

*Yes, I thought I was pretty brave, too. The Samaritan returned pretty soon after but I had things under control with the goon squad doing my bidding. Didn't know I could affect so many people. Or do the full telepath mind-meld. Shows what utter terror and adrenaline can do, huh? None of them remembered anything about me. Was pretty easy. Just edit their memories so that they remember the Samaritan fighting, stray shots hitting the throne, big boom, but no handsome psychoanalyst fiddling with their grey matter. I didn't get as many suspicious visits after that. He didn't stop entirely but they felt a lot less accusatory and more checking up how I was doing, not what I was doing. Right until I got the visit that changed changed everything all over again.*

Closer to now but still definitely then. Kent sits across the table drinking his sweet tea with honey. Pranger takes his with bourbon. "How's the clinic doing?"

"Doing well. I saw you and Lana got another shared front page. Anything serious going on?"

There's a brief choke before he swallows, "Nothing like that. I mean, she's a swell girl, but, she's already in love."

"Oh, man, that's rough."

"Tell me about it. She's in love with the Samaritan."

It's now Pranger's turn to choke on his drink. "But you are..."

"I know. But I haven't told her. I can't. It's too..."

"I swear to God, sometimes, you are the densest motherfucker I've ever met!"

"Hey! Language!"

"She's already taking all the risks she'd take if she was your girlfriend. Probably more given she's obviously trying to get your attention."

"I don't..."

"You don't think she's getting in to so much trouble when you happen to be around entirely accidentally, do you?"

"Why would she..."

"You can not be this clueless!"

"How can I tell her? It's too dangerous."

"Apparently not too dangerous to rope me into rescuing her, though."

"That's..."

"Different. I know, that was *my* life on the line. And you didn't pay for the new suit I needed afterwards."

"That suit cost more than my rent!"

"I know. How on Earth are you keeping it a secret from her, anyway? I swear she's better at seeing through lies than I am and I can read minds!"

"Well, you see..."

"Oh, I recognise that shifty look. What did you do?"

"I don't know what you..."

"Tell me."

"I used a memotic device from my planet to make her forget." his eyes blink and focus, "Don't do that!"

"Wait. You used something to mess with her mind and you have the nerve to criticise my moral stance?"

"I panicked! She said she knew and I didn't know what to do and..."

"Ok, ok, so what are you going to do about it?"

"I..."

"Hold on, when did this happen?"

"Well, you see," he rubs the back of his neck.

"Not recent, then."

"No. I've tried telling her, really, I have, but she just can't retain that fact. Goes in one ear and out the other."

"Interesting."

"Is that all you can say?"

"No. Get her an appointment at the clinic. I'll see what I can do."

"But..."

"Do you want to be lying to her and continue violating her mind?"

"No."

"Exactly."

Three days, and much negotiation and promises of pizza and beer afterwards, later, "Mr Clarkson, Ms Losi."

"Alright, I'm here." she stands with her arms folded, "This better be good. I've got stories to chase down."

"Quite so. Has Mr Clarkson explained why you're here?"

"No. He's being uncharacteristically secretive. Which means this is something odd. Which is the only reason why I'm here. I do not need therapy."

"If you say so. This isn't a conventional therapy session. Mr Clarkson is...concerned that your memory has been interfered with. Possibly because of something you found out in your investigations."

"And he told you not me?" she turns her fierce glare onto Kent who shrinks smaller into himself.

"He felt that it would be best to have a possible solution in play before raising the issue. You are not a woman who likes to be kept waiting."

"And yet here we are."

"Here we are. To cut to the chase, I would like to put you into a trance and see if I can discover if Mr Clarkson's intuition is correct. And, if I can, to repair the damage."

She doesn't let up her glare at Kent. "If this is payback for knocking you into that cake..."

"I assure you, Ms Losi, it is not. I do not engage in pranks like that. Particularly not with people who can chew up and spit out my reputation before they've had their morning coffee."

"Fine. I guess I can spare half an hour if only to stop him making those puppy dog eyes at me. But don't try anything."

"I promise. Mr Clarkson can stay in the room so I don't do anything untoward or ask you anything inappropriate."

"Yeah, that's fine." She flops onto the sofa. "So, do you get out a watch or..."

"No. You just need to close your eyes, focus on your breathing and imagine you're at the top of a flight of stairs going down into the unknown. I want you to start counting to yourself down from one hundred and with each count take a step down, and with each step down, you descend deeper into the trance. And when you reach zero you'll be deep in your trance and we can get to work."

"No making me cluck like a chicken."

"Of course not."

"One hundred...ninety nine..."

He looks over to find Clarkson counting down at the same pace. "Fine, whatever."

At zero, he turns to Lana, "Now, Ms Losi, I'm talking directly to your subconscious, so you'll be able to answer me clearly and honestly, ok?"

"Ok."

"Who is the Samaritan?"

"Kent Clarkson."

"And how did you find this out?"

"At first, there were clues. I didn't believe them, but, there was a story there and the pieces kept fitting into the same place."

"So you worked it out yourself."

"Yes."

"Sounds like hard work."

"Weeks of clues and fitting them together. Tried everything because it couldn't be true. But it was. Only answer."

“And does your conscious mind know that now?”

“No.”

“And why is that?”

“Samaritan did something. Some raygun when I told him I knew.”

“Do you want to know?”

“Yes. I worked hard for it.”

“Good. Now, I want you to visualise a door in your mind, right in front of you. Behind that door are the memories you can't see, only it's locked so you can't open it.”

“Not fair.”

“Indeed not. Take a look at the lock.”

“Looks alien, Xenonian. Like the ray he used. Shame, if it was a normal lock, I could pick it in no time flat.”

“Ok. Think back, remember what the ray looked like, what he did to activate it.”

“Pushed buttons.”

“Can you see the same buttons on the lock?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Push them in the reverse sequence he used and that will open the lock.” He watches her fingers move, and her face grimace.

“Ms Losi?”

“Hurts. Stuck.”

“Perhaps...”

“No. My memories!” she grimaces again. “Mine.” her hand clenches and jerks, “Give them back!” and again. She snarls, and finally gasps, her body shaking.

“Ms Losi? Are you alright?”

“Fine. Hurts. But...I remember.”

“Good. Are you damaged in any way?”

There's a long pause, “No.”

“Good. Now, leave the door open and start climbing out of your trance, counting up as you do so until you reach one hundred when you'll be awake and alert like you've had a full night's sleep.” he turns to the still entranced Clarkson, “Now, what about you?”

“Door.”

“What?”

“There's a door. Looks Xenonian, like the pod I crashed in, but, the script's wrong.”

“Do you want to open it, or should we get you conscious?”

“Open.”

“Ok. Reach out and open the door. Tell me what's happening.”

“Door's warm. Looks like a sleep-pod door. No window. Entering code. Unlatching. Open...” his voice stops.

“Kent?” he looks on as the muscular figure in front of him shimmers and shrinks down. His hair gets longer, the clothes seem looser, his hands more slender, his face shifting, lips getting fuller, nose smaller, jaw less defined, eyelashes longer. “Kent? What's...”

Brilliant blue eyes open, “Not Kent. Kent's not available.” a decidedly more feminine voice answers, “Call me...Sammie.”

“What...the...fuck?!”