

THE TURNING



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the turning

preview

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one

fifteen items or less

Despite being a week into spring, it's a stubbornly gray and chilly day in South San Francisco the morning Diana meets the goddess of love and war in a checkout line.

The sheep tosses two vegetable primavera frozen dinners in her cart, starts to wheel away, pauses, and adds two spinach lasagnas. The grocery store's selection of full vegetarian and low-meat dishes has been getting better the last few years, an unexpected silver lining to the way the neighborhood's segregation skyrocketed since she moved in eight years ago. They're not the highest-quality brands anymore, but they're within her budget.

She pulls her phone out of her purse and checks off "frozen meals," then looks between it and the cart. Laundry detergent, dish soap, breakfast cereal (she should have gone with something healthy but got Berry Honey Os, shut up), soy milk. Grapes. Dried dandelion trail mix. Bagged salad? Yes, there. Okay.

One of the wheels on her shopping cart fights her vigorously as she pushes it toward checkout. Grunting with effort, she holds it straight, making a beeline for the express lane. She should have a small enough basket. The stores in the richer, carnivore-heavy towns along the Peninsula mostly all have self-checkouts, but they haven't upgraded to those here yet. They're promised along with the remodeling, but she's skeptical.

It's not a long line, but it's moving slow, the stoat behind the cash register looking like he wants to be anywhere else but here making money. What's he doing here? Slumming? Or is his family too poor to move out? The mouse woman at the head of the line and the elderly squirrel woman behind her both look patient. The tiger guy directly behind the squirrel, the one Diana's right behind, doesn't. He stands out here, and he knows it. He looks rushed and maybe a touch nervous, like he's afraid he's in the bad part of town and might get jumped by, well, who, exactly? A tired middle-aged black sheep woman? That hasn't stopped him from pushing a half-full cart into the line, though. Figures.

A tall rabbit woman gets in line behind Diana, tall enough that the sheep does a double-take. She's taller than the tiger, so has to be, what, six foot three or four? She looks strong, too, but radiates a movie star out of makeup vibe—like she could make everyone in a room fall dead silent when she walked in if she wanted to, but it's a power she can turn on and off. She seems familiar. Maybe. From where?

The rabbit looks down at the black sheep's five-foot-six self and raises a brow. Diana smiles awkwardly. "Sorry, you're just...very tall."

"Yes," the woman says flatly, with a bare hint of a return smile.

The sheep clears her throat, nods, and looks away, drumming her fingers on her cart's handlebar. She's unexpectedly feeling a fraction more bisexual, and she's afraid she's going to put her hoof in her mouth if she keeps speaking.

The mouse gets checked out and the stoat starts lackadaisically sliding the squirrel's eight items through.

"I'm sorry," Diana says, turning back to the rabbit, "but..." She lowers her voice. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

"I don't think so." The woman sounds amused now. There's a lovely lilt to her voice that makes Diana think of harp music.

"I don't mean that we've met, I mean..." She furrows her brow and sighs, waving a hand. "I don't know. Like I've seen you in a movie or on TV."

She shakes her head. "Not me."

“Hey!”

Both the rabbit and Diana look at the weasel who’s gotten behind them in line.

“That’s sixteen,” he snaps, angrily pointing at Diana’s cart. “You have *sixteen* items and this is a *fifteen items or less* line!”

Diana looks in her cart. Shit, he’s right. “It’s only one over.”

“Rules are rules!”

The rabbit turns to him. “Don’t you have anything better to do with your life?”

That draws him up short for a couple of seconds. He is short, not even Diana’s height, so the bunny might be intimidating—although he seems to be staring right into her cleavage as he tries to put together a response. “You can’t ignore the rules,” he finally says, giving her his best glare. “What happens if everyone ignores the rules?”

“What happens if I snap you like a birch twig?”

Diana glances around, nervous. Yeah, people are staring. The tiger’s looking back with an ugly smirk, a vixen one line over is glaring, the stoat has his hand on a phone behind the register like he’s going to call over a manager.

“It’s fine.” She holds up a hand to the rabbit placatingly, and starts to pull her cart out of line.

“No.” The taller woman puts her hand on Diana’s cart. It’s a casual motion, but she might as well have set a one-ton rock in the basket. Suddenly it’s not going anywhere. “You only have one item over, and that tiger has at least two dozen items in his cart.”

The tiger glowers at her. “I’m not the one making a scene.”

“No, he is.” She jerks a thumb at the weasel. “And about the sheep, not you.”

“I didn’t see his cart,” the weasel protests.

“Come on,” the rabbit snaps. “You have eyes.”

The weasel doesn’t say anything, just crosses his arms. The tiger snorts, shaking his head. Even the squirrel looks upset, but more in a shit-rolls-downhill way. The stoat still has two of her eight items to tally.

“Ma’am, you’re going to have to get out of line,” the stoat says.

Diana sighs heavily and starts trying to back up. The rabbit's hand remains on her cart. *Oh, come on, let it go, lady.* Standing on principle only causes trouble.

The rabbit locks eyes with the stoat. "Make them both leave," she says flatly, "or ring them both up."

"Or what?" The tiger turns to the sheep's self-appointed bunny savior, looking exasperated. "I don't know what it is with you herbivores. You know what? Rabbits are the worst, always acting like the rules don't—"

He disappears, along with his cart.

"I'm not a rabbit. I'm a hare. Hares are bigger."

"What the..." Diana looks around wildly. She can still kind of hear him, but distantly. *Squeakily.* The weasel who started it has disappeared, too.

The rabbit—hare—lets go of her cart. "Watch your step."

She looks down, then shrieks. Her left hoof dwarfs both the tiger and his cart. He's staring up, making incoherent mewling noises. Tiny mewling noises.

"Better yet, don't," the hare continues, looking down at the toy-sized, abruptly bluster-free cat.

"What? I can't step on him!"

"Of course you can. It's easy. Watch." The woman turns around and smashes her paw down on the weasel. "You could crush the cart, too, without hurting yourself. There's no stomp like a hoof stomp."

Diana watches, open-mouthed. She casually *shrank* someone and *stepped* on them just for being annoying? For being casually speciesist? For benefiting from species registries and all the discrimination built on top of them? Discrimination that created "Grasstowns" like this one? That created *decades* of shit that people like him—like the weasel, the stoat, the smirking vixen—never had to deal with and wouldn't see even if you smashed their faces against it, crushed them under a giant paw, ground them under a hoof—

She puts a hand to her muzzle. It's not that she's horrified at the thought of how easy smiting the tiger for his impudence

would be, it's that she *isn't* horrified by it. At all. And *that* horrifies her.

And where the hell did "smiting him for his impudence" come from?

"You're up," the hare says, pointing.

Diana blinks herself out of her headspace, looking back and forth. The entire grocery store has come to a stop, everyone staring at her. Maybe they're staring at the hare. Maybe both.

"I. Uh." She rolls her cart forward, hesitates, and brings her hoof *right* over the tiger, holding it there like the threat of divine retribution.

"Please!" he yells at the top of his tiny little lungs. "I'm sorry!"

She feels her temper flare. "Tell me what you're sorry *for*."

"I don't know! I don't know!"

She stomps her hoof down, *hard*, right next to him. He howls and faints dead away.

Snorting, she unloads her cart. "Are you going to give me trouble?" she says to the stoat, letting her tone fill with acid. She isn't the one who did any of this, she doesn't know *how* the hare did any of this, but right now she feels—powerful. She feels a thousand feet tall.

Good lord, Diana, what's gotten into you?

The stoat, eyes wide, shakes his head quickly, and starts ringing her up, for the first time as fast as he should be.

"I'd make a terrible goddess," Diana mutters under her breath, pulling out her credit card.

"No." The hare studies her. "I don't think you would."

Diana starts to flash a puzzled smile at her in return. *Don't engage, she's a super-powered psychopath, you idiot.* Clearing her throat, she takes her card and her bagged groceries from the clerk. "Are you...going to make him normal-size again?"

The hare shrugs. "Do you want me to?"

"Yes. Of course. I mean..." She looks down at him. "What I *want* is for him to not be the way he is."

The woman hands her single item—a bottle of single malt rye—to the clerk. "Ah, well. He'll remember that I shrank him and that

you spared his life, and that might mean something. It probably won't, though. He'll convince himself it didn't happen, because nobody else will remember any of it." She pays, and strolls toward the exit.

Diana follows. "Including me?"

"Including you. Sorry."

"I..." She runs a hand through her thick hair. "But I want to remember."

They step out into the too-small parking lot and the oppressive heat, enveloped by the smell of asphalt and stagnant polluted puddles, the sounds of tires and brakes and car horns from the weary traffic crawling along the suburb's main thoroughfare. A battered grey sedan with a THIRD EYE SECURITY logo idles by the far entrance, the panther behind the wheel staring down at his phone with a bored expression.

"You're sure?"

"Yes," she says, unhesitatingly.

"All right, then." The hare smiles, and for a moment, the rest of the world vanishes, leaving only her. Only this tall, mysterious, murderous woman, the most beautiful being in the universe, favoring Diana with the delirious experience of being a veritable goddess in line at the grocery store.

Then it's over, and she's walking away.

But Diana *does* know her, she's sure of it, from somewhere. She can't think of the show or the movie or the song or anything else, but she can think of a name. "Moirra," she murmurs.

The hare stops, goes perfectly still for a moment, then turns. "How did you know my name?" Her tone isn't threatening, isn't accusing. It's wondering.

"I don't know." Her mouth goes dry, but it's the truth. "I just... recognize you."

"Do you." The woman crosses her arms. "And you are?"

"Diana." She tries not to stammer. "Diana Lindsay."

"Nobody's recognized me for a very, *very* long time, Diana Lindsay."

"Are you..."

She waits expectantly, lifting a brow.

"A goddess?" Somehow Diana knows the answer is yes. She doesn't believe in gods, not like this, but it doesn't matter.

"This world doesn't have gods. Not any more."

That's not a no. "Maybe it should." It slips out sounding defiant. "It's not as if us mortals have done a great job on our own."

"No, you haven't." Moira's tone is matter-of-fact. "If you *did* have the power of a god, what would you do?"

"I don't—" Diana shakes her head. "Like I said, I'd make a terrible goddess."

"And I said you wouldn't. If I was one, wouldn't I know?"

"I'd think anyone who wants to be a god probably shouldn't be."

"I'd think it depends on why they want it."

"I don't know yet!" Diana winces at herself as soon as she says it. *Yet?*

Moira narrows her eyes, slowly looking Diana up and down, then uncrosses her arms and laughs. "That's an honest answer." She holds out her free hand.

The sheep reaches for it, then pauses, wondering if some kind of...offer has just been made. Ludicrous. But this entire afternoon has been ludicrous.

Biting her lip, she takes Moira's hand.

She's prepared for electricity, a lightning bolt, fire, ice, something, *anything*. Anything except what she gets: a tall, bewitching woman clasping her hand for a couple of seconds and letting go. That's it.

"Um." She looks at her hand. "Am I...?"

"Are you what?"

Diana lets out a soft chuckle. "Never mind."

"I hope keeping this memory gives you dreams, not nightmares." She lifts the bottle as if making a toast, and starts walking away. "Maybe it'll give you an answer to that question."

"And then what?"

The hare doesn't turn around, walking toward a crimson red Porsche Panamera. "And then you'll know."

"Just tell me who you are. *What* you are."

The hare drops into her car, gives the sheep that same slight smile as before, and roars out of the parking lot.

Diana stares after her, then pushes her cart toward her old Subaru. After she unloads it, she reaches for the door handle and stops. No. She has to see.

She heads back into the store.

Everything there's normal. Nobody's talking about the way two people impossibly shrank, the way a hare woman stepped on one and a sheep woman threatened to step on the other. The stoat checkout guy glances past her without obvious recognition. And wait. Isn't that the weasel Moira stepped on leaving the store, normal height, unharmed?

She couldn't have imagined it all. But—

Why *would* she want the power of a god, anyway?

Shaking her head at herself, she walks back out to her car. She's so lost in her thoughts she doesn't see the tiger until he literally grabs her, gripping both shoulders and spinning her around to face him.

"What the hell did you *do* to me?" he snarls.

She stares up, letting out an involuntary bleat, and pushes against him. "Nothing!" He remembers? But he wasn't—shit, that means—

"It wasn't you, it was the damned rabbit." He shoves her away, looking around wildly, and starts advancing on her, baring his teeth. "But you threatened to *step* on me!"

She backs up. "But I didn't," she protests. "Not that you deserved being spared."

Oh, why did she say that, she *knows* she shouldn't have said that. Now he's even angrier. She looks around desperately. A few bystanders watch: a couple of frightened mice, a sad-looking deer woman.

"Cunt!" he screams, swinging his fist at her face. She bleats again, raising her hands to block him. If she was really a goddess, this fucker would be staring up at her hoof again, he—

He vanishes.

Diana lowers her hands, eyes wide. She almost doesn't want to look down.

Almost.

She does, and there he is. He's fallen on his butt in one of the parking lot's noxious puddles, staring up at her open-mouthed.

The black sheep slowly leans over, watching him. The herbivores who were watching her have moved closer, their own eyes wide, and other people coming out of the store have stopped to watch, too.

"Help me!" the little tiger squeals. "Dammit, help me!"

She watches him, and she knows. She can *see*. He isn't sorry. He doesn't know what he should be sorry for, and even if he did, he wouldn't be. He's always behaved this way to herbivores, to women, to anyone he can. To anyone who can't fight back. And she's seen more than enough of this mortal.

"No. I gave you your chance." Straightening up, towering, she raises that almighty hoof and brings it down squarely on top of him.

Oh, shit. She just—oh dear God, how could she have—why did she think "this mortal," it's not as if—

—but she feels *something* in her, about her—

She looks around at the bystanders, at least a dozen people. They look shocked, but they're not screaming and pointing, not shooting live video, not calling the police.

The deer woman drops to her knees. Then the mice. Then, by ones and twos, the rest of them. Even the carnivores. Even the security guard.

Diana bolts back to her car as if demons were after her.

two things that need breaking

Moir gets down a double rocks glass, drops in two ice cubes, and fills the glass up with the rye she bought yesterday, taking a seat on the couch.

It's a nice sofa, right? She tells herself that every time she sits down on it, trying to convince herself this particular modern style isn't ass. It's fine. It's just not her style.

The condo came furnished. She's been here three months. Somehow, this is her first time living in the San Francisco area. Maybe. Was she here during the Gold Rush? No. She was up north of here for a while, but in one of her especially misanthropic phases. She remembers nearly leveling a small mountain settlement. The bartender at the one saloon in town saved them by giving her free drinks and good advice on where to go next.

She puts her paws up on the coffee table, takes a long drink, and stares at the ceiling. The same question has cycled through her mind for the past twenty-four hours and change: how did Diana know her name?

Worse, how does she not *know* how Diana knew her name? Sure, she's not omniscient, let alone omnipotent, but this is...

Well, if she knew what it was, it wouldn't be eating at her, would it.

Okay. Hypothesize. Could Diana be a secret worshipper of the

old gods? No. She was sincerely clueless about who Moira was. She recognized her, but she didn't *know* her.

So that recognition wasn't conscious. On some level, Diana believes that the world needs gods.

Great. Warm fuzzies for the forgotten goddess. But she knows damn well the sheep isn't the *only* person she's met in the last few thousand years who believes that. In her less antisocial decades, she drank with countless grizzled warriors and earnest monks lamenting how the world needed to return to the ways of the old gods. And not one of them ever squinted over their cups at her and called her by name.

"Then what *is* it about her?" she bellows. Her voice echoes around the living room, but doesn't come back with an answer.

Moira sits up, takes another long swig of whiskey, and rubs her face. She shouldn't have let Diana go. She should have brought her home and—and—what? If she genuinely didn't know why she recognized Moira, there was no answer to threaten or seduce out of her.

But, no, instead she let the woman remember Moira as the petulant, short-tempered goddess she is. She let her remember what it's like to have an enemy literally at her feet, and let her ponder what she'd do if she had the power of a god. Diana seemed to think Moira was about to *make* her a god, as if the hare could do that merely by taking her hand and wishing it.

She could have, once. But that wasn't just another time, it was another Moira. Even if she still could, like she said, the world doesn't have gods anymore. It doesn't want gods.

Maybe it should.

Abruptly, a wave of nausea washes over her. Moira hurriedly sets down the glass, and sprawls across the couch on her side, waiting for it to pass. What *is* this? It's been happening for weeks. She can't get sick; she knows she isn't pregnant. She'd been feeling better since finding a few local craft breweries—finally, good beer in this country—and feeling *great* since the run-in with Diana, better than she remembers feeling in years, even decades. Until she started thinking about it later. Maybe that's her mistake.

Why did she drive down to *that* grocery store, anyway? She could have walked to one of a half-dozen markets in the city, to a specialty liquor store or two. But no, she got up yesterday morning and thought *hey, time to visit South San Francisco*. Time to find somewhere a degree or two more hostile to herbivores, a degree or two more likely to piss her off.

Time to find somewhere she'd just *happen* to run into that sheep.

It's not that Moira doesn't believe in coincidences as a concept, but coincidences don't happen to her, don't happen to gods. What was it Briley used to say? A god's whim always means something.

Yeah, well. She's had nothing but whim to follow for the last few thousand years, nothing to do but kill time until the world ends. She wishes, not for the first time, that it'd hurry up and fucking end already.

Moira sits up gingerly. Enough. She's got to fill the hours with more than ale. She doesn't need money, but she needs work again. What's San Francisco known for? Mining's over, right? Bars, but she can't ruin liquor by making it a job. A great food scene, but—no. Too much, still. Lots of technology, but computers mostly piss her off, so she'd simply end up destroying a tech office. Although from what she's gathered, a lot of them could use a good stomping.

"There's no stomp like a hoof stomp," she murmurs, and shakes her head at herself, smirking. Diana might not have made a terrible goddess, but you absolutely do, Moira.

Okay, so then what? A few years ago, she could have paged through a phone book, but they don't have those anymore. That was a hell of a brief blip in history. They have temp agencies, though. She could check what one of those has. Hmm. Fashion agency? They'll tell her she's too tall and muscular to be a model, but if she wants to, she'll convince them otherwise.

If she wants to.

First step, though: get out of the condo and go somewhere besides a damn brewery.

She takes the elevator down to street level, walks out, and summons a jacket to pull around herself as she starts down the

sidewalk. The old-to-mortals joke “the coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco” is stupid—she’s been in countless winters in the subtropics colder than it ever gets here—but she’s sympathetic to the spirit.

Does San Francisco have a fashion district? It must. There’s a clothing company or two headquartered here, she’s pretty sure. No idea where, though. Maybe near the financial district, which seems to be where her paws are taking her. Or maybe that’s divine whim again. Ha ha ugh.

In her experience so far, San Francisco thinks of itself as simultaneously more and less of a great world city than it is. Nothing mortals built here is awe-inspiring, but most of it’s pretty. Dirty, too, but everyone pretends it’s worse than the reality. Inequality, that’s a real issue. But it’s been one as long as she can remember—it’s why she’s stuck here, instead of having fucked off to wherever the other gods fucked off to. Still, the gap here startles her. There are probably more herbivores living on the street than there are in housing within the city limits. Ironically, San Francisco doesn’t have that much blatant legal discrimination; this is all organically grown economic disparity.

She turns down Howard, walking right into the thick of the city’s skyscrapers. What might other gods have thought of modern cities? Any one of these buildings would have been a true wonder of the world a few hundred years ago. Now they’re high rise monuments to white-collar drudgery.

Pedestrians crowd the sidewalk here; it’s a weekday, and the Financial District buzzes for twelve hours a day, five days a week. Five hours from now, past seven o’clock, it’ll be quiet except around the hotels and the restaurants that cater to convention-goers, to business dinners instead of worker lunches.

So just where is she going? She stops at a corner and considers her own question. She hasn’t gone job-hunting recently and she’s gotten the impression much of it’s moved “online” now, but she’s been able to walk into an office and get a job for as long as there have been offices. Even in this computerized everything moment,

offices are still staffed by mortals she can wrap around her finger with a few seconds of charm.

Okay. Looking up at buildings tells her nothing. She picks the tallest one at this intersection and walks into the lobby, studying the directory.

Financial companies, check. Tech companies, check. A construction company. A venture capital firm. Nothing that sounds like she'd want to work there, even for laughs. She turns and heads back toward the exit.

A woman in a wheelchair, a pika who couldn't be out of her twenties yet, rolls past her in the same direction. She's devastatingly cute in a kind of butch way: short sandy hair, denim shorts, faded t-shirt tight around both chest and biceps. Moira moves to hold the door for her, but the pika slaps the door open button as she rolls past, effectively holding the door for the hare. "Thanks," she says, walking behind her.

"You're welcome." The pika looks up at her, and tilts her head, slowing her roll and studying the hare more intently. "Do I know you?"

Again? Seriously? She shakes her head. "No."

"Okay." The pika nods and wheels ahead.

Moira makes it four more steps before a luxury coupe, a red and grey imported two-seater, screeches into a prime parking spot in front of the building—a space clearly marked with the blue and white disability sign. The car's hood slides into a no-parking zone before the driver slams on the brakes.

The pika slams on the brakes, too—from the way she jerks in the chair, as literally as wheelchairs get. She'd been heading for a curb cut that the front of the sports car now blocks. "What the hell, man!"

The driver, a tiger who looks like the asshole from yesterday but in a nicer suit, jumps out. He has to have heard the pika, but he doesn't even look at her.

"That's a handicapped space," Moira says, stepping in front of him close enough to force him to stop.

"Only gonna be here a half-hour. And I'm late." He steps around her.

"Asshole," the pika says, loudly enough that he gives her a dirty look. "You're parking illegally *and* parking like a dick, too."

He rolls his eyes. "Just go around." Clearly, to him the pika's the asshole for calling him on his shit.

"Move your car," Moira says flatly, "or I'm going to step on it."

He doesn't stop walking toward the building, but he turns to look at her incredulously. "What kind of crazy threat is that, bunnygirl?"

"That's a no, right?" She clasps her hands together and grins. "I've been wanting a good excuse to do this for years now."

He points at her. "Touch my car and I'll have your carrot-eating ass in jail." He turns around, heading into the building.

"Back up," she tells the pika.

"Ooooookay." She does so.

Moira strides forward, rapidly growing as she moves. Her second step shakes the sidewalk. Her third adds new cracks to it. Her fourth takes her right into the street, cars in both directions braking to avoid hitting a paw as long as a delivery truck.

She pivots, bringing her other paw down right on top of the car. She lets it rest there a second, then begins shifting her weight.

The tiger runs out of the building, staring up at Moira, screaming. He's the only one running toward her. Everyone else is sensibly running away.

He stops in front of his car, pinwheeling his arms. She makes a show of it, letting each luxury tire blow out and each luxury window shatter as the luxury roof meets the luxury seats. It takes maybe five seconds for the whole luxury cabin to become one with the luxury floorboards.

"Holy fucking shit." The pika hasn't fled, either. She's staring up at Moira, dazzled rather than scared.

"No!" The cat screams. "No! What the hell—you can't—oh my God!"

"Goddess," the pika says.

Moira looks down at her sharply.

The tiger screams again. “A giant rabbit—giant rabbit crushed—”

“Not a rabbit,” Moira mutters. A truck trying to inch past her taps its horn. She grits her teeth, but stops herself from giving it a reflexive kick. Instead, she picks up the flattened car, crumples it into a ball, and waves at the now-unblocked curb cut. “There you go,” she says to the pika.

The woman keeps staring up at her, and barely whispers a name. *Her* name. “Moira.”

Abruptly Moira returns to her normal size, standing by the wheelchair. She leans over, expression hard. “Why did you call me that?”

That gets the pika looking frightened, but for only a moment. “Myths. I love old myths and folk tales. And I know the ones about a beautiful hare, the goddess of love and war, sometimes as tall as the sky.”

“And you think gods are real?”

“I didn’t.”

“I’m not the asshole!” the tiger wails.

“You are *totally* the asshole,” the pika snaps before Moira can respond. “If I could make myself giant, I’d fucking eat you.”

Moira smirks. “Honestly, I’d enjoy seeing that.”

The tiger’s ears flatten, and he pulls out his phone.

Moira waves a hand, and he freezes. Everything freezes, except for her and the pika. The pika looks around, eyes snapping open wide again.

“It’s easier,” Moira says simply. “I’m going to have to figure out a different memory to give everyone of all this, except him. Nobody will believe his car got crushed by a giant hare.” She crosses her arms. “What’s your name?”

“Hazel.” She swallows. “You...you’re really her, aren’t you?”

Moira sighs, and nods curtly.

“*Please* let me remember this.”

She knows that’s a bad idea, but the girl seems so sincere, and at least she *has* an explanation for why she came up with Moira’s

name. Not a fully satisfying one, one that still ends with “I don’t know, it’s just you.” But.

The same question she asked Diana pops unbidden into her head. No, you sorry excuse for a war god, don’t ask it. Even though you want to know. It’s a fancy. It’s toying with the poor woman’s emotions.

She looks up at the gray sky, and asks the damn question anyway. “What would you do if you had the power of a god, Hazel?”

The pika blinks several times, and focuses back on Moira. “Fix things that need fixing and break things that need breaking.”

“That’s a good answer.” It’s the answer she’d have given a couple of millennia ago. Although seeing where it got her, maybe it’s not that good an answer after all. “All right.”

“All right...?”

“You can keep the memory.” She holds out a hand for Hazel. A moment later, the pika takes it, and breaks out into an adorably blissful grin.

As Moira starts to walk away, Hazel squeaks. “Will I see you again?”

“I don’t know.” Moira shrugs without looking back. “I’m in the area.” She snaps her fingers, and the world picks up where it left off. Almost. Everyone but Hazel and the tiger resume their business as if nothing strange had happened over the last ten minutes. Or, rather, only one thing: a crushed ball of once-luxury car sits next to a handicapped parking space. Passersby stare, but nobody asks any questions. It’s San Francisco.

The tiger still has his phone out, Moira guesses, from the way he launches into more cursing. She hears Hazel cursing back. Hopefully he’s not going to cause trouble for the pika. There’s still time to crush him like his car. On the flip side, Hazel seems like she can take care of herself, and Moira’s caused enough trouble for the afternoon.

She’s rounded the corner toward Market when she hears screeching traffic and horns blaring behind her. And a crash. Furrowing her brow, Moira turns back.

Hazel and her wheelchair sit dangerously in the middle of the

street—but not dangerously for Hazel. The pika might have been five and a half feet tall if she stood, but now she has to be at least the size Moira was a few minutes ago, chair sized to match. She blocks traffic completely on one side of the street, but she's too preoccupied to pay attention. She's dropping her hand away from her muzzle, as if she's just stuffed something in her mouth. Or someone.

The pika makes a funny face, as if debating whether she *really* wants to do this, then tilts her head back and swallows.

Moira runs a hand through her hair. She should ask what the hell happened, but she can see what the hell happened. She can *feel* what the hell happened. What she doesn't know is *how* what the hell happened. There is, as of about two minutes ago, a new goddess in the world, and her first act of divinity was becoming giant and swallowing an idiot tiger whole.

Which, fine, Moira *did* enjoy seeing.

Hazel looks around her wheels now with obvious delight, although her ears dip when she sees the fender bender behind her. "Sorry," she calls. "I'll...uh..." She trails off, her expression shifting to wide-eyed confusion. The crowd that's left around her isn't running. They're dropping to their knees, looking up at her adoringly.

Moira strokes her chin. Hazel might get the hang of it on her own. She'll have to check if there's any news about this in tomorrow's papers. If the pika plays her cards right, figures out what to do, there won't be.

And if she doesn't, well. Maybe the world *could* use a new god who's up for fixing things. She's got an impressive head start on the breaking things part.

But—

Don't play dumb with yourself. It wasn't Hazel, it was you. It had to be you.

And it wasn't Diana...

Cursing under her breath, Moira tears her gaze away from the giant pika and hurries to the closest newsstand. She needs to check if there's any news about *yesterday* in *today's* papers.

three

weather report

Fresh coffee at hand, Lily Parker opens the morning weather report.

The data it tracks isn't weather in the sense anyone outside her organization understands it. It has currents and patterns, ebbs and flows, but it's a far different mix than hot and cold air masses: it's the mix of order and chaos across the world. Law against lawlessness, calm against riots, hierarchy against anarchy. As with the natural climate, mortal actions influence it across the long term; unlike the climate, it's been slowly but steadily moving in the desired direction. More order, less chaos.

The silver vixen stops, goes back two frames, zooms in on a map of northern California, and frowns.

The mix is volatile, naturally, and she expects regressions. San Francisco remains too tumultuous for the company's tastes, although they're making some breakthroughs thanks to the tech billionaire class. This late in the project, though, there should be few truly unpredicted bursts of chaos.

And this outbreak isn't the kind she'd expect in San Francisco, not the quick flurry of an anti-authority street protest or the simmer of a temporarily successful collective. This burst is strong, with no antecedents they'd been tracking, and most alarmingly, it's *instant*. That's unusual.

That makes two in the same region, separated by a single day. She adjusts the date range to bring both of them into view. With a right-click on the southern one, she runs a quick news search for stories originating in that area since it happened. No headlines stand out. A right-click on the one within San Francisco, a day later, shows—hmm. One curious headline from a popular local blog about a traffic jam on Howard onlookers swear had been caused by...

A giant young pika woman. In a wheelchair.

Scowling, she sends the article to Torrance, the head of Celestial Venture Partners in Palo Alto, with a short note: *Have an explanation for this by 8:30 am your time.*

She presses a button on her desk intercom. "Ms. Storm."

"Yes, Ms. Parker?"

"I'm sending you two points of interest from the weather map. I want you to find anything about them online that the system's standard news search might not pick up. I particularly want anything that can verify the story about the pika woman."

"Got it. I'll get back with that shortly."

"Thank you." She pauses. "Do we know if Moira is in the San Francisco Bay Area?"

She hears the rat typing furiously for a few seconds. She's no longer wholly sure what research magic her assistant's capable of, but she's faster with answers than any search engine, and before that, any librarian. "Her last known residence was Rio de Janeiro, where she lived for twenty-eight years. But she left eight years ago. We have no later records of her."

"Hmm." She drums her fingers on the desk. "So she stayed entirely off our radar since. She was quiet in Rio, wasn't she, too? By her standards."

Ms. Storm sounds amused. "With that important qualification, yes, ma'am. Do you think she's connected with these?"

Parker smiles humorlessly. Quiet for Moira entails one or two incidents a generation when she rains down chaos because she's taken affront over something, rather than one or two a year. By that measure, she's been reasonably quiet going on a century. "I

can't say yet. But these manifesting less than two weeks after the events at Test Site 3 sets my ears back. We only have half a year to finish."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll keep my eyes open for Moira as well."

When Storm disconnects, the vixen takes off her glasses and rubs her temples. She'd suspected for years that Moira had gone quiet in part because she'd grown ever less interested in mortal affairs, but also because she was as aware of the changing times as they were. In past times they'd discreetly contained her effects, keeping her out of the news of the day and keeping themselves from her attention. Moira had been doing more of the containing on her own for the past century or two, though, a decidedly mixed blessing. Mr. Nunwick simultaneously wanted the organization to keep close track of Moira's misadventures and to keep him from ever hearing of them. If she had to explain this level of chaos, now, it would be deemed a spectacular failure.

Her spectacular failure.

Yet if Moira *was* behind this nonsense, it was...different. Making a mortal giant so *they* could wreak havoc isn't her style; Parker doesn't need to flip back through case histories to know that. The damn woman wouldn't be so good at staying off their radar if she was that blatant.

She sighs, closing the weather map, and goes about the more mundane business of running a billion-dollar private equity firm.

It's over an hour before Ms. Storm calls her back. "Here's what I've found, Ms. Parker, and it's...somewhat unsettling. There are several cell phone photos of the pika woman on social media, and some commentary from witnesses who reported feeling compelled to drop to their knees around her."

Parker sits up. "Really."

"Yes. Fortunately, the stories haven't gotten much traction, and no major news source has issued any corroboration."

She knows that effect, and so does Ms. Storm: the compulsion a mortal gets around a god who's just performed a divine act. "You're sure they're referring to the pika woman, specifically."

"And to the sheep."

The vixen rubs her temples again. "The who?"

"The later incident you asked me to look into involves the pika; the previous one involves the sheep. A similar event in a super-market parking lot. She didn't become giant, but she apparently shrank someone and flattened him underhoof."

"And instead of running, bystanders fell to their knees."

"That's what several reports say. They're as unverifiable as the reports about the pika, I'm afraid, but..."

"But a sufficient amount of anecdotal data suggests real data, yes."

"I think so. None of the reports mention a rabbit or hare in either location."

As Storm speaks, mail comes in from the Palo Alto office, five minutes late.

I'm assigning an agent right now and we're getting security camera footage as I type this. Get back to you ASAP.

Security camera footage. Would Moira remember to erase that if she were involved? Not explicitly, but she was powerful enough that if she placed a geas of forgetting on the area it might well affect machinery. She supposes she'll give Mr. Torrance the benefit of the doubt for now, though. "All right. Ms. Storm, keep looking for any sign of Moira. She's never deified a mortal before that we know of, but she's the only one outside our organization that we know could. If she's changed her modus operandi after several thousand years, we need to know why. Fast."

"Yes, ma'am."

She drums her fingers on the desk again. Hopefully she can get a handle on this before Mr. Nunwick gets wind of it. More than anything else, Parker hates waiting for the next shoe to drop.

four

levitating plushies

Hazel's wheelchair appears on the sidewalk in front of her house with a window-rattling bang. From the jarring drop, it might have teleported in an inch or two over the sidewalk, not on it. She'll have to work on that.

An elderly dingo woman on the sidewalk a few doors down, holding a watering can, stares at Hazel open-mouthed.

Oh, she'll have to work on that, too. Dammit. She wiggles her fingers at the woman. "Forget everything." As soon as she says it, a voice in the back of her head screams, *you fool, she'll forget literally everything including her name!* Hazel starts to stammer out a retraction. Remember everything? No, that'd be worse. What about—

But no, as far as she can tell nothing happens at all. The dingo freezes for a full second, then drops the watering can and bolts inside her row house.

"I guess I should just keep taking the damn bus," Hazel mutters, rolling toward her door. Even with the nice street level entrance, one of the irritatingly few in the Castro without steps, it's a nuisance: a barred wrought iron screen door swings out while a heavy wooden door swings in. Her housemate likes the extra security of the second lockable door, though.

Hmm. She tries wiggling her fingers at the first door. "Open." Nothing.

Come *on*, she was a fucking *giantess* an hour ago. How did she do that? How did she change back? She pictured herself Moira's size, and later pictured herself back at normal size, right?

Picturing stuff. Maybe that's the key. She pictures the door swinging open.

It swings open.

Hazel bounces in her chair, clapping, and rolls ahead. She still opens the inner door by hand without even thinking about it.

Rhiannon's sitting on the living room sofa, laptop balanced across her crossed legs as usual. The room doesn't get much natural light, but the squirrel's got the knack of a gifted interior designer, accenting the white walls with pastel pink and blue decor. The couch is a neutral gray, but pillows, crocheted throws, and a half-dozen whimsical plushies—five of them Hazel's—stand out against it. She looks up, brushing long curly black hair away from her face. "I thought you'd be out longer."

"Yeah, so did I." Hazel starts to reach for the door to close it, but instead tries willing it shut. It slams closed. The pika winces.

The squirrel stares, setting down the laptop. "How'd you do that?"

"Magic. I guess. I'm still practicing."

Rhiannon narrows her eyes and walks over, smoothing down her skirt. She's tall, towering over Hazel (*for now*, ha), and she's chosen orange for today's theme: pale orange tank top, deeper orange miniskirt, amber-gold bangles around wrists and ankles. "Seriously." She studies the door and Hazel's wheelchair. "What did you do?"

Hazel scratches the back of one of her round ears. "This is going to take a while to explain, and even longer to convince you I'm not bullshitting you."

Rhiannon gives her a long, appraising look. "You're lucky I think you're so cute," she says with a sigh, dropping back into her seat and motioning for Hazel to go on.

"I *am* cute," Hazel says, locking the chair's brake. "It's a curse." She gets up, steadying herself for a second, and walks across the

carpet to the couch and sits down on her end. "So. Do you know who Moira is?"

"Moira who?"

"Moira, the goddess of love and war."

"Oh, *that* Moira. Sure, we used to hang out at that dive bar over in Noe Valley."

Hazel picks up one of the plush toys, a cartoonish blue shark, and tosses it at the squirrel.

Rhiannon deflects it. "I don't remember much about mythology classes. What about her?"

"I met her."

The squirrel stares at her blankly, unmoving.

"I know how that sounds." Hazel raises her hands. "But I swear. I met her."

"You met a woman who told you she was Moira."

"No, I had to pry it out of her at first."

Rhiannon covers her face and sighs melodramatically. "You mean *you* told *her* she was Moira, and she said yes."

"No. I mean, yes, kind of, but that's not—" She takes a deep breath. "Rhi, I have *powers* now. She did something to me." She points. "That's what I did with the door."

"Powers," Rhiannon repeats. "Like...superpowers."

The pika nods. "Yeah."

"Such as? Super speed? Strength? Or just the ability to magically close doors?" She holds up her hands. "Evildoers beware, it's the Incredible Door Closer!"

Hazel crosses her arms. She's got to come up with a better demonstration, but what? Nothing potentially dangerous, and nothing that's going to freak Rhiannon out. Much.

She bites her lip and concentrates. All the plush toys smoothly rise into the air and slowly begin circling Rhiannon's head.

The squirrel's eyes get wide, darting from toy to toy. She grabs one, searching it for hidden wires, then tosses it across the room. Hazel "catches" it and sends it back into position.

"How are you doing that?" The squirrel's voice is higher pitched, breathier than normal.

"I don't know. I just...picture what I want to happen and it does."

Rhiannon gives her a terrified look. "Anything?"

"I don't know," Hazel repeats, letting the plush toys drop back to the sofa. "Well, no. I'm pretty sure I'm not omnipotent."

The squirrel closes her eyes, holding her head in her hands and rocking back and forth. "This doesn't make any sense. What else are you going to tell me you've done?"

"Uh, I teleported back here from downtown." She clears her throat and adds in a mumble, "And I became a giantess."

Rhiannon snaps her eyes open. "What did you say?"

Hazel looks at the ceiling. She feels weirdly like her mom's caught her sneaking from a cookie jar. "There was a guy being a real asshole to Moira and me, and she got giant and stepped on his car, and I said to him if I could become giant I'd eat him. When Moira left, suddenly I felt like this, like I was *powerful*, like I was..." She takes a deep breath. "Like I was a goddess. And..." She trails off, not at all liking the way her roommate's staring again.

"You think you're a goddess."

"Well...maybe?"

"And you're telling me you became a giant. You know that's impossible." She narrows her eyes. "You didn't eat him, did you?"

Hazel crosses her arms. "Obviously not, if becoming a giant is impossible!"

"Hazel!"

The pika covers her face. "God, I'm hearing myself, and now I'm wondering if I'm going crazy. But it was... I could feel his hatred. *Hate*. Unredeemable hate. That's the only way to put it. Not of me, specifically, but of everyone he thought was beneath him. All the herbivores. Anyone lower class." She points at her chair. "Anyone with one of those."

"You're saying you saw into his soul. Because you're a goddess."

Hazel rubs the back of her ear, eyes widening. "Yeah," she mumbles. "Holy hell. I did."

She looks at the pika pleadingly. "You know how—how *insane* this all sounds."

"How do you explain what I just did? What you just saw?"

"I don't know, Hazel. I can't. But faking levitating plushies isn't exactly parting the sea."

"It wasn't faking." She sighs, shrugging. "I couldn't think of anything else to do that wouldn't freak you out even more, or damage something, or risk hurting you."

Rhiannon chews on her lip, then gets up. "All right. If this is real, we need to figure out what powers you have, how you *really* got them, and what you should do with them."

"We?"

"I don't have anything else to do until I get a job again, assuming I ever get one." She walks to Hazel's chair. "Can I ask a delicate question?"

Hazel pushes herself to her paws and walks to the chair, too. "If I'm a goddess—"

"—which you're not—"

"—do I still need this." It's not as if she hasn't already thought about it, but she's not sure whatever powers she has extend to curing the incurable. And she's been using it for over a decade. She sits down in it and looks up at the squirrel. "The truth is, I don't know. But there's something powerful about the image of a goddess using a wheelchair. Does that sound crazy?"

"No," Rhiannon says after a moment. "Honestly, if there *were* such a thing as gods, the world could do worse than to have one like you." She looks at the door. "Do what you did before, but without slamming anything."

Hazel looks at the door. Okay, think about gently opening it, reaching over and turning the knob, pulling it back...

The door opens, without slamming. She opens the iron door that way, too, and looks at Rhiannon triumphantly.

The squirrel slowly steps through the door onto the sidewalk, eyes wide. Hazel follows, rolling the chair along manually. She bets she can magically race along at freeway speeds, but she's not ready to try. Yet.

"Make yourself giant," Rhiannon says.

"What?"

"There's nobody on the street, and we don't get much traffic on it. You won't hurt anything. Make yourself giant."

"You don't think I can do it, do you?"

In response, Rhiannon waves her hands grandly toward the avenue.

Hazel grins, and rolls to the closest curb cut and out into the street. Okay. How did she do this before? She just did. She wanted to be big, and—

With a soft sonic boom, she's the hundred-foot tall pika woman again, enthroned in her appropriately sized chair—which sinks a few inches into the street as if it were sand. The blast of wind from air she displaces sends trash skittering down the sidewalks and blows Rhiannon's hair back like a banner for a second.

The squirrel stares up, mouth open, and steadies herself against a lamp post, looking weak-kneed.

Hazel leans over. "You okay?"

Rhiannon keeps staring up, breathing hard, gripping the post as if it's all that keeps her from collapsing. She manages a shaky nod.

A few people step out of buildings along the street to investigate the noise. They're all staring, too, naturally. A shrew woman Hazel's seen before a few times slowly gets to her knees.

"Still sure I'm not a goddess?" Hazel murmurs to Rhiannon.

The squirrel straightens up, but keeps a hand on the post. "You're a superhero."

"Oh, so divinity is nonsense, but physics-violating mutant powers are a-ok. Got it."

"It's a working theory." She takes a tentative step forward, then walks into the street in front of the wheelchair and puts her hands on her hips. "Although if you really ate somebody, you're a supervillain."

Hazel leans over more, holding her hand out for the squirrel, palm up. "I'm telling you, you don't understand how unredeemable he was."

"Still a supervillain." Rhiannon stares at the hand dubiously.

"C'mon, I'm not going to eat you."

That gets Rhiannon to look up at her, and the squirrel visibly

blushes. Hazel grins lopsidedly. She didn't mean it as a double entendre.

"Not as reassuring as you might think," the squirrel eventually mutters, but she climbs onto the pika's hand.

"Okay, comics nerd." Hazel gently sets Rhiannon down on her thigh, which makes the squirrel tense up. "Should I set you somewhere else?"

"No. Uh, this is fine." She looks up at the pika, swallowing hard once, and slips into a more genuine smile. "So what do you plan to do with your newfound powers?"

"I guess if I'm a villain, I should roll over a bank or something."

She holds up her hands. "Please don't."

"I wasn't planning to." Hazel laughs. "Moirra asked me what I'd do with the power of a god—"

"—superhero—"

"—and I said that I'd break things that need breaking and fix things that need fixing."

"Huh. That's clever, although we're going to have to figure out why this Moirra gave you whatever power she did. Nothing this unbelievable comes without strings." She points out at the city. "Let's find things to fix."

"At this size?"

"Maybe a more manageable one."

Hazel carefully picks Rhiannon back up, sets her down on the sidewalk, and returns to her normal size. She pivots the chair to get out of the street, then blinks several times. Everyone outside who *isn't* Rhiannon is on their knees now.

As she rolls along the street, Rhiannon walking beside her, she looks up at the squirrel and grins teasingly. "Sure you don't want to fall to your knees and worship me?"

"See, asking that question even in jest clearly means you need someone who can smack you in the head when you need it."

Hazel laughs. "Deal."

five **checkpoint**

When she gets up the next morning—fine, the next afternoon—and heads down to the newsstand to buy a paper, Moira doesn't find anything about Diana or Hazel. She didn't find anything yesterday, either. She's not sure what she's looking for, especially about the sheep, though. Maybe there's nothing to find. Maybe what she meant to happen is precisely what did happen: she let a mortal remember a chance meeting with a goddess.

But that's what she meant to happen with Hazel. It might not have happened immediately, but when she stood a block away looking up at the giantess she sensed what the mortals had—the new, wobbly, barely formed divinity of it all. That hadn't happened with Diana.

At least, not before she drove off.

Had she ever done this before? Three days ago, she'd have bitterly laughed off the idea, but now she wonders if she can make new gods by accident. Surely not. If this had happened before, she'd have eventually discovered it. Unless the new gods were as careful about hiding themselves from mortals as she'd gotten since the Industrial Revolution, there'd have been reports, legends. Hell, new religions. Yes, these were the first two mortals she could remember revealing herself to in centuries, but—

But, no, not revealing. These were the first two she could remember *recognizing* her. Ever. The world has gone *weird* all of a sudden, and she's the locus of that weirdness.

And she doesn't like it at all.

Maybe moving back to a big city was a mistake. She'd been happy enough leaving Rio to live in a trailer at the edge of the Mojave for a while, where she could go a season or two without seeing anyone chattier than a saguaro. (They had more to say than you'd think, but you had to know how to ask.) But she'd gotten restless, and set out hiking the Pacific Crest Trail until she hit the Cascades. By that point, she was itching to get back to civilization.

She flips back through the paper, scanning headlines, frowning at one. About a dozen states had passed "group area acts" in the last decade that divided up their cities and metros into carnivore-only, herbivore-only, and mixed residence zones; she'd known that, but she hadn't known the federal version had gotten as close to passing as it had. It'd still leave the divisions up to states and cities, but it *required* states to come up with group area plans for every "metropolitan statistical area" within their boundaries. California vowed to make all zones in the state mixed use if it passed, but some cities and counties were "reviewing legal options" for end runs around Sacramento. Fresno was about to pilot their version.

Fucking *Fresno*.

Tossing the paper onto the coffee table, she picks up the alt-weekly she'd also grabbed. Nothing about the new goddesses in here, either, but there's an events calendar. She hasn't gotten that strange nausea today. If anything, she feels more chipper than usual, like she wants to get out and socialize.

A music festival across the Bay, up in Vallejo, all day Saturday? That might be worth a trip. She hadn't kept up with music for years, not since she spent a decade as a folk singer. She got too close to actual fame for her tastes and backed off, but it'd been fun for a while.

Maybe she should drive around South San Francisco today, though, to see if anything looked out of place. New temples, suspiciously large hoofprints, that sort of thing. And where did Hazel

live? Maybe somewhere in San Francisco proper, but without a sign, she can't narrow that down enough to be useful.

Sighing, she grabs her keys.

A meandering ride through the City down to South SF finds nothing out of the ordinary. The frustration with not being omniscient has been unusually high lately.

Well, there's one last check to make. She pulls into the supermarket parking lot, gets out, heads into the store. If anything drew her here apart from the opportunity to run into Diana, it's sure not obvious. Is that relieving or unnerving?

Slumming stoat boy isn't at any of the registers today, and a cursory check down the aisles doesn't show anyone else she remembers. There was that security guy outside, though, if he ever looked up from his phone.

She walks back out and looks for the Third Eye sedan. There it is, and it looks as if the same panther's behind the wheel.

Moira walks over, prepared to rap on the window, but he looks up from his phone when she's still a few steps away and rolls it down without prompting, flashing her a faintly suspicious look. "Can I help you?"

"Maybe. Did you catch anything strange out here in the parking lot two days ago? Tuesday, just after lunch?"

"Like what?"

"A black sheep woman doing anything..." She waves a hand, and repeats, "strange."

He swallows, ears flicking back an inch for a split-second. "Nope, sorry."

Okay, so that's a yes. She leans forward and gives him a big smile with a tiny push behind it. "I'm one of Diana's friends. I'm just trying to make sure she's all right."

He's immediately transfixed, staring at her so adoringly he's nearly forgetting to breathe. Oops, that might have been more than a tiny push. "She's...uh... I don't know, truthfully, my lady. She performed a miracle. A terrible miracle." He lowers his voice conspiratorially. "She's a *goddess*. We all knew."

"What did she do?"

"She *smited* someone!" His eyes are wide with fright and awe before he pauses. "Is that the right word?"

"I think it's 'smote.' Let me guess. A loudmouth tiger, a few inches shorter than I am?"

He nods. "Then he was a *lot* shorter than you were." He holds his thumb and forefinger a few inches apart, and finishes in a disquietingly reverent tone. "She brought her divine hoof down upon him."

"Dramatic. And then what happened?"

He shakes his head. "We all fell to our knees, and she ran to her car."

At least he's not referring to it as a fucking chariot. "All right." She pats him on the shoulder. "Thank you."

He slides his hand over hers, clasping it, and brings it to his muzzle for a gallant kiss. And another and another.

She clears her throat and pulls her hand away. She has *got* to work on her magic again, doesn't she? The only miracles she's performed for the last few centuries involved smashing things, so she didn't have to worry too much about finesse.

When she gets back home, she sprawls on her couch again. Okay, Moira, you've had a couple of thousand years of being the last god left in the world. No worshippers, no believers, drifting around on eternal vacation. Now, all the evidence suggests that you've accidentally deified two mortals in two days.

How do you *accidentally create divine beings*? And what do you do about it?

"Nothing" might be the easiest answer, but it might also be a valid one. They weren't going to stay hidden for long. Yes, they'd mess things up at first, but so what? With no other gods in the world, no mythic monsters or legendary heroes, nothing could kill them. They'd have time to learn. Once they got settled, she could...

Who knows. Watch from afar. Keep on keeping on.

Moira sleeps in longer than she should on Saturday, but gets out in the afternoon. Once she's through Treasure Island on the Bay Bridge, traffic thins. She moves into the fast lane and opens up the Porsche's throttle. She could easily make a Shortcut, turn off an exit and be right where she needs to be, but she's gotten to like driving

again. This span is at least as pretty as the Golden Gate Bridge; it's just not as famous. Maybe they should paint it orange. She resists the temptation to snap her fingers and change its color.

If Moira's ever been to Vallejo, she doesn't remember it. It has more of a working-class vibe than where she lives in the City, but it's prettier than South San Francisco. Maybe it's the waterfront, the city nestled between San Francisco Bay to the south and the mouth of the Napa River to the west, running up into foothills along the east side.

The police presence is less attractive, though. As she approaches the riverfront park holding the festival, she passes cruiser after cruiser with lights flashing. Cops directing traffic, blocking off streets, corralling pedestrians, running speed traps. Lighted signs for festival parking warn about checkpoints. What fresh hell is this?

Fine, she won't make a scene yet. She follows the signs for parking, pulls in next to an SUV, and looks around.

Fences block off the neighboring park and the streets leading into downtown. Signs direct her to a gate with a short line in front of one of the blocked-off streets, with a police car parked there and a cop standing by the gate. There's *another* line a few yards past the gate, a much longer, slower one, leading toward a couple more police cruisers flashing their lights a block away. No, wait: there are two long lines, the slow one and a faster one alongside it.

When she gets in line behind a lanky, shaggy-haired coyote guy decked out in denim, he gives her a glance, then double-takes. Moira finds herself tensing up. *Fuck, please don't whisper my name to me.*

He doesn't. He clears his throat, looking self-conscious about staring, and says, "Hey." He's not recognizing her as a goddess, he's recognizing her as an attractive bunny who has about half a foot on him. He's cute, too, in a kind of cowboy way.

"Hello. So, is this normal?" She waves between the two lines.

"Last time I went was two years ago, and there wasn't anything like this. They're doing more ID checks to 'keep trouble down.'" He makes skeptical air quotes with his fingers.

"Ah." She studies the cop car for a moment; the logo on the door

is weird. It has a typical yellow-and-blue shield design reading *Vallejo Police*, but in small print under the shield it says *Managed by NorthStar Enforcement*. Daranu's nutsack, the *police force* has been privatized. When did that happen?

It takes no time to get to the front of this first line, because the tiger's just scanning IDs and directing people into one of the other two lines. The coyote gets pointed toward the fast line; people at its head get waved through the fences. The cop points her toward the slow line.

"Why is one line so much slower?"

The tiger doesn't look at her. "One line's running IDs, the other isn't."

"But *you're* running IDs right here in this line. Why are all the herbivores in the slow line and the carnivores in the fast one?"

"I'm following directions, and everything will move faster if you do, too."

Another officer, a wolf, waves both the coyote and Moira along. "Hurry up."

The coyote looks flummoxed, maybe a little angry. "We're both going to the same place."

Moira gives him an appraising look. It's sweet to be offended on her behalf, but it's also naïve. Sure enough, the wolf gives him a sharp glare. "You're in the fast line, sir. Keep moving." He turns the glare on Moira. "And you, don't make this a scene. Move along, now."

"Fine." She slides her hands into her pockets and saunters past him into the fast line. The coyote tags along, looking nervous but impressed.

"I *said*," the wolf growls, "don't make this a scene." He points at the slow line. The closest rabbits and rodents and deer watch now, with varying levels of interest and dismay. Some carnivores look back, but, well, their line's moving.

"I'm not." She shrugs, hands still in her pockets. "I believe *you* are, Officer."

"All right," he snarls. "That's enough." He grabs her arm, leading her toward the closest cruiser.

The coyote skews his ears, stepping out of line. "Hey!" The cops ignore him. Naturally.

The wolf gives Moira a shove. "Put your hands on the car and give me your ID."

"I can't give you my ID if my hands are on the car, now, can I."

He grits his teeth. "ID."

Shaking her head, she digs into her pocket and hands it over.

He studies it intently. "Moira..." He clears his throat. "Leannán?" He pronounces it as *lee-ann-in* rather than *lyann-uhn*, but she's heard worse. "I can't make out your birthdate."

"How old do I look?"

He narrows his eyes at her, and gets in the car, two-finger typing information into the onboard computer.

Moira realizes the coyote's still hovering around, looking anxious. She glances over at him. "Look, if you wait around here you're going to get in trouble, too."

"But I shouldn't. And *you* shouldn't. This is bullshit. I've never seen anything like this." He points at the two lines.

"The bullshit is getting worse lately. But there's a lot you might not have noticed because..." She scoffs. "You know."

He looks blank.

"She means because you're a carnivore," a stag in the herbivore line calls. A few people around him nod.

The coyote opens his mouth as if to protest, looks back and forth, and runs his hand through his hair. "I hear about the laws, but... I guess I don't..." His ears fold back.

"You don't have to think about them," a mouse says sourly, crossing his arms.

The wolf gets back out of the car, and gives Moira the hardest look he can muster, moving his hand to rest by his gun. If she wasn't who she was, it'd be downright intimidating. "You know anything about a disturbance in South San Francisco Tuesday, or in downtown San Francisco the day after?"

"You'll have to be more specific." How are they connecting her with any of that?

"It's a bulletin from Corporate." He sounds defensive.

"Did you like it better when you could at least pretend you were working for the people, or is it refreshing to have it all out in the open now?"

He bares his teeth, grip tightening on his gun for a moment. Then he slams her against the hood of the car.

"Hey! Don't you—" the coyote yells, but gets cut off when the tiger slams him down next to Moira. He looks thunderstruck.

"Okay, lady, let's do it your way," the wolf growls, forcing her arms behind her back and snapping cuffs around her wrists.

Moira grimaces, feeling pressure building inside her. It's not the odd, queer joy around Diana and Hazel. There's a joy to it, but no gentleness. She knows what's coming, but for the last few centuries she's quelled it. Tonight, though, she won't. Corporate hasn't seen what kind of disturbance she can *really* cause.

She takes a deep, ragged breath, and straightens up. The wolf lets out an annoyed, surprised bark and pushes her again, but this time she doesn't move. Not for him.

"Yes, let's do it my way." Moira straightens her arms, handcuff chain snapping like a brittle rubber band, whirls, and grabs him by the throat. "I accept your invitation to battle." She lifts him into the air.

He kicks, wrapping his hands around her fingers and struggling to pry them off. His ears go flat against his head.

The tiger draws his gun. "Let him go!" He fumbles to get a radio in his other hand. "I need backup at the Riverfront checkpoint. 10-33, repeat, 10-33!"

Moira drops the wolf. He staggers, drawing his gun, too. "Down!" he snarls. "Hands and knees!"

The hare moves in a blur, and now she's holding both guns, the two cops shrieking and holding their broken hands. She crumples the pistols and tosses them aside.

Both of the entrance lines have stopped now, staring. Some of the crowd backs away, breaking up, but others cheer, egging Moira on. More of the carnivores run. More of the herbivores clap.

The police car by the barricades at the front of the lines

switches on its sirens and pulls onto the street, heading toward them. Other sirens sound in the distance. “L-lady,” the tiger stammers, “there’s gonna be dozens of patrol cars here in a minute or two.”

She grins, looking far more predatory than any of the carnivores around. That fierce, terrible joy surges in her. “Oh, I *hope* so.” She claps once, hard, and electricity sparks along the fences, melting them away.

The crowd scatters in all directions—many heading into the now open-for-all festival areas, toward the stages and the street fair. Hundreds of others watch Moira and cheer, fists in the air.

The cop car coming up the street screeches to a halt. Two officers scramble out, guns drawn, and Moira *runs* toward them. They fire at her, squeezing off dozens of shots. The crowd screams.

She doesn’t go down, though. She leaps into the air, somersaults, and slams her paws down on the cop car’s roof hard enough to shatter its windows. They turn around barely in time for her to jump down and smack their heads together. She strides back toward the still-cuffed coyote.

He gapes at her, muzzle wide open. She can’t tell if he’s terrified, turned on, or both.

Moira effortlessly snaps off his handcuffs. “You really shouldn’t have stayed.”

“It, uh, seemed like the right thing to do.” He rubs his wrists. “I didn’t know you were...what are you?”

“A goddess.” The sirens that had been in the distance aren’t in the distance now, cop cars filling both the blocked-off street and the street she’d turned in on, coming across the grass. Officers on paw swarm through the crowd, too, shields out and riot control weapons drawn.

The wolf cop lumbers toward them, looking frenzied. “What the hell did you do!” He takes a swing at Moira and misses. She takes a return swing and doesn’t, smashing him in the face. Her next punch audibly cracks his ribs. He topples over.

The tiger stares dumbly, and starts to back off. The coyote stays

close to her, despite looking like he's on the verge of fainting. Meanwhile, the crowd's screams grow uglier and more frightened as the cops beat people out of the way, firing tear gas grenades, to move toward her.

Moira snarls. She'd have given them the dignity of a fair loss—more than they deserved—but not now that they've hurt innocents to get to her. She raises her hands over her head and claps them together again. The magic sweeps out of her, roaring across city blocks in a sonic boom.

All the cars, all the cops, abruptly shrink to toy size. Moira leans over, hands on her knees, catching her breath.

The coyote lets out a squeak, eyes as wide as golf balls. "Holy shit." The rest of the crowd is screaming and bleating, staring and pointing.

The miniature cars all still have their lights and sirens on as most screech to a stop. Some drive even faster, trying to weave between paws and hooves. The cops on foot, finding themselves ankle-high to the crowd they'd been bullying, lose their minds, half of them running haphazardly and half of them pleading their authority over the relative giants around them. For their part, the crowd's terrified, confused, uncertain, but you can watch the realization of the literal shift in power running through them in real time.

"Sure you want to stay with me?" Moira motions to the coyote and starts strolling down the street, hands back in her pockets.

"I-I..." He hurries after her. "I do, even though it seems lethally dangerous. I don't even know your name."

"Moira."

"I'm Stetson. Are you really—" He yips, hopping in the air over one of the cop cars, and points in front of her paws at another one. "Watch out."

"Good eye. Thanks." She kicks it out of the way.

"Oh my god oh my god oh my god," the coyote mutters, sticking with her but looking shellshocked now. "You are the most terrifying rabbit I've ever seen."

"I'm a hare. Hares are bigger."

"Right." Stetson laughs weakly.

They walk into the downtown area. Music's still going, people are starting to dance again. The flashing lights on the ground have been corralled in by a crowd, nearly all herbivores. Some of them lean down to pick up the cars, studying them in wonder. A wine-mom deer rolls a cruiser back and forth under one of her hooves, laughing incredulously. A cute red panda couple, guy and girl, have a car trapped between their muzzles, trying to fish the cops out with their tongues.

"Well, *this* hasn't happened in a while," she muses.

"It's happened before?" His voice is a hoarse squeak.

"People lose their inhibitions around me when I get wound up and do..." Moira waves a hand. "Goddess shit. Orgies, fights, a lot of flipped roles between predator and prey, dominant and submissive, all that. There's going to be dangerous magic in the air here until sunrise."

"Uh."

A few people—more than a few—have shed their clothes. And, yeah, there are actual fights breaking out. Some people are bigger or smaller than they started out as, too. She didn't mean to do that, but she's been on kind of a size kick for a while, and it's leaking through. Well, a night of role-reversal will likely do some good, and the ones who haven't fled—besides the police, who lost their chance—radiate embarrassed, ashamed interest.

"Is everyone changing size?" Stetson bursts out, sounding terrified again.

"Not everyone. I'm not. I mean, I *could*, but I'm not." She glances at him. "You are, though. You're smaller."

"What?" His voice rises an octave.

She moves to stand next to him. "You're barely chest-high to me now. Why'd you choose that height?"

"I... I didn't." His voice wavers.

"Mmm. Perhaps you find tall, terrifying women attractive, Stetson."

"I..." He trails off, glancing around the crowd. It's not exclusively big herbivores and small carnivores, but the balance defi-

Arilin Thorferra

nitely favors the herbivores. And many of them are dropping to their knees to stare reverently at Moira.

“What are you a goddess *of*?” he whispers.

“Tonight?” She grins, taking the coyote’s smaller hand in hers. “You.”

six

severe bullying

The mountain lion on Parker's screen looks disheveled, his shirt collar crooked and his tie—a clip-on, which seems perfectly in character—slipping. It matches the way his off-the-rack suit jacket hangs precariously on the back of his chair. He scans through the same reports she's looking at in another window. "From what we're seeing on social media so far, everyone affected appears to remember it as a dream. That's what Ms. Moira does, isn't it? Stays off the radar by—"

"Mr. Torrance." Her voice is tight, exasperated. "If this was 'off the radar,' we wouldn't be having this discussion. Festival-goers may remember this as a dream, but they're already noticing the similarities between those dreams. Ones that remember Moira specifically remember her casting magic. Far too many remember having magic themselves for a night, and using it to create a violently debauched bacchanalia. With twenty thousand attendees, thousands of whom woke up mere hours ago on the festival grounds after sunrise, how long do you think it's going to be before serious questions arise?" Her tone rises with her temper. "We don't even know at this point whether all those attendees survived, but we *do* know that ninety percent of the police force is unaccounted for. Do you know what happened to them?"

"I, uh, a few of the dreams seemed like they were about... bullying tiny policemen."

"Bullying," Parker echoes, and glances at highlighted posts in a social media feed. "Such as 'brb crushing cop cars under my hooves like fascist tinfoil' and 'maybe ACAB but they were so fucking delicious.'" She narrows her eyes at him.

"Severe bullying." He clears his throat. "Uh, we've contacted everyone we have in place at media outlets, and we're working on cover stories."

She drums her fingers on the desk. "Such as."

"Psychedelics in the food?"

"No. It would need to be an agent that everyone could plausibly be exposed to."

"So, uh, airborne." He scribbles that down.

Ms. Storm cuts in. Unlike Torrance, she's sharply dressed in a deep purple one-button blazer over a black blouse, the executive secretary who expects to own any boardroom she walks into. With few exceptions, she does. "There are no airborne psychedelics. Look at ones that can be absorbed through contact with skin and pads."

"Got it." He nods hurriedly, continuing to scribble.

"Now, tell me you've found *some* lead on Moira's whereabouts."

"We have not."

She narrows her eyes again.

"But, we *did* get a report from one of our security companies that she went back to the supermarket in South San Fran that you mentioned, and asked questions about the sheep woman."

"Go on."

He pulls up another window. "It's an odd report. An employee of Third Eye who *wasn't* assigned to that store said the guard who *was* assigned to it mentioned a rabbit woman asking about the goddess. When his coworker questioned what that meant, the guard started, quote, 'proselytizing about the sheep.'"

Parker takes off her glasses and rubs her temples, trying to quell a dull throb. "And what have you learned about the sheep and the pika yet?"

“Nothing.”

She pulls up the day’s weather report and zooms in on the SF Bay Area. There have been warm spots in South San Francisco and along Market Street in the last day, but nothing clearly unusual. Vallejo is another matter. If the chaos storm that had erupted there early yesterday evening had been physical, half of the town would have washed away. This isn’t an effect mortals could create. It’s not an effect she’s seen from Moira in at least a century, long before instant global communication—and that last time, nowhere close to a metropolitan area.

So why *now*? Could Moira have become aware of them, tried to deliberately sabotage their plan? She couldn’t rule it out, but subtlety wasn’t the hare’s style. Not that magicking tipsy citizens into literally eating law enforcement was “subtle,” to be sure. But if Moira had decided to take on Celestial, she wouldn’t come at them from the shadows.

“Ma’am?”

She snaps her attention back to the video call. “‘Nothing’ is not an acceptable answer, Mr. Torrance. There’s no video from security cameras or traffic cameras available?”

“You didn’t get the traffic camera footage?”

She closes her eyes, feeling the migraine throb. “No, Mr. Torrance, I did not.”

“Oh. Uh, I’ll send what we have to you now. We were able to catch it before any employees reviewed the footage, I think.”

“You think.” She opens the video and reviews it. Grainy, black and white, but exactly what she’d been promised: a giant young pika woman in a wheelchair, blocking traffic. No one had mentioned her decidedly predatory turn with the tiger before, though. Wonderful. “Surely, this is enough to identify who she is?”

“We’re working on it.”

She gives him a long, measured look. Who was it who hired Torrance again? He was one of Howell’s chosen, wasn’t he? “Mr. Torrance, I trust you watched that pika woman swallowing someone whole and alive.”

“Uh, I did, ma’am.”

"Do you have any idea what's that like?"

He blinks several times, looking even more nervous. "No, I don't."

"Ms. Storm, could you be so kind as to demonstrate for Mr. Torrance?"

"Of course, Ms. Parker."

Torrance holds up a hand, desperately. "Ma'am, please, I swear I'm—"

The rat leans forward, opening her mouth wide as if she were about to eat her video camera. The view fills with her tongue and teeth before going dark. On Torrance's feed, the mountain lion looks up in shock a moment before a shapely rat muzzle descends over him. He gets out a terrified yowl loud enough to cause microphone feedback as the jaws clamp shut and lift him up. The camera shakes, trying to focus on his empty, spinning chair as his jacket falls to the floor. Ms. Storm's feed brightens and refocuses on her as she leans back in her seat, the cat's legs kicking frantically between her lips. Tilting her head back, she snaps her jaws once, the legs disappearing, and swallows hard. A wriggling lump ripples down her throat.

Parker laces her hands together and lets out a slow breath. "And with that, my migraine fades away. All right, Ms. Storm. Psychedelics might be our best cover story for now. It's weak, but with luck we can use it to our advantage in a few months as we set the stage for Project Maelstrom."

Ms. Storm nods, shutting off Torrance's camera.

"Could you connect Max Howell in with the call?"

"Of course."

It takes thirty seconds for a new video feed to kick in, a dashing fox man who might have stepped out of the pages of a high-end clothing catalog. "Ms. Parker. What can I do for you?"

"I need you to take over an essential project from Mr. Torrance. He's no longer with the company."

The rat dabs her muzzle daintily with a silk handkerchief, brushing away the tiny clip-on tie stuck to her lower lip.

Howell's ears splay. "Of course." He grabs a pocket notebook and an expensive-looking pen.

"There are three subjects of intense interest to us in your area. One is a hare named Moira."

"The Moira?"

She nods. "And a pika girl and a ewe who we have reason to believe Moira has granted powers to. By the end of next week we need to know, at a minimum, where all three of them are and who the pika and the sheep are. With that information, we can discuss options going forward for dealing with them."

Max nods, scribbling in the notebook. "On it. It'll be my top priority for the next week."

"Thank you, Mr. Howell." She shuts off the feed.

the turning

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Arilin Thorferra has been involved with the furry and macrophile community since the 1990s, writing dozens of short stories and several novels under both this name and their real one. As Arilin, their published work from FurPlanet includes *Goddess* and *Saida & Autumn*.

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