

They took the train out to some shit neighborhood where nobody would recognize them, or later identify them to the police, and Enoch had some horrendous new punk music blasting through his headphones and out into the train car the whole way. Landon's concentration was not disturbed, but he pitied the boy's ear drums. Enoch stood, gripping the bar above his head with a drug-fueled intensity, even though every seat in the train car was empty except for Landon's.

The train slowed and leaned as it turned west, rattling over patchy lots and dark six flats. Thousands of lights from the skyscrapers in the distance turned the night sky purple.

Enoch spit on the floor and yelled, "The money that it takes to wash the windows on one of those buildings could buy this whole neighborhood."

That was an exaggeration. Landon ignored him, running contingencies through his head. Enoch took a long pull from a chrome flask and offered it to Landon. Landon shook his head without looking up. Enoch's computer skills were incomparable, but he was a lost child in many ways. Enoch shrugged and took another drink as the train shuddered to a stop at their destination.

The platform smelled like piss and woodchips, and the night air was oppressive and damp. Enoch shifted his shoulders in his leather jacket, unsticking the collar from his neck, and lit a cigarette. The train tracks ran directly over the tattoo parlor. The neon light from the tattoo parlor stained the blanket of pigeon shit at the bottom of the stairs from the platform orange.

Next to the tattoo parlor was a wood-paneled store front with a hanging Old Style sign reading "Zimne Pivo" and a handwritten sign on the door advertising that the place was "Air Conditioned." Landon handed Enoch a twenty and nodded to the bar.

A bell rang as Landon entered the empty tattoo parlor. The interior was faded, but clean. Landon looked over the objects arrayed on the counter behind the lone chair, and found the sanitation procedures sufficient. A bony bald man with a grey beard appeared from the back, his tank-top showing off full-color sleeves packed with mythical creatures and Catholic iconography.

"You want to look at the books?" The man asked, nodding to binders of art layed out on a card table.

"No need," Landon smiled, and the man gestured for him to sit.

Landon rolled up his left sleeve and showed the man the list of nine dates in Old English font on the inside of his wrist.

"This the only art you got?" The tattoo artist asked.

"For now," Landon said.

"August 21, 1791?" The man read a line off Landon's wrist curiously, scratching his beard.

"On that day," Landon began, with dispassionate theatricality, "The slaves in Saint Domingue revolted, taking much of the Haitian island and visiting on their former masters many of the torments that the slaves had been subjected to for generations."

The man pursed his lips, mildly suspicious, then shrugged and asked, "October 31, 1517. What's that?"

Landon smiled at the irony, examining the elaborate golden cross tattooed on the man's throat. He replied, "That's the night when, according to legend, Martin Luther, despising the corrupt practices of Rome, nailed his Ninety-Five theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg. An apocryphal story, but consider it a metaphor... Within a year, Luther's teachings had been reproduced and distributed at a speed and over a range that was unknown previously in history, and peasants were rising up to begin a new world order."

Now the tattoo artist wore a distinct look of distaste.

"And what do you want me to draw?" The man asked, his voice chilly.

"August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011," Landon said flatly, looking the man in the eyes.

"Oh yeah? What's going to happen tomorrow?" The tattoo artist sneered a little.

"My good man," Landon smiled expansively, and lied, "tomorrow I'm getting married!"

The tattoos artist laughed a long, wheezing smoker's laugh, and clapped Landon on the shoulder. "You're a strange one, I'll give you that," he said.

Landon settled back into the chair to the familiar buzzing sound, and meditated.

He wished that it was more painful, after all, this was a transformation. Soon it was over. Landon gave the man a fifty, and went back out into the sticky night, rubbing his bandaged wrist unconsciously.

Entering the bar, Landon nearly ran into the back of Enoch. The boy was poised in a slight crouch with his fists held out from his sides, brass knuckles gleaming on each hand. A tall blonde woman in heels and a flattering skirt stood, looking offended, near the pool table. Three angry young men, all well-muscled, two holding pool cues, one with a bloody face, stood in front of Enoch. Enoch looked back at the sound of the door opening, with a wild-eyed expression and a bloody chin. Five empty shot glasses sat in a neat row on the bar. Behind the bar, a wrinkled man with a white buzz cut looked on with a jowly expression of displeasure.

Landon slapped Enoch on the back of the head, and spoke to the old man behind the bar, "Bardzo przepraszam pana, mój kolega jest lekko uciężały umysłowo."

The old man raised a bushy eyebrow, and one of the young men laughed an unfriendly laugh. Landon took Enoch by the arm and pulled him to the door. The young men moved to follow, but the barkeep called them off with a toss of his head. Landon shoved Enoch out into the street and followed behind him. He kept shoving him up the stairs toward the train, and it wasn't until they'd jumped the turnstyle and were waiting on the platform that either of them spoke.

"You are truly a fuck up," Landon said.

Enoch took the flask out of his pocket, but Landon reached out and took it from him.

"Where'd you learn to speak Polack?" Enoch said, suddenly mopey.

"I picked it up in my travels," Landon answered.

"What'd you say to him?"

"I'm sorry, sir, my friend is a fucking retard."

The platform began to vibrate with the roar of an approaching train. Enoch screwed up his mouth, working his tongue back and forth, and then spit out a wad of blood with a tooth in it.

"Fuck!" Enoch yelled, putting his hands into the pockets of his coat and pulling them out wearing his brass knuckles again. He beat the shit out of a trash can while the train rumbled into the station. Landon boarded the train, which was empty once again. Enoch lifted the trash can over his head and hurled it off the platform, in the general direction of the bar, and slipped into the train car as the doors were closing.

Enoch sat across from Landon. He held the back of his hand up to his mouth and found that he was still bleeding prodigiously. He spit blood onto the floor and asked Landon, "You got anything for the pain?"

Landon took an engraved chrome cigarette case from his pocket, popped it open, and handed two pills over to Enoch. Enoch spit out more blood, and swallowed the pills. It was time for Enoch to start sleeping it off. Landon would need him tomorrow. It was a long ride back into the city. Enoch was asleep before the first stop.

"Can today get any worse?" Julius Martin asked a dead bird, not long before his day got even worse. He looked at the dead cockatiel, claws up and glassy-eyed, lying on poopy newspaper, and said, "Okay, you're right."

Poppy, the dead cockatiel, lay on his back in a cheap cage on a very expensive wood table, in the parlor of the house of Mr. and Mrs. Donte Gallardo, who were taking their vacation in the Pyrenees. They had left an envelope for Julius with fourteen twenty dollar bills on this very table, expecting, in exchange, that he would be the caretaker of their house, and, in particular, of their beloved Poppy. Julius had earned nine days of his pay so far, but he had spent all fourteen already.

Julius took the plastic from the Sunday edition of the Tribunes that were stacked by the door and used it as a glove to remove the dead bird from its cage. Not wanting to throw Poppy in the garbage, or take time to bury her, Julius put her in the freezer. He watered the plants quickly and took in the mail and the newspaper.

He was anxious to get to the bank. He was behind on his mortgage. The payment that should have pacified his creditors for a while had bounced, and he could not understand why. A phone call, alerting him of the bounced check, had woken him up not long after he had finally gone to sleep, having been up most of the night in severe gastrointestinal distress. He could not understand his illness, either, but suspected that it might be the fault of a jar of spaghetti sauce that had possibly been in the fridge for a very long time.

The morning was warm and damp. Julius checked his phone and found that he had two new emails. One was from EarthTech Solutions, thanking him for the interview and saying that, while they found his qualifications impressive, they had decided to hire somebody else. Julius had been doing whatever odd jobs he could find for the past six months, since the small ISP he had helped to start twenty years ago, when he was just a kid, had finally closed its doors. The second email was from Jessica, asking if he could please find her Buffy boxed set and mail it to her. Julius thought about writing back and saying that that would be inconvenient, because everything in the house he had bought for the two of them was now in poorly-labeled boxes, because the only way he was going to avoid bankruptcy was to sell the place quickly and move back in with his parents at the age of thirty-seven. Instead, he wrote back and said "sure."

The stoplights were out at the corner, and Julius had to jump out of the way of a

pickup truck that made no effort to slow down. His phone went flying, skidded across the street, teetered for a second on the edge of a drain, and then fell into the black depths of the Chicago sewer system. Julius closed his eyes and took a couple deep breaths before heading on to the bank.

There was a long line at the bank, and the tellers were frazzled. When Julius had looked for a bank, he had looked for a bank with high ceilings and marble floors, and brass grates at the teller windows. He had settled for a bank with complimentary Hinkley Springs water and a cool pneumatic tube connecting the drive-through to the main building. The carpet was clean and the fluorescent lights did not flicker. One of the tellers knew him by name, but she was not there today.

Something was wrong today. There was almost never a line, and this line was full of craning necks and tapping feet. Julius went to stand dutifully at the back of the line. He stuck his hand into the pocket of his jeans, habitually reaching for his phone to check the time. His pocket was empty and he sighed. He must have sighed loudly, because a young woman in a sun dress and a leather jacket stopped as she walked past him.

"It'll all be okay," she said, smiling at him. She looked positively giddy.

Julius smiled back at her, unenthusiastically, and she left.

It took twenty minutes for Julius to get to a teller, only to be told that they had no record of any check being drawn from his account. In fact, they had no record of his account at all. He was told not to worry by a young woman who looked as if she had probably been perky when she had arrived at work, but who now looked vaguely defeated. Julius asked her, as nicely as possible, why he shouldn't worry, and was told that the problem was just with the computers. Julius asked whether his money existed anywhere other than inside their computers, and the unfortunate teller looked baffled.

"Is there a shoebox full of cash somewhere in the vault with 'Julius' written on it?" He asked, and then, worried that the teller might cry, mumbled, "Don't worry, it wouldn't be a very big shoebox."

Julius walked out of the bank feeling slightly numb. The clouds had burned off and now it was hot outside. Gross hot. Julius thought that if he stood in one place on the sidewalk too long, the soles of his shoes might fuse themselves to the

pavement.

"Need a ride?"

It took a second for Julius to realize that somebody was talking to him. He looked around and saw the young woman in the sundress, with the leather jacket now slung over her shoulder, leaning on the hood of a black BMW convertible and smoking a cigarette.

It was an odd question to be asked by a stranger, and so it took Julius a second to parse it. Then he shrugged.

"Sure," he said. It was hot out, she did not appear threatening, and it was a sweet car.

"Hop in," she said, tossing her jacket into the small back seat, on top of a pile of grocery bags, luggage, and blankets. She climbed into the driver's seat, and leaned across to unlock the passenger door. She had an unmarked CD case in her hand, and she put this in the glove box, making a face as the gear shift poked her in the ribs.

Julius got into car, thinking of perversely of the warnings he had received as a child, to never get into a car with a stranger. He looked across the car at the driver. She was wearing sunglasses now, much wider than her face, and a broad, private smile. She flicked away her cigarette and put the key in the ignition. Julius felt the growl of the engine.

"Cool car," Julius said, and she turned around to check her blind spots, put the car in gear, and left the parking space fast. "Is it an M6?"

"Something like that," she said. "What's your name?" She asked.

"Julius," Julius said, "and you?"

"Denali," she said. "Denali Song. Bad day?"

Denali glanced both directions as they sped through the flashing red stoplight.

"The bank lost my mortgage check," he said, "and I think I might lose my house."

They sped through another flashing stoplight. It seemed as if the lights were out all over the area. Julius grasped the door handle tightly and fought the urge to offer suggestions on her driving.

"I wouldn't worry about," she said. Julius was getting tired of people telling him not to worry. Denali said, "If the banks can't tell whether or not you paid the money, how will they know to take your house away?"

Julius did not follow her logic. They had to stop at the next intersection. Traffic had backed up as cars took their turns pulling up to the defunct stoplight and remembering how right-of-way works at a four way stop.

"...And besides," she added, "it's just you, right? No wife? No kids? You'll figure something out."

"Who says it's just me?" Julius asked.

"Married men don't get into convertibles with strange younger women outside their local bank, where anybody can see." Denali turned and grinned at him. "Smart ones, anyway."

"Well, you're right," Julius said. "Jessica took the dog. You'll want to get on the freeway going east up here."

"Huh..." Denali said, with pursed-lips, as if she was doing math in her head. "So no pets?" She asked.

Julius thought about the dead bird in the freezer at the Gallardo house and said, "Nope."

"Houseplants?"

Julius shook his head, "I always kill them."

"Do you like your job?"

"I'm... in between jobs..." Julius said. "Are you trying to make me feel like a loser?"

Denali shook her head.

"You'll want to get over," Julius said, pointing at the approaching on-ramp two lanes to their right.

"Some people might envy your freedom," Denali said. The traffic cleared in front of them.

"You need to get over," Julius repeated.

Denali hit the gas, blew by Julius' exit, and took the westbound exit instead. She accelerated through the turn, and they were going 75 by the time they hit the highway.

"I said 'eastbound'!" Julius yelled over the roar of the wind.

The wind whipped Denali's hair back over the top of her seat.

"I'm not taking you home!" She yelled back. Julius gave her a puzzled look. "I'm kidnapping you!"

Julius opened his mouth a few times and found he had nothing to say. Eventually, he managed to ask her "Why?"

"You seem like you could use it."

An old man with pursed lips and an old jack russell terrier stared Landon down as they passed, and Landon stared back at them until they were gone, leaning on the doorbell the entire time. Finally, the intercom crackled.

"Yeah?" an indistinct voice asked.

"It's me," Landon replied, his voice equally indistinct on the other end.

The door buzzed and Landon pushed his way into the apartment building. There was no air in the stairwell, and it stank of hot mildew and carpet cleaner. Those smells gave way to kimchi and shoe polish as Landon reached the first floor, and were to giving way to the smells of marijuana, cigarettes, and patchouli when Landon started to hear gunshots.

Landon put his hand on the door to the apartment with the "Fuck Off" welcome mat. The doorknob was reverberating with automatic weapons fire from the Playstation on a 200 watt sound system. He let himself in and went to the living room, where the bushy-bearded giant, Gustav, sat cross-legged and dull-eyed on the bare wooden floor, between an overflowing ashtray and a two foot bong. Gustav muttered something at the game as Landon stalked by, looking distastefully at the collection of takeout containers, old 40s, and Dunkin Donuts coffees that festered around the room.

Landon pushed open the door to the room where Gustav let Enoch crash, a half-rotted screened-in porch full of old file boxes and a broken refrigerator, left over from the previous tenants. Enoch slept on a sunken couch beneath his leather jacket. A mop of greasy black hair stuck out on one side of the jacket, and faded jeans that the boy did not come close to filling stuck out on the other. Enoch had at least removed his combat boots before bed, and Landon stooped to take the cigarettes from Enoch's boot. He lit one, and shook the boy's shoulder.

Enoch woke up and punched the refrigerator, yelling "Fuck!"

Landon stuck the cigarette in the boy's mouth and said, "I see you decided not to go to school today."

Enoch did not deign to answer. Instead, he puffed several times on the cigarette and whispered, "That fucking bitch." He looked as if he had been

crying.

"Which fucking bitch?" Landon asked, picking up Enoch's stack of reading material and sorting through it.

"Leah." Enoch said, sitting up on the couch and fishing around in his boot for his phone.

Enoch's reading, aside from his standard fare of porn, weapons, and computers, contained a 1,200 page xeroxed pamphlet on the operating systems of ATM machines. Landon pulled a nutritionally perfect granola bar, wrapped in waxed paper, from his pocket and handed it to Enoch.

"What's wrong with Leah?" Landon asked. Leah was the girl Enoch was stalking. Landon had little doubt that she wanted nothing to do with Enoch, but she had made the mistake of being nice to him once.

"She's having phone sex with Stack Williams," Enoch said, around a mouthful of granola bar.

"You listened to their voicemails?" Landon asked, and Enoch nodded. Landon smiled wistfully and said, "Now you know that Leah is a whore. You can do better."

Enoch leaned his head against Landon, and Landon stroked the boy's hair a couple times before pushing him away.

"Here," Landon offered Enoch a pair of pills-- one to help him relax, and one to give him an edge. Enoch dry-swallowed them without question. He sulked a while longer, but soon there was sugar in his blood and chemicals in his brain, and he was ready to face the day.

"Let's see who's phoning home," Enoch said, pulling his laptop from underneath the couch. Landon sat beside him and looked over his shoulder, as Enoch sped through command lines. The background on his monitor changed to a photo of an elderly woman and two gap-toothed children in windbreakers on a grey beach, and Enoch chuckled. An unorganized collection of files and folders were strewn across the photo. "Today's host," Enoch said, and then, pointing to a cluster of .jpegs on the desktop, he snorted, "she's got pictures of her cats."

Enoch typed a few more commands, and then squinted at a list of addresses that scrolled quickly by.

"We got Illinois Department of Transportation...," Enoch said, then added a moment later, "AT&T," and then, gleefully, "Chicago Public Schools..." Landon nodded after Enoch read each name. Another moment passed, and Enoch added, "United Airlines, American Airlines, Southwest... Fifth-Third Bank, Busey Bank, University National Bank..." Enoch coughed and lit an unfiltered Lucky Strike off his last one. "Not bad for a day. 73,674 users."

"No Defense Department?" Landon asked.

"Too soon. Can't target dot mil until we've got at least a million fucking users." Enoch fingers stopped working the keyboard only to scratch his neck hastily and ash his cigarette. The drugs were working to their full effect. Leah the fucking bitch had been forgotten. "Three airlines, three banks, CPS and IDOT, in a day... We're talking about some serious fucking mayhem here."

"Mayhem is not our ultimate goal," Landon reminded the boy, "what do the message boards say?"

Enoch flipped open a notepad next to the computer and consulted a handwritten list. Soon he had joined the discussion on a Huston Cirulius fan site. Landon had not heard of Cirulius, but it seemed that he was the newest pop boy toy.

"Fucking faggot," Enoch laughed, fingers flying. On the host's computer, windows opened and closed. He had downloaded a picture of Cirulius, inserted something malicious into the file, and posted it to the site before Landon could even tell what he was doing.

"OMG. Love his hair," Enoch typed, sniggering.

"Focus, Enoch," Landon said, and Enoch began scrolling back through the previous discussions.

"Laugh Man, Ballyhoo, and Prefect all checked in," Enoch said, "seven injections between them."

From the beginning, Landon had insisted they create their own vocabulary for public communications. An injection was a direct installation of Landon's

software onto a computer-- ideally, either a high-value target that could not be left to the vagaries of virulence, or one on a closed system.

"There's Pyre," Enoch said, cracking his knuckles, "he's the one who got CPS."

Enoch had no love for the Chicago Public Schools.

"I could really go for a bong rip," Enoch said, scratching his neck and looking over his shoulder and Landon with a narrow-eyed glare that dared Landon to refuse. Marijuana was inimical to the orderly mind, but the boy's mind was hardly orderly, and there were pills that could counteract the lack of focus. Landon smiled at the boy, and went back to the living room where Gustav belched a long welcome.

Gustav was closer to Landon's age than to Enoch's, but had made nothing of his life and had only drugs, video games, and high school students as diversions. He was slovenly, out-of-shape, and wearing the same t-shirt and cargo shorts he had been wearing for a week. Landon could smell him, even over the varieties of smoke that were deeply entrenched in the room. Gustav paid Landon no attention.

"Enoch would like a bong rip," Landon said, stalking around behind Gustav, dodging empty carryout containers and empty 40s and picking up the bong. It was sticky. Gustav did not protest. Landon went back to the porch, and caught Enoch taking a long swig from his flask.

"No more, Enoch," Landon chided, "We have too much ahead of us to begin clouding our impulses so early in the day."

Enoch put the flask back in the pocket of his jacket, lying on the bed, and then took the bong from Landon and lit it with a Zippo.

"Well?" Landon asked.

After several seconds of bubbling water, Enoch looked up at him, held his breath for several seconds longer, and exhaled a bit of smoke.

"Everybody checked in," Enoch said, and then added slowly and, Landon thought, with some amount of satisfaction, "except for Denali."

Landon was able to control his face, except perhaps for a twitch of the

eye.

"Anything else?" Landon asked, as if Denali meant nothing.

After a moment of confused silence, Enoch shrugged and looked back at the computer, looking sufficiently chagrined. With a sudden curl of his lip, he typed a few words and hit the ENTER key emphatically. The desktop went grey, leaving only his command line.

"What did you do, Enoch?" Landon asked.

"Wiped her harddrive," Enoch responded nonchalantly.

"That was uncouth," Landon scolded.

"Whatever. Bitch still used AOL."

"I'll need a toothbrush," Julius said eventually, playing along. He had to yell over wind and the rumbling of the CTA train as the BMW convertible blew by it. They were heading north on the Kennedy.

Denali yelled back, "What about a razor?"

Julius shrugged. Captives usually had beards. He had never tried to grow one, but he got a five o'clock shadow around noon every day, so he figured he could manage. On this stretch of I-90/94 the buildings, billboards, and underpasses were like family, and the heat of the day felt good with the wind blowing his hair back at 80 miles an hour. He turned to examine the strange woman who was pretending to kidnap him.

She was younger than Julius-- maybe thirty, maybe not quite. She was pale for summer, with shiny brown hair whipping all around her. He was pondering the freckles on her shoulder when she turned to him and smiled a dimply smile. He could not see her eyes behind her sunglasses. Julius quickly turned his attention back to the road.

"So, uh..." Julius said, trying to think of something to say. An SUV cut them off and Denali layed on the horn and stuck her middle finger as far as she could over her head.

"Yes?" Denali asked.

"Um..." Julius was not accustomed to being stuck in cars with strangers. "Have you seen any good movies recently?"

"No."

"Cop," Julius said, pointing at a squad car half-hidden beyond the next overpass. Denali eased onto the brake.

"Thanks," she said, as they cruised past the cop at exactly 65 miles per hour.

Nobody said anything for a while.

"Can we listen to the Sox game?" Julius asked, and Denali shrugged. Julius reached over and tuned the radio to the game. Then he moved his seat back as far as it would go and stretched his legs. The sun was warm on his face. This whole situation was fairly amusing, and he had nowhere else to be...

ever, really.

Denali turned down the radio to practically zero volume, and yelled over the noise of a truck, "I can't stand commercials. Especially when they're talking about catheters!"

Julius had not even noticed the commercial. He knew them all by heart. They were like the scenery on this stretch of highway through Chicago.

Denali hit the brake and veered across a lane of traffic to take the Division Street exit. Julius turned the radio back up now that the commercials were over. He could tell by Ed Farmer's voice, without hearing the score, that the Sox were losing badly. He turned the radio back down.

At the first stop light, Denalia turned to him and said "I need a favor." There was no expression in her lips and her eyes were hidden behind her sunglasses.

"Sure," Julius shrugged. Denali turned down a side street and pulled up in front of a fire hydrant, switching her blinkers on.

"There's a bookstore and coffee shop around the corner called 'Anachronism,'" Denali told him. She handed him a five. "Get us a couple coffees to go. If there's a guy in there... tall, about your age, narrow face, brown eyes, pale... probably wearing a black button down shirt and black jeans... tattoos on his left arm... just come back here with the coffees. Otherwise, read the paper for a minute and I'll catch up."

Julius looked at her sidelong. She was chewing her lip. He let himself out of the car and headed toward the coffee shop, baking in the hot air coming off the sidewalk.

The Anachronism had a small store front with a hand-painted sign, which was dominated by a fiery circle and anarchist 'A.' Julius pushed the door open to the clank of a cowbell. The bookstore was hot and smelled of wood and old paper and coffee. There were only two patrons, both sitting at small tables, typing on laptops. Neither resembled the man that Denali described.

Julius sat on a bar stool by the counter near the espresso machine, and looked around the room. Mismatched bookshelves, jammed to capacity,

lined the walls. More books were piled on top of the bookshelves, in every corner of the room, and beneath the reading tables.

"What can I get for you?" The man behind the counter was young and trim and clean-cut, with dark hair, big black discs in his ear lobes, and an inch-long spike through his lower lip. He smiled at Julius, who was staring at his spike.

Julius looked over his shoulder at the two patrons and decided for sure that neither looked anything like the man Denali had described. "Two coffees, to go," he said, and pulled the sports section out of the paper. He sipped his coffee and read about how terrible all his sports teams were. A minute later, with another clank of the cowbell, Denali breezed into the Anachronism, pulling off her sunglasses and smiling at everybody, searching the room with her eyes. The two young men who had been reading at a table noticed her and watched as she sat down beside Julius, without acknowledging him.

She spoke to barista, trying to be quiet and casual at the same time, "Hey, Jimmy. I need the inoculation."

Jimmy licked his lips. He glanced quickly past Julius to the two men behind him.

"Landon sent you?" He asked.

"Of course, Landon sent me," Denali whispered. She gave him a silent, pleading look.

Jimmy looked past her at the two men. He smiled at Denali, almost sadly, and then reached beneath the espresso machine and slid something across the bar to her. She grabbed it and buried her clenched fist in her lap. A shadow fell across them. Julius spun around in his stool nonchalantly and leaned back with his elbows on the bar. A pale, lanky, youth, with two straight curtains of dark hair and a tattered Kurt Cobain t-shirt stood over them, his closed laptop under his arm.

"Hi, Denali," he said, looking briefly at her face, and then turning his attention to the bar top.

"Ballyhoo," Denali addressed the young man in a vaguely displeased tone, and Julius saw him flinch.

"Where've you been?" Ballyhoo asked, quietly.

"Around." Denali's face had gone stony.

"You didn't check in," Ballyhoo said, half-smiling apologetically.

Julius was watching the other man, who was watching Denali and Ballyhoo with a narrow-eyed frown. He was thick, with horn-rimmed glasses and a rather tight denim jacket.

Denali spun her stool around, catching Julius' eyes, and flicking her own eyes toward the door. Julius coughed and stretched, trying to act natural, before picking up the coffees, nodding to the barista, and leaving the Anachronism.

Outside, Julius hesitated for a moment, wondering if he should wait for Denali, but decided to wait at the car. She had clearly not wanted the people in Anachronism to know that he was there with her. He climbed into the passenger seat of the BMW convertible and sipped his coffee. A minute later, Denali turned the corner quickly. She jumped into the car, jammed the key into the ignition, and made a u-turn out of the parking space. She laughed loudly and shouted as she made a rolling stop at the intersection, turned onto an empty boulevard, and floored it toward the blue signs for I-90/94.

A second later, she glanced over at Julius, looking a little surprised, as if she'd forgotten about him.

"Um..." Denali started. She hit the brakes, and approached the on ramps slowly, without committing to either lane. "Do you drive stick?"

Julius nodded.

"And you're not, like, super-pissed at me?" Denali asked.

Julius smiled a little and shook his head.

"All right, then," Denali proclaimed, and swerved decisively toward the westbound ramp. She jabbed a finger at the stereo, and grinding, distorted, guitars blasted out of the speakers. Denali bobbed her head to the rhythm, cut somebody in an SUV off, and stepped on the gas.

