



# LOOKING DOWN AT HEAVEN BY LAMARDEUSE

WRITTEN FOR EOTU AND THE MARCH 2007 SWEET CHARITY AUCTION



Doug Richardson, head of the Athens office, was usually the master of the deadpan expression, so when Scotty walked into his office three days early and caught the slight widening of his eyes, he knew.

“Okay,” he said, “where is he?”

Richardson held his gaze. “On vacation. You know that.”

Scotty took a step forward. Sometimes he hated being right all the time. “That's where he told me he'd be. What I'd like you to tell me is where he really is.”

Richardson didn't flinch. “He'll be back here on Tuesday, ready to start a new assignment.” *That's all you need to know* was the unspoken addition.

Scotty took another step forward, and this time Richardson flinched. “Listen to me, please. Whatever line Kelly fed you, I know him, and I know that when I am not around, he tends to get himself into scrapes, the likes of which often involve trips to the hospital. He sometimes likes to think he's a very independent fellow, but since you and I both know differently, perhaps you could tell me just where he is. Now.”

Richardson hesitated for a moment, then looked away. “He's not going to get himself in any trouble where he is. Not that kind of trouble, anyway.”

Scotty's blood ran cold. “Dimitrios. He's with Dimitrios, isn't he?”

Richardson lifted his chin. “He accepted his invitation, yes.”

Scotty wasn't usually a swearing man, but he was sorely tempted to start right about now. “I told him we could get the information another way,” he gritted.

“And I told him we couldn't.”

Scotty stared at him. “You – ”

“Goddammit, don't give me that righteous indignation,” Richardson snapped. “You know it as well as I do. Dimitrios is – ”

“Small. Fry,” growled Scotty.

Richardson reached into the box on his desk for a cigar. “Yes, certainly. But he's a small fry with close ties to some very big fish. We've been trying for years to get close to them, and we're no further ahead than we were when we started.”

Scotty clenched his hands into fists. “So Kel's just supposed to go up there and offer up his – ”

“He doesn't have to do anything he doesn't want to do,” Richardson said, taking a drag of his lit cigar. “And it's not as though he hasn't done it before.”

“With women, sure, but that's – ” Richardson's look stopped him dead in his tracks. It was a pitying look, mixed with anger. Scotty couldn't tell whether the anger was directed at him, at himself, at the situation, or at all three, but he knew damned well where the pity was aimed.

*He's done it before.* Somehow Scotty had always known on instinct, the way he knew a thousand other small facts about Kelly Robinson, but this was different, a secret he'd kept from himself, because he'd been too scared to take it out into the light and look at it.

There had been that time in London, with the Minister who'd been flirting with the other side. Scotty had returned to the hotel early, and Kel hadn't gotten back until morning. Mission accomplished, a modern miracle: the man had seen the light and remembered where his allegiances lay. God save the Queen, hip hip hoorah.

If Scotty started thinking about it, he knew he'd be able to come up with a few more. But not here, and not now. He met Richardson's gaze and nodded. “Yeah, well. I'm still his partner. And I have met Dimitrios and talked with him, and I am telling you he is not as harmless as you think he is.” Richardson opened his mouth, but Scotty kept talking. “I will not interfere with the mission.” He held up a hand. “Scout's honor.”

Richardson raised an eyebrow. “You were never a Boy Scout.”

“I just joined last week. I'm waiting for the uniform – they have to have it custom-made.”

Richardson eyed him for a long moment, then sighed around his cigar. Stubbing it out almost viciously in the ashtray, he said, “Yeah, okay. Go. But I'm not taking the fall for this, all right?”

“I will tell him that a little birdie informed me of his whereabouts,” Scotty said, still saluting.

“You could have been a comedian, you know that?” Richardson sighed.

Scotty was already on his way out the door. “So they tell me.”

Dimitrios' estate occupied a small peninsula on the Saronic Gulf about twenty miles outside of Athens. He might have been a small fry, but he was a small fry who had gotten nice and fat on the morsels dropped by the sharks. It wasn't surprising that he was the son of a wealthy merchant who'd died and left him a fortune that he'd promptly squandered, along with the family business. Weak men who were accustomed to the finer things were usually willing to do just about anything to get back on top.

Kelly's dad had been a good for nothing who'd hadn't left him a dime, not that Kel would have taken it if he had. Scotty's dad had worked himself into an early grave to save for his son and daughter's education, because he knew that was the key to everything. At sixteen, Scotty had won a full scholarship to Temple, then felt terrible guilt because he hadn't needed the money after all. It took all kinds to spin a world, but Scotty could have done without Dimitrios' kind.

He reached the house after nightfall, not too late but late enough that turning him away would look inhospitable, and if there was one good thing about Dimitrios, it was his hospitality. To turn away a guest, even an uninvited one, was impossible for him.

“Mister Scott! What a pleasure to see you again!” Dimitrios' hands were big, even bigger than Scotty's, engulfing them in warmth. He was just the near side of fifty, with a lean, well-preserved build and graying hair he was still vain enough to dye. It was an expensive dye job, though, one you wouldn't notice unless you got fairly close.

“I'm sorry to bother you this late...” Scotty began.

“Nonsense!” Dimitrios clapped him on the shoulder and left it there as he drew him further inside. “The night, as they say, is young, and so are we, hm?”

“It's only that I wanted to talk to Kelly,” Scotty explained as they walked down the wide central corridor to the back of the house. There's a tournament in Sicily in three days, and I'm hoping to get him trained up before the match.” That wasn't strictly a lie, nor was it strictly the truth; Scotty had wanted to leave early, and Kel had said no. At the time, Scotty hadn't spent much time reasoning out the possible causes of the difference of opinion.

Sitting here in front of the cause across a teak table on a softly lit patio made it kind of difficult to avoid, though.

“I can assure you that Kelly –” Scotty tried not to react to the way Dimitrios said the name, somewhere between familiarity and possessiveness, though he knew that could easily be all in his head “ – has been practicing daily during his stay here. I can honestly say I have never seen him play so beautifully,” and God, Scotty could feel his left eye twitch at that, and he did not *do* this, he did not blow his cool, and certainly not because of this minor player.

“I’m glad to hear he’s performing well under your – care,” Scotty said, pausing just long enough before saying the last word to make Dimitrios’ eyes widen. There was a moment of silence, and then Dimitrios roared with laughter.

“Mister Scott, you are without doubt a gentleman and a scholar,” he said, smiling with genuine amusement.

“He’s also three days early.” Scotty twisted around in his seat to see Kelly standing behind him, a figure silhouetted in the golden light spilling from the house, his face nothing but shadows. Scotty felt his skin prickle as it did whenever there was a warning of danger.

“We had this conversation before,” Scotty said easily, forcing a smile he had no way of knowing was being returned. “Either I’m three days early or I’m right on time – it’s all a matter of perspective.”

Kelly turned his head away, his profile revealing a toothy, humorless grin. “Yeah, well, I’ve always been crazy about trying new positions. Uh, perspectives.”

Scotty schooled his features to blandness, no mean feat considering his gut was roiling. He’d long since figured out how to tell exactly how drunk Kel was. Right now he’d guess he was about a quarter of the way in the bag, and the night was still young. Unless he managed to find other things to amuse himself besides alcohol, of course.

Suddenly he felt like this had been one of his stupider ideas. He couldn’t do this, couldn’t stay in this house while Kel did whatever he was going to do with Dimitrios. Whatever he’d probably been doing the last four goddamned nights with Dimitrios.

He nodded at his erstwhile host and rose. “Well, sir, I’ve imposed on your hospitality enough –”

Dimitrios was on his feet before Scotty had straightened. “No imposition at all, Mister Scott. I implore you to spend the night. I have a sumptuous guest room waiting for you. It overlooks the ocean, and in the morning you will rise to the warmth of the Hellenic sun.”

Scotty didn’t look at Kel. “Well, I…”

Dimitrios clapped his hands together. “Good! Then it is settled. Come, I understand from Kelly that you do not smoke or drink, but I can still offer you coffee and conversation, if that will suffice.”

Scotty inclined his head as Dimitrios motioned to a butler who seemed to have materialized out of thin air. “That will be more than enough,” he said, Kelly’s too-purposeful slouch a reproach at his back as he slid back into his chair.

Conversation and coffee lasted longer than expected; the coffee, of course, was impeccable, and the conversation was much more stimulating than Scotty would have expected. Dimitrios was literate, certainly, even urbane, but Scotty would never have expected to converse with him on topics as diverse as Mark Twain's work, the preservation of African wildlife and the mysteries of the Aztec pyramids. No one could say the man wasn't a true conversationalist, and Scotty found himself being drawn in by those piercing brown eyes more than once. When he found himself smiling and chuckling at one of Dimitrios' wittier jokes, he had to stop himself.

*Is this how it becomes easier to take?* he thought, glancing at Kel as though the other could hear his words.

As if in response, Kelly turned toward him for what seemed like the first time that night and looked at him. On the surface, his gaze was impassive, but Scotty had long since learned to read the minute traces of emotion that flickered across Kel's face, even when he was working. This time, his face showed the barest trace of fear.

Scotty struggled to keep his own cool as he took in the implications of that. What was Kel afraid of? Dimitrios? Was he afraid that Dimitrios was on to them, or was he simply dreading what was going to happen when the lights went down?

Ultimately, though, Scotty knew that no misgivings Kel might entertain privately – or even admit to Scotty in a brief lifting of the facade – would keep him from doing what he had to do. As much as he might complain about their place in the universe, Kel was a consummate professional. When the job needed to be done, he did it, and he knew that he could count on Scotty to back him up.

Scotty just wished he could be sure this was a job that needed to be done.

It was no accident that he found no opportunity to be alone with Kelly before retiring for the night, and Scotty knew just who to thank for that. Kel clearly was not in the mood for heart to heart discussions on the merits of his plans for the evening. And so Scotty ended up in his luxuriously appointed room alone, staring up at the lazily turning ceiling fan, trying not to think about what might or might not be going on down the hall.

That didn't end up working so well, because of course it soon became all he could think about. He closed his eyes, trying to calm his racing heart rate, only to practically vault up off the bed when he heard a muffled *thump* down the hall. Grabbing his Model 1911

out of his nightstand drawer, he ran to the door, yanked it open and froze, listening intently.

For close to a minute there was only silence. Scotty debated making a quick reconnaissance foray in the direction of Dimitrios' bedroom, and then he heard it.

It was faint, but it was laughter. Kel's laughter, low and seductive, the way he sounded when he was about to –

Scotty stepped back into the room and closed the door as softly as he could, his heart leaping crazily. He was appalled to find he couldn't think in coherent sentences any more, because his brain was too busy serving up image after image: Kel stripped to the waist, sweat sheening on his skin while a muscular arm slid over his chest, the hand curling possessively, staking claim. Kel on his hands and knees, teeth clamping down on a groan, head hanging down as if it were too heavy for him to hold it up. Kel stark naked, lying on his back, his legs splayed wantonly, his gaze heavy-lidded and sated, his belly glistening with –

“Okay,” Scotty said aloud, leaping to his feet again. “Time for a shower.”

Which turned out to be another stupid idea, because even with the water as cold as he could stand it, he couldn't make the movie playing in his head go away. In fact, there was now accompanying sound, a chorus of groans and sighs and soft grunts as Kel lay there and took it.

For there was no doubt in Scotty's mind that Kelly would be the one taking it; Dimitrios didn't seem like the type to play the girl's role. Not that Kel did either, but then again, he'd do whatever it took to get the job done. He'd roll over for Dimitrios, his firm ass offered up for sacrifice as easily as the proverbial calf at Delphi, and Kel would arch his back and surge into it because he wanted it over with as quickly as possible, but he'd still be panting and open-mouthed, letting it happen...

Squeezing his eyes shut, Scotty gasped as the cold water cascaded over his face. One hand braced itself on the wall while the other reached down, and God, God, he should just stop right now, but he couldn't. He couldn't help Kel, and he couldn't help himself, and the frustration was boiling up and over his skin, drenching him as easily as the frigid water. He came to a brief, shattering end an embarrassingly short time later, teeth sunk into his upper arm to keep himself from crying out.

He shut off the water and dried himself quickly, then walked out onto the balcony, wishing for the first time he'd taken up the habit of smoking. Out here, all he could hear was the sound of the waves destroying themselves against the rocks, and as he leaned on the railing and stared out at the darkness, he could almost forget what was going on inside the house.

Almost.

Morning came, the way it always did, and Scotty, whose survival depended on being observant, decided to turn it off until they could get out of there. And so he didn't notice the way Dimitrios looked at Kel across the breakfast table, and he didn't notice the way Kel's index finger tapped against the tablecloth in time with the Mozart coming from the hi-fi, and he ignored the screaming voice in his head that told him Kel could see his own hypocritical desire on him like a gaping wound.

In his first year at Oxford he'd become friends with another language student, a young man of Turkish descent with startling rust-brown eyes framed by the thickest eyelashes Scotty had ever seen on another man. They spent long nights poring over Cicero and Catullus, drinking tiny cups of sweet, atomic-powered coffee as rich and dark as Omar's voice, and there were nights when Scotty had been weary enough to let the thought slip through to the conscious part of his mind. What would it be like, he wondered, to lean over and place his mouth on the olive skin stretched taut over muscle and bone? How would it taste? Would it compare to the flavor of Grace Washington, who during his senior year at Temple had let him strip her to the waist with trembling fingers, let him kiss her broad, generous nipples?

He spent months wondering if Omar had been thinking the same thing, and then one rain-soaked February night they left off the studying and sat together on Omar's couch, thighs almost touching, listening to Omar's truly impressive collection of bebop and talking lazily about the merits of Coleman Hawkins versus Charlie Parker. Scotty must've dozed off, because the next thing he knew Omar was hovering over him, a blanket clutched in his hands and a look on his face Scotty'd never seen before on a man. He tried to push himself up, but Omar's hand was suddenly there, splayed against his chest, and Scotty knew his heart was beating out a Dixieland tempo and Omar had to know it.

*It's all right*, he'd said, murmuring low as his head descended toward Scotty's, *it's all right*.

But it hadn't been all right, and it hadn't been anything Scotty could let himself have, and he'd summoned all his strength of will and run like hell, into the night, hadn't stopped running until he stood dripping and shivering in his own room, his heart feeling as though it might burst. And he'd never felt that way again, not until last night had slammed into him with the force of an onrushing freight train.

Once they were away from Dimitrios' house in the late morning, the intense, crushing frustration began to pass, though the fear of Kelly figuring out exactly what was going through his head continued to dog him. Scotty drove the car with single-minded focus; these roads were treacherous, and you never knew when some stray, rampaging sheep would leap out in front of you –

“You ever going to look at me again?”

Kelly's soft question startled him; the wheel jerked to the right as his hands convulsed, but he recovered before he landed them both in the ditch. Turning his head, he shot Kel a smile he knew looked forced. "Sure I am," he said, as reassuringly as he could.

Kel looked back for a moment, then turned toward the windshield. "You were right about him," he said, and Scotty jerked again. "He didn't have anything we could use."

Scotty's hands clenched on the wheel. "You mean this was a waste of time?"

Kel shrugged. "I suppose that's one way to look at it."

*It's the only way, Scotty wanted to scream at him. You trying to tell me you put yourself through this for nothing?*

"Look," Kel said, blowing out a breath before he continued, "they wanted me to infiltrate and I did. I'm pretty sure I managed to convince him that I was disillusioned and angry and ready to consider higher-paying options for employment. If there's a suspicion he's got something good in the future, I've already printed myself a guilt-edged invitation."

Scotty nodded, amazed that they could talk about it so easily, so dispassionately, when all he wanted to do was drive back there and wring Dimitrios' neck. "Yeah, well, I guess that's something," he muttered.

Kel didn't talk for a long time, and then he blew out a breath and nodded. "Yeah. That's something."

The tournament was a total bust. Kelly finished as close to last place as he'd ever done, and since he washed out early, they ended up at loose ends back at their hotel. Kel disappeared into the bathroom for an hour, and emerged pink-skinned and floating on a cloud of steam.

"Man, did you use up all the hot water in the hotel?" Scotty said, trying to be jocular and failing miserably.

Kel smiled back, but there was no humor in it. "I left a couple of teaspoons for you, my man." As he walked by, his bare arm brushed against Scotty's. Scotty did not jump at the contact, though it was a close thing.

Scotty's mouth was half-open, prepared to ask a question, but it died in his throat as he turned and caught sight of Kel stripping off his towel. Scotty never usually spent a great deal of time looking at his partner's ass, but his gaze was inevitably drawn to it as

Kel bent over to retrieve his shorts. It was, in an objective sense, a skinny ass compared to the ones he usually favored, but it was also well-formed and muscular. There were dimples that deepened as he shifted onto one foot, and God, Scotty was crossing so many lines in the sand the beach had to look like a tic-tac-toe board by now. Luckily, he managed to pry his eyes away just as Kel turned around to face him again, but he was sure he had to look as guilty as he felt.

“Okay, so, you getting that shower or what?” Kelly demanded.

Scotty stared at him for a moment, then nodded. “Yes, I am,” he said stupidly, then turned and fled for the bathroom, where he spent five minutes gripping the rim of the sink so hard he thought it might crack.

After that, they were contacted and given a new assignment, this one in Nice. Scotty banished his more rebellious thoughts to carefully locked cells deep in his mind, without hope of parole. Occasionally, the odd thought would dig its way out, but he'd swiftly catch it and slap it back behind bars. It worked pretty well, except for one tiny snag: he was so on edge most of the time he couldn't tell up from down, and he knew there was an increasing likelihood he was going to be so distracted from not thinking about what he didn't want to think about that he was going get them both killed one day.

He considered asking for a vacation, but Kel would want to know what was going on, and so would the Pentagon. He thought, briefly, about asking for a transfer before dismissing it. He wasn't even sure whether he'd want anyone to replace Kel. Probably, if he wanted to be honest, he'd quit the game and finally go for that doctorate, then set up house on a beach in Mexico and write the definitive translation of the *Iliad*. Eventually, he'd become one of those slightly crazy hermits the villagers always talked about in hushed tones at the local *cantina*.

It was a good thing that this assignment was as much of a cake walk as anything they'd done since they were rookies. They'd been tapped to provide security for an informal conference between the Secretary of State and the French prime minister. The location was a private estate on the coast, with enough French security stationed around the perimeter to keep out half the Russian army. By contrast, Kelly and Scotty were playing the role of junior attaches, which meant they could remain close to the action without looking like hired goons. It wasn't likely that anything would happen, but they still stayed sharp, stayed alert.

The last night of the conference, Scotty finished his routine check of the interior and headed outside to join Kel, who was giving the exterior the once-over. The French security was adequate, but the two of them were used to working without support, and it was a hard habit to break.

He didn't see Kel anywhere around the house, and so he began walking the grounds himself. After twenty minutes of fruitless searching he was starting to get a little twitchy, and he had just drawn his Colt when he heard that familiar chuckle.

Approaching carefully, he slowly made his way from shadow to shadow until he was close enough to see Kel. He was standing in front of the main gate talking to one of the security guards, his hip cocked, the line of his shoulders easy and relaxed in a way they hadn't been in weeks. While Scotty watched from the bushes like a peeping Tom, Kel leaned in toward the other man, a toothy, seductive smile on his face. In the dim light over the gates, Scotty could see that the guard was young and attractive, with classic Gallic features and olive skin.

Blinking, Scotty looked down and realized he was still gripping his .45. Carefully, he checked the safeties and holstered it again, then turned away.

He was halfway to the house when he heard the soft but unmistakable sound of footsteps behind him, approaching fast. Whirling, he caught Kel by the arms just as Kel was about to leap onto his back. Kel's momentum still forced him backward, and he stumbled once before regaining his footing.

“Well,” Kelly said, and even though it was too dark to see him Scotty could tell he was grinning, “I almost got you, anyway.”

“Not even close,” Scotty shot back, hands still gripping Kel's forearms. “You sound like an elephant thundering across the Serengeti.”

“You wound me. My steps are as fleet as any gazelle's, sir, and it is only your superhuman hearing which is able to detect a fly breaking wind at twenty paces – ”

Scotty didn't know where the fury came from, only that it was there, suddenly, with the force of a hurricane; the next thing he knew he was pushing Kelly backward. Kel made a small, surprised sound, but he was either too startled to fight back or he was letting Scotty have his own way, because he went where he was shoved. Scotty was shocked when he felt an immense surge of satisfaction as Kel's back thudded against a tree trunk, but the rage made it easier to take.

What wasn't easy to take was the way the smile was still in Kel's voice when he said, “Something on your mind these days, chum?”

Scotty's hands tightened on Kel's arms; he was sure if he stripped the shirt off him he'd see the imprint of every one of his fingers on Kel's flesh. “You gettin' information out of him, too?”

There was a brief silence in which all Scotty could hear was the sound of their mingled breathing, Kelly's labored from the chase, Scotty's from the weight of the anger crushing his chest. “Which answer do you want to hear?” Kel asked, and the low,

deliberate tone of it told Scotty in no uncertain terms that his partner had stopped smiling.

“The truth,” Scotty hissed. “That is what I want; that is what we always tell one another.”

“Not always,” Kel murmured. He shifted against the tree trunk, and Scotty tightened his grip even further. He felt his hands start to cramp up, but he didn't care.

“Then let's start,” Scotty urged. “Please.”

Another silence, then a dry chuckle that was nothing like the one Kelly had bestowed on the pretty young security guard. “Ah, well, okay, sure. Shall I start with the story of my life, or would you like to tie me to the tree first?”

Scotty took a step forward, pressing his body from hip to chest against Kel's. He knew he was already hard, and a quick grind against Kel told him that his partner was in the same condition. He couldn't see Kel's face, but he was nevertheless rewarded with a quick, harsh intake of breath.

“Scotty, Jesus – ”

“Is that what you do sometimes, when you go out late at night?” Scotty murmured. His face was close to Kel's; he could feel the heat radiating off his skin. “Do you look for boys the way you look for girls? Are they as easy to get?”

“I don't – ”

“*Answer me.*”

“Easier,” Kelly gritted, and Scotty's knees nearly buckled at the twin waves of relief and shock that swept over him, because it was finally *real*, not just rumor, not merely his fevered imagination. “They're always easier, because they know what they want. But this isn't what you want, man.”

Scotty ground his hips again, and Kel gasped for breath. “Does it feel like this isn't what I want?”

“You're just – you're angry,” Kel said, far too gently for a man as close to the edge as he was, as they both were. “I get that, and I'm sorry I didn't tell you – ”

“It doesn't matter,” Scotty snapped. “I knew. I always knew.” And that was true, although he'd shoved it away from himself, refused to accept it.

“Then what?” Kel demanded, exasperation and weariness creeping into his tone. “What do you want from me?”

“The same thing you give all of them.”

Kelly suddenly shoved against him with all his might, and Scotty staggered back, his hold on Kel finally dislodged.

“I don't – give them *anything*.” Scotty didn't receive any warning of Kelly's approach this time; the next thing he knew, he was being pulled in, yanked hard against Kel's lean body. One hand stole around his back, the other slipped between their bodies, and oh, *God*. Scotty's eyes slammed shut and his head dropped onto Kel's shoulder.

Kel's breath was hot against his neck as he stroked him ruthlessly. “This what you want? I can give you this. It's *easy*,” he practically snarled in Scotty's ear, and Scotty knew they were in trouble here, that when this was over they'd be lucky if there were enough pieces left to make one of them, but he couldn't pull away. For the first time in his life, he couldn't do what he knew was right, because being wrong was too much of what he needed. Instead, he set his teeth against Kel's shoulder to muffle his cry as he came, too soon, too soon.

He was dimly aware of Kel's arms supporting him as his knees remembered how to work again. As he straightened, feeling bruised and humiliated and shameful, he felt the ghost of a caress against his shoulder as Kelly stepped back, withdrawing from him.

Even though he shouldn't have been, Scotty was surprised at how well they worked together afterwards. But then, they were consummate professionals, experienced in the tidy elimination of evidence and people. *This never happened. We were never here.* By the end of a month, Scotty was halfway convinced he'd only imagined the feel of Kelly's hands on him.

And then they went to a tournament in Barcelona, and Kel managed to trip spectacularly on a lunge and go down hard. When Scotty jogged over and helped him to his feet, he could see Kel had skinned his knees, the clay powder of the court's surface driven into the scrapes.

“Man, you – ”

Kelly gritted his teeth. “Just – please do not say it.”

“Okay,” Scotty said, as the announcer declared the match a win for Kel's opponent, “okay.”

Once they got back to the locker room, Kel made a beeline for the shower. Scotty prepped the massage table, adding a bottle of iodine to the small array of potions and oils he always brought to Kel's games. The routine was soothing, and he took refuge in it, used it to soothe his jangled nerves. Seeing Kel hurt was never easy, but this time

there was guilt thrown into the mix, because Scotty had a strong suspicion that there was another reason his partner had gone off his game today.

When Kel emerged from the shower room, a towel snugged around his hips and another one draped across his shoulders, the scrapes on his knees were bleeding more freely now. Scotty stared at them stupidly for a few moments before snatching up the iodine bottle.

“Sit,” he commanded, nodding at the table. Kelly muttered something unintelligible, but he obeyed, hopping up and swinging his legs over. Scotty wiped away the blood with a damp cloth, then drenched a cotton ball in iodine and dabbed at the scrapes.

Kel jerked slightly under his touch, but didn't make any sound of protest, and Scotty continued his ministrations, applying the stinging stuff to every one of Kel's cuts.

“You got all the clay out of these in the shower?” he demanded gruffly.

Kel closed his eyes. “Yeah. I think so.”

“You think so?” Scotty almost winced at the unexpected harshness in his own tone.

“Don't worry about me, Mom,” Kel drawled, eyes still shut, “I've fallen off my bike plenty of times before.”

“Should get you a tetanus shot,” Scotty grumbled, dabbing the last of the scrapes and touching a quick, impersonal finger to the side of Kel's knee, directing it to show him its range of movement. Kel flinched away from the touch, hopped down off the table and stood. Scotty opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again when he saw the tension in Kel's shoulders.

“I got a – call this morning before the tournament,” Kel said, his voice falsely cheerful. “You'll never guess who's in town.”

Scotty's blood congealed in his veins. “You're not gonna – ”

“It is – my – job,” Kel gritted. Then, as quickly as it had appeared, the tension seemed to melt away from him. He turned to face Scotty, a nearly convincing smile on his face. “Now, what is it that makes this partnership successful? It's that we each keep to our respective strengths, Holmes.” Laying his hands on Scotty's shoulders, he looked deeply into his eyes, his tone patient, pedantic. “You are the brains, and I am the whore.”

This time it was Scotty's turn to flinch. Kel stared at him for a moment longer, then released him.

“Okay, then,” he murmured, focusing on a spot over Scotty's shoulder. “This is the way it will happen. Williams in the Barcelona office received some valuable intel: Dimitrios will be meeting tonight with what our organization believes to be some Very Important

Persons. If he receives the promotion he so richly deserves, as they believe he will, then he will be very effusive tonight. Elated, even. In the mood, perhaps, to take on some new staff – especially those who have previously shown interest in working for him.”

“And where will I be?” Scotty demanded.

Kel shook his head. “Asleep in bed, where all good little boys should be.”

Scotty could only stare at him and remember how to breathe while he recovered from the gut-punch. There had been times, when Kel had been under the influence of someone or something else, that he had said things like this, and Scotty's wounds had been shallow and swiftly healed because he'd been sure that the words that were said did not have anything to do with what they were to one another. But now there was no outside influence, merely Kelly himself, and the wounds were surgical, precise, and cut straight to the bone.

Scotty picked up his rubbing alcohol and his iodine bottles and placed them back into the bag, knowing Kel would be able to see even the minute tremor in his hands, but helpless to hide from him, from this, from any of it. With as much dignity as he could muster, he picked up the bag and walked out of the locker room without another word.

The problem, of course, was that Scotty had never really been a good little boy.

The security on the estate where Dimitrios was staying was almost as impressive as that of their French hosts, which means it took Scotty a full hour to observe the guards' patrol patterns and figure out a way inside. He threaded his way between the hedges, keeping out of sight, and finally found a cellar door with a lock that responded well to picks. It was dank inside and blacker than the bottom of a coal mine, and even though it had been dark outside, Scotty found he needed a couple of minutes for his eyes to adjust.

Leaning against a crumbling wall, it occurred to Scotty that he might just have gone off the deep end. What, exactly, did he think was going to happen now? Was he going to charge in, guns blazing, and rescue the damsel in distress? The smartest thing to do would be to turn around, relock the door, and try not to get himself shot on the way off the grounds. Kelly didn't need rescuing; he was doing his job, just as he'd said, and Scotty was about to bungle the best chance they'd had to bring down one of the most successful Communist intelligence networks in Europe. It wasn't as though Kel needed his help, or as though he were anything but a liability here, especially considering he could no longer claim to be impartial. Still, he couldn't force his feet to take him back out the door; his desire to rush in and stop Kel before he could offer himself up again warred with his common sense.

*Kel doesn't need you, genius. He knows what he's doing; he's done it God knows how many times before. You're going to get him killed if you keep on this way, and you know it. He's not yours to have and to hold, forever and ever, amen. Like it or not, that's not anything he wants to give you.*

Closing his eyes for a moment, Scotty took a few deep, calming breaths, then pushed off the wall and began to head back the way he had come. Suddenly, he heard a muffled *thump* from outside and the sound of muffled voices, and then the creak of the door that represented his only known escape route. Swiftly, trying not to trip in the darkness, he slid back along the wall until he found an alcove in which to hide. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing. At the same time, he drew his .45 and listened with both ears wide open.

A light flipped on, and Scotty heard a pair of voices speaking in fast, Castilian-accented Spanish. They were arguing about a bar they'd been to the night before. The first man thought the drinks had been watered down, and the second argued the opposite. It was a stimulating intellectual conversation that was livened only by the swift staccato of Scotty's heartbeat as they approached.

Now that the lights were on, Scotty could see he was trapped a narrow corridor that ended in a heavy wooden door outfitted with a massive padlock. The voices grew closer, and then abruptly faded. Cautiously, Scotty poked his head out of the alcove, and saw that the corridor was deserted. They'd taken another route out of the cellar, and he'd managed by dumb luck to avoid detection altogether. Now was the time to get out of here. He took a couple of cautious steps, then flattened himself against the wall again when he heard the first one's voice raised in anger.

“Not until they're asleep, Caravallo said,” the first one growled. “Weren't you listening?”

There was the unmistakable sound of a slide being racked. “I'm only checking the action,” the second one grumbled.

“Just remember we each finish one; the bullets can't match. It's supposed to look like they shot one another.”

“I remember, I remember,” snarled the other man.

Scotty's gut churned. He couldn't be sure they were talking about Kelly, but he couldn't be sure they weren't. There was nothing else to be done. Slowly, with as much stealth as he could manage, he followed them deeper into the lion's den.

Bud and Lou, as Scotty had decided to call them, weren't all that bright. It was the only edge that Scotty had in an unfamiliar house, cut off from his partner and surrounded by enemies.

The house was mostly dark, with a couple of servants flitting about downstairs, straightening up from the night's festivities. Apparently, the security was concentrated outside; there seemed to be no one on the inside to keep watch for intruders, a fact for which Scotty was infinitely grateful as he ducked around corners and into closets to avoid the few pairs of eyes that were still open. By the time he made it to the upper floor, there was no sign of his new friends, and no hint of where he'd be able to find Kel.

He came to another hallway and peeked around the corner, finding his target. Bud and Lou were about twenty feet away, standing in front of a door. Heart pounding, Scotty watched as one of them pressed his ear to it, then pulled back and nodded to his companion. When he pushed the door open and the two of them slipped inside, Scotty sprinted into action.

He burst through the door and delivered a swift chop to back of the first guy's neck, dropping him like a sack of potatoes. The second one, who had been advancing on the bed, spun around at the sound; Scotty had just enough time to catch the expression on his face, anger transitioning into rage, before Scotty stepped forward and unceremoniously backhanded him, the blow given added weight by two and a half pounds of pistol.

Satisfied that both of them were down, he moved to the bed and pulled back the covers. There was a man lying in the bed with a neat hole shot in his forehead, his eyes open and staring at nothing, and in the split second before Scotty's brain caught up with him, his world ended. And then he finally realized that he was looking at Dimitrios, not Kelly.

"My hero." Scotty stiffened and turned to find Kel leaning back against the wall behind the door, his P-38 down by his side. Rolling Lou (or was it Bud?) out of the way with his foot, Scotty checked the corridor quickly – still deserted, but probably not for long – and shut the door, plunging them back into darkness.

"I take it, then, that you knew they were coming," Scotty murmured.

"I had my suspicions," Kel said dryly.

"You got any suggestions on how to get out of here?"

"How about the way you came in?"

Scotty sighed. "Maybe."

"What do you mean, maybe?"

“I mean maybe.”

“Has anyone ever told you you – oh, never mind,” Kel muttered. “Open the door so I can see well enough not to trip over these fine specimens of manhood.”

The debriefing, mercifully, was short and to the point. Apparently Williams had caught wind a few hours ago that Kel was being set up. He'd tried to contact Scotty at the hotel, but Scotty was already gone by that point. He'd still been debating on whether or not to send a second team along to infiltrate the estate when Kelly and Scotty had shown up again, safe and sound. As Scotty sat in the man's office beside his partner, the two of them exhausted and footsore, he resisted the urge to tell his superior exactly where to get off and what to do with himself while he was there.

“Dimitrios wasn't being promoted at all,” Williams said, stating the obvious. “He'd gotten a little too big for his britches, demanded too much money. The other side didn't like that.” He lifted a chin at Kelly. “We think that they were going to frame Robinson for the murder.”

“A two for one sale,” Kel muttered. “Those fellas sure know how to shop the bargains.”

“They weren't going to frame him, they were going to kill him,” Scotty gritted. “I heard them talking.”

Kelly flipped a hand, unconcerned – Scotty could see the scratches on his arms where the thorns of the bushes had cut him as they'd fled across the grounds – then turned to Williams, smiling thinly. “There is one thing I would really like to know, and that is how we failed to pick up on the real purpose behind Dimitrios' visit. Perhaps it's petty of me, but I don't like the idea that our intel wasn't any better than his.”

Williams nodded curtly. “That's under investigation,” he said, and Scotty gripped the arms of his chair at the obvious brush-off. He couldn't help thinking that if Kel hadn't been in that house to play Dimitrios' toy boy, Williams would be taking this a lot more seriously. He opened his mouth to say as much, but stopped when he suddenly felt a hand on his arm. Turning to Kel, he read the look on his face and closed his mouth, because for the first time in weeks, Kel was asking something of him.

Williams regarded them both for a moment, then nodded again. “That's all, gentlemen. Get some rest; you'll have a new assignment soon.” As one, they rose up off the couch and headed for the door.

“Oh, and by the way,” Williams said, and Scotty turned back around. “It's a good thing you followed your instincts, Scott.”

The weight of Kel's gaze on his back was a palpable thing, as physical as the sharp lash of pain that struck his already tense shoulders at the effort it took to hold back. "Thank you, sir. I certainly do try to follow my instincts, but on occasion I find my brain helps out a little, too." And with a final tight smile at Williams' darkening scowl, he spun on his heel and followed Kel out the door.

When they arrived back at the hotel, it was after two in the morning. Still, they packed up their bags and moved across town to another hotel, leaving no hint of their whereabouts behind. It was unlikely that Kel's attackers would come looking for him to finish the job, but it didn't pay to be too complacent. They signed in under false names and left strict instructions that they were not to be disturbed until well after noon.

By the time they were finally in their new room, Scotty had just enough strength to strip to his shorts and collapse onto the bed. As he twisted, trying to force his exhaustion-addled brain to figure out a way to get the covers out from under him, he felt something in his back actually *twang* like a snapping guitar string right before the wave of pain slammed into him.

Scotty was dimly aware of his own involuntary cry of pain, of the bed dipping, of broad, warm hands fanning out over his throbbing back. "Hey, hey. It's just a spasm, we'll take care of it, don't worry," Kel soothed, his voice low and even. Scotty buried his face in his folded arms, hiding his gasp, but Kel tapped the back of his head with a finger. "Loosen up those arms," he commanded. "C'mon, you know better than that."

Reluctantly, Scotty obeyed while Kel removed the pillow from under his head. His body was slow to react to his commands, as though he was trying to swim through thick, cold mud.

"Y'think they'll still try to pin the murder on you?" he mumbled, as he tried to relax onto the mattress.

Kel's hands expertly probed his lower back, and then started a gentle massage of the sore spot with just the tips of his fingers. "No. I don't think they'll be reporting his death; he'll just disappear. Being able to blame each of us for the other's murder would've been preferable – killing two birds with one stone, as it were – but they'll get over it."

"Mmmnnnggg," Scotty agreed. God, that felt good. Felt so good to have Kel touch him, the way he used to. Should never have stopped. Why did they stop?

Kelly chuckled. "You're pretty far gone, aren't you, Holmes? Where's that formidable brain now?"

“Must've left it 'round here someplace,” Scotty slurred. “You help me find it in the mornin', huh?”

Another chuckle. “Sure. Come to think of it, I misplaced my room key, so you can lend me a hand with that. Give and take.”

The last functioning scrap of Scotty's brain dredged up a memory at that. When it hit him, he came fully and completely awake, because finally, *finally*, he understood.

*I don't give them anything.*

Kelly must have sensed the change in him, because his hands stilled on Scotty's back, coming to a rest on either side of his spine. Scotty rolled to his side and looked up at Kel; he was surprised to see Kel looked no different than he had five minutes ago.

“I knew it would kick into gear again,” Kel murmured, tapping a finger against Scotty's forehead. There was some of that old affection in his gaze, and Scotty basked in it as though it were Mediterranean sunshine. “You can't help it, can you?”

Scotty shook his head. “Haven't been doing much thinking lately. Not enough, anyway.”

Kel hoisted a leg up onto the mattress and looked down at him warily. “What conclusions are you drawing now?”

Scotty took a deep breath, and jumped. “You love me.”

Kel regarded him levelly for a few moments before speaking. “That's not exactly splitting the atom, Einstein.”

Scotty moved to sit up, relieved when his back did no more than creak slightly. “Okay. Then how about – I'm starting to get that it's not the same thing.”

Kel raised his eyebrows. “As?”

“As – ” Scotty waved a hand out the window “ – what happens *out there*. There's the job, and everything we do and say and *are* to get it done, and then – there's us.”

Kel looked at his hands. “I used to think it was that easy, but it's not. We are the job.”

“That's not true.” Scotty risked placing a hand on Kel's arm; he was startled to feel a slight tremor in the muscle. “It's different. It has to be.”

“Maybe for you,” Kel acknowledged. “You always manage to stay above it all, unsullied, pure. I don't know that I was ever...” Kel's smile was thin. “Well. That's another story.”

“Stop putting me on a pedestal,” Scotty growled. “I'm not as pure as you think.”

Kel barked a short, mirthless laugh, then scratched behind an ear. “Yeah, I know. That was my fault, too, and for that I am truly – ”

“I wanted it as much as you did, maybe more,” Scotty breathed.

Kel's head snapped up. “I don't know how that would be possible,” he murmured, and Scotty's heart slammed against his rib cage, fighting to get out. Reaching up with trembling fingers, he touched Kelly's shoulder.

“Kel,” he said, but that was all he got out before Kelly drew back, gaze angry and desperate and more fearful than Scotty had ever seen it.

“Don't you get it?” Kel snarled. “I'm – not – *clean*. And you want me to put my hands on you and – drag you down into the filth,” he choked. “I can't do that.”

“That's not what this is,” Scotty protested. His hand was still on Kel's shoulder, and he slid it up Kel's neck to cup his jaw. “There's nothing filthy about this, about us,” he whispered against Kel's lips. “I'll prove it to you.”

That last was said with more bravado than confidence, because in truth Scotty needed to prove it to himself as much as to Kel, but that didn't stop him from leaning in and pressing his mouth to Kel's. He started off gentle, because he suspected that was all either of them could handle, but he didn't back away, and after a couple of seconds he tilted his head and brushed his lips over Kel's chin before returning to his mouth. The rasp of early morning stubble didn't shock him the way he'd expected; instead, it set up an electric buzz just under the surface of his skin, like a raw, live wire ready to set fire to the whole damned house.

Scotty lost track of how long he spent kissing Kel's unresponsive mouth; he only knew that he had to keep trying, to keep pushing until Kel gave in. They'd always been fairly evenly matched; whenever they sparred, it was even money as to who would come out on top. But this time, Scotty was determined to win, to pin Kel to the mat and show him this was something they could have that was theirs and only theirs, a piece of them no one could touch.

He slid his fingers into Kel's hair, marveling at the gossamer softness of it, then wrapped his other arm around Kel's back, pulling him closer. Scotty felt him stiffen at that, felt the resistance in his bowstring-taut body, and then Kel made a small, broken sound deep in his throat and surged forward, and Scotty suddenly had his two arms full of Kelly Robinson. Taking Scotty's face in his hands, Kel tilted his head and opened his mouth and licked at Scotty's lips, and Scotty, gasping, let him in. They struggled against one another for a tense, breathless moment, and then they found the perfect fit, sliding closer, deeper, together.

“Christ,” Kelly rasped, coming up for air briefly before diving in again. Scotty made a sound of wordless agreement, and then they stopped talking for a while longer. Somewhere in there, Scotty's hands started undressing Kel, apparently of their own

accord. Since they seemed to know what they were doing, he didn't worry about it, nor did he give too much thought to Kelly's hands reciprocating, divesting him of his last scrap of clothing.

When they were finally stretched out beside one another, skins touching all along their length, Scotty drew back to look at him.

“Nothing you haven't seen before,” Kel murmured, shifting almost shyly.

Scotty placed a hand on Kel's chest, fingers gently exploring, unhurried. “Shh,” he whispered. “Let me.”

Kel closed his eyes and sucked in a sharp breath. “God, Scotty. Are you sure you – ”

Scotty shut him up with a hard kiss. “Let me,” he repeated, and Kel nodded shakily. He pushed against Kel's shoulder, and Kel obediently flipped over onto his back, lying down and looking up at Scotty expectantly. Scotty smiled, and kissed him again as a reward, then began trailing more kisses down his body. Kel's nipples, he found, didn't have quite the same sweetness as Grace Washington's, but they had their own distinct flavor, bold and intoxicating. Kel groaned and sighed and bucked under him, his hands alternating between gripping Scotty's shoulders and caressing them blindly.

After a time Scotty looked up to see his own arm lying against Kel's sun-bronzed skin, his fingers splayed over Kel's belly. While he watched, Kel's own hand stole down and covered the back of Scotty's, brushing lightly against it as though proving to himself that it was there.

Moving lower to settle between Kel's spread thighs, Scotty rubbed a thumb over Kel's hip, brushed his lips against a tangle of hair, then impossibly smooth, vulnerable flesh. Kel released a startled sound and pushed himself up on his elbows. “You don't have to – ” he began, but that was all he managed before Scotty's tongue darted out to taste the tip of him.

Kel's protest died in his throat, and when Scotty looked up at him, Kel's gaze was pure heat. For the first time Scotty realized just how much Kel had been holding back from him, how much of his own desire he'd locked away to keep Scotty safe from it. Jagged, unreasoning fear tore through Scotty like shrapnel, and he almost drew back before he remembered he was never scared with Kel at his side.

Carefully, almost reverently, Scotty cupped Kelly's erection with his hand while he ran the flat of his tongue up the underside. Kel's whole body jerked, his mouth opening on a silent scream, and Scotty smiled before bending his head to his task. His world narrowed to Kel's sharp taste, the slick press of him against his tongue, the back of his throat. It was at once terrifying and exulting to know he was able to give this to Kel, and along the way he realized he was receiving gifts himself – gifts of Kel's complete, unquestioning trust and soft, breathless need.

“Stop. Please.” Scotty raised his head and saw Kel gazing down at him, lips parted as he panted for air, face filled with such naked emotion that Scotty forgot where he was for a few moments.

“You still in there?” Kel murmured, bringing Scotty back to awareness.

Scotty shook his head. “I’m in here, with you,” he corrected, stroking Kel slowly, fascinated by the helpless, rhythmic lift of Kel’s hips off the mattress. “Always gonna be in here with you,” he vowed, and Kelly’s eyes slammed shut, but not before Scotty caught sight of the small glimmer of hope in them.

“C’mere?” It was a request, not an order, and Scotty went willingly, as he always had where Kel was concerned, sliding up Kel’s body and into his waiting arms. Kel pulled him close and kissed him fiercely and urged Scotty onto his side, then wrapped a long, graceful hand around both of them.

“Oh,” Scotty said, because that was all he was capable of at the moment, what with Kel’s erection snug against his, the friction just this side of maddening.

“Yeah,” Kel agreed. He dropped his head onto Scotty’s shoulder, and Scotty realized he had to be watching them move together, pushing themselves into the exquisite pressure of Kel’s fist. He pressed his lips to Kel’s soft, soft hair, then wrapped his own hand around Kel’s. He didn’t need to see it to know it was a beautiful sight; besides, Kel seemed to agree, because within moments he shuddered and came, groaning loud and long.

“Give me all of it,” Scotty urged, mouth against Kel’s ear. “Give me everything.”

Kel whimpered and turned his head into the crook of Scotty’s neck, breathing hotly as Scotty guided him through the last pulses of his orgasm. When Kel jerked in his arms, Scotty released him, kissing him softly. Kelly hooked one arm around Scotty’s shoulders and hugged him with almost bruising force, then pulled him over on top of him. Scotty rose up and braced himself above Kel, looking down, suddenly unsure for the first time since this had started.

Kel’s hands traveled downward until they were resting just over the swell of Scotty’s ass, and he treated Scotty to a smile that made him look about ten years younger. “It’s okay, it’s all right,” he soothed, urging Scotty into motion against him, movements that soon turned uncoordinated and desperate. The crazy thing was that when Scotty finally came apart and collapsed, gutted and shaking and more than a little awed, into the welcoming haven of Kelly’s arms, he started to believe that maybe, just maybe, it would be.

“Mexico?” Kel appeared to mull it over, then shook his head. “No good.”

“And why would that be?” Scotty asked, pressing a kiss to one of Kel's knuckles where it peeked between two of his own.

“Too close,” Kel answered, squeezing Scotty's hand. “They'd find us in a thrice.”

“Then what would be your suggestion, sir?”

“Constantinople.”

“Not Istanbul.”

“Nope. Constantinople.”

“Well, there's only one small problem, you see, and that would be that Constantinople has not existed lo these many years.”

“Ha!” Kelly crowed triumphantly. “That is not a liability, that is an asset. They'll never think to look for us there.”

Scotty stared at him for a moment, then chuckled. “Well. I hadn't thought of that.”

Kelly snorted. “And they call you the brains of this outfit.”

Grinning, Scotty urged Kel up a little higher on his chest, close over his heart, then kissed his forehead. “I can't imagine what they were thinking.”

“Let's be serious, here,” Kel huffed, though the fact that he was pushing his nose into Scotty's neck and licking experimentally wasn't helping his case any.

“Okay,” Scotty said, using his free hand to ruffle Kel's hair. “I can do it if you can.”

“We need a plan.”

“Agreed.”

“We need strategy.”

“No question.”

Kel raised his head, smiling wickedly, and Scotty's heart did a little samba in his chest. “Corsica.”

Scotty frowned. “What?”

“I just thought of it. Great hiding place.” Another lick, this time bestowed on the point of his shoulder. “Amazing food. Breathtaking scenery. Sun and surf.”

Scotty wrinkled his nose. “That sounds like half the places we go.”

“So we'll feel right at home,” Kelly said, his hand starting to wander its way down Scotty's chest. When it found its target, Scotty arched his neck and groaned; he felt a lick to his Adam's apple and shivered again.

“I got a – better idea,” Scotty gasped, using both arms to haul Kel closer. “Let's just stay in this room forever and not tell anybody.”

“Mmmmmm,” Kel hummed in pleasure. “The Casa del Hilton, serving the lonely out of town businessman since 1482.”

“Don't you mean 1492?”

Kel leaned in and kissed him thoroughly. “Columbus' brother Shecky.” When Scotty's shoulders began to shake with laughter, he added, “Never made it into the history books, which, I must say, was a crushing disappointment to him.”

Still chuckling, Scotty pulled Kel completely on top of him. “Must've been horrible. All those streets with your name on 'em and you can't even get a job opening a mall.”

“Things are tough all over.” Kel sat up, straddling him, looking determined and beautiful and *happy*, and Scotty wondered if his impressive brain would ever figure a way out of this devilish trap.

*God, I hope not*, he thought, drawing Kel back down into his arms and into his heart.

End