

As the volcano God's anger boiled, some of the rootless humans were making plans.

Looking out the window of her apartment in Charlottenburg, she ran her hand over the cashmere cover on the window seat and breathed in the beautiful urban view. Listening to her soothing playlist, Sarah filled her lungs and felt a wave of relief flow through her body. Her thoughts turned to David.

Since they met in Berlin at one of his weekend Spiritual Warrior seminars the chaos that was her life had achieved a level of calm she never imagined possible. Before David she thought monogamy meant monotony, but David introduced her to the possibilities of moving and using the flow of sexual energy. Their sex magic worked too. Now the universe brought her all of her clients. She did not have time for the clients her uncle and the castle group sent. Still, only she and her uncle knew that her swift rise in top-end apartment design was his orchestration. She picked up the phone to thank him, hopefully for the last time.

„Hello Sarah! So good of you to call. How is life in Berlin?“ His tone was cheerful. Swallowing hard, she closed her eyes, inhaled and began;

„Fine Uncle, I am fine and business is good... very good. I called to thank you again for helping me get started, and to tell you... I won't be needing any more referrals.“

He frowned so hard Sarah felt it through the phone. He waved his assistants out of his office like he was chasing flies. He squinted, and after a moment of silence there was a different tone, like a parent talking a child out of playing outside in the rain. Not yet dropping his friendly voice, he countered;

„You want to abandon me and our friends in the castle? We'll all miss you so much!“ A master manipulator, he brought in father's early death, abandonment issues and panic attacks in one calm question. She blinked rapidly, breathed deep before answering and still stuttered.

„I... I am forever grateful for your help in building my client base and reputation. I appreciate your help in getting to where... to where I can manage on my own...“ Faltering less than she expected, she continued; „and.. and I can.. manage on my own. I have a solid client base, two years of commitments in front of me, I write books and blogs on interior design, I...I.“ Her uncle took advantage of the pause to insert another, sharper toned knife.

„The people I introduced you to at our weekend parties have brought you business and prosperity. They made you who you are...“ He strongly emphasized the next word; "I made you who you are.. Look around yourself... everything you see is due to me and my influence... you could say that it... and you.. belong to me... But now you are all grown up and ready to leave us behind... make your way... all by yourself.... are you sure?“

„Yes, uncle, I am sure. I am sure I am grateful and I am sure I can do this.“ Not ready to accept her decision, he tried another knife.

"You enjoyed our gatherings... So many times you took... and gave pleasure ...you have a real... lust for life. You weren't pretending were you?" The two edges of this knife were her strange tastes in pleasure and sex addiction. It took great effort to keep her mind from going back to the warm hours spent in dimly lit rooms at the castle. The smell of massage oil and incense, the sound of people moaning in pleasure as she worked her addiction. Blinking through tears she focused on the note she left herself before she started; "YOU CAN DO THIS!" She cleared her throat;

"Uncle, I am taking my life in a different direction now... There are things I want beyond the castle."

His eyes and voice narrowed;

"You're sure?" Nodding, she said;

„Yes, uncle, I am sure. I am sure I am grateful and... I am sure.. I am sure I can do this.“ She would never mention David and the life she wanted to build with him. Uncle had ways, evil ways, to get what he wanted. She heard his mind working in the silence.

"That still leaves you walking around with, ah.. "intimate information" about people in power, our friends from the castle... Sarah, the tail does not tell the dog when it wants to wag, when it wants to move on. What I am saying is; the control mechanism in this relationship is not you."

"Uncle please, for years I have done everything you ordered, requested even hinted at. Please, may I have my life back? I can keep quiet about the castle members. I have every reason to keep silent and no reason to say anything - ever- to anyone." Another frosty silence that seemed much longer than it actually was. Finally;

"As fond as you are of lying, I know I can't trust you Sarah." Then, after a pause, "I understand the desire to take your life in a new direction and our relationship, yours and mine, is more important to me than your participation in our weekend "debaucheries." Like you, I have other things calling for my attention at the moment, so we will, I will, honor your request for the time being. The door remains open, I look forward to the next time we meet."

Suddenly the line was dead. Though he had kept a civil tone, Sarah felt like lord Voldemort had just left the room. Uncle had always been so generous to her; advice, time, attention, important introductions, and he seemed to ignore her little lies... but there was his vicious side. A side she had seen at the castle orgies. He enjoyed hurting people physically, sexually and emotionally.

And now... All that. Was. Over.

She breathed deep, laid the phone down on the cashmere cushion, wiped her eyes dry and walked over to the bar. She poured a crystal glass of champagne to celebrate. Free! Free, free, free, free! She was free! Free to live her life with David, no longer having to leave him for sex with the wealthy clients her uncle referred to her as part of her well paid interior decoration services. Free from the fear that her dark past and appetites could ruin their happiness or future together. Sex with David was so deep, like

the slow, soulful tantric massage afternoons they shared. Not at all selfish and lazy like weekends at the castle. The Dom Perignon coolly slid down her throat as she looked out the window. She looked at the pink pearlescent cloud in the sky, breathed deep and easy. She smiled as three birds flew past her window.

As Jörg hung up the phone his twin brother Günter asked;

"Sarah straying from the herd?"

"I'll deal with that lying little whore later, get that new consultant in here. I want this project running now."

Although Jörg and Günter Schneider were born in 1940, they both looked like they were in their early forties. They were strong and robust from daily workouts. An associate of their father's, named Baldaur, had educated them in many dark secrets of the east, longevity and health among them. Another gift from Baldaur was Mr. Stone who just showed up at their Munich offices one day wearing an expensive London outfit after the twins returned from living in America. He looked like a weight-lifting-cage-fighting-hit-man in a three piece suit. A damn good three piece suit too. When the twins asked Mr. Stone why he was in their Financial Services office, he simply replied; "Baldaur sent me to look after you." The twins never asked and Mr. Stone never offered any more details. He became driver, bodyguard and constant companion since. He maintained his own on-call crew and handled "difficult tasks" and wet work for the twins.

As Mr. Stone escorted in the new consultant, Mr. Wright, he told him not to ask any questions or interrupt Mr. Schneider.

Mr. Wright replied;

"My resume, charm and finesse will carry the day." Mr. Stone pursed his lips, gave a slight nod and led the way into the most lavish office Mr. Wright had ever seen. The paneling was original Hawaiian Koa, a dark and rare wood that must have cost a fortune. Tastefully displayed collectibles from around the world lined the room; Chinese vases, several Isfahan rugs, Cecil Rhodes personal writing desk, and a security display case of gold artifacts from central and south America. They stopped three meters from the desk, a solid piece of hardwood with nothing on it. There were no chairs or conference tables in the fifty square meter, rectangular office.

Jörg got right to the point;

"You're working here as a "consultant". Your boss tells us that you are aggressive and get results. I hope so. Standing, Jörg boomed; "You have entered the lion's den, Mr. Wright, and since you are not the biblical Daniel, you had better be a fucking lion." Jörg paused to let that sink in. "You report to Mr. Stone. He is your driver, fixer, money man, ... handler. He will arrange any contacts you need and brief you on your assignment immediately." Jörg delivered the following warning with clear emphasis; "Focus on the rewards of the job Mr. Wright. The carrots. But keep in mind... the stick is ever present.... Looking forward to your successes." With a dismissive wave of his hand he turned and finished with; "Good-bye." Mr. Jörg Schneider sat in his chair

and looked at a particularly beautiful cloud through the 20<sup>th</sup> floor window.  
On their way out, Mr. Wright commented with irony;  
    "He hates being interrupted?" Mr. Stone seriously replied;  
    "Not near as much as he hates being disappointed."

Nele was putting wood on the fire and to one soldier, it seemed as if she were gathering her thoughts. She was really tuning into knowing how much they were ready to understand about the events before The Fall.