can eat an entire loaf.”

“Huh,” said Flip, “I want meat. Tons and tons of meat. I once ate four steaks and two burgers after I moved a car.”

“It’s sugar for me,” said Aislinn, smiling. “Everything from candy bars to cupcakes and brownies. What about you, Kane?”

“I-I don’t know,” he said, thinking. “I seem to be thirsty mostly. My last case, the one I finished and saw you. I followed you to the hospital, but I drank like ten sodas in about twenty minutes. The nurse even asked if I was okay.”

“Okay, so carbs, meat, sugar, and liquid,” said Adam. “Now, if Spook would just tell us...”

“Shut the fuck up! I’m not some freak!” he shouted from the corner where he sat with his computer. He turned to face the foursome, his face red with anger and embarrassment. “I-I’m not a freak.”

“Is that what you think I am?” asked Aislinn.

“N-no, I... Aislinn, don’t do this,” he said, staring at her.

“We’re not freaks, Van, none of us. When you realize that you’ve been given a gift that will make a difference in this world, you’ll be better off.”

She turned back to her plate of food and continued to eat her pancakes. Flip eyed Spook, letting him know that his outburst was not a good thing. Kane eyed his friend.

Spook stared straight at the group, his computer pinging behind him. Without turning, he spoke.

“She’s on the move. Headed toward the hospital if my guess is right,” he said, staring at Aislinn, who only smiled.

“Wait, how did you know that?” asked Adam. “You didn’t look at the screen.”

“He knows,” said Aislinn. “Call Christopher and let him know she may be headed to the hospital. He’ll need to let the staff know to not give anything away.”

Adam nodded and moved toward the window, dialing Christopher Krauss.

Aislinn continued to stare at Spook, who refused to look away. She knew. Somehow, she knew about his gift. If anyone found out, anyone in the government, he would become a freak show or worse. Most likely, they would carve his brain open, and he would never be the same again.

Aislinn continued to smile at him but said nothing. Kane watched the interaction with curiosity and, if he were honest, a smidge of jealousy. Something was happening between his woman and his friend, and he wasn’t sure he liked it. In fact, something was happening between his woman and ALL of his friends.

“Okay, he’s going to call the hospital and tell them he has a woman who’s going to ask for his brother, and they are to pretend he’s out with a death in his family,” said Adam.

“She’s there now,” said Spook.

Adam stared open-mouthed at his friend, shaking his head. Flip looked at Spook with curiosity but said nothing. He understood what it was like to be judged. Hating the silence, Kane spoke up.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said, sitting between Flip and Aislinn. “We all seem to have some sort of voodoo connection here. Especially all of us with Aislinn. I personally think I was supposed to find her. She was supposed to be mine. I knew all of you before, but none of us knew about our gifts. I think all of this was supposed to happen. I don’t know why, other than I think together we’re stronger than apart.”

“What do you mean?” asked Flip.

“I think we’re supposed to work together.”

“You mean as private security?” asked Adam, curling his nose.

“I don’t know if it’s just private security anymore,” said Kane. “Think about it. With all of us together, the impact we could make on national security threats.”

“Christ! Are you fucking crazy?!” said Spook. “They would never believe any of us, and even if they did, they’d want to experiment on us, cut us open! No fucking way! I agreed to help with this, but that’s it.”

“Van, he’s not suggesting that,” said Aislinn calmly. “I think he’s saying that we might be able to help in ways that only we know. Finding things that the government or others might ignore. No one would need to know about the gifts.”

“Exactly,” said Kane, eyeing Spook suspiciously. “I wouldn’t tell anyone about our gifts, Spook, ever. But I do think we could make a huge impact in the world.”

“It’s an interesting idea,” said Adam. “My practice is really good, but I have to say, I’ve been careful not to let others near me when I’m operating for fear of them finding out what I do. It would be good to have it on a smaller scale.”

“What do you think, Flip?” asked Kane.

“I got nothing going on,” he said, grinning at Aislinn. “I thought I was hiding, and yet something brought me here to all of you and especially to her. It’s like she’s the glue or something. I don’t know. I know that I feel more in control when she’s around. Maybe it’s her gift. I mean, I know she can see evil in people and all, but maybe she helps to keep us all grounded as well.”

“I think it’s the opposite of that,” said Aislinn. “I think you all keep me grounded. There is energy when we’re in the room together. I can’t explain it. I do wonder, though, what happened to all of us that gave us these gifts.”

“It’s a great question,” said Adam. “We four were in the Army together, but you weren’t. Besides, we had our gifts as children.”

He eyed Spook for affirmation, but the young man said nothing and showed no signs of involving himself in the conversation. Adam’s phone pinged, and he looked down.

“Christopher is confirming that Deborah went to the hospital and asked for him. The nurse told her he was out for a family funeral, and she seemed to accept that.”

“Where did you live?” asked Aislinn. All eyes turned to her, looking confused. “When you were children? Where did you all live?”

“Well,” said Adam, “my dad was an Army surgeon as well. I lived in many places. Fayetteville, Shreveport, Sierra...”

“Wait, Sierra Depot?” asked Kane.

“Yea, it was the weirdest place ever. No towns around, nothing, just munitions.”

“I was there,” said Kane. “As a kid, I was there. My old man was a contractor on the base.”

“Fucking hell,” whispered Flip. “I was there too. My father was stationed there for two years.”

All eyes turned to Spook. His mouth held in a tight line, his fists clenched at his sides. He was battling something internally but hearing the words from the others had his

mind racing.

“I lived there too,” said Aislinn, staring at Spook. “My father worked on a laser-guided system, repairing, not building.” Her eyes continued to stare at Spook, the others holding his gaze as well.

The deafening silence covered the room like a blanket of fog. No one moved, no one took his or her eyes from anyone, just staring ahead. Spook finally blinked and looked at each face, settling back on the sweet face of his friend’s woman.

“I lived there, too.”

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“Well, doesn’t that spin a new light on things,” said Aislinn. “We’re all pretty close to the same age. It would make sense that perhaps we were all exposed to something.”

“Then why aren’t there hundreds of people with gifts?” asked Kane.

“Maybe there are,” she said. “Maybe they don’t know they have it. If someone had my gift, I can tell you that they may be labeled as psychotic, or they could be hiding their gifts. I don’t remember a lot of children near or around the base. In fact, I don’t remember a lot of anything there.”

“I don’t remember much about being there,” said Adam. “I was pretty young. Maybe three or four when we got there and six or seven when I left.”

“Same,” said Kane. “I don’t remember any of you, so maybe we were all there at different times. I do know there weren’t a lot of children. We lived in this dump of an apartment above a garage in Herlong.”

“I remember going to the one little store they had as a child,” said Aislinn. “I was really young. I think my first episode happened about a year after I left.”

“My dad was stationed there for two years,” said Flip. “We lived in a trailer outside the base. My mom home-schooled me. I think my first episode was about a year after we moved to Fort Lewis.”

Adam looked at his friends and shook his head. They were all in the same area, around the same time, on a base that held munitions and potentially weapons that no

one was aware existed. Anything could have been in the air or transmitted through the water.

“I was five,” said Spook softly. All eyes turned to him, not saying anything to him. “We – my mom and me – we lived with her boyfriend. He would come home every day with this pink dust all over him. My mom would shake it off on the front porch.”

“Pink dust,” whispered Aislinn. “I remember...”

“He would ruffle my hair and hand me a dollar so I could run to the candy store. I think he did it so he and my mom could get it on, but I didn’t care.” It was as if Spook were speaking to himself. He stared over the heads of his friends out the window into the gray day.

“Cell phones were just starting to get popular, but we had this house phone that when it rang, I knew who it was without answering. It would freak my mom out. I would say ‘grandma’s calling.’ Her boyfriend had a beeper or pager or whatever, and I would know when he was within a few miles of the house.”

“I don’t understand,” said Adam.

“He sees the signals. He feels them,” said Aislinn, staring at Spook. He gave her a slight nod.

“I do. I feel the signals, but more than that, I see the numbers associated with them.”

“You mean like all the ones and zeros?” asked Flip.

“Something like that, but more like... like your digital print. For instance, I know that Adam’s first cell phone number was 555-831-2345.”

“What the fuck!?! How did you know that?” he asked.

“I don’t know. It’s like it’s imprinted in your DNA. The man down there, the one with the black umbrella in his hand? His cell phone is 555-275-0892. His last three calls have been from his mother.”

“You see this all the time?” asked Adam.

“All the fucking time,” he said calmly. “In the sandbox, over there, I could hear and see the numbers like a teletype machine racing across my brain. It was so much I could barely cope. When I’m in a city, it’s fucking overwhelming. Thousands of people with thousands of numbers. Over there? I always knew where you guys were by your signals.”

“And you knew where the enemy was?” said Kane. “That’s how you saved our asses in the mountains.”

Spook nodded.

“It was also why I couldn’t save the team from the two hundred and fifty-first. I was so focused on your numbers, when I figured out theirs was coming from another hot zone I didn’t have enough reaction time. They died, all of them. Because I couldn’t see the numbers fast enough.” He folded his lean muscular arms and stared out into the street.

“Jesus, Spook, you couldn’t have saved them. They were like forty miles away! Dude, there is no fucking way you could have saved them. You can’t carry that burden,” said Flip.

“But I can, and I do. Just like you carry the burden of all the men you couldn’t save,” he said, staring at his friend.

“No one should carry any burdens at all,” said Aislinn. “Do you know how many murders I’ve been a witness to and unable to stop? If I had carried that burden, I would have been committed years ago. Look, I don’t know what happened to us, but I think we all have a good place to start now. More importantly, we have each other. Something a few weeks ago I would have never dreamed could happen. I have a man I love...”

“You love me?” asked Kane.

“Yes, you idiot, I love you. I have a man I love and friends. I feel it in my soul. You are my friends and so much more. Do you know how lonely my life has been? I don’t care what brought us together. I just know that this was supposed to happen.”

“I agree,” said Flip. “Had I known about all of you while we were in the Army, my life would have been very different. This seems natural, all of us being together.”

Kane nodded at his friends and pulled Aislinn in tight for a hug.

“You stay here with Spook tonight,” he said. Aislinn started to argue, but he kissed her, quieting her instantly. “It will be safer if you stay here. Spook will have us on communications. We’ll stop Deborah. Don’t worry.”

Aislinn nodded and watched as the men prepared to leave for the night. Kane kissed her once more as he left the loft. Locking the door, she turned to see Spook, still cross-armed staring at her.

“I’m sorry you had to reveal your secret,” she said.

“I’m not. Thank you, Aislinn,” he said, letting out a long, slow breath. “I feel as though a weight has been lifted from my shoulders.”

Aislinn smiled at him as he turned to focus his attention on the computer screen. She pulled the afghan from the back of the sofa and covered her legs, a chill settling in the apartment. Picking up the book on the coffee table, she tried to read, but sleep crept up on her, and she finally nodded off.

Spook turned to see the pretty woman sound asleep. He smiled and stood, pulling the blanket up under her chin. She looked so angelic sleeping there and so brave. He knew what thoughts must be entering her head as she slept, and although his burden was great, hers was terrifying.

Let's end this, and I'll disappear.

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“Hi, baby,” said the woman, leaning over to reveal unbridled breasts.

Her pink nipples poked through the white silk blouse, her long red fingernails danced up his sleeve. He tried to smile, his expression more pain than passion. Her lips touched his and pressed hard at first but then relaxed.

“What’s the matter?” she asked in an angry tone. “I thought you wanted to play tonight.”

“I do,” he said shakily. “I do. I just, well, the funeral is still fresh in my mind.”

Good cover. Stay calm, Christopher. We’re here.

“Funerals! What a crock! They’re for the living, not the dead. I need a good hard fuck tonight, baby. I need you to really pound me. Can you do that?” she asked, leaning forward to reveal her breasts once more.

He nodded as she reached for his hand, guiding it up her lean, creamy white thigh beneath her tight black skirt. His fingers brushed against the tuft of hair, and instinctively, his cock jumped. Christopher wanted to curse himself, to hate himself, but as a physician, he knew his body was reacting to a biological function.

“Finger me,” she whispered, “finger fuck me right here.”

“Here?” he said. Her eyes went wide as if shocked by his reaction. “I mean, why not let the anticipation build a little, and then I’ll fuck you in the bathroom.”

Good answer, but don't go anywhere alone with her.

It was difficult for Christopher not to turn and seek out the voice in his ear. He knew that the three men were in the restaurant or close by, but he had no clue where. He also had no clue where the police were, but he knew that Kane had assured him they would be there.

“Oooohhhh,” she breathed heavily, “that makes me so hot. I want you to fuck me so hard you make me bleed, baby. And when we're done with that sweet couple tonight, I want you to bathe me in their blood all over, just rub it all over. Will you do that?”

He nodded, staring at her, trying not to show his disgust.

“If we cut his cock off while it's hard, can I still fuck myself with it?” she asked.

“N-no, it will...”

“I'm just kidding, Michael, geez! Is this how you're going to be all night? I mean, I've been waiting for you for days. I need this, baby, and you know, I think this might actually be the couple that's responsible for your wife and son.”

Christopher's eyes widened, and he sat back as if she had slapped him. She convinced his brother that she could find his family's killers. That's how Michael had been lured into this sick world.

“What? What are you talking about?” he asked, shocked.

“Your wife and son? You do remember them, don't you? That's why you're doing this, right? I think I found them, baby. I think this couple were responsible for their deaths. Can't you just think of all the wonderful ways to torture them? Make them pay?”

Christopher thought he would vomit right there at the table. She still held his hand against her pussy, the wetness increasing with every word she spoke. This woman was truly psychotic.

Take a break, Christopher. You're doing great. Don't let her know...

He swallowed hard, his body filling with both disgust and anger. He jammed his fingers hard inside her, needing to cause this woman discomfort and pain for the angst she caused his brother.

"Oh! Oh yes, baby. You know how I like it," she smiled. Deborah squirmed against his hand, and he immediately pulled his hand away, wiping her juices on his napkin. "Baby, that's not fair. You're gonna make me wait?"

"Yes. I'm going to make you wait until I say so," he said, suddenly calm and focused.

Her long red fingernails walked up his thigh to the traitorous bulge in his pants. She squeezed his cock hard, rubbing her knuckles roughly against his balls. Christopher closed his eyes, smothering a groan.

"You'll do what I say," she whispered. He opened his eyes and leaned forward, kissing her softly on the cheek.

"Excuse me a moment. I need to make sure the hospital is okay without me again tonight. I'll be right back, and then we can leave."

She looked at him suspiciously and then nodded. Walking to the back of the restaurant, he ducked inside the men's room and took several deep breaths. Leaning over the sink, he splashed cold water on his face and looked in the mirror, jumping at the sight of Flip standing behind him.

“It’s okay, Doc. You’re doing great.”

“I can’t do this,” he said, shaking his head. “She’s crazy. She’s fucking crazy, and Michael, oh God, Michael was with that woman because...”

“Doc, it’s okay,” he said, placing a firm hand on his shoulder. “She’s a manipulator. You’re doing the right thing. Everyone is in place. Let’s just get her to take you to the couple, and then we’ll be done with this business.”

Christopher nodded his head and took another long breath. Straightening his tie, he headed back to the table.

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

Aislinn tossed back and forth on the sofa. The dream was coming on heavily now. Except it wasn't like the others, not exactly. It was filled with grief and sadness and death but not murder. She saw his face, Michael Krauss sobbing hysterically. No, no, it wasn't Michael. It was Christopher. Somehow, she knew it wasn't Michael. It was Christopher, and there was a woman standing behind him.

But it wasn't the woman behind him that he was focused on. It was the woman lying in front of him. Her long blonde hair was covered in blood, her face marred as if she had fallen against the concrete, the skin scraped off, revealing raw red burns. She was barely breathing, barely awake, but she was reaching for something, for someone. A hand, a small hand. The hand of a little boy.

"I'm so sorry," he cried, "I didn't see you, Ellie. I didn't see you or Tommy. Ellie, hold on. Please hold on..."

"I-I can't. Take care of... take care of Michael. He needs you..."

"No! No, Ellie, no, please, don't go!" he cried.

"It's okay. I forgive... I..." the last gasps of breath left her body, and he hugged her close, blood soaking his shirt. The boy was gone, dead from the impact of the vehicle.

He turned to see the woman behind him, her face drunk from alcohol and sex. He successfully hid his lustful cravings and tendencies from his family. Tonight, the woman behind him insisted on drugs to increase their appetite, and he had gone along with it, his senses dulled to the pain. The pain is what he enjoyed. The whippings, the slaps, the cock rings, the piercings. No one knew. Not even his twin. His twin, whose

wife and son were now dead at his feet.

He didn't see them. They were walking across the quiet residential street as he turned the corner. He didn't recognize the street, so addled by the drugs, he didn't even know it was his brother's neighborhood.

"What do we do?" asked the woman drowsily.

"Get in the car," he said.

"But..."

"I said get in the car!"

They left the bodies there on the blood-stained sidewalk. The darkness would cover them until another car drove by. He took the narrow dark streets to the interstate, where he drove for what seemed like hours, the woman beside him sound asleep. When he reached the remote lake, he found his bag in the back of the vehicle and changed into his scrubs from the hospital. He carefully wiped his fingerprints from the car and the woman as best he could.

He thought of the night of violent sex, the marks now marring his body. The needs of his body forced him to do things he didn't want to do, fucking the woman over and over again even as she was completely out of it from the drugs. Thank goodness he had used a condom with her. There would be no DNA linked to him.

He unbuckled her seatbelt and pushed her to the driver's side. She barely made a sound, so drunk and lost in the drugs. The car was hers, so the authorities would only believe she had killed herself if found. He placed the car in drive and watched as it raced down the steep embankment and into the deep lake.

Aislinn watched him run down the long dirt road along the lake. Outside a small cabin, he tied his bag to the back of an old motorcycle and pushed it to the main road before starting it. He was in such pain, crying, angry. He was in his own home now, scrubbing himself, washing himself. He pulled the cock ring off and then one-by-one the piercings, pulling the skin carelessly, causing blood to ooze from his skin.

Stepping from the shower, he gathered all his toys into a trash bag and tied it off. Never again. I will never live this life again . He was making a vow. A vow to his brother's dead wife and son. Sitting on his sofa in blue jeans and a t-shirt, he was waiting. What was he waiting for? The knock on the door, his brother sobbing, distraught. His brother. He was waiting for his brother.

"I will make this right, Michael. I will find a way," he whispered to his brother.

"Aislinn? Aislinn, honey, wake up. Aislinn, you're scaring me," said Spook.

Aislinn jerked awake, the pillow beneath her head soaked with tears. She gulped back a sob, her own body shaking.

"Aislinn? Honey, what's wrong? I could feel your sadness. It wasn't like before. It wasn't dark," he said, holding her against him.

"It's, oh God! We have to call them!"

"Call who, honey?" asked Spook.

"Kane. Adam. Flip. Christopher killed his brother's wife and son. He didn't mean to. It was an accident!"

"What? Slow down, Aislinn. What do you mean?"

“He killed them. He used to be into the same lifestyle. He was with a woman, and they were drunk and high. He didn’t see Michael’s wife and son. He killed them, and then he killed the woman he was with!”

“Fuck!”

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Christopher watched Deborah work her magic with the couple, her blouse now completely unbuttoned to the waist of her skirt, her breasts accessible for both the man and woman.

“Doesn’t your friend want to join us?” asked the woman.

“He likes watching,” said Deborah in a perturbed tone. “Don’t you, baby?”

“Yes. Yes, I like watching,” he said, smiling at her.

He remembered what this was like. Finding another couple who would let you do all the things you wanted to do, all the things you dreamed of doing. He remembered the hunt, the thrill, the morning-after feelings of disgust and regret. Promises of never doing that again, only to have your body betray you one more time. Until that night, that fateful night.

“What do you say we take this to our place?” said the man.

“Perfect,” said Deborah, standing. She held a tight grip on the man’s cock, straining against the zipper of his pants, the woman smiling at the pair. The wife reached for Christopher, rubbing the front of his pants.

“This one needs some work,” she smiled.

“He’ll come up to the challenge. Don’t worry.” They headed toward the front door of the private club, Deborah and Christopher following. “What the fuck is wrong with you?” she seethed.

“What do you mean?”

“Get your fucking head in the game, Michael! This couple is golden. They want it. They’re practically begging us for it. I can tell. Now get with it!”

He nodded at her, following the couple down the block to a small apartment building.

We’re with you, Christopher. The couple is identified. Law enforcement is in the apartment.

He said nothing but obediently followed Deborah, who was already pulling out the man’s cock in the elevator. Lowering to her knees, she sucked him hard and then bit down, making him yell. His wife giggled and stroked Deborah’s face, brushing back her hair. Deborah willingly stood and captured the wife’s mouth, shoving her tongue into her mouth violently.

The apartment seemed non-descript. Plain furniture, plain rugs, plain everything. But like all couples with a penchant for their kind of sex, they had a secret room with all the play toys you could want or need. Christopher watched as Deborah stripped the couple and then stripped herself. She looked over her shoulder, and he slowly started to unbutton his own shirt, praying for time.

Chaining the woman to the fleece-lined cuffs hanging from the ceiling, she shoved three hard, cold silver balls roughly into her vagina, and the woman squirmed. Deborah reached for her nipples and twisted hard, slapping the woman across the face. Gagging her with a thin red scarf, she turned her attention to the man, cuffing him to a bed, his legs spread wide.

Deborah took delight in biting and slapping his rigid cock. Christopher knew it must be painful for the man, but his gagged mouth could only groan. She stood on the table and lifted her leg, still covered in the stiletto boot.

“Wait!” he screamed. She turned, anger and fire in her eyes. “I can’t do this. I can’t let you...”

“What the fuck are you talking about? This is what we do, Michael. I find them. I fuck them. I kill them, and you get to watch as I make them beg.”

The eyes of the man and woman went wide, their bodies flailing against the restraints.

“No. No, this isn’t what we do. It’s what you and my brother did.”

“Your brother?” her eyes narrowed.

“I’m Christopher, not Michael. I’m his twin.”

“His twin? What the fuck kind of game is this?” she sneered at him, anger filling her features. He nearly left the room but stared her down.

“I’m sorry. I have to stop you. I can’t let you...”

Move... move... move! Christopher, get out of there now!

“No, I have to make this right.”

“Who are you talking to? You will not stop me!”

She lifted her leg and slammed the heel into the chest of the now sobbing man. Christopher leapt forward, his pants and shoes still on, his chest bare. He shoved Deborah off the table and knelt beside the man, holding his hand over the now gushing blood. He heard footsteps outside and banging on the door, the heavy deadbolt holding tight.

Turning, he watched as Deborah slashed at the woman. The large butcher knife glinted with every movement of her arm.

“Stop! Deborah, stop!” he yelled.

Turning her anger toward him, her body covered in blood, she jumped onto the table and slashed at his chest and neck, blood squirting in all directions. The splintering of wood turned her attention for only a moment, and then through her deafening, sick laughter, Christopher heard his brother’s voice.

Stay with me, Christopher. It’s okay. I forgive you.

Sounds and sights assailed him. His vision blurred. He stared up at the blood-red ceiling. A gunshot sounded, and then another and another, and Deborah’s eyes went wide as she slumped forward.

Christopher’s body finally relaxed. It was done. She was dead.

“Christopher, stay with me,” said Adam.

“I-I’m sorry. I killed them. I killed...”

“We know, Christopher. You killed your brother’s wife and son. We know. It was an accident, Christopher.”

Christopher’s eyes grew wide, and then as if knowing how, he smiled and nodded. The knife had nicked several arteries. Blood was pumping too fast. Adam saw the damage, the pints of blood pouring quickly from his body. There were too many wounds. He would never get them all tied off.

“Let me go,” he pleaded, looking up at Adam. “Let me go. I want to be with my

brother. I need to tell him... tell him I'm sorry... tell him..." The last breath of Christopher Krauss faded into the room as police and paramedics raced back and forth between the couple.

Deborah lay dead on the floor. Three gunshots fired expertly through her internal organs.

"Damn," said Adam under his breath.

"He would have been brought up on manslaughter charges, Adam. You know that," said Kane. "He knew that and wanted to go."

"I know, but I also know he was living with a helluva lot of guilt. I'm a doctor, Kane. I try to save everyone, even the bad guys. Except her," he said, pointing to Deborah, "her I wouldn't have tried to save. She is just one mean, evil bitch."

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The couple would survive to get kinky another day, although both claimed they would never partake of that lifestyle again. Christopher Krauss was laid to rest next to his brother, his brother's wife and son, and their parents.

The police did not question how Kane and his team of misfits knew so much about the murders. They were only grateful to have a final resolution. A win for them was a win for the public. Kane had no interest in telling anyone that his team was part of the investigation, and the police department was just fine with that.

With the deaths of Christopher and Michael Krauss, Aislinn felt an unusual release in her chest that other nightmares had not possessed. It was as if the story had finally finished, and she was a part of the ending. The conclusion gave her peace. The horrible, disorienting feelings that Deborah had given her were gone and laid to rest

as well.

Flip insisted on living in his travel trailer, saying it was more his style and easier to clean. He did not intend to leave the area, having found his family.

Adam decided to move his practice closer to Kane and Aislinn, selling his suburban home and buying a loft in the building across the street. Spook was still living the furthest away on the other side of town but at least showed up more often.

The wet, cold days of late winter and early spring gave way to the sunshine and beauty of summer. Kane and Aislinn had slipped into a steady rhythm. Aislinn became the new business manager for PPS. Personal and Private Security. She managed all of the contracts and even built their website. The resolution rate was higher than the police departments, but Kane knew if the others joined full-time, their business would turn toward more serious crimes.

Their personal relationship was on a high that didn't seem to end. Kane had proposed twice to Aislinn. Both times, she smiled at him and said, 'not yet.' Kane was a patient man, but he wanted this woman as his and his only. In his mind, marriage was the way to make that happen.

As a family, they met every Sunday for dinner. Flip and Aislinn would share the cooking duties, and, more often than not, Dr. Brennan would join them as well. She was highly interested in trying to find out about their connection, particularly the exposure to the pink dust for them all.

"So, what's happening in your world, my darling Aislinn?" asked Dr. Brennan.

"Well, we just finished two more cases this week. Kane and I bought the loft downstairs, and we'll be expanding the space to give us an additional bedroom and more office space. I think I'm going to buy some new furniture this week, and oh,

we're going to Ireland next month to get married, and you're all invited."

Aislinn chewed her mouthful of food and smiled at the table as silence filled the room. Kane dropped his fork and stood abruptly, walking away. Her eyes followed him, grinning. She watched him open the bedside table and pull out the familiar red velvet box. Walking back to the table, he kneeled down as he had so many times before.

"Aislinn Carter, will you marry me in one month... in Ireland?" he smiled at her.

"I will," she said, smiling back.

The table erupted in cheers and laughter, and Kane lifted her from the seat, nearly overturning the table. He kissed her, devouring her lips, tasting the spaghetti sauce.

"Will you always make me work this hard?" he asked.

"Always because I love you," she said quietly.

"Congratulations!" said Adam, hugging them both. "Ireland? Why Ireland?"

"Well," said Aislinn, smiling, "my mother and grandmother were from Ireland, and Dr. Brennan, Angela, and her sister both think some of my gift may have come from her. With the revelation of the pink dust, I'm not so sure that's true any longer, but it would still be interesting to visit and learn more about my heritage."

"But I'm definitely not Irish," said Flip with a sideways grin.

"No, no, yer definitely not," said Angela, smiling. "But there may be something to all of you being connected. Besides, there's nothin' like an Irish wedding. You'll see!"

“You have this all planned?” asked Kane.

“Yes,” said Aislinn shyly. “We’re getting married at the castle ruins near my grandmother’s birthplace. We’ll be staying in Dublin for two weeks, all of us, and then spending some time with Angela and her sister.”

“You’re coming too?” asked Kane.

“I am. ‘Tis been too long since I’ve seen my sister. ‘Tis time I go home,” she said with misty eyes.

“Well then, to good friends and strange gifts,” said Adam, raising his wine glass, “Slainté!”

“Slainté!”

Source Creation Date: August 3, 2025, 12:45 am

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