

Agency Publishing's

Anthologies: Volume I

THE AGENCIES
Endurance
by Annals Votary

THE AGENCIES
Five Stars
by Okami-no-Kari

THE AGENCIES
Premonition
by Mike Brooklyn

THE
RUTHLESS
The Talisman
by Munchausen

Four amazing stories
of tickle torture

100+ page
publication

38,000+ words



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Endurance written by Annals Votary

A tickle torture story written in *The Agencies* universe.

Edited by: Jonathan Essex



The sound of heavy footfalls echoed down the long metallic corridor, which was just one of the many winding twists and turns that led through the heart of the Agency. Nicole would have been lying to herself if she didn't feel at least a little nervous, but who wouldn't be? It wasn't every day that you were selected to be a part of such an important organization. She thought back to her fateful meeting with Mr. Nathan just a month ago. It had all happened so suddenly—becoming aware of her potential, kissing her old life goodbye, moving into a facility where the threat of danger and the thrill of espionage constantly loomed over her shoulder. There was always so much to learn, so much that Nicole was uncertain about. Still, it beat working minimum-wage at a coffee joint; that much was certain.

She glanced over to her left, where her fellow agents walked beside her, themselves too caught up in their own thoughts to notice her looking. One was an attractive woman with blond hair that fell in gorgeous curls down her back. Her crystal blue eyes were glued to the floor and she was nibbling her lip with a worried look on her face. The other woman to the blonde's left was more athletic than the blonde, with raven-black hair that was even shorter than Nicole's. She was looking straight ahead, but her brow was furrowed in heavy thought.

It occurred to Nicole that she didn't even know their names!

She was used to being conversational. It didn't just help at the cafe, it came naturally—she liked getting to know people. Normally she'd have been chatting with her fellow agents within the first week, but there was just so much to take in. It wasn't like they made the effort either. Every new agent she'd seen was wrapped up in their own heads, trying to keep all the new information and training in place. And for good reason too. Tests were frequent and comprehensive. Hell, she was headed to one now!

She didn't know what the test would entail. It was a "field duty assessment," was all she had been told by her superiors. When she asked Mr. Nathan about it, all he did was smile and tell her to think about their first meeting. Nicole closed her eyes and thought back.

The incident with the tear in her nylons? There was that weird chemical solution that fixed the material, even if it did tickle her beyond anything she'd ever felt before. The solution.... It was going to be a test on synthetic compounds! It did explain the secrecy, especially considering how much she thought the Agency kept from her. Was it going to be a "field test" because she would be given raw chemicals to work with? With the practical understanding of chemistry they were beginning to give her, she should be able to do it. Surely her fellow agents-in-training would have felt the same way, but they didn't look too sure of themselves. That didn't help her feel any more at ease.

One more heavy metal door opened before the group reached a long hallway. At its end stood two blond agents, who Nicole immediately recognized. One was just barely taller than Nicole, with long, straight hair and a piercing, attentive gaze. She was a woman whose gait spoke of incredible confidence and calculation, yet somehow she wasn't at all unapproachable. Once you got over her powerful presence, she was a very amiable person, one you couldn't help but smile with and feel drawn to. She was Agent Crosshair, mathematician, physicist, and an agent aptly named for her deadly abilities at combining her numerical expertise with just about any ranged weapon. The woman standing to Agent Crosshair's right was shorter; her blond hair fell in luscious waves down her back and a coy smile seemed to be ever-present on her beautiful face. It took Nicole quite a bit of personal willpower to unglue her eyes from the woman. She had never given much thought to how attracted she could be to members of the same sex, but every spare glance she threw at the curvaceous blonde seemed to fan a mild heat rising in her heart. There was no mistake, it was Agent Succubus, with a codename designed to reflect her impressive, almost supernatural, abilities in seduction and infiltration. Like her partner, she carried herself with capable confidence, but one of a different kind. While Agent Crosshair seemed to keep herself standing firmly, scanning the environment and making who-knew how many unconscious calculations, Agent Succubus kept her shoulders back, her body relaxed, as if there was no threat that couldn't be handled with a look

that could kill. The experienced agents were leaning toward each other, talking, and abruptly stopped when Nicole and her peers began their approach.

“Right on time!” Agent Crosshair said with a smile.

“So... what’s this assessment gonna be like?” the black-haired woman asked the question all the younger agents were thinking.

The two veteran agents looked at each other with secretive smiles.

“We might as well tell you now,” Agent Succubus spoke first. “Don’t let the test’s name throw you off. Pretty much everything you’re learning already can be used in the field, but that’s not what makes a field agent tick. You have to be cool under pressure, aware of yourself and everything around you, and always be prepared for the event of enemy capture.”

Nicole blinked. Enemy capture? An assessment for that? They couldn’t mean....

“This field assessment will test all those things by putting you in interrogation situations. They’re not always fun to do, but if you can take what we can dish out, you’ve got what it takes to rise through the field ranks of the Agency.”

“You’re scaring them,” Agent Crosshair reproached her friend, though there was a flash of mischief in her eyes. The playful smile that Agent Succubus replied with did nothing to put the recruits at ease.

“It’s still just an assessment,” Agent Crosshair said to the recruits. “You’ll all be given a safeword that you can say at any time during the test to stop the interrogation sequence. Field duty’s not for everyone. God knows we still need people around this place too, so don’t worry if you don’t pass. We’ll find something for you to do that’ll better suit your abilities.”

Nicole nibbled her lower lip in quiet thought. As long as she could stop the test if it got too intense, she should be okay. She looked over to her peers and was relieved to see that they were just as confused as she was.

“What kind of interrogation is it?” the new blond agent asked.

“I don’t want to ruin the surprise,” Agent Succubus pouted.

Agent Crosshair giggled and turned to the younger agents with a worrying grin. “Nothing that you guys can’t handle; just get ready to laugh.”

The recruits threw uncertain glances at each other. It was about as cryptic as everything else they’d come to expect by now.

“Do you guys have any more questions?” Agent Succubus asked. When the three women shook their heads she cried, “Great! Let’s head over to the testing area now!”

Without another look back, the veteran agents turned to the big metal door behind them. Agent Crosshair input a security code into the tiny keypad by the door’s frame. With a heavy hydraulic hiss that let the agents-in-training know they were heading into a secret area, the door began to slide open. They found themselves in an enormous, open lab filled with many computer monitors, whirring robotic devices attached to countless clusters of circuitry, and a few agents dressed in long, white lab coats busying themselves at the machines. Some tinkered at workstations with soldering rods and safety goggles, others stood behind computers, checking program code with studious frowns. It was a technological advancement wing in the Agency, but one that the recruits had never seen before.

“Welcome to the Interrogation Equipment Research Lab!” Agent Crosshair declared, her voice carrying over the sound of engineering and whirring. “Here the latest advancements in the fields of robotics and neurological probing are practically applied to the task of interrogation.”

A scientist looked up from his work as he noticed the lab’s door open. His face brightened when he saw that it was the five agents who stepped into the room. He set aside whatever he had been hunched over and strode over to meet them. “Agent Crosshair, our developments on the arc nerve stimulator are complete,” he said.

“Excellent! Is it ready for testing?”

Her smile widened when the scientist nodded.

“I think it’ll be our new agents’ first test. Are the interrogation rooms free?”

Again, the scientist nodded.

“Alright, prepare room one with the arc nerve stimulator and let me know when it’s ready.”

His orders received, the scientist hurriedly strode away, visibly eager to put his research to work.

“The arc nerve stimulator has been one of our little pet projects for a really long time. I’m pretty excited myself to see how it’ll work,” Agent Succubus remarked to Crosshair. When she saw the looks of worry on the recruits’ faces, she smiled reassuringly. “Don’t worry, it’s perfectly safe. We’ve tested it more than enough times. The stimulator is a device that uses electricity to play with a person’s nerves in a specifically titillating way. It won’t hurt a bit.”

Nicole blinked as she thought back to her meeting with Nathan. Getting ready to laugh? Titillating nerves? How did she not realize it before?

“You’re gonna tickle us!” Nicole burst out in disbelief. To her further confusion, her two superiors began to laugh.

“That’s the plan, yeah. But like I said, you can stop it whenever you think you’ve had enough. Otherwise the machine will keep running for an indefinite amount of time.” Agent Crosshair said. “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of a little tickling.”

Nicole had never really thought about it. Tickling was just one of those weird things that happened between people. Her old boyfriends sometimes did it to her; she sometimes did it to them; sometimes a close coworker would tease her with it back when she worked at the coffee joint. Nicole was ticklish all over, but she always liked to laugh. The thought never really bothered her. But here it was going to be applied to an interrogation situation; she assumed bondage would be involved and the tickling itself would of course be different—intense, merciless even. She didn’t know what to think. Her peers, however, had visibly more adverse reactions about the test.

“W-why tickling?” the blonde asked in a meek voice. “It’s not really what you think of when you hear the word ‘interrogation.’”

“That’s precisely why it’s such an effective method,” Agent Succubus said. “Not many expect it, and unlike with pain, there’s

something about being tickled that the mind just can't build a defense as quickly for. It's easy to become overwhelmed."

No sooner had she finished explaining than the scientist appeared by her side again, an exciting grin on his face.

"It's ready, agents," he said.

"Good! Let's go get started." Agent Crosshair said. Without another word, the leading agents strode through the labs into the open metal door, not even bothering to look back to see if the recruits were following. Of course they were, though they hardly shared the enthusiastic step of those up front. Tickling, Nicole reflected, but they could stop it at any time. Judging from her peers' faces, they were just as ticklish as she was—if she were lucky, more so. It was just a matter of outlasting them, and she was certain she could do that much.... Maybe.

Down the newly-opened, metal door, they found themselves facing another corridor, though not for long enough to take a good look. Almost immediately, they turned left into another open door. This room was starkly different from the open spaces and wide array of busily-arranged technology and machinery found in the labs. It wasn't exactly small, but it wasn't particularly spacious. The room was large enough to accommodate its few features of interest: three large, X-shaped, metal tables covered in padding and straps, arranged side by side at the center of the room.

One wall of the room had an enormous glass fixture set in the center of it. On the other side, one dark figure moved. It was the dim side of a one-way window. On the same wall was a door that probably led into what Nicole surmised was the viewing room.

"You're gonna need to take off your clothes for the test," Agent Crosshair instructed. The three recruits looked at each other with uncertainty. It wasn't the first time they had heard the words—physical evaluations were common and stripping down was just another part of them. The command this time, however, meant that something else was coming. The dark-haired girl was the first to begin removing her shirt, followed by a hesitant Nicole, and lastly the blond agent-in-training, who seemed to have the most misgivings. As the recruits were undressing, Agent Crosshair and the scientist

punched in the code to the door by the window, through which they then disappeared, leaving Agent Succubus with the blushing agents-in-training.

The recruits fidgeted nervously. They felt terribly exposed, each standing in their bras and panties. The dark-haired agent-in-training also wore pale lemon-colored socks that stopped just short of her ankles.

“Everyone ready?” Succubus asked with a coy giggle. “Lay down on the X-frames and we’ll strap you in for the test.”

“Okay no, I can’t do this,” the blond recruit flatly said and crossed her arms over her navy blue bra.

“You’re still under contract. You can just quit at any time once the test starts.” Agent Succubus leaned in and locked eyes with the blonde. Just as she was about to protest again, the blond agent-in-training’s lips parted and her eyes took on a softer sheen. Agent Succubus smiled sweetly. “You might as well have some fun.”

The blonde wanted to protest—she absolutely hated being tickled. There was nothing about it in the contract; all she’d been told was that she was going to help Mr. Nathan with unspecified services. But she suddenly wanted nothing more than to please her superior. She took a few slow steps back until her butt collided with the padded frame. Without taking her eyes off of Agent Succubus, the blonde eased herself up to sit on it, and then lay down, bringing her arms up and over head while aligning her legs with the frame’s shape.

Nicole shared a concerned look with her dark-haired peer before they hesitantly lay down on their respective contraptions. Nicole’s heart was beating like a drum in her chest. She swallowed hard when she heard Agent Succubus adjusting the straps on the blond recruit’s table. It was just tickling; it couldn’t be so bad, right?

The older agent strode over to Nicole’s X-frame, her hips emphasizing each step as her footfalls danced ever closer. Tap. Tap. Tap. Agent Succubus smiled at Nicole as she began to work on her straps.

There were six on each arm and six on each leg, keeping her limbs tightly bound to the frame. When her superior had finished and was working on the dark-haired agent’s restraints, Nicole wiggled to

test them. The results made her heart sink down to her stomach. She could only wiggle her torso the barest few inches, her arms and legs were completely immobile.

“And you won’t be needing these, of course,” Agent Succubus’s voice was touched with teasing. The whimpering sound of her peer’s groans caught her attention. She looked over in time to see Agent Succubus slowly peeling one ankle-length sock off of the dark-haired woman’s foot, revealing a smooth, creamy sole, flushed with an apricot glow along her heels and sloping arches. When she peeled off the second sock, Agent Succubus ran her nails playfully up the freshly bared foot, eliciting an immediate, squealing giggle that the recruit tried to stifle with a frustrated growl.

“The test will begin shortly,” their superior said. With one last wink, she opened the door leading to the observation room and let it close behind her, leaving the three recruits laying fearfully in silence for a few moments.

“Okay, agents!” Agent Crosshair’s voice rang clearly through a loudspeaker they couldn’t see. “The test is ready to begin; we’ll be putting our arc nerve stimulator to use as the first part of the exam. As we discussed, this device uses an electrical current to simulate a tickling sensation in your nerves. With adjustments to the device itself, a larger surface area can be affected. We’ll be using the device on your abdomens. The current will be set on maximum power for fifteen minutes. If you can last that long, you’ll move on to the second part. If not, you can get your clothes and join us in the observation room. We’ll take your name off of field training rosters and you can look through other contribution options.

“After this test, there will be two more to follow, so save your energy! You’ll need it!”

Nicole didn’t know what to think. At least it was timed; nobody was competing to outlast each other. It made her feel better that once the thing was over there wouldn’t be any hard feelings between her and the other recruits. She didn’t get the impression her peers wanted to be assigned to field duty all that much. She knew she did, and she’d taken her training seriously. But after this test there were going to be two more to follow...

“Preparing the machine,” the scientist said over the speaker. “Your safe word for this assessment is ‘telephone.’” Nicole branded the word into her memory just in case.

A sudden whirring sound jolted around them. Nicole lifted her head from the padding’s headrest but couldn’t see anything until a few seconds later. A complex robotic arm comprised of thick plating and carefully arranged wires rose from the ground to her left and stretched outward, pointing strange glass tines towards her body. She turned her head and saw that identical devices were aimed at her. With a faint whirr, the device adjusted itself until it hovered just above her navel and then descended down until it was only a foot from her skin.

“I really don’t want to do this,” the blonde groaned. Whatever spell Agent Succubus had on her had begun to loosen its grip. “What am I even doing strapped in?”

“Ready?” came the scientist’s voice from the speaker.

The young women nodded meekly. The blonde was nibbling her lip worriedly and struggling against her bonds before the tickling even began.

“Starting the program! Good luck, agents!”

A low buzzing began somewhere within the machine, growing in volume until it reached a high-pitched whine. The glass tines that faced the agents’ abdomens began to glow with a soft blue light as electrical sparks danced between the spaces of each tine.

Maybe it won’t be so bad, Nicole thought. The tines reminded her of electric coil treatments that you pressed against your skin to get rid of wrinkles or whatever they were supposed to do. If the machine was anything like that, but with a lighter tickling edge, she was certain she’d be able to make it through. Another few seconds was all it took to prove this connection wrong.

A sudden flash of blue lightning erupted from the tines and made contact with her bare abdomen, dancing along its surface in sporadic and jarring, but surprisingly constant and controlled, surges. The feeling was unlike any type of tickling she had ever felt before. It was as though every sensitive nerve on her belly was alight, screaming in response to the unbearable waves of titillation coursing over her.

At the same time, the tickling somehow felt uniform, like it was a single object of pressure responsible for the feeling of hundreds of tiny fingers scribbling all over her skin.

Nicole exploded with laughter before she could even think of mustering some sort of defense. Her arms and legs jolted forward to try to desperately cover her helpless belly, but her bonds held fast and tight. She whipped her head from side to side, her red hair made a whirling dervish by her frantic movements. The tickling itself was unbearable enough, but the tightness of the bondage did more than enough to direct her focus entirely on her plight. She couldn't move, she couldn't stop the torment in any way; all she could do was laugh until she thought she'd had enough, or make it through the fifteen minutes in one piece. Beneath the firestorm of synapses screaming their ticklish agony in Nicole's mind, she mustered enough of her wits to steel herself. It was only fifteen minutes; she knew she could do it. But as the devilish electricity danced steadily on her quivering abdomen, she couldn't help but feel the slightest tinges of doubt.

Her peers didn't seem to be faring any better. The blond agent was screaming with frantic laughter, her pretty face already beginning to redden from her mad efforts against the torture. If her reactions were any indications, she seemed to be much more ticklish than Nicole, evident in the sheer volume of her helpless mirth and the way she thrashed violently against her bounds. It was nothing short of remarkable that the leather straps holding her in place didn't snap off by now.

"Please! Turn it off! I can't stand it!" she screamed in broken intervals through peels of wild, gushing laughter. Her eyes screwed shut and tears flowed freely down her red cheeks as she tried her best to deal with the sensations. She seemed to Nicole to be trying to think of something else, anything, to take her mind off of the tickling, but no thought seemed to last longer than a second so long as the machine was up and running. It appeared to be rapidly destroying what little resolve she'd had. Hell, even Nicole didn't think it was possible for anything to tickle as much as the machine did.

The safeword!, Nicole thought. She still has the safeword! If she can't take it, she should use it! But try as she might, the other

recruit didn't seem to be bringing her thoughts together well enough to string the word together. The machine's unending and mercilessly random pattern of attack sent her whole body into hysterical convulsions. She cried, and pleaded, and shook the room with a vehement cacophony of laughter, all the while trying desperately to form the safeword.

Nicole noticed that the black-haired agent seemed to be having the mildest reaction. She'd managed to stifle her laughter for at least a second or two before the dam inevitably broke and a stream of heavy giggles flowed freely. The young woman seemed almost morbidly fascinated with how the sensations were able to be produced by the electrical currents. She lifted her head, squinting through the tears that began to well up in the corners of her eyes, and watched the electricity wreak havoc on her belly.

The dark-haired recruit seemed to have given up on trying to prepare herself for the ticklish shocks. The current of the device was too effective and unpredictable. Instead she let her head fall back onto the X-frame's padding and appeared to be forcing her mind to keep busy with anything she could think of. It was only fifteen minutes, thought Nicole. She could make it if she didn't let the tickling get to her, though that was much easier said than done. Though her peers were having much more trouble with the device, the young woman still couldn't help but tug at her sturdy restraints and, like her companions, pray that some sort of malfunction in the device would save her from the test.

The first minute passed by like an eternity to the suffering recruits. Their melodiously shrieking laughter filled the air and threatened to deafen anyone who stood too close.

None of the recruits could have imagined that such an intense sensation could be produced from such an unconventional method. Nicole would have been fascinated by the device if she hadn't begun to hate it for what it was doing to her.

She swung her head back and forth and madly wiggled her fingers and toes. It was the only free movement she could make. The security of the bonds was maddening, but the tickling more so. She

would have thought that eventually she could have gotten used to the machine, but something about its methods kept her as sensitive as when it was first turned on. Nicole howled her frustration into the air in the form of hysterical laughter. It was terrible, but it wasn't bad enough that she would forfeit now. She could do it, she knew she could. She screwed her eyes shut and screamed with mirth under the device's ruthlessly ticklish touch. Nicole was doing all she could to keep her wits about her. There was no way she was going to say—

“Telephone! For the love of God, telephone!”

The blond agent was the first to fall. She had finally managed to blurt out the words amidst the torrent of laughter that flowed from her mouth like a waterfall. Mercifully, the machine was stopped immediately, leaving the blonde helplessly panting deep, ragged breaths between loose drops of mirth.

The metal door suddenly opened and the scientist strode out, a broad smile on his face, as much from the success of his hard work as it was seeing it put to good use. He undid the blond recruit's straps and helped her to her feet. She collected her clothes, blinking away tears, and gingerly followed the scientist into the observation room. Before she went through the door, she took one last look at her peers' suffering, both impressed and moved to pity by their condition. Nicole's eyes popped open and she threw a pleading look at the blonde, just as the metal door shut itself again.

Four minutes passed. As Nicole watched, the cracks finally began to show in the dark-haired girl's earlier resolve. Waiting for the time to pass had turned into watching the second slowly crawl by on the wall-clock as the machine's current visibly chipped away at her mental defenses. Her stomach shook and quivered madly under the incessant assault, all while its owner's laughter began to take on a more desperate tone. She stiffened as she tried to keep her head in the game, hoping for a shot at becoming a field agent. After a moment, however, she lost control. Her heart could be seen hammering in her chest as she renewed her struggles against the straps with newfound zeal, all her thoughts on how badly she wanted to get out of her bondage.

The torment was getting to Nicole as well. She bucked and laughed just as frantically against her bonds, unable to believe that the machine could cause such a reaction. She hadn't even known that she was this ticklish! All she was aware of now was the assault on her belly and how helpless she was to stop it.

Nicole felt every nerve in her abdomen work against her, the augmented electricity manipulating her in such a way that all she could do was laugh and hope for mercy that, ironically, she herself could dole out. It was bad, it was torture, but she did not want to cry out the safeword just yet. There couldn't be much time left on the clock for them, and she didn't want to be out of the running. All she had to do was keep her head.

Seconds dragged on into minutes, and with no mental clarity to understand time, there seemed to be no end in sight for the ticklish recruits. Every peal of laughter that escaped their lips also elicited small, aching pangs from the madly quivering muscles of their abdomens. At least it's a good workout, Nicole couldn't help but sardonically think. Finally, before they could understand what was happening, both machines turned off simultaneously.

"Congratulations, agents! You've passed the first test!"

"Whoop-de-doo," the black-haired girl panted. The observation room's door opened and Agent Succubus came out again, this time the coy edge to her smile was replaced by pride.

"Good job, girls," she said as she began to unlatch their restraints. "Don't get comfortable just yet; there are still two more tests to go."

"One after the other?" the dark-haired recruit asked in disbelief. She rose to sit on the X-frame, drenched in sweat, rubbing her aching abdominal muscles.

"It was just fifteen minutes," Agent Succubus giggled. "If you're captured by the enemy, you won't know how long the tickling could go on — hours, even days if they're especially evil. The next test is designed to simulate that."

"How?" Nicole asked. She sat up and tried to catch her racing breath.

“You’ll see,” was her superior’s reply. “For now, come with me to the observation room, there’s water and bathrooms if you need them.”

The two recruits obliged. The observation room was surprisingly roomy. The most prominent feature was an enormous control panel filled with flashing lights and buttons. The scientist, Agent Crosshair, and their blond peer sat in office chairs behind the panel. To their backs was a large table stacked with various papers, gadgets, and a coffeemaker set next to a tall, standing water cooler.

Nicole immediately went for the water cooler and got herself a plastic cupful, while the other recruit went straight for the bathroom.

“Not bad at all,” Agent Crosshair turned to Nicole with a smile. All the exhausted agent-in-training could do was smile back as she tried to control her heavy breathing.

“Stick around,” continued the veteran agent. “We’re going to change the setup. You should see how it works; it’s always fun.”

Nicole wordlessly leaned against a chair and looked through the large window. She watched the scientist work with the control panel and moments later, the room beyond the window began to respond. The floor around the X-frames opened with a soft, grinding buzz and the padded frames slowly descended until they disappeared into the darkness beneath the floor. The floor closed again while the sound of loudly shifting gears filled the interrogation room, audible even in the observation room. Nicole wondered if the sound of their laughter had the same muffled quality, and shuddered to think that only the blond agent-in-training would find out. A tiny rumbling sound vibrated the floor beneath their feet, gears whirring and clanking as the scientist performed unseen commands on the panel. Finally the floor opened again and a new device rose. At a glance, it looked like a recliner that had been laid back, surrounded by metal on all sides. Sage green cushions lined the seat. The insides of the small metal walls looked like they were lined with some sort of dark screen, fizzling softly with green static.

“Just in time,” Agent Succubus said when the dark-haired recruit emerged from the bathroom. “Let’s go get started.”

“What about a break?” Nicole asked with disbelief.

“Will your interrogators give you a break?” her superior asked. A reassuring smile appeared on her face. “It’s not for everyone. Remember, you can still stop it at any time.”

Resolute, Nicole swallowed her complaints and made it out the open door followed by her very hesitant dark-haired peer.

“Put your legs and arms into the indents on the frame,” Succubus instructed. “We’ll take care of the rest.”

The recruits nervously obliged. When their limbs were in place, Agent Succubus looked over both of their positions to make sure that nothing was out of place and turned to give the thumbs up to the dim window. The figure of the scientist moved behind the glass. A sudden, sharp sound signified metal bands snapping out from large slits that ran along the length of the frame’s indentions, each locking into place around the agents-in-trainings’ limbs. They were metal, lined with a comfortable bit of padding to keep the young women from hurting their joints. Nicole didn’t even want to test these new bonds; she’d known she was trapped as soon as she’d heard the terrifying clack.

Agent Crosshair’s voice rang over the loudspeaker again. “Alright agents, this test is designed to run indefinitely until you say the safeword. You’ll notice the black sensors on the bars by your sides. These are neural mappers, designed to track your brain activities to pinpoint your most sensitive spots. For this test, they’ll be set on your feet, combined with the recliner’s rotary brushes to try to get you to submit.”

That doesn’t sound good at all, Nicole thought as she nibbled her lip. Her feet were easily one of her most ticklish spots. She glanced over at her peer and saw that she was already squirming, a look of panic in her eyes.

“Oh, and there is another catch,” Crosshair said. Agent Succubus giggled and brought out two blindfolds from behind her back. “You’ll be blindfolded for this part. When you’re helpless, your interrogators will do anything to get you to break, including mind games.”

“Wait! I don’t like this!” the dark-haired recruit cried. She pulled at her clamps but of course they didn’t budge an inch. The

ease with which Agent Succubus tied the blindfold onto the struggling recruit's head warned Nicole that there was no point in trying to escape it. She sighed with resignation when her superior came over to tie the cloth over her own eyes. The last thing she saw was the pretty blonde's teasing smile before darkness left her with four remaining senses, each made stronger by the absence of sight. She could definitely see how this heightened sense of feeling would be an advantage to her tormentors. Nicole scrunched and wiggled her toes defensively. The sound of Agent Succubus's shoes striking the floor became more and more distant until finally she heard the metal door open and the footfalls disappear entirely. Nicole lay in uncomfortable silence for a few seconds before the speaker piped up again.

“Your safeword for this test is ‘elephant!’” announced Crosshair over the speaker. “Good luck, agents!”

Without another word, a whirring sound began faintly by her feet. Nicole strained her ears to understand what it was until she felt the barest touch of something soft, small, and rigid against her heels. She yelped when the alien object (probably a brush) made contact with her feet. She burst into giggles and struggled fruitlessly, then squealed again as more began to arrange themselves against her feet, on their sides, the insteps, under her arches, even some underneath her toes. Nicole wasn't the only one laughing; she could hear frustrated squeaks and giggles coming from the other recruit as well. Blissfully, the brushes stopped moving.

And then nothing happened.

Nicole bit her lower lip in trepidation. She couldn't relax, the tickling would be made that much worse. This must be part of the mind games that— A sudden flurry of movement under her toes disrupted her train of thought and she released a shrieking peal of laughter from deep in her belly. The brush had only rotated for a few seconds before stopping again, leaving Nicole panting. The brushes on her insteps began rotating next, for a few second longer, sending the young redhead into a frenzy of giggles as she struggled against her bonds. As quickly as the onslaught had begun, it had stopped.

It was worse than she'd expected. The blindfold made every second she wasn't tickled crawl painfully by.

Another attack came from the brushes around her heels. These spun for but a second before their motions were replaced by the movement of the brushes under her arches, turning Nicole's quiet giggle into a barely-stifled roar of laughter.

All the while, when the brushes didn't occupy her attention, she heard the dark-haired recruit's sporadic laughter echo beside her. It seemed she wasn't enjoying their plight any more than Nicole was.

Nicole's thoughts didn't stay on her peer for long, however. The rotary brushes around the sides of her feet began spinning again and she yelped, dissolving into a flurry of giggles. It was maddening, not knowing where the assault was coming from. That she couldn't stop it didn't matter. There was some kind of small psychological comfort in knowing what a type of torture was and how it was going to affect her that was absent here.

The brushes around her sides stopped spinning and the ones around her heels began, turning on at the same time as the ones underneath her toes. The sudden duality of the sensations made her throw her head back and scream with helpless laughter. Nicole's feet twitched madly. She scrunched her toes and quickly fanned them out again. Curling her toes just let the unbearably tickling bristles dig deeper into her sensitive skin.

She waited expectantly for the rotations to stop, laughing freely. They will eventually, right? she thought. Nicole struggled hard against her bonds and threw her head back and forth as she released peal after peal of frenzied laughter. Why wasn't the machine switching gears? Why was it still focused on her toes and heels?

Nicole scrunched her toes down again and screamed with ticklish frustration. She had already fallen prey to the idea that changes in the attack would occur frequently, hoping the few seconds the brushes took to turn on and off would help her keep her cool. Instead, wave after wave of wild laughter escaped her lips as the brushes continued relentlessly. Why won't it just move somewhere else?

Almost as if reading her mind, the two assaults ceased just as the brushes against her arches began to rotate instead. Her surprised squeal immediately dissolved in a torrent of laughter, and the tingling sensations that remained on her toes and heels did nothing to help her situation either.

“Please! Stop!” she cried, but all she heard in response was the dark-haired woman’s own frenetic gales of mirth.

Nicole imagined that the sound of her pleading brought a tiny bit of comfort to the dark-haired agent-in-training, signaling that perhaps the redhead was already being broken. But did that matter? Now that she thought about it, she had no idea how she would pass this test. Her superiors hadn’t mentioned that she needed to outlast her peer. As the session continued, she began to forget what the test was even supposed to accomplish.

The brushes suddenly began alternating pulses between her arches and insteps, on and off, on and off, leaving her to giggle in halting, exasperated bursts. Her feet flinched and danced under every glide of the brush’s bristles. It was maddening, and it didn’t help that her feet were so ticklish, but she knew she thought she could do it. They were going to stop the machines eventually, right?

Just like that, the machine stopped and Nicole tried to catch her breath. Her companion’s machine was still going, consistently, judging from the continuous stream of laughter that flowed by her side. There must have been another change in the program, however, as she heard the other girl scream before it was abruptly silenced by another burst of wild laughter. The test must not be over, she thought.

As if to emphasize this point, Nicole felt the brushes on her feet activate again. The tickling she felt on her tender insteps seemed to spread outward, almost amplifying the maddening ticklish fire that threatened to engulf her mind. She convulsed against her bonds and began to thrash, swinging her head from side to side in a flurry of frantic mirth. What she didn’t expect was all of the brushes turning on at once. Her feet felt as though they were on fire as every bristle spun madly over the surface of her soft soles. Tears flowed freely

from her eyes and dampened the blindfold when she screwed them shut. But she couldn't give up! Not yet!

Nicole jumped and shook, throwing her head back and screaming with laughter. The device began playing a little game with her feet, activating two brushes at a time before turning them off and switching to a third. In one instant the sides and heels of her poor feet felt the merciless fury of the tickling brushes, and then in another those brushes shut off entirely, leaving the bottoms of her arches to deal with the assault instead. It happened at such random intervals that she had no idea what to expect or when to expect it.

She suddenly hated the blindfold for how aware of her feet it made her. With nothing else to see, her mind's eye developed a very clear image of her soles amidst the screaming storm of tickling, helplessly twitching and glowing from the assault. She could see herself scrunching her madly flinching toes against the rotary brush under them, furious that even that basic defense was taken from her regardless of whether or not it actually helped. Bright red hotspots appeared and disappeared in her mind's vision in time with the movements of the brushes, like some kind of cruel memory test.

The worst instances occurred when the entire surface of her soles felt the brushes' wrath. Nicole's feet were always soft and sensitive. Even before joining the Agency she had always taken good care of her skin, moisturizing and exfoliating without the slightest idea that her efforts could have been turned against her so viciously.

How much time has passed? she wondered. The cruel, teasing methods of the machine warped Nicole's concept of time even worse than the previous test had.

A pause in the program let a spark of hope flutter in her heart, only to be snatched away a second or two later when the brushes began to rotate under her ticklish toes, or glide against the surprisingly sensitive base of her heels. There was only so much she could take. Elephant. Saying it would be so easy. It would end her chances of putting her training to good use, but it would also end her immediate suffering.

The machine stopped again, letting Nicole catch her breath. Her head hurt from laughter and her entire body was damp with

sweat, but she couldn't afford to reflect on it for too long. Even though the tickle-storm had subsided, she knew it would only start again. She clenched her teeth and muffled the loose giggles that escaped, anticipating the worse. A second crawled by, and then another. She heard her peer's laughter die down to fearful giggles too, yet nothing happened. The machine, thankfully, did not turn on.

"Congratulations, agents! You have passed the second test!" Agent Crosshair's voice echoed joyfully through the room. At the same instant, Nicole heard the door slide open and the familiar telltale sound of Agent Succubus's shoes as she entered the room. The room's light blinded her when her superior took her blindfold off, the cloth soaked with perspiration and tears.

"There's only one test left. You can do it," Agent Succubus soothed Nicole. Nicole blinked away her tears and tried to steady her breathing. They lied! the young woman thought. The test didn't go on indefinitely! Was it part of the test to lie about the test?

The redhead watched agent Succubus walk over to the dark-haired agent, where she lifted the blindfold off her head and leaned forward, probably to whisper similar words of encouragement. Without another word she began to walk back to the metal door.

"Wait a minute! Aren't you going to untie us?" the dark-haired woman called after her superior.

Agent Succubus turned around with another playful smile. "There's no need to. The last test will be with the same machines. You're getting a five minute break too, so get comfy!" Before the recruit could complain, Agent Succubus spun on her heel and walked through the door. Nicole turned her gaze up to the ceiling when she heard the door close again.

One last test. What could it be? Nicole wondered. After what she had been through, the thought of dealing with more sent nervous shivers down her body. Should she even believe that this was going to be the last test? Her breathing finally settled and she closed her eyes.

Reflecting on the past half hour, she realized that she didn't seem all that bothered. Sure the torture itself was enough to make her lose her mind, but she somehow didn't. It was the weirdest thing. A

small part of her somehow observed the wild ride as a backseat passenger, aware of the suffering yet still able to go with it. She wondered why.

“Alright, agents! The last test!” Agent Crosshair spoke again over the hidden loudspeaker. “This one’s really straight-forward. All you have to do is last five minutes while we turn the machine on to maximum power. No mind-games, but you’ll have rotating brushes on your underarms, ribs, hips, and feet. Think of it as a personal endurance trial. You can let the program run for as long as you think you can handle it, but five minutes is the minimum.”

Nicole glanced at the dark-haired recruit uncertainly and was surprised to see that the look was returned.

Agent Crosshair continued. “The safeword is ‘pineapple.’ Good luck!”

The silence that followed the announcement was ominous, but it was broken all too soon by a whirring that surrounded the two agents-in-training on both of their sides. Nicole yelped and tried to squirm as she felt firm brushes, almost the same as the ones on her feet, rise from somewhere in the recliner and set themselves in all the sensitive spots of her body. She was already dreading what came next. It made no sense for her to be this ticklish, and not just on her feet. She clenched her teeth as the brushes finally stopped moving, and heard her peer’s barely stifled laughter slow to a stop as well. The silence that followed was deadly. Neither woman moved a single muscle from fear of setting off the machines. Despite the unbearably uncomfortable silence, it ended all too quickly when every single brush set against their skin began to rotate all at once.

“Oh god! No! Let me out!” The black-haired recruit exploded with laughter, her body immediately convulsing uselessly against her bonds. An utter inundation of ticklish electricity flooded her brain from every nerve that made contact with the devilishly merciless brushes. Her mind was completely overwhelmed by the unbearable sensations; her head was a flurry of movement as she shook it to and fro. She tried to blurt out the safeword, the only coherent thing that still existed at the forefront of her tickler-stormed mind, but only made it as far as “pine” before degenerating into a whirlwind

hysterical laughter. Suddenly her training didn't matter much, nor did passing this stupid field assessment. All that mattered was getting the tickling to stop before she lost her mind.

In the observation room, Agent Crosshair turned to her friend. "You know she's trying to say the safe word, right?" She wasn't surprised to see the mischievous smirk on her face.

"I know. But she's not saying it, is she?" Agent Succubus replied.

Agent Crosshair lifted a hand to her mouth and laughed softly. "Terrible."

Somehow, despite the raucous din of her own deafening mirth, Nicole's was distinctly aware of her peer's desperately unsuccessful attempts to scream out the safeword. So she was out of the running, right? Nicole could finally cry the safeword herself, ending the program and freeing her body from the torturous clutches of the brushes. But for some reason, she didn't.

The part of her mind that was aware of her surroundings finally heard the dark-haired woman scream the safeword. Nicole swung her head from side to side, still laughing as she was aware of the other agent-in-training's laughter beginning to die down to weak, panting giggles.

The metal door leading to the observation room slid open and Agent Succubus strutted out. Nicole screwed her eyes open for a split second to see the veteran agent's coy smile before shutting them again, lost in the undertow of fiery, snapping, tickling synapses.

"What took you so long?" the dark-haired agent murmured through her loose giggles.

Agent Succubus said nothing as she undid the recruit's straps; instead of speaking, she was observing Nicole with a kind of fascination similar to a baby watching a bird fly through the air. The machine is on full force, she thought, and her only competition had dropped out of the running. Why was she still holding on?

When the dark-haired agent rose to a sitting position on the recliner, her chest heaving with mirth-laden breaths, she looked over at her peer with the same fascination as Agent Succubus. How long was she planning on staying there? The dark-haired woman didn't

plan on wasting any more time in the room to ponder the matter. Gingerly, she slid off the recliner, her whole body shaking from the shock of her feet hitting the floor. With the help of Agent Succubus, the two gathered the recruit's clothes and made their way to the observation room, where the metal door slid closed again. Nicole was left alone with the machines.

The red-haired agent recruit watched the door close, the whirring sounds not unlike the closing of a tomb. She wondered if she had been her own executioner. A little voice in her mind screamed at her, piercing the thick blanket of hellish tickling. You should have said something! It's not too late! Say something now! Scream 'pineapple'! Just make it stop!

She didn't exactly want the tickling to stop, at least not wholeheartedly. Of course it was unbearable and it was all she could do to keep from swearing herself hoarse through peal after peal of frantic laughter, but somewhere in the back of her mind there a pressing question. Just how much could she take? She was already screaming her head off with frantic laughter, but she wasn't desperate enough to blurt out the safeword. Personal challenges had always been a part of her life. She could be taking this test a bit too far, but at the same time there was something deeper to it that she couldn't quite explain. Before she was even aware of it, a small, part of her consciousness became a passenger to the torturous ride the rest of her mind and body were being taken on.

Nicole didn't know which of the sensations was worse. The rotary brushes on her feet definitely contributed no small part in driving her hysterical with laughter, particularly with how many individual brushes were unforgivingly attached to each foot. It felt as if the entirety of her foot was dipped in some sort of tickle solution that dug its merciless tendrils through every last inch of her madly dancing soles, but she knew this was not the case. The problem was that the brushes were more strategically placed than she had originally given them credit for. They were evenly spaced on nearly every major, ticklish region of her foot. They were large enough to make the entire area feel like it was under attack, but precise enough to ensure that the tickling feeling couldn't be ignored. They dragged in

the same mindless cycle against her sensitive skin, which had long since turned a bright shade of pink from the relentless assault.

She screwed her eyes open and tried to crane her head to get a better look at the brushes on her underarms and sides. These were very straightforward; what they lacked in tactical finesse, they more than made up for in sheer ticklish strength. They were of a much larger variety and nestled snugly into the hollows of her underarms, as if perfectly in shape with the curve. Nicole howled with laughter and fought at her bonds as the utter size of the firm yet fluffy brushes filled the entirety of her underarms with ticklish electricity. Her underarms rivaled her feet in terms of ticklishness, but it was the twin assault on these two fronts that sent her howling up a storm of wild laughter. For all intents and purposes, the brushes at her sides may not have even existed. They still tickled, she was still aware of the way they played with the curving slopes above her hips, but they were only the background instruments to a mirthful concerto that was already booming full force.

“I don’t believe it,” Agent Succubus murmured behind the computer monitor.

“All of her vitals are fine too. Mental activity’s there. Nothing’s wrong,” the scientist added.

Agent Crosshair said nothing, instead merely observing the agent-in-training as Nicole thrashed against her bonds, laughing a deafening storm that threatened to shatter even the strong glass dividing the two rooms.

“What did you say her name was?” she asked her colleague.

“Nicole. She’s only been with the Agency for a short time but she’s proven to be a promising recruit. She’s done well in adapting to living here and her courses show excellent grades.”

“What did she do before?”

“She worked at a coffee joint.”

Agent Crosshair gave her friend an incredulous look before turning to face the window again. Nicole had already lasted fifteen minutes on a machine that she had the chance to leave at any time.

“We’ll leave the machine on for a bit.”

Agent Succubus peered at her friend.

“Fine with me,” the scientist flatly remarked. “We’ll keep monitoring her vitals. If things get critical, we’ll shut it off.”

The other two agents-in-training kept quiet while the conversation was going on. Their gaze drifted from the health monitor to the ruckus behind the window. Did Nicole really want to be a field agent that badly?

Seconds crawled into minutes, and all the while the one thing Nicole was hoping for still didn’t happen. Her skin was still every bit as sensitive as it had been when she first started the damn test. She didn’t even notice the tears that were freely flowing down her cheeks; there was little she was aware of aside from the maddeningly persistent gliding of the brushes against her sensitive flesh. In her mind’s eye, Nicole saw her feet twitching madly, almost impossibly keeping up with the spin of each. She imagined that they must have been glowing bright red by now, but what surprised her was how much feeling they still retained. Not that it mattered; she had long since given up struggling against her bonds. Whatever movements she made against them were done so involuntarily in response to the unbearably strong sensations under her arms.

Her mind searched for something to focus on, anything that would lessen the toll the tickling was beginning to take. Why hadn’t her skin gotten used to the stupid program’s repetitive cycle yet? Somehow the conscious part of Nicole’s mind observed her body respond to the tickling with an almost casual fascination. She was aware of herself screaming and crying with helpless laughter as the enormous brushes under her arms sent a veritable torrent of ticklish electricity to flood her already-overwhelmed brain. Time was no longer a concept she was familiar with as the tickling went on. The machine truly was designed to break anybody caught in its vicious throes. Peel after peel of hysterical laughter gushed from her mouth and her hair was flurry fireball of movement. But she was still aware of herself, aware that she could stop the tickling at any time, but still chose not to. It was—somehow—Zen to her, in a torturous way that she didn’t quite understand. The seconds crawled by as her body jerked like a marionette to and fro in desperate attempts to avoid the tickling.

She heard herself still laughing but noticed that the fog in her mind was beginning to disperse. The merciless shocks that were ravaging her had been reduced to a mere decimal of their former strength. Cautiously, like a groundhog peeking at its shadow, her awareness began to return. Nicole blinked away tears and took deep shuddering breaths. What had happened? Why was it over? She didn't remember saying the safeword. Had an unconscious part of her finally decided that the tickling was too much?

The metal door slid open; surprisingly, the first thing she heard was the sound of sparse applause.

"I can't believe it!" Agent Succubus cried excitedly. "An hour! You made it a whole hour! I barely made thirty minutes on the thing!"

"I think I only did half an hour and a few minutes," Agent Crosshair admitted.

Nicole didn't reply as they undid her bonds.

"It's amazing!" continued Crosshair. "We had to shut the machine off ourselves. We probably could have even left it on for longer."

Nicole was glad they hadn't. She looked up at their proud faces and allowed herself an honest smile, one that had nothing to do with the aftermath of the torture. She had done it, all by herself, just to see if she could. It was a good feeling.

"The Agent That Couldn't Be Broken," Agent Succubus's words were barely above a whisper but Nicole still heard them.

"I like that actually," Agent Crosshair turned to her friend with a grin. She looked back to the new agent on the recliner. "Hope you don't mind that as a nickname, Agent." A slow smile grew on her face. "Welcome to the field team."

Five Stars written by: Okami-no-Kari

A tickle torture story written in *The Agencies* universe.

Edited by: Jonathan Essex



(Note: The following takes place before the events of The Agencies #7)

The light on the door's electronic lock flicked from red to green, and with a beep it swung open.

Wearing a giddy grin, Nicole swept into the room, her hands thrown up over her head in a victorious whoop. Light from the westward-facing windows filled the luxurious chamber, streaming down in golden rays to land on the massive bed, clean white sheets and plush coverlet radiant in the late afternoon sun.

“Oh, Kedrick,” she beamed. “It's...it's just...”

“Perfect?” her companion answered with a sly smile, dragging their luggage into the spacious hotel room behind him. The man otherwise called “Agent Spectre” straightened up, running a hand through his sandy, gold-brown hair; the thinnest sheen of sweat on the straight locks reflected the ambient light. “I tried. Only the finest for our—”

“For our first – year – anniversary,” Nicole completed his sentence for him in a singsong voice that rose and fell with purposeful inflections on each word as she smiled brightly. “I can't believe it either!”

For the first time in a long time, the happy expression she wore on her pretty, finely-featured face was genuine. Kedrick couldn't suppress a smile of his own. It was good to see her happy and hear her laugh. Of her own volition, of course; countless forced screams of laughter and twisted grins had been extracted from Nicole in the many convolutions of their clandestine business.

No, he reminded himself. Not Nicole. Agent Starlight. Business was business and pleasure was pleasure, and never the twain shall meet. It had become almost a mantra to Kedrick, reminding himself with the regularity of punching a time clock. Agent Spectre, the suit, the incarnation of the Agency's facility floor, began where Kedrick the man ended.

How did the saying go? All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

“So you like it?” he smiled to the ecstatic Nicole, who all but

danced over with a happy laugh, flinging her arms around his shoulders and pecking his cheek. "That's a yes," he added as she giggled.

"Goof." Nicole poked out her tongue. "You know I do. Doesn't every girl plan the first anniversary before the wedding?" she teased, before leaning in for a proper kiss.

Kedrick's lips pressed back to hers as the corners of his mouth turned up into a smile. He knew she'd love the place. In truth, most of the planning had been his. He'd been looking forward to taking Nicole somewhere special to get her mind off of the goings-on around the Agency. What better way, then, than a beachfront vacation? He let his arms loop casually about her waist and lazily rested his hands upon her thighs, goosing her there almost as an afterthought.

Nicole let out an involuntary giggle. "Eep!" She smiled warmly even as she squirmed in Kedrick's grip. "Stop that, you...."

Kedrick obliged, merely pursing his lips in a sly smile of his own. Turning, he angled Nicole towards the broad, southern windows of the room and edged her that way with his hips, as if leading her through the steps of a tango; she followed suit, turning to look out over the ocean.

"Oh, Ked," she all but gasped, eyes widening at the way the rippling water caught the thousand rays of the late afternoon sun. The large westward- and south-facing windows occupied most of the walls of the room, coming together in a corner that was entirely glass, leading out to an all-white balcony. The room would have been stark but for the warm light flooding it, minimalistic white furniture and brushed steel fixtures cast in clean relief by the bright sun. Tiny motes danced in the ambient light, until the wind kicked up, setting white curtains to move and sway in their own time. As if on cue an ethereal breeze swept through the room, filling it with a serenity so unlike the Agency workspace it felt otherworldly.

Nicole looked from the westernmost overlook out across the clean ivory sands of the beach, to the vast, lone level of the ocean that stretched out to the endless horizon. She watched the waves peak and ripple like a cat's paw, and breathed a sigh. "It's...it's like heaven,"

she murmured through a dreamy smile, leaning back into Kedrick's embrace. Her arms folded over her chest, fingers trailing along his sides as his own arms encircled her, holding her back against him. She sighed again as he kissed her neck.

“Mm-hmm,” he nodded proudly. “It's just like I pictured. Thought you'd love it at first sight.”

“Oh, I do...gaah!” Nicole yelped sharply as Kedrick's hands slipped back down to her thighs to give her another playful squeeze there. She shoved back against him with a wry smirk. “Don't you even *think* about starting with that,” she mock-chided him. “Not here.”

Kedrick gave a placating chuckle and kissed her again, on the cheek this time despite her low, grumbling protest. “You know you like it,” he teased.

Nicole couldn't altogether conceal her grin, lingering even after the ticklish sensations had faded. “Could you – just once, at least – *try* not to kill the mood?” she huffed, struggling to keep her expression serious.

The knock came at the door then, almost apologetically quiet as if in fear of interrupting. Kedrick swung it open, instinctively checking the hallway. The foyer was empty, but he gave a nod at seeing what had been left outside his door: a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket.

“Not bad for service,” he murmured to himself as he checked the bottle's label, bringing it inside. Nicole was sitting in one of the chairs across the room, wearing a curious smile and toying with a lock of her hair idly. One of her shapely legs was crossed demurely over the knee opposite, her foot bobbing up and down, dangling her shoe off of her toes. The shoes were professional affairs, sensible yet sexy pumps in a well-maintained leather, complementing the clean white blouse and medium-short length skirt she wore, enough to catch the eye without being intentionally provocative.

Kedrick couldn't help but glance down at the rounded curve of her heel and arch. Nicole had known this day was coming, and she'd been good enough to give herself a pedicure in anticipation. She'd always loved teasing Kedrick with her shoe, dangling the patent

leather pump until he wondered when it'd drop, revealing her trimmed and polished nails. He chuckled to himself and shook his head, bringing in the ice bucket and setting it down. "Your equipment for this mission, Agent Starlight," he said with intentionally overwrought gravitas, parodying the Agency handlers' tone with such exaggerated seriousness it was comical. Nicole giggled.

"Thank you, 'Agent Spectre,'" she replied, purposely over-enunciating his codename with a sly grin as they each took a long-stemmed glass from the tabletop. Kedrick filled them both and clinked his to hers musically, letting the simple harmonic tone fill the calm room. Their arms twined around one another's in a lovers' gesture as they smiled, gazing into each others' eyes, and took a sip of the champagne.

Nicole couldn't help but twitch her nose as the carbonated bubbles tickled there. "This is the real stuff, mm?"

Kedrick nodded. "Only the finest, celebrating one year of love...and laughter," he added with a smile, reaching down to squeeze Nicole's knee with thumb and forefinger. Her leg jerked.

"K-Kehed! Stoppit, you'll make me spill," she protested with a giggle, covering her mouth. Her shoe fell to the floor as her leg twitched involuntarily, her champagne glass tipping slightly. She only barely avoided a spill.

"Oh, you knew it'd happen sooner or later." He teased her with a playful wink, causing Nicole to feign a glower at him – still smiling with the trace of a giggle forming on her lips – and pull her arm back as if threatening to throw the sparkling wine in his face. They both knew she never would, of course; this was the real thing, not a cheap mass-market knockoff, and had come with the expected price tag.

"You're ridiculous, Ked," Nicole remarked, setting her glass down on the table between the two of them. With her foot free of its shoe, she stretched her toes out, bare but for the taupe stockings she wore. She spread her pedicured toes deliberately, as far apart as she could manage in comfort, letting the nylon form tight webs between them. She moved her ankle back and forth slightly, enjoying the feel of the cool air between her toes.

On the horizon the warm sun mellowed to a welcoming orange

tone, even as the sky darkened in the east.

"It's what you love about me, Nicki," Kedrick shot back, leaning forward with his elbows on the edge of the small table. She couldn't remember the last time she'd seen him so relaxed.

Pursing her lips in a smile, Nicole ran a finger along the rim of her fluted champagne glass. "I suppose," she murmured, resting her chin in her free hand as she gazed into his eyes. Slowly her foot moved under the table, coming to rest her nylon clad toes on his ankle. "More like it's what I put up with...among other things from you."

Kedrick shifted his weight slightly as Nicole's toes flexed gently and moved around to his shin, sliding up under the hem of his trousers. Her smile became a smirk in response to the look he gave her. It was the same look she remembered, as if from a photograph, from the very first day they'd gotten together. "Mm," she made a noise between a sigh and a purr, tugging gently at his sock with her toes. "I remember," Nicole remarked in an offhanded tone, only the first traces of sultriness creeping in. "I remember, when you used to give me that look all the time."

"Look?" Kedrick repeated, his head inclining. A hand went to his chin, fingers spread along his cheek as he smiled from the feeling of Nicole teasing him with her foot. He'd always admired her delicate, pretty feet, how she took good care of them; the sounds she made at having her soles tickled through nylon or silk stockings, or from brushes and feathers on her bare skin.

The early evening air was starting to blow in from the east, driven by the warmer currents that rose swirling from the shore. With the cooling breeze came the sultry scent of balmy ocean air, soothing on exposed skin. Kedrick's fingertips trailed over his forehead, running briefly through his own short hair.

"The look," Nicole nodded. The look of new lovers, but she didn't say as much. Instead her toes lightly "walked" up along Kedrick's shin bone as she clarified, "The look...the one I used to see you give Succubus."

"How did you – ?" Kedrick began, pushing back from the table just slightly; she'd caught him off guard, with a look of triumph that

said she was aware he knew that.

An entertained laugh escaped Nicole then, her palm cupped under her chin, fingers spread over her glossy red lips as her top teeth grazed the curve of the bottom lip. “Everyone gave Succubus that look.”

He laughed a bit at that, and she joined in. Then they drank again, Kedrick refilling their tall glasses.

It was good to share a laugh.

“Well,” Nicole lowered her foot and stood, setting her half-empty glass down. Her finger trailed along the faintest imprint of lips at its rim. “Tired from all the travelling?”

“Not even a little,” replied Kedrick, giving his shoulders a slight shrug as he took her glass and finished its sparkling contents himself, setting both delicate flutes aside.

Nicole smirked.

“I am,” she replied haughtily, “so if you still want to go down to the beach, you're going alone.” With that she nudged her discarded shoes off to the side and strode purposefully to the huge bed dominating the center of the room. She let out a luxuriating sigh as she collapsed into the embrace of the covers, at once feeling enervated and entirely too comfortable for her own good. “Aah...” Her eyelids fluttered.

The mattress bounced as Kedrick sat on the bed's edge, taking off his own shoes and unbuttoning his shirt's top buttons. “The sun's barely halfway down,” he noted, reaching over to put a hand on her head and angle her vision out over the balcony. There the lowest point on the orange solar disk was indeed descending, but did not yet touch the horizon line. “Don't tell me you want to waste our very first anniversary sleeping?”

Nicole made a noise of mock protest and reached for a pillow, swinging it clumsily over her shoulder behind her, where it glanced off of Kedrick's side. Even for a pillow-strike it was particularly harmless. “I...suppose,” she rolled over and gazed up to him, curling her lower lip under her teeth and biting down gently, “I suppose we could do...something. I mean we really ought to take advantage of this nice bed...” Her legs pulled up as she grinned at him, one hand

brushing over the coverlet suggestively at her side.

Kedrick chuckled. "There you go." He leaned in and kissed her, upon her neck, her cheek, twice more before leaving one lingering on her lips. His nose touched to hers and her sigh caught upon his own lips, which drew into a gentle, accommodating smile. "I wanted to give you your anniversary present." Pulling away almost reluctantly, he brushed his light fingers along her hair and cheek, teasing the curve of her ear in a way that made her squirm just a little, the hairs on the back of Nicole's neck standing up in a gooseflesh response of pleasant surprise. "It's something you'll like. I guarantee it."

Turning, Kedrick opened his suitcase and took out a slender white box. "Close your eyes," he instructed Nicole, affecting a stern tone despite his smile, which she returned. Even as her hands went to her eyes he admonished her. "No peeking," he said with a quirk of an eyebrow, anticipating the split between fingers that Nicole peeked out of. She closed her fingers obligingly and lay back on the bed.

Kedrick took a moment to admire her. Nicole had undone more buttons of her crisp white blouse as the night had gone on. As the late afternoon pushed on into early evening, the cooling air had condensed Nicole's perspiration, leaving fresh droplets of sweat beading on her perfect skin. He slowly ran a hand down the sheer black of her professional skirt, over her thigh, eliciting another giggle from her. With her eyes closed the sensual excitement of his touch was amplified further. "Alright," he said at last and opened the box. "You can look now."

Nicole opened her eyes and gasped. "Oh...Kedrick..." In the box was a deliciously naughty two-piece lingerie set. Deep, sensual material formed the garment – a pristine darkness impossibly beyond black, pure, seeming to swallow the light. It made a perfect void against the white box and cotton packaging, deep blues and purples swirling among the intricate threads of the lace. As Kedrick tipped the box forward, the wind caught the hem of the wispy negligee and played through the material, tossing it about just enough to let light filter through the fine blackness. The embroidery around its neckline and the matching panties compelled the eye, drawing the gaze deep

into the centers of hypnotic, ever-tinier circles within circles. The entire ensemble appeared to glimmer as nigh-invisible threads woven into the material shimmered. Their luminescence against the deep black was like the infinity of the endless celestial sphere above. Like... Starlight.

"It's beautiful," Nicole practically cooed, lacing her fingers together and touching her hands to her lips. "I...don't..." she breathed before Kedrick hushed her with a simple gesture, taking the nightwear from its box and holding it out to her.

"Put it on," he murmured, and she bobbed her head in a slow nod of compliance. Unbuttoning her blouse, she shimmied out of the garment, rising up to her knees as she swayed side to side. She smiled seductively to her lover as she undid the closure at the front of her bra, sliding it off and easing her panties down her thighs.

"You can look if you want," she teased him, "but it'll spoil the surprise."

"I've seen it before," Kedrick snorted in reply. "But it's better every time." He winked.

"You," Nicole stuck out her tongue as she pulled the diaphanous black lingerie on, panties first, then the negligee over the top, cool and smooth enough on her skin to elicit the tiniest shiver. The gentle breezes came in through the window, caressing Nicole's curves through her new outfit, teasing her nipples under the lacy black material. It moved so smoothly across her skin, the gentle sensuality drawing another, anticipatory shiver from her. She kept swaying and weaving, moving her hips and abdomen, putting on a sinuous dance for Kedrick. "So...do I – ?"

"Look beautiful," he cut her off with his reply, leaning in to give her a deep, passionate kiss on the mouth. She kissed him back, parting his lips gently with her tongue. Slowly she lay back, with an undulating movement of her spine to press herself up closer to him.

But he pulled away, his hands gathering her discarded bra and panties.

"Kedrick...what are...?" she murmured, her excitement giving way to confusion with a touch of apprehension.

"I gotta admit, Nicki," he replied, moving around to her legs to

unroll her stockings. “I got you that for selfish reasons. You see, I had an ulterior motive in all of this...”

Nicole didn't resist, she just looked down in growing consternation as he eased off the nylons, balling them up in his free hand while sliding her panties down around her ankles. He twisted them, passing the waistband through itself and letting the elastic snap tight, pulling the undergarments into a makeshift knot that held her now-bare feet together with her soles exposed.

“K...Kedrick,” she repeated, attempting sternness. Her tone quavered just a bit and she forced an unconvincing cough in a failed attempt at composure. He went on as if he hadn't heard her, wrapping the nylons around her knees and thighs, tying her legs together.

Nicole tried to scissor her legs apart, but the nylons and panties had been tied close to her joints, denying her the leverage she needed to get free and reducing her struggles to mere squirming. She knew what was coming and bit her lip, trying to steel her nerves. “C-can you just give me a—?” she started to ask before Kedrick silenced her gently with a finger to her lips. They trailed down her cheek to the side of her neck, the tiny hairs there standing up. His finger stroked ever so lightly along the prickly gooseflesh and she giggled with a twitch, hunching her shoulders. “N-no...don't!” she protested weakly.

Kedrick paid her no mind. As she reached up reflexively he intercepted her wrists, a skillful twist bringing one over the other, one of his hands locking her wrists in a cross. His free hand brought her bra around them, her hands slipping through the shoulder straps as the cushioned cups came in tight from top and bottom, the strap wrapping around fully in a firm cinch. Kedrick fastened the tiny clasps on the back of the bra strap and smiled at his handiwork. “Mm, not bad for an improvised setup, eh, luv?”

Nicole's teeth pressed gently into her lower lip. “B...be gentle,” she murmured and fidgeted atop the bed.

“I always am,” he replied softly, his tone gentle, reassuring. The very sound made the tension ease out of Nicole's shoulders as she relaxed, closing her eyes as if trust-falling back against the coverlet. She gave a light nod of consent before feeling Kedrick's fingers brush

down over her shoulder.

“Ahh,” she gasped gently as his fingers moved up and in, under the impossibly thin strap of her negligee, circling down to her shaven underarm. They pressed in gently at the sensitive, smooth curve there, eliciting an overexcited giggle from Nicole.

“H-hey!” she couldn't keep her voice from cracking, the noise of protest coming out almost as a high-pitched yelp as Kedrick's fingers flicked and circled, curling in to scratch lightly at the curve of her underarm, alternately pressing in and massaging at her pressure points there. His agile fingers danced, making her tense up and writhe against his hand. Then he'd stop, pulling back to let her relax as the ticklish pins-and-needles feeling faded, to trace gently once more over the same spots they'd just been stimulating. This was his little way of letting Nicole know that he knew what made her squirm, the man who could get into anywhere at all making a point of being inside her head.

Nicole shut her eyes and tried to relax, giving a sigh. *You can do this. Just a little willpower, she told herself, that's all. Don't need to be a Zen master. Just calm yourself, still your thoughts, clear your mind and—*

Kedrick's other hand slipped in underneath her other arm.

Nicole lost it.

“Nyaaahaha! Yeeiii – eek!!” she shrieked, twisting frantically with gales of panicked laughter as his fingers dug in under her arms, her torso twisting this way and that. Her legs kicked out as Kedrick leaned forward to lay over her, his torso perpendicular to her abdomen, keeping her pinned as his fingers undulated into the spots under her arms.

“K-Kehedriiick!” she squealed out, arching her back as best she could, bucking against him, though she knew she was outmatched. He barely set his weight on her, mostly pinning her hips as he tickled under her arms, before his wrists turned. Fingers slipped beneath the fabric of her negligee to press in at the sides of her pert breasts, his fingers splaying out across the extreme upper edge of the ribcage along her sensuous curves as his thumbs found purchase in the hollows of her clean-shaven armpits. Nicole exploded.

“G-ggh hnnngahaAHAHA AHHA AKEDRRRIIIICCKK!!” she

screamed as his fingers kneaded in, pressing along her ribs and into the spaces between. They tapped out staccato rhythms as they raked along her sides, barely teasing the lateral curves of her breasts with his short-clipped nails on each downstroke. In the meantime his thumbs circled firmly underneath her arms, bending at their first knuckle to drive their tips in deeper. Nicole's reddish-auburn hair tossed about madly as she sputtered furiously, demanding and pleading all at once. "K, Kehe...K-K-Ked," she practically choked on the hard consonants as he tickled her.

Kedrick slowed his motions, his own lips drawing into a thin line to hide his amused smile as Nicole's sweet laughter filled the room and drifted out to the balcony to dance upon the ocean breeze. His hands moved further down to his lover's trim waist, her weight and figure maintained so proudly and meticulously. "I know you didn't get me anything," he teased her as his hands closed around her midriff from either side, pinching along her skin lightly, fingers "walking" from her ribcage to her hips. "You're my anniversary present, Nicki." He slowed the tickling down just to hear her reply.

"A...aa, ahh...ahah. Ahh, aww. Kedrick...that's so sweet," she sighed softly upon catching her breath. "Y...you always did just know what to *eeep!*"

Kedrick had squeezed his hands around Nicole's midsection, thumbs pressing in either side of her cute little belly button, working in circles, one counter to the other. His remaining fingers curled around to grasp her sides and give a tickling sort of massage there, rolling and kneading his grip up and down. Nicole yelped and laughed helplessly, jack-knifing back and forth atop the bedspread, futilely grasping for a pillow to throw at him with her bound hands. Her efforts proved in vain and she collapsed back against the bed, spine bowing as she gave in to uncontrollable laughter.

"Y-you ruhuuuuined iiiit! We – ahaha! – were really hahaaAAAVING a...a moment th-there!" she gasped in between deep breaths and shuddering bursts of laughter. She tried to curl into a ball as Kedrick's fingers spidered their way up her sides and along her belly, rubbing in little circles as they gently dug in to her tense abdominal muscles, visceral lines of her midsection quivering from

her laughter and heavy breathing. “Ked...Kedrick, don't,” she pleaded haltingly as his hands went to her lower abdomen, working just along the shallow V-shaped lines of her outlined musculature, sweat starting to bead along her core as he tickled her belly. “P-plee-eeheeeeze!”

It was too late. One of Kedrick's fingers had sought out her navel, swirling around the rim of her delicate innie while his other hand's curled fingers, clawlike, raked back and forth with diabolical slowness over her center of breath, the sensitive cluster of nerves at the midpoint between her bellybutton and lap. Nicole's sharp squeal became riotous laughing as his finger dipped gently into the shallow groove, squirming along into the sensitive hollow before pulling back out. Her wrists strained hard at the elastic straps and fabric binding them, arms pulling in tight as her shoulders arched backwards, shoulder blades harrowing the bed underneath her. Her laughter echoed through the room, rebounding off the glass windows and shiny, austere, steel modernities.

“Kah, Kahahaah, *KED!!* Stoppit PLEASE!” she managed to gasp out as her fitful laughter faded to more gentle giggles. He eased off the stimulation, holding her sides as he blew a playful raspberry along her belly, reaching down to snap the waistband of her panties with a teasing smirk.

“So giggly already,” he mused aloud, causing Nicole to try to shoot him a look, but her mouth was still twisted in mirth as her chest heaved for air. The writhing and thrashing about had caused the thin, gauzy fabric of her lingerie top to brush over her nipples in a terribly teasing manner, ticklish in its own right, as maddeningly gentle as her lover's touches or kisses. Kedrick seemed to sense this; he tugged at the hem of the negligee, letting it cover her stomach and sides where they'd been exposed. The fabric lay across her midriff so lightly that Nicole couldn't help but squirm a little from its silken caress.

“Y-you...son of a bi—” she started before Kedrick shushed her again, placing his finger to her lips. She never finished her indignant response, his lips were on hers, swallowing the last word with a passionate sigh as they kissed. Her lips parted permissively for his, and his tongue grazed her teeth before the tip touched hers in a palpable spark of electricity. He pulled away, leaving Nicole on the

edge, the memory of that sudden kiss fading away just as instantaneously.

“I think it's the champagne,” he commented with a smile, straightening his cuffs and collar. “See, the little bubbles get into your bloodstream and start tickling you from the inside, right?”

“Ugh.” Nicole let out an exaggeratedly exasperated sigh and let her head slump back on the bed, eyes rolling. “You are *such* a dink. That is NOT how it works and you know it.”

“Oh well excuse me, miss chemical expert,” he bowed his head to her mockingly. “Why do they call you 'Starlight' anyway? What does that have to do with your skill set? Chemistry and computers; they ought to call you Agent *Egghead*.”

Nicole groaned and let her eyes lid heavily. “Just...untie me. You've had your fun already.” Her skin was still flushed, perspiration beading on her face, neck, and chest, tiny droplets of sweat misted along her thighs. “C'mon, I'm all sweaty and I think I left my antiperspirant in my other handbag.”

“Should've been prepared,” Kedrick teased her, provoking another protruding tongue of childish rebuke. “I always pack everything I need.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out his travel toothbrush.

Nicole's eyes snapped open. “Kedrick...don't even think about *gnnyaahnngh!*”

Her last words dissolved into an inarticulate gurgle as Kedrick brushed the little bristles along her exposed and sensitive navel, trying to hide his gleeful grin at how much she squirmed and the little noises she made. She really was his perfect anniversary gift.

“Better not laugh,” he teased her, only to be admonished with a *hmmnrrgh* noise through gritted teeth. With a little snicker of his own at her predicament, he trailed his fingers down along her thigh, crossing over her hip. She twitched and jerked in response, giving only a brief sputter through tightly pursed lips as Kedrick's active fingers pinched and tweaked down her thigh, before he moved them steadily to the often neglected spot right in the hollow behind her knee. She yelped in surprise as his fingers twisted around to press in at the sensitive nerve cluster there.

“Naahahaagh!! Stop stop oh god stoppit!” she sputtered, legs kicking in response to her reflexes. The tingles shot up her limbs, an electric current running up her spine into her already over-stimulated brain. She trembled in her bindings, straining against them to no avail. Her pleas faded to wordless whimpers as Kedrick's digging, probing fingers pulled back; still tickling her, fluttering lightly up and down the taut skin behind her knee joint as she struggled to bend her legs.

“Kuh. Kaahah. Kedrick. Please,” she breathed between gasps for air, her chest rising and falling as she struggled to compose herself. “Just...just let me catch a breather.”

He seemed to grant this request for a moment, sliding down past her legs to have a look at her feet. Soft and clean, her pale skin and French-pedicured toes almost sparkled in the low, saturated light of the evening as the sun brushed the horizon, starting its slow descent past the line where sea met sky. He'd never thought of himself as having a foot fetish (every part of a woman's body was beautiful as far as Kedrick was concerned) but Nicole's feet were so lovely. Her toes were unblemished, though she was given to wearing high-heeled shoes from time to time; her arches and insteps perfectly-tended curves that were so very sensitive. He couldn't resist brushing a finger along her sole, watching her predictably yank her foot back. Thwarted once more by the bindings, poor Nicole could only kick feebly, her dainty toes spreading wide before curling in tight.

“No, Kedrick, don't no please don't do that,” she hurriedly insisted, tossing her head from side to side, her bobbed hair fluttering across her flushed and flustered face. “Please, I know...but.” She bit her lip, cutting her own sentence short, and instinctively clenching her toes before she could stop herself.

“Nicole,” he chided her gently. “Do you want to be the best interrogator the Agency has or not?”

“I...” she hesitated, setting her jaw, teeth on edge. Before the rest of the answer was out of her, Kedrick's fingers curled in, drawing a sharp gasp from the back Nicole's throat. Her foot twitched as those fingers then flicked outward and the short, close-clipped nails scraped in one quick move across the underside of her ticklish sole.

“HhnnNYAGH!”

“Then you'll have to learn how to take it before you can give it.” Kedrick again manoeuvred his fingers back to her soles to move them in tight circles, around and around, savouring the almost melodic whimpers and strained giggles as Nicole fought, valiantly but hopelessly, to stem the tide of her ticklish laughter. Her feet jerked around, kicking and flailing wildly.

“Kedrick...ohgod...I – can't,” Nicole gasped ineloquently between spates of giggles and fitful cackles as Kedrick's fingers raked along her bare soles, curled like the talons of some great, sadistic bird of prey. She arched her back and wheezed for breath, her eyes beginning to water under the torments Kedrick's agile fingers visited on her tender, wriggling feet as she tried desperately to avoid his touch.

“Can't what? Mm? Can't say how much you're enjoying this? Oh, Nicki...I've wanted us to be able to do this for the longest time.” Kedrick grabbed hold of Nicole's foot with one hand, crossing one ankle over the other, the fingers of his free hand digging into her exposed arch. Gentle but firm, the nimble digits wriggled in rapid circular movements, making poor Nicole burst out in a fresh torrent of unrestrained giggles.

Nicole couldn't attest to how long the tickling lasted, only her gratitude when it ended. The over-stimulation faded, leaving her breathing heavily and slumped against the bed, her throat nearly raw as she gasped and wheezed for breath. Her cheeks were flushed, not only with exertion but self-conscious awareness: of the peaks her nipples made in her wispy nightshirt, of the outline of the most intimate areas in her panties where the dark gleam on the fabric was not entirely due to sweat. “God, Kedrick. Y-you haven't tickled me like that in...ohh.”

Kedrick turned and leaned down, lying next to her, kissing her lips softly. They shared a gentle spark of warm affection as his body pressed against hers, curves and contours tapering together, the two forms briefly melting into one atop the bed. “I love you so much,” she whispered to him.

“And I love you,” he replied, softly brushing his cheek against

her hair. "Always have." He kissed her forehead, her cheek, her ear. "Always will." Nibbled gently on her earlobe. Kissed her neck. The tiny, tingling jolts of bliss replaced the ticklish sensations through her nervous system as he set her skin alight with a new, gentler feeling. His caresses complemented the cooling breezes sweeping over her dewy skin, tousling her hair. "Do you want to watch the sunset together?" he asked. Nicole nodded.

Kedrick placed his arm under Nicole's back and half-supported her, loosening her bound wrists as he turned her to face west out over the rippling waters. Together they watched the sky's spectrum fade from the warm yellow-gold and orange-bronze corona around the setting sun to its cooler reds, pinks, and purples, heralding the deep blue of the coming night. Already stars could be seen out the easternmost view of the northern windows, beginning to dot the evening sky as the sun descended behind the calm horizon.

"It's beautiful, Ked," Nicole murmured as she watched the light gradually fade, every moment bringing the sun one infinitesimal fraction of an inch lower, behind the line of the vast sea stretching indefinitely along the horizon. Tranquil waves in every direction seemed to swallow the rich sunset. Nicole could only stare transfixed at the palette of sensual hues.

"*You're* beautiful," Kedrick murmured in her ear and caressed her hair gently.

"And you're sweet," she replied softly, with a hint of a wry smile creeping to her lips. She kissed him then, gently, teasing his lips with her tongue before pulling back. "Even if that was a downright *hokey* thing you just said."

"Now who's a mood ruiner?" Kedrick tried not to smile but his overwrought, accusatory tone made Nicole let out just a hint of a giggle.

"Ruiner' isn't a word," she retorted, only to let out a sharp yelp followed by a stream of giggles as Kedrick leaned down to blow a raspberry on her tummy.

"Is so," he responded in a tone bordering on childlike indignation. "It means someone who ruins things, like moods. Someone with a delightful giggle," he poked her sides playfully,

making her yelp again and bow her spine up off the bed, bucking side to side to avoid his teasing. “Someone with gorgeous, soft skin and pretty red hair. Named Nicole.” He smiled and kissed her exposed tummy, drawing more gentle giggles from her that trailed off into a sigh.

“Mm...at least you try,” she murmured, lidding her eyes.

The bed bounced as Kedrick got up. For a second Nicole hunched her shoulders, fearing her teasing had gone too far and she'd genuinely offended the sweetest, most loving guy she'd ever been with. But she knew Kedrick could take the teasing as well as he dished it out, though her neck muscles remained tense with apprehension. She only fully relaxed when he crossed the room to the table and came back with the champagne bottle swinging from his hand.

“Another drink to celebrate?” she asked, but Kedrick only smiled. “Thanks,” Nicole continued obliviously. “I've gotten a bit thirsty from all this *ghrrk!*”

Kedrick upended the bottle and began pouring its contents over her belly and thighs, letting the golden wine sparkle and bubble, frothing into foam all over her sensitized regions.

“Khhkh...khekh...Kedrickyou'rewastingit!” she managed to blurt as he tipped the bottle back up. “Aah, ahaahaand you're gonna ruin my present,” her voice almost trailed off to a whine at the end, before she let out a piercing squeal.

Kedrick lowered his head and began licking the champagne off her body, swirling his tongue back and forth along her tensing lower abdomen, the fizzing alcohol's tiny bubbles amplifying the sensation as his tongue burrowed here and there along her sensitive spots. She kicked and thrashed in protest, sending droplets of liquid and foam flying every which way. When his tongue probed into her bellybutton she jerked sharply with a particularly satisfying howl.

“G-GAAHahahaKedrickstopit!” she blurted hurriedly, her tone all but panicked. He paid her no heed, swirling his tongue into the gentle divot of her navel as hysterical laughter continued to wrack Nicole's frame. His tongue moved around in tiny circles as the fizzing of the champagne bubbles wound down, movements persisting for a

little while before easing off just long enough to let Nicole catch her breath.

“That...*really*...tickles,” she panted, shifting her thighs left and right to let the mingled droplets of champagne and her own perspiration drip off her sides and hips.

“That's the idea,” replied Kedrick with a grin too charming for his own good, receiving a mock-indignant pout for his troubles.

“I wasn't ready for that last thing you did with your tongue.”

Kedrick gave a noncommittal shrug and then lay back on his hands, sending a little smile across the bed at her. He watched the remnants of the sparkling champagne glimmer as the droplets mingled with the pearlescent dew of her perspiration, dappling her thighs and midriff. Leaning forward, he ran a finger along her thigh, ignoring her little gasp at the feeling of having her sensitive skin further stimulated. He placed that fingertip to his lips and sucked it gently, tasting the faintest, sweet tang the liquid gold had left behind. “We're secret agents, luv. Expecting the unexpected comes with the job. Unless you'd rather be a housewife married to an accountant? I'm told it's every woman's fantasy!”

Nicole snorted with derision. “All right, you've had your fun. Now untie me and let's finish that champagne?”

“This?” Kedrick gestured to the bottle. Although he kept a straight face, Nicole read him like a book. He was having too much fun playing up the dominant role, acting in command of the situation. She wasn't about to let him get away with playing dumb.

“Yes, that,” she nodded with intentional slowness, aping his tone. “You're a dynamite lover, Ked, but you're a *lousy* actor. You know exactly what I'm getting at.”

Kedrick, to his credit, kept his expression deadpan. Ah, of course. We'd better drink this all down while the night is young, before it goes flat. The genuine article doesn't grow on trees, after all. It'd be downright criminal to waste something so rare, so...precious.”

With that he flipped the bottle upside down and spilled the last of it across Nicole's bare feet.

“Oops!”

Nicole squeaked in ticklish surprise, the initial shock at Kedrick

cavalierly wasting such expensive libation fading quickly in the wake of the sudden rush of sensation. Her spastic giggling renewed her vigour as she kicked and twitched against her bindings, feeling the foam rising up between her toes, frothing along her soles, giving them what felt like a very strange pedicure. “Tha-aha, aaahht feels weiheeheheird...!” she managed to get out, flinching away from the unusual sensations. Her toes curled in tight as she winced, her soles cringing while the champagne dripped down them, tingling all the way.

“Aw.” Kedrick feigned a disappointed look. “I’ve gone and spilled the rest of the bubbly. Pity...better clean up what’s left,” he murmured, crouching down to run his tongue in long sweeps along her bare soles.

“Oh no, no don’t you dahaare – eeee!!” Nicole shrieked out as he licked along her tender feet, his deft tongue sliding along the curves of her arches and insteps, hitting all the particularly sensitive areas there. True to form, his technique was rewarded with a bout of squealing and cackling from the helpless Nicole as she tried to pedal her feet wildly away from Kedrick’s diligent, unmerciful tongue.

“Mm – can’t waste – one drop,” murmured Kedrick, tiny droplets of champagne gleaming from his chin and jaw, dripping down to his collar as he licked up the last of the gilded foam from Nicole’s tender soles. “Now,” he said as his hand went to his pocket to draw the toothbrush again, “to get you clean.”

“No, Kedrick – ” Nicole blurted in uncharacteristic fright, eyes wide as her face temporarily cringed, sheer adrenaline overwhelming the logical pathways of her brain. Her usual self-assurance quailed reflexively, gripped by a moment of terror that reflected across her face. Her feet likewise recoiled, nerves starting to tingle prematurely, toes tightly curled and clenched in a futile effort to protect her vulnerable soles. “I’m...” she started, dumbly, mentally fumbling to put an excuse into words as quickly as possible. “I’m not *ready*,” she insisted in a voice that came out much too plaintive for her liking.

Deaf to her pleas, the toothbrush landed square in the middle of her left sole and began scrubbing back and forth.

Nicole’s screaming laughter shook the bed.

Kedrick had to sit on her ankles to stop her mad kicking and

flailing as she bucked and howled like a caged animal. Up and down scraped the stiff, unrelenting bristles of the toothbrush, back and forth across her tender sole, then switching to scrubbing tiny circles all over the sensitive bottom of her foot as she squealed for mercy. Her hysteria swallowed the words, turning her pleas into garbled mush, piercing laughs punctuated by greedy, gulping gasps of air. She huffed and wheezed, tried not to bite her tongue clean off. She laughed madly, head slamming back and thumping the pillow, whipping her short hair back and forth as she tossed side to side, desperate to shake Kedrick. Her toes splayed reflexively, which she instantly regretted as it gave Kedrick the opportunity to push the head of the toothbrush in there, the bristles pushing up and over the tender webbing between them. Nicole's laughter became a screech as Kedrick's thumb and forefinger caught her smallest toe and tugged gently, pulling her toes apart to tense and tighten the tender expanses of skin between, sensitive and helpless, hopelessly ticklish as he "cleaned" there with his travel toothbrush.

"NO!! No Kedrick oh gahahaawd Ked I'm gonna...aah," she moaned incoherently as her gasps for breath came in deep, heaving sobs, her eyes bulging open, lids pulled all the way apart. Her mouth twisted into a comical, grinning mask that left her cheek muscles aching. Mercifully, Kedrick slowed the motions of the brush down to a maddening crawl, giving Nicole just enough time to come back from the brink. Her nerves fraying, leaving her twitching in the aftermath of the torturous tickling of her foot, she exhaled heavily before drawing air in the way a man dying of thirst drinks water from the first available source. Her chest swelled outward, pert breasts pushed towards the ceiling of the room as she breathed in again and again. Kedrick knew her limits, he'd pushed them so many times. He was toying with her, a cat with a mouse, his desires aligning with her own, secret ones.

That was why Kedrick knew, down to the core, that she could take it. For him.

Nicole tried to shut her eyes to still her thoughts. Then her face twisted and contorted, eyes clamping shut and teeth grinding as Kedrick now raked the bristles of the toothbrush back and forth

under the tightly curled toes of Nicole's other foot, teasing their horridly ticklish undersides!

“Almost clean,” he said in an attempt at a sardonic deadpan, but he couldn't keep a hint of playfulness from his words.

“Nnngh hnnnghnghh nffmmphnh” came her reply as her toes twitched madly, Nicole's wiry but slight frame trembling fitfully as he “cleaned” her other foot with the brush. She tensed, desperate to hold back her paroxysms of laughter. Thankfully, Kedrick eased off the teasing this time, even giving her foot a little kiss (which made her shiver with a giggle, of course) as he stopped.

“All done with brushing. And you know the next step?”

“What...?” she asked between deep breaths. *The next step is you quit teasing me, mister, get up here and untie me so we can wreck this bed frame.*

“After you brush...always make sure to floss.”

Nicole made a little noise in the back of her throat. Kedrick smiled down to her, his usual expression of relaxed confidence, but with a devilishly creative gleam in his eye. It was the look that Michelangelo must have given the block of marble that would be David, that Pygmalion gave the clay which became Galatea. She was his muse, her body and spirit bringing out a diabolical tickle-ophile in him; and she loved every minute of it, even as she screamed and thrashed and resisted.

“Floss,” she repeated in a quiet breath. “Oh you're not thinking of...” but her eyes had already caught the gossamer strand extending between two of his fingertips like a thread of spider's silk.

“Be prepared,” he replied with a chuckle as he unspooled the waxed floss.

Nicole fidgeted at the gentle touch as he let the length of floss go between the last two toes on her right foot, opting to anchor the tough skein with a single loop around her smallest toe rather than risk cutting off circulation with a tighter tie. He crisscrossed the floss, weaving it back and forth to trap her toes in a splayed position with a cat's-cradle of thin but strong filament. Nicole couldn't help but giggle at his practiced ease as he tied her toes apart like this, the giggle becoming a yelp as he teased her toes with his fingertips.

“Don't you even think about – ” she began before gritting her

teeth and squirming back against the bed, the back of her head pressing hard into a pillow. Kedrick's fingers teased the helpless spots under her toes, smiling as he relished the feel of her soft skin against his own.

“This little agent...” he started, and Nicole groaned.

“You are – mmnf! – way too into my feet.”

Kedrick shook his head. “Mm-mm. Your exes didn't like them enough.” He finished twining her toes lightly together with the floss, enough that she couldn't move one without the others following. With both her feet restrained, he stood and reached over for the bucket the champagne had come in. Nicole watched him with a mix of curiosity and nervousness, trying to wiggle her tied toes but only managing to stretch them all back at once, creating a smooth tension in the exposed skin of her bare arches.

Kedrick reached into the ice bucket, his hand dipping all the way down into it and coming up with a fistful of flat ice chips. Nicole's shoulders tensed in an anticipatory hunch. “Y-you're not really,” she began, her inflection betraying more of her surprise than she had intended.

“You don't want me to stop, do you?” Kedrick asked, without looking up. Nicole's lips pursed. Her head gave a barely perceptible shake no.

“Good. I know you like when I get creative with these things.” He smiled up to her, taking a good-sized, narrow-edged chunk of ice in two fingertips. Nicole briefly squeezed the tip of her tongue between her teeth; not hard, just enough to focus. The ice resembled a trapezoid with one edge collapsed, leaving a dull, blunted point at one vertex. Kedrick placed this tip right at the crease in the middle of the ball of her foot, and she let out a surprised gasp.

“Aah...! Th-that's cold,” she breathed, her foot twitching back from the first shock of icy wetness on her foot. She tried to curl her toes, but the floss webbing pulled them right back. She only managed to make her sole quiver. Kedrick turned the bit of ice sideways, getting more of its surface area sweeping along Nicole's exposed foot, her laughter going up and down in pitch as he dragged it along particularly tender intersections of her nerves. She whooped loudly as

the ice fragment travelled between her toes, teasing the joints under them and areas between.

“Too cold?” he asked softly and she shook her head. She let out a renewed burst of giggling as he glided the face of the ice chip up and down her sensitive arch, eliciting several more gasping breaths. He paused for a moment, letting Nicole rest, before turning the icy shard between two fingers and rolling it in vertical zig-zags like a Wartenburg wheel along her foot. Nicole twisted, her laughter coming steadily, interspersed with squeals of mingled delight and desperation as she tried in vain to kick free of the floss snaring her toes. It wasn't until Kedrick turned to follow up his motions with horizontal criss-crosses that Nicole cried out.

“T-too cold!” she struggled to keep the shivering stutter from her voice, cheeks instantly flushed at the unbecoming sound of her own capitulation. But Kedrick obliged, the ice now melted from both his body heat and hers, down to a mere splinter between two damp fingers.

“Better warm you up then,” he nodded, giving her foot a kiss, before returning his tongue to her sole. Bound at her toes, helpless to resist, Nicole's mind flashed back to the feeling of his tongue and the expensive champagne on her sensitive feet, even as her voice came out in girlish squeals. Her leg muscles tensed as she struggled not to kick her lover square in the face, trying to enjoy the sensation as his thorough tongue-tickling of her foot faded to more gentle kisses.

“Nicki,” he murmured as his finger traced a gentle line along the top of her foot, which twitched in response to his touch, her toes still restrained by the floss. “My love. You're going to be the very best interrogator in the Agency one day.”

Though she bit her lip to keep from giggling at his tantalizingly light touch, she sighed with warm affection. “That's my dream, Kedrick,” she breathed in a soft reply before resting her head back gently. Another giggle trickled through her barely parted lips; Kedrick was using the corner of the bed's topsheet to dry her sole, and the nubby texture tickled her thoroughly overworked foot.

“Mmm.” He set the ice bucket down and slid up the bed to dance still-cool fingers gently up her exposed belly, making her wiggle.

“Can I tell you that I love you?”

“Of course,” she replied. Half-rolling on her side, she did her best to rub her bound leg against his side in affection.

“Can I say that you're the only one for me?”

“Kedrick...” she blushed, giggling.

He smiled, and then leaned down to whisper in her ear. “Can I ask why they call you Starlight?”

“Mmm...” Nicole shook her head. “You know I can't say.”

“Then can I ask you what project XFLR-6 is?”

The words hit her ears and Nicole's distant expression and dreamy tone vanished in a heartbeat, her hooded eyes snapping open as her head jerked upright. “How did you—?”

“Find out? I don't know if I should be disappointed or insulted, Nicki. How long did you think you could go behind my back on this, really?” His smile was rapidly fading. A chill ran through Nicole then, brief but sobering. *Oh no. Is it because I didn't tell him or...? He'll be SO pissed.*

“It's classified information,” Nicole said, though the words sounded hollow and wooden even to her own ear.

“So we're in the business of keeping secrets from one another now?” Kedrick got off the bed and moved to the closet. Nicole called his name after him, her tone gentle, almost sadly conciliatory but he paid her no heed. She groaned defeatedly, her head slumping back, assuming the worst. Just like the others, one secret would lead to another; then pretty soon it's 'Look, things got too serious too fast, we need some time apart,' and just like that it's over, and the magic is gone....

After some rummaging, Kedrick returned, holding a device on a gleaming chrome pole. Nicole had to squint to make it out. The shoe-polishing buffer brush was a standard hotel fixture, and he hoisted it up on the bed with nary an effort, his smile returning to his handsome features. “We have ways of making you talk,” he intoned, a light of good humor returning to his eyes. The machine was a retro design, little changed since the machine's introduction in the 20th century: the twin, oblong buffer heads pointed out in opposite directions, one black for dark shoes, one red for lighter leather. A

small knob sat at the other end of the device's metallic handle, opposite the brush heads. Kedrick thumbed a recessed button on the knob and the mechanism clicked into life, twin brushes spinning rapidly with an attentive whirr.

Fortunately for Nicole, it drowned out the sound she made – one she couldn't reproduce if asked, any more than she could describe how she felt. “Oh...you're not planning...to use...on my?” she asked haltingly, her toes once more meeting the unyielding resistance of twined floss as she attempted to curl them defensively. Even as her relief sloughed off of her, wariness crept in: as glad she was that Kedrick wasn't genuinely angry with her, she couldn't help but chew her lip, her wrists tugging and twisting her knotted bra, ankles pulling the band of her panties binding them. She'd be spending the night with the man she loved, but...

That machine.

She shifted nervously and swallowed a small, nasal, giggly sort of half-whine as Kedrick brought the twin buffers up flush against her bare soles, tingling from the previous tickle-torment of her sensitive feet. He didn't move the machine at all, just sat its base and tipped it to keep the handle angled and the bristly, wiry surfaces in contact with her poor, tender feet. She bit her lip softly and shut her eyes, for a second reminded of the texture of the carpet underfoot back at the Agency HQ. “Kedrick...you know I really shouldn't...” she began, fearing for a moment that she exaggerated the pleading in her tone, that she'd lose her edge.

Kedrick leaned in with a soft look on his defined features. “You had your chance,” he whispered into her ear, swinging his leg over her thighs to pin her legs down, thumbing the machine's “on” button.

The twin buffers spun to life, whirling about a full rotation before gathering speed as they worked through the resistant friction of the mechanism. Another revolution and they reached their full speed, creating a high-pitched mechanical whine that drowned out Nicole's terrified shriek and throaty laughter. Desperate, hopeless, she clung to consciousness even as she howled and cackled, her laughs ripped from her heaving chest and echoing throughout the room, rebounding off the austere walls and low ceiling, until the noises

seemed to shake the very bed the two of them lay on.

“*Kedrick!! PLEASE!*” she screamed as he shifted his position, keeping her legs pinned firmly and her soles pushed flush to the unyielding brushes of the shoe-shine machine, its buffering heads “polishing” her bare soles in relentless cycles as they whirled and drilled about. The force of the buffer brushes pushed her ankles apart, even as the elastic tension of her knotted undergarments around her ankles pulled her desperately-peddalling feet into the unbearable friction of the buffer heads.

For every action, an equal and opposite reaction. The thought swirled through Nicole's mind amid the vortex of ticklish terror as her own laughs rang in her ears. She had endured so much, all too much. Surely she had proven herself to Kedrick and to the Agency, her devotion to her love and her line of business. The words didn't even seem to be her own, as though she heard them from some distance away, coming across from over the sea perhaps, carried on the otherwise tranquil waves.

“*I'LL TALK!*”

The words were almost too desperate for her to admit they'd been her own, distorted over the buzz of the buffers' motor. The machine lowered its pitch, those insatiable heads slowing to a crawl before resting at last.

“You will?” he asked all too sweetly, his tone intentionally cloying, leaving the honeyed words sticking in her ears. She could only nod her head exhaustedly with a spent whimper-sigh, attempting to push the shoe-shiner away with her feet and instantly regretting her decision as her soles touched the buffer heads.

“Good. Because I'm just *dying*,” he sneaked a poke at her ribs, eliciting a hoarse gasp from Nicole's exhausted vocal cords, “to know all about your little Project XFLR-6.”

Nicole's tongue rasped over dry lips. In for a penny...

“Project XFLR-6,” she began, trying to affect the same tone she took when presenting the initial notes to the Agency contractors. “Codename: Love Potion. It's the latest in a line of endeavours to replicate one of the special abilities of a known Controller.”

Kedrick paused. He let the gravity of what he was hearing sink

in. “So...” he started after a while.

Nicole nodded. “Control for this experiment was Agent Succubus. Noted for her...” she looked almost bashful for a second, “...non-lethal conflict resolution abilities. Love Potion was an attempt to replicate this power for riot control in an aerosol or gaseous form.”

Kedrick blinked, twice, thrice. He even touched a hand to his forehead. His lips moved wordlessly before he let out another, “So....”

Nicole pursed her lips tight. “I've already said too much,” she backpedalled hastily, shaking her head. “If the Agency – *yipe!*”

Kedrick had slid a hand up under the hem of her now-thoroughly rumpled nightshirt and grasped her bare belly, kneading fingers into her abdomen and wriggling them.

“No no no nononono *pleeheeze...*” she begged and he relented, cautiously, with a guarded, “Go on....”

Nicole continued as bidden. “Love Potion mitigates feelings of aggression in the targets. It defuses potentially hostile situations and is able to negate the... well, the mob mentality when peaceful assemblies turn violent. Given the events which led up to the last global conflict,” she went on, closing her eyes as she recalled the project's details from memory, “the Agency felt it expedient to look into large-scale riot control options, preferably nonlethal. With the proper distribution—”

“—Love Potion could turn an armed rebellion into a love-in.” Kedrick's consternation melted off his face, replaced with an admiring smile. “Nicki, you sly little minx.”

Nicole shook her head. “The project was considered unfeasible and mothballed. At least...for a while. I just, well. I figured I'd save some for myself.” She turned her eyes downward almost sheepishly. “It could have been...well....”

“Fun.” Kedrick grinned openly. “At least in a civilian application.”

Nicole looked up, meeting his eyes with hers, and nodded, smiling. “Yes...especially since one of its unforeseen side effects was opening up receptivity to non-verbal communication. Meaning two people who were normally incompatible would start to see things each

others' way.”

“Or...a loving couple in a committed relationship?” Kedrick's teeth gleamed in the remaining rays of sunlight as the day's last vestiges faded in the west. The room's lights lent the bare, modernistic, eggshell-white walls a warm, pale-orange glow as they flickered on automatically.

Nicole giggled mirthfully. “A pair of close lovers might start acting a bit uncharacteristically like a pair of horny teenagers,” she teased him, giving a playful wink. “And if they're especially attuned to each others' desires and curiosities, they may begin acting out one another's' closest and most intimate fantasies without even knowing it.”

Kedrick laughed openly. “Oh, my...” He unbuttoned his shirt down all the way, revealing the clean white undershirt beneath. “So a clever, unbreakable little interrogator who wants to be interrogated and give in...”

Nicole grinned widely. ”And I got you to confess to snooping, didn't I?”

They shared a laugh: honest, warm, natural. He lay down against her side, their eyes coming together in another mutual gaze, intimate smiles mirroring one another's'. Nicole turned to him, relaxed in her bonds, exhausted from her lover's playfulness, all but glowing with radiance. “I got you.”

“You certainly did,” he murmured to her, and their lips locked together.

“One thing I don't understand,” she asked as he began undoing the impromptu bondage from her wrists before moving down to the nylons binding her upper legs. “How did you know about XFLR-6 in the first place?”

“If you're 'Agent Starlight' for your smarts,” Kedrick replied, kissing her bellybutton directly and making her squirm, gently giggling under her breath. “I can be Agent Spectre for what I do, mm? It's better than Agent...Get Into Anywhere...Man, anyway.”

Nicole covered her mouth with a hand, laughing as her eyes narrowed. “Oh, you. At least you're consistent about bringing your work home with you.” She pointed her toes as he removed the waxed

floss binding them, flexing her feet as he unbound her ankles and spreading her pedicured toes apart. Her nails shone briefly as her toes curled. Kedrick had been careful to maintain circulation in them even as they were tied, amplifying rather than numbing the sensitivity of the tender spots right underneath her toes.

“It's easy when you love your job.” He smiled as he kissed her toes, making her giggle again. “So how much did you give me? Or did we both just go a bit heavy with the champagne tonight?”

Nicole shook her head. “Some things have to remain a secret,” she teased him, curling her toes again.

“Suit yourself.” He brushed a finger at the arch of her foot, savoring her gasp. “Just be careful you don't accidentally dose yourself, next time.”

Nicole grinned crookedly. She beckoned him closer with a bent finger as her tone dropped to a husky, flirtatious whisper. “I'd never be so careless as to accidentally dose myself.” She leaned in close to murmur suggestively in his ear. “That's why I was *very* careful to dose us both.”

Kedrick chuckled with a roguish grin, one Nicole returned wholeheartedly as she winked back to him. “Well, the night is young as they say!” she exclaimed and fell back on the bed, beaming a wide, toothy smile to the love of her life. “So...shall we see how useful that power of yours to get into anywhere at all *really* is?” she all but purred to him, crossing one leg over the other as her tongue ran along her upper teeth. “Maybe,” her eyes gleamed in the dim ambience of the room, “I'll even let something slip about why I'm called – ”

Just then, a knock came at the door. Both agents sighed, Kedrick's shoulders slumping as Nicole tried to stifle her groan of disappointment. “I'll get it,” she shook her head resignedly, putting a hand on his chest and guiding him down to a comfortable position on the bed. “You just make yourself cozy, mm? I'll be just a moment.” She smiled and winked, and he nodded with a smile of acquiescence, resting on his back.

“Mr. Kedrick?” came an almost apologetic tone from behind the door, quiet as if fearful of the potential intrusion. Nicole sighed again, shaking her head and tousling her hair with her hand before

tugging her lingerie into position. *May as well try to straighten up*, she thought, making a concerted effort to keep the exasperation out of her tone and body language.

“Yes?” she opened the door and paused.

The housekeeper was young, Nicole's age if as much, slight in stature with a nervous expression on her finely-boned facial features. Her high cheekbones and delicate nose lent her face an exotic look that was accentuated further by her dark, almond-shaped eyes and olive-toned skin. “I come to take champagne for Mr. Kedrick?” she intoned, her halting English inflected as a question. “Sorry if I interrupt,” she added hastily, appearing to blush in the dim artificial light of the hotel room, her dark poker-straight hair falling into the line of her gaze.

Nicole cocked her hip, leaning her hand on the wall. She was a pretty thing, this girl. Oh yes – eagerness to please was written all over her body as she fidgeted nervously, as if unable to meet Nicole's eyes in the little ensemble the agent was currently dressed in. Nicole's eyes looked over the flattering cut of the hotel worker's neat little black dress, accented with her white hat and apron. Impressively coltish legs for a girl her size led down into petite, open-toed shoes, revealing pretty little toes.

Well there's this place's fifth star right there. “Happy Anniversary, Kedrick,” she murmured to herself under her breath.

The maid lifted her head, curiosity briefly overcoming her embarrassment at seeing Nicole only in such risqué undergarments. “Pardon, miss?” she asked in her lilting accent, elongating the vowels.

Nicole just smiled and held the door open. “I said, 'please come in.'”

Premonition written by Mike Brooklyn

A tickle torture story written in *The Agencies* universe.

Edited by: Jonathan Essex



(Note: The following takes place before the events of *The Agencies* #7)

Pitch black darkness. That was all Agent Starlight could see at first. That was how all her premonitions began. Then an image began to fade in. Blurry at first, but then it came into focus. It was Mirth, one of Starlight's associates from the Agency. Only Mirth's beauty—flowing brunette hair, haunting hazel eyes, and flawless tanned skin—matched her skills as a mercenary. However, it was not Mirth's attractiveness that was the focus of this premonition; it was the situation she was in. Mirth was naked and bound to a torture table of sorts. A strange vest-shaped plate covered her torso and began to tickle Mirth's helpless, bare skin with vibrations. Mirth could do nothing but laugh, as there was no means for her to escape.

As time slowly passed, the noises of the vest's vibrations grew louder. As their tickling functions intensified, so did Mirth's reactions. Sweat came rolling down her forehead and tears poured from her eyes. The laughter finally came to a fever pitch and then Mirth's reaction changed. Her eyes began to glow blue as her unique controller power, amplified by the stressful circumstances, caused her body to emit powerful vibrations.

The entire torture table shook. The vest broke into several pieces, flying in all directions, before the rest of the table exploded. Mirth was free, and she was angry. But then a curious thing happened. Rather than seek vengeance on whoever was holding her captive, Mirth dropped to her knees as a sign of allegiance to her captor. This puzzled Starlight, not only because she did not understand why Mirth would do this, but also because she could not make out to whom Mirth was kneeling to.

“Agent Starlight?” a male voice echoed. “Agent Starlight, are you asleep?”

Starlight quickly woke up to find herself in the Agency's main conference room. Sure enough, she had fallen asleep at her desk. As she regained consciousness, Starlight brushed her auburn hair away from her eyes.

“Ah, Agent Starlight, how nice of you to rejoin us here in the land of the living,” said Mr. Nathan. His was the voice that was in

Starlight's dream. Mr. Nathan was the director of the Agency; all orders came from him. His age was a mystery to the agents, despite his young appearance.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Nathan. I was just resting my eyes," Starlight tried to explain. Starlight's eyes began to adjust to the room's light. The room itself had two dozen desks facing the front of the room. There, Mr. Nathan sat behind the main desk, complete with a slide projector. To Starlight's left was Mirth, and to Starlight's right was Agent Succubus.

"Still tired from celebrating your anniversary last night at that fancy hotel?" Succubus asked. "I figured the bed was involved, but you obviously didn't do much sleeping on it."

"Don't be jealous," was all Starlight could say to her blonde-haired compatriot.

"Ladies, if I might move on to your new mission," Mr. Nathan said in an annoyed voice.

"Sorry," Starlight and Succubus both apologized.

Mr. Nathan turned off the room's lights and turned on the slide projector. A picture of a middle-aged Indian businessman appeared on the white projection screen. "This is Sonjay Raaj," he explained. "He is the head of a rival agency, Utopia, and his personal wealth is in the one billion dollar range. He has become quite the thorn in our side."

"You want us to kill him?" interrupted Mirth.

"Nothing that extreme, Mirth," Mr. Nathan replied. A new picture appeared on the screen, that of an ancient mask. It resembled a Bengal tiger with three eye sockets, each housing a large gemstone: the world's largest ruby, emerald, and sapphire. "This is the Three-Eyed Tiger of Bangladesh," Mr. Nathan continued. "Since coming into possession of it two years ago, Raaj's wealth has doubled, mainly through various high-risk investments. He believes it to be a good luck charm."

A new picture of a luxurious manor house appeared on the screen, surrounded by a huge estate. "This is Raaj's holdings in Los Angeles. He's having a dinner party there tomorrow night. Your mission is to crash that party and steal the mask."

“Agent Succubus, we’ve given you a cover as a socialite. You’ll mingle with the guests and work over Raaj to see what information you can get out of him. Mirth, you will sneak into Raaj’s private vault where the mask is hidden and attempt to steal it. And Agent Starlight, you will do surveillance from our mobile headquarters. Are there any questions?”

Agent Starlight raised her hand, as if she were in grade school. “What would stealing the mask do?” she asked.

“Raaj believes the mask brings him good luck and fortune,” replied Mr. Nathan. “We would like to run some tests to see if there is any truth to that. If it is, making Raaj part with the mask might lead to his downfall, if his luck takes a sudden turn for the worse.” He paused, looking around the room. “Are there any other questions? No? Good; you are to leave for Los Angeles this afternoon. Make the Agency proud, ladies!”

* * *

Agent Starlight parked the Agency’s mobile headquarters van just outside Raaj’s estate. The vehicle itself was around 24 feet long and included various sections: a computer center tied into surveillance equipment, changing rooms, and even an integration area in the far back. Starlight was sitting in the surveillance area, using her personal laptop computer to hack into the mansion’s security cameras. She could now see everything Raaj’s personal security team did.

“How do I look?” Agent Succubus asked as she emerged from one of the van’s changing rooms. She was dressed in a sparkingly white cocktail dress with a matching feather boa.

Starlight tried her best not to laugh at the sight of the ridiculous dress. “Aww, that’s so cute. You saved your old prom dress!” she joked.

“Like you even went to yours,” Succubus joked back.

“I’m ready”, Agent Mirth said as she emerged from a second changing room. She was dressed entirely in a black speedsuit, including a mask over her face that left only her hazel eyes exposed.

She even had her favorite weapon, her katana sword, strapped to her back.

“What is with you and your ninja fetish?” asked Succubus.

“What about it? Ninjas are badass. Besides, what better costume to sneak into a house with?” Mirth replied.

“It’s just that all that black comes across as so emo,” Succubus said as she exhaled sharply.

Mirth grinned. “Don’t be jealous that I look better in this than you do in your prom dress, ‘Bus.”

The tall blonde rolled her eyes. “Don’t call me ‘Bus.’ I hate that!”

“Hey, you know what my favorite song used to be?” continued Mirth. “*The wheels on the bus go round and round! Round and round, round and round.*”

Starlight chuckled and shook her head. “OK, guys. Let’s get down to business.” Starlight used her laptop to access a blueprint of the mansion. “This is the ballroom the party will be in. That’s where you’ll be stationed, Succubus.

“Mirth,” continued Starlight, “the vault room is all the way on the opposite side of the mansion. You’ll enter the building through the air vents’ main shaft near the air conditioning unit. Once inside, I can guide you to the room.

“The floor is covered with motion-detecting lasers, so be careful. If you step into one of them, it will trigger a silent alarm. The vault has a five digit PIN, which Raaj probably knows. Succubus will get it from him and I’ll pass it on to you. Is that all understood?” Mirth and Succubus both nodded. “Alright. Let’s be naughty,” Starlight said with a precocious smile.

* * *

“Introducing Miss Julianne Morrison of Beverly Hills,” a butler announced as Agent Succubus entered the party. That was the identity given to her: the daughter of a high-powered movie studio executive.

The grand ballroom was packed with partygoers, mainly businessmen and their wives and girlfriends. Succubus made her way

across the room until she found Raaj. Spotting him, she reported into her hidden earpiece. “Target has been sighted. Now engaging him,” she said before moving any further.

On the opposite wing to the mansion, Mirth was exiting the air shaft through a vent in the ceiling. She carefully landed in the hallway in front of vault room’s door. Without hesitation, she began to pick the door’s lock with her universal key kit. On her second try, the door unlocked and opened. Mirth then donned a special pair of night vision goggles. With them, she was able to see the motion-detecting lasers on the floor that Starlight had warned her about. Using grace learned through years of martial arts, Mirth made her way over each of the lasers until she reached the vault on the far end of the room. “Starlight, I’ve reached the vault. I’m going to need that PIN,” Mirth whispered into her earpiece.

“Succubus is working Raaj over for it,” replied Starlight.

“Mister Raaj, it is my pleasure to meet you,” Succubus said as she greeted Raaj. “My name is Julianne Morrison. Perhaps you know my father, Steven Morrison? He’s the head of Daydreamer Studios. I think you did business with him last summer.”

“No, I don’t recall ever meeting him,” replied Raaj in confusion. “But it is lovely to meet you never the less.”

Raaj didn’t impress Succubus all that much. He looked like any other businessman she had ever encountered: eyeglasses, well-trimmed bread, and a generic tuxedo. Succubus extended her hand out to him, which he quickly accepted and kissed on her knuckles. This provided Succubus the perfect opportunity to drive home her controller power. Within a matter of seconds, Raaj found Succubus to be the most beautiful woman he had ever met. He couldn’t help but give in to her every demand.

“Please, call me Sonjay,” Raaj cooed.

“Very well, Sonjay,” said Succubus. “I was just wondering if you could tell me—”

Before Succubus could finish her sentence, Raaj’s daughter, Trishna, stormed into the room. “Daddy! Daddy, where you?” she

yelled at the top of her lungs. She was a beautiful, young woman in her twenties with jet black hair, brown eyes, and even darker brown skin. Her barking commands came with the ease of consistency.

Raaj snapped out of whatever control Succubus had over him to tend to his daughter's needs. "Yes, Trishna, I'm over here!" he exclaimed as Trishna marched over to him.

"Daddy, you don't really expect me to wear this!" shouted Trishna, indicating her outfit. She was wearing a blue Indian choli and sari dress that left her arms and slender midriff bare. She also wore sandals on her small feet.

"What is the matter with it, darling?" Raaj asked. "It's the traditional dress of our women. You should be proud and honored to wear it."

"Daddy, you're so old-fashioned," complained the young woman. "Can't I wear something new? What's the point of having all those personal clothing designers if you're going to make me wear Mommy's old hand-me-downs?"

Raaj stepped closer to Trishna to speak into her ear. "Young lady, stop making a spectacle of yourself while I'm entertaining my guests," he demanded in a hiss. "So long as you live in my house, you will do as you are told. You'll either wear that dress or you can go lock yourself in your bedroom, as usual, until this party is done. Do I make myself clear?"

"Fine!" Trishna yelled as she stepped away. "I hope you all have a miserable time at this boring party!" She stormed off in huff as all of the guests' attention awkwardly turned toward Raaj.

"Girls will be girls; you know how it is," Raaj half-heartedly joked to the crowd. "Don't mind my moody daughter, let the party go on!"

Needing no further encouragement, the guests went back to drinking and socializing.

Raaj returned his attention to Succubus. "You'll have to excuse her. She's been like that ever since her mother died. Now, my lovely Julianne, where were we?" he asked as he placed his hands on her shoulders.

“I was curious to know if you would let me see that Three-Eyed Tiger mask you’re rumored to own,” answered Succubus.

“My mask? Oh no, my lovely, it can’t leave its resting place. Especially on a night like tonight, with the stars out of alignment. It’s bad luck.”

Succubus let out a small giggle at Raaj’s outdated ideas, disguising the realization that she would have to increase the effects of her powers to get more out of him. “Well then, if you won’t show me the mask, could you at least tell me where it is?” she whispered into his ear.

“It’s locked away in my vault room, where I keep all of my most prized possessions,” said Raaj, intoxicated by Succubus’s presence.

“I see. And what would be the PIN for that vault, if you don’t mind my asking?” asked Succubus in her most sensual voice.

“I don’t know,” replied Raaj.

Succubus quickly pulled away from him. “What do you mean, you don’t know?” she asked, wondering if he was somehow becoming immune to her powers.

“I mean just that. I don’t know the PIN. I keep it that way so that it can never be stolen if I were to be kidnapped. Only Trishna knows it,” he explained.

Oh goodie, I have to deal with that brat, Succubus thought. “One last question: where would the bathroom be? I have to go...powder my nose.”

“The bathroom? It’s down the hall, third door on your right. Although, you look perfect just as you are now,” answered Raaj.

“Ah, you can never look too perfect,” Succubus replied as she began to step towards the ballroom’s exit.

“I will count the seconds while you are away,” Raaj said as he waved good-bye to her.

Back at the vault room, Mirth was impatiently tapping her foot on the floor. Waiting seemed to happen more often than she would like when on missions with Succubus: she would be stuck twiddling her thumbs while Succubus would prolong the mission just so she

could enjoy having total control over another person. “Bus, what’s taking so long? I need that PIN,” Mirth mumbled into her earpiece.

“Raaj’s spoiled little daughter has it. I’m going to have to work her over instead,” replied Succubus.

Mirth went back to staring at the vault. “So, Starlight, know any good knock-knock jokes?”

Mirth’s comment went unnoticed as Starlight guided Succubus to Trishna’s room. “It should be to your left,” she instructed.

Succubus knocked on the door Starlight had indicated. Trishna flung it open with a bellowed “WHAT?!” without looking to see who was on the other side. Seeing an unfamiliar face, the young woman quickly became embarrassed. “Oh, sorry. I thought you were my asshole dad,” she apologized.

Despite Trishna’s earlier complaints, Succubus noticed she had not changed her clothes. “Oh no, I should apologize for bothering you,” Succubus said in a sweet voice. “I was looking for the bathroom and I got lost. Could you point me in the right direction?”

“You’re not too far. It is right around this corner here,” Trishna said as she pointed. Succubus reached her arm out to mimic Trishna’s gesture, causing her finger to brush up against Trishna’s hand. Even this light touch added to the growing influence Succubus was exerting over the other woman, intensifying her power’s effects on a physical level.

“Wow, I just noticed you’re really pretty. Almost as pretty as I am,” Trishna said in a lovey-dovey voice.

“Thanks, I think,” responded Succubus. “But what I really want to know is the PIN to your father’s vault.”

“I can’t tell you that, it’s a secret,” Trishna replied.

“Trishna, tell me what the PIN is, *now*,” said Succubus, her voice stern as her annoyance got the better of her.

“I’ll never tell,” Trishna said in a sing-song tone.

Succubus had had enough of these games. Regaining control of her frustration, she put her right hand into her purse. “Then would you mind telling me if the perfume I have on this handkerchief is too

strong?” she asked with a smile, pulling the square of cloth into view. “I like to dab a bit on during the evening.”

Trishna leaned forward as Succubus held up the handkerchief, sniffing. “Yeah, it’s a little—”

With a quick move, Succubus pushed the chloroform-soaked handkerchief against Trishna’s face, pushing against the back of the young woman’s head with her left. After a moment of struggle, Trishna fell into Succubus’s arms. “Starlight, this is Succubus. I have Raaj’s kid. She knows the code but she’s not coughing it up, even with my powers. I’m delivering her to you for questioning.”

* * *

Minutes later, Trishna awoke from her deep sleep. She was inside the interrogation room of the Agency mobile headquarters. Trishna could not make out much detail due to the darkness of the room and her own, lingering drowsiness. Her wrists were bound and held overhead by a chain, while her ankles were similarly chained to a link on the floor. She was still wearing her choli and sari.

As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she could make out the silhouette of someone standing in front of her. “Where am I?! Who are you?! What do you want?!” Trishna shouted without stopping to hear a response.

The figure was Starlight who, much like Mirth, was dressed in black with a ninja mask of her own. Only her steely blue eyes could be seen.

“The PIN to your father’s vault. Tell me what it is,” Starlight said in a calm, cold voice.

“Go fuck yourself!” replied Trishna.

“If there’s one thing I can’t stand, it’s a guest being rude to her host,” said Starlight, shaking her head. She flipped a switch on the wall. Two spotlights lit up, one pointing down on Trishna, and a second on a metal tray table in the far right corner of the room. The table held a variety of items: bird feathers, an electric toothbrush, a bottle of scented oil, a cotton swab, and a water pistol.

“Here’s what I’m going to do,” explained Starlight. “I’m going to ask you what the PIN to your father’s vault is. If you tell me, I’ll let you go. If you don’t, the tickling will begin. The more you struggle, the worse the tickling will become. So, one last time, what is the PIN?”

“GO...FUCK...OFF!”

“You brought this on yourself,” Starlight said in disgust. She took the bottle of oil and poured some of the contents into her palm. She then rubbed the oil between her hands and applied it onto the bare skin around Trishna’s neck. “I must say, this dress makes my job easier. You’ll be all slippery and sensitive to my touch in no time.”

Trishna said nothing in return.

Starlight applied the oil to every bare inch of Trishna’s skin: around her neck, along her arms, all over her stomach and back, even on her feet. When Starlight was finished, Trishna’s skin shined under the spotlight’s glow.

The agent picked up a bird feather and gently brushed it around Trishna’s neck in a teasing manner.

Trishna tilted her head from side to side in an attempt to block the feather. “A feather? That’s just fucking stupid!” yelled Trishna.

“It’s just a warm-up,” Starlight replied. She then moved the feather to Trishna’s left armpit.

Trishna twitched slightly, but still said nothing. The feather continued heading south. It brushed along Trishna’s side. Trishna only shivered a little. Then the feather came down to Trishna’s feet. It tickled in between each of her toes, but Trishna quickly curled them up.

“Nothing, eh?” asked Starlight. Trishna didn’t bother to respond to the question. This was not uncommon during Starlight’s torture sessions. The feather would often be more of a minor annoyance than an object of dread. Starlight put the feather aside and picked up the water pistol. Again, she started with Trishna’s neck. This time, the streams of water got a stronger reaction out of Trishna, as she jerked around in place.

“Ahh! That shit is cold!” Trishna screamed.

In the same pattern as before, Starlight headed down Trishna's body with the water pistol: in Trishna's armpits, along her sides, in between her toes. Trishna jerked around with every spray, but it did little to get her free. "Enough of this shit already! I'll tell you the fucking code!" Trishna finally bellowed.

Gee, that was easy. They don't usually break that quickly. She must be spoiled rotten to give in like that, thought Starlight.

"The PIN is 6-2-0-8-5," Trishna said.

"Thank you," replied the agent. She then placed the water pistol on the tray table and turned to leave the interrogation room.

"Wait, you said you would let me go!" Trishna yelled.

"I have to make sure that PIN works first," Starlight said, closing the door behind her.

Once out of the back room, Starlight spoke into her earpiece. "Mirth, do you copy? The PIN is 6-2-0-8-5."

Mirth was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the vault room, meditating. It was her usual routine whenever a mission was moving slowly.

Once she heard the information she had been waiting for, she leapt onto her feet. "It's about damn time," she muttered.

Mirth entered the PIN into the vault's touch-screen, but got an "access denied" response. "Starlight, the PIN isn't working."

Starlight quickly looked on the screen to her laptop computer. "That's not the worst of it. She must have given us an alarm code, because it set off the silent alarm! There are a half-dozen guards headed your way!"

Oh wonderful! Good thing I brought my sword with me, thought Mirth. She unsheathed her katana and took up a fighting stance.

Back in the mobile headquarters, Starlight tried to run damage control. "Succubus, do you copy? Mirth's in trouble. You need to get to the vault room *now!*"

"I'm on my way," Succubus replied. She was making her way down the mansion's main hallway when she was suddenly stopped by someone covering her eyes with their hands.

“Guess who,” Raaj’s voice said.

“Oh I don’t know. Is that you, Sonjay?” replied Succubus.

“Got it in one!” Raaj said as he uncovered her eyes. “Where have you been? I looked everywhere for you.”

“It’s such a large house, I got lost,” Succubus lied.

“Well then, I’ll give you the guided tour. How about we start with my bedroom?” He reached out for Succubus’s arm.

“No, thank you. I think I’ll be leaving,” said the agent as she stepped away.

Raaj grabbed Succubus’s feather boa and pulled it right off her shoulders. “Ha, got your boa! What are going to do to get it back?” he joked playfully.

“Stop being so silly and give me that,” replied Succubus, trying not to raise her voice.

“Okay,” Raaj said, a grin on his face. He took one tip of the boa and brushed it against Succubus’s bare legs. “You said to give it to you, you didn’t say how.”

Succubus was taken back as the boa tickled her and she tripped on her own feet. The agent fell onto her back.

Raaj was quick to pounce, sitting on her stomach and pinning her down. “Someone’s ticklish!” he teased as he began to remove Succubus’s high-heel shoes.

Succubus tried to work her powers on him, but Raaj was enjoying himself too much. His attraction was working against her. “Get off—” was all she managed before Raaj began tickling her feet with the boa, its feathers brushing between her toes. All that could come out of Succubus’s mouth after that was laughter.

Back in the mobile headquarters, Starlight reentered the interrogation room. “You little bitch, you gave me the wrong PIN!” she snarled.

“Who, me? Oops,” replied Trishna in a childish voice.

“I’ve been too nice to you so far,” Starlight warned. “It’s time to get serious.” She extended her index finger and began tracing Trishna’s face. “Everyone has a weak spot. I just need to find yours.”

The agent's finger slowly explored Trishna's body. No matter where the finger went, Trishna's reaction did not change: not her neck, her armpits, or her feet. Starlight's finger was heading back up Trishna's body when she noticed something. As her finger approached Trishna's bare stomach, she would bite her bottom lip. Starlight then brought her finger to Trishna's bellybutton, a rather large and deep innie the size of a quarter. Trishna swallowed hard. The finger entered Trishna's bellybutton, and Trishna let out a shriek like that of a wounded animal.

"Bingo" Starlight whispered.

In the vault room, Mirth was greeted by the half-dozen guards Starlight had warned her about. All of them were burly men in suits and sunglasses, and each was armed with a handgun. No longer worried about the motion-detecting lasers, Mirth could move freely. She would have to in order to defend herself.

"Surrender!" one guard yelled.

Mirth didn't reply. She simply waved her hand, challenging them to fight her. As one of the guards opened fire, Mirth channeled her powers, causing vibrations in the air to slow the bullet down. She easily swatted it away with a well-timed stroke of her katana. More bullets were fired, but they met the same fate. The guards eventually ran out of bullets and holstered their guns.

The security team reached for their secondary weapons: telescopic batons. They charged Mirth simultaneously but Mirth proved to be too quick, dodging their attacks. Her katana reached farther than the guards' weapons as she spun the blade in sideways slashes and forward thrusts, forcing them to keep their distance.

A bold guard leapt forward and Mirth's katana cut into the back of his hand, causing him to drop his baton. She followed through with a roundhouse kick to his head, knocking him out. Hoping to use the opening, another guard advanced from behind. The agent reversed her swing, bringing the sword's pommel into the man's stomach. As he doubled over, Mirth flicked the handle up, striking him in the throat. The guard fell, the pain instantly stealing his consciousness.

A third guard brought his baton down toward Mirth's head, but the teen sidestepped the blow. This man was faster, recovering from the swing much more quickly. The two dueled for a moment, weapons ringing from the impacts, until a well-placed stroke by Mirth split the baton in two. She then followed through with a thrust kick to his chin, knocking him out.

The baton of a fourth guard swung up around Mirth's throat. The agent kicked him in the groin almost without a thought, and then snapped her skull back into his nose. He also fell to the ground, writhing in pain.

The final two guards charged Mirth, one from her left and one from her right. She leapt into the air, her feet lashing out in a double kick, hitting each guard in the face. With that, Mirth was the only person in the room left standing.

With all the guards down, Mirth turned her attention to the vault. If she couldn't open it with the PIN, maybe she could open it with her sword, or her power if need be. Suddenly, she felt a sting in her back that quickly grew overbearingly painful. She had been hit with a Taser. Her whole body shook uncontrollably as electricity flowed through the device. She fell to the ground, hard. The last thing she saw before blacking out was a seventh guard standing over her with the Taser gun in hand.

Succubus was having problems of her own. She couldn't free herself from Raaj's weight as it pressed on top of her and she couldn't command him to stop tickling her as he wasn't giving her the chance to speak. The feather boa brushed along her soles and in between her toes. Succubus was left with nothing to do but laugh and kick her legs wildly.

"I must say, I haven't had this much fun in ages," Raaj said as he grabbed Succubus's right ankle and tickled her foot with the boa.

"GO-HAHA-TO-HEHEHE!" was all Succubus could say as she struggled to reach the chloroform-laced handkerchief in her purse. Succubus had thought the boa would be a perfect accessory for her cover, but she now found herself regretting it.

Suddenly, Raaj stopped tickling Succubus' feet, and instead grabbed and wiggled each of her toes. "This little piggy when to the market, and this little piggy stayed home. This little piggy had roast beef, and this little piggy had none," he cooed.

This gave Succubus the break she needed. Reaching into her purse, she grabbed the chloroform handkerchief. Before she could apply the handkerchief, Raaj finished his rhyme. "And this little piggy cried "wee-wee-wee-wee-wee", all the way home!"

Raaj tickled Succubus' foot with the boa again. Succubus was sent into another laughing fit, and as she uncontrollably flopped her arms about, she dropped the handkerchief out of her reach.

Within the interrogation room of the mobile headquarters, Starlight continued to tease Trishna's bellybutton. She gently raked her index finger's nail around Trishna's navel, just to see the young girl's reaction. Starlight noticed tiny beads of sweat forming on Trishna's forehead. Then Starlight inserted her finger into Trishna's bellybutton and wiggled it about.

"NOT THE BUTTON!" Trishna shrieked.

Starlight wiggled the finger some more. Part of her was amazed how deep the young girl's navel was. The entire first digit of her finger had disappeared into the hole. She quickly pulled her finger out, causing a loud popping noise from the suction.

Starlight then picked up the cotton swab from the tray table. "You know, the bellybutton is often overlooked when bathing," she said as she waved the swab in Trishna's face. "Who knows how dirty yours might be? Here, I'll clean it out for you."

As promised, Starlight flicked the cotton swab into Trishna's bellybutton. Trishna did her best to suck in her stomach, but it wasn't much help. The young woman felt as if an electric shock had shot up her spine.

"AHHAHAHA!" was all that could escape Trishna's lips. Starlight pushed the cotton swab deeper and began to twirl it, causing Trishna's bellybutton to change from a circular shape to more of spiral. Trisha thrashed around in her chains, but it did little good. She tried to arch her body from side to side, but Starlight held Trishna's

stomach in place with one hand while probing her bellybutton with the swab.

“Tell me the PIN!” ordered Starlight.

“HEHEHEHE-FUCK YOU-HEHEHE!” Trishna managed to bellow. Starlight pushed the swab harder into Trishna’s bellybutton, which broke it in two and rendering it useless. For a moment, Trishna was able to catch her breath.

Starlight turned to the tray table. “That leaves one toy left,” she said, reaching for the electric toothbrush.

Mirth slowly awoke. She hadn’t completely come to her senses just yet, but she could tell her hands were handcuffed behind her back. Her feet were also handcuffed together at the ankles. She realized she was still on the floor of the vault room, and that her ninja mask had been removed. The seventh guard stood over her.

“Normally, I report intruders to Master Raaj right away,” the guard said. “But since you beat the shit out of my friends, I think I’ll play with you first.”

Mirth shook head her, trying to snap herself out of the haze she was in.

The guard removed the shoes and socks from Mirth’s feet, and then presented a cattle prod to her. “See this? I have it set on low. It’ll only tickle.” He brought the prod to the sole of Mirth’s right foot.

Mirth’s whole body shook and a tiny chuckle, like the squeak of a mouse, escaped her lips.

“Who sent you?” the guard asked.

When Mirth said nothing, he Tasered her left foot again, keeping the prod there longer than before. Mirth shook violently and chuckled out loud.

“Who sent you?” he asked again.

When there was no reply he continued, first the left foot, then the right. Sometimes he would stop in between and ask her who sent her, other times he wouldn’t bother.

Whether it was due to her strong will, or the fact the tickling made it impossible for her to form coherent speech, she wouldn’t answer. The guard started to become annoyed, and began holding the

Taser to Mirth's feet for much longer intervals. Mirth bit her lower lip in pain.

Then the guard stopped, and Mirth had a moment to breathe. Her face was covered with her sweat-matted hair. "Someone thinks they're tough, eh? We'll see about that," the guard said. He flipped Mirth onto her back, and ripped apart the cloth above Mirth's midriff. "You'll talk. They always talk," he threatened.

Trishna's eyes grew wide as Starlight presented the electric toothbrush to her. "You are one fucked-up bitch," Trishna spat in disgust.

"Me? I'm just doing my duty," Starlight replied before turning the toothbrush on. The bristles whirled and hummed. Starlight began moving the toothbrush along Trishna's hip bones.

The bristles were far worse than Starlight's finger or the cotton swab. They weren't as soft and forgiving. The sound of Trishna's screaming laughter echoed through the van.

Starlight moved the toothbrush along Trishna's side. The young woman trashed about to avoid the toothbrush, but it didn't help matters. Starlight then moved the toothbrush in between each of Trishna's ribs. "HAHAHAA- STOP!!!!" Trishna screamed as her throat began to become sore.

"Tell me the correct PIN and this will all end," replied Starlight.

Suddenly, Trishna could no longer hear the toothbrush spinning. Maybe the toothbrush's battery had died, or maybe Starlight had given up. Trishna did not care, she was just glad she was not being tickled anymore.

But it was just Starlight giving Trishna a sliver of false hope. Starlight revealed a second toothbrush in her left hand. She quickly inserted one toothbrush's head inside Trishna's bellybutton and used the other along her captive's ribs and hipbones.

This was too much for Trishna. She laughed and howled for what felt like forever. Her hair was a mess from shaking her head about. Her body was covered in a mixture of oil and sweat. Her voice was almost gone from all the screaming and laughing. She couldn't

take much more of this. She would pass out from the lack of oxygen at this rate.

“AAHAHAHA-I’LL TELL YOU-HEEHEHEE-I’LL TELL YOU THE PIN-HAHAHA-JUST PLEASE STOP TICKLING ME!!!” screeched Trishna as if it were the last thing she would ever say.

With that, Starlight turned the toothbrushes off.

Mirth clinched her teeth together as the guard Tasered her stomach. It was far more painful than when he had Tasered her feet; it did not tickle at all. He must have increased the voltage. If that weren’t enough, he was not stopping to question her. This wasn’t about getting information; this was about getting payback for his fellow guards.

All that ran through Mirth’s mind was the pain. She could not focus on anything else.

Suddenly, Mirth’s eyes began to glow blue. Her power had kicked in, and given all the stress she was under, it kicked in a *big* way. The entire mansion began to shake.

In the hallway, Raaj was still tickling Succubus with the feather boa when he suddenly felt the vibrations from Mirth’s power. He stopped. “An earthquake?” he asked in a puzzled tone.

With this window of opportunity open, Succubus placed her hand on Raaj’s cheek. “Enough fun, Raaj,” she said, hiding her annoyance with him behind a concerned tone. “You must see to your guests’ safety.”

“Y–yes of course,” stuttered Raaj, suddenly elated at the thought of playing hero for Succubus. Both stood and made their way toward the ballroom, where the guests were already panicking and ducking for cover.

The vibrations continued. Starlight could even feel a slight rumble from within the mobile headquarters. Trishna’s senses were so overloaded that she couldn’t have cared less about what was happening.

In the vault room, the guard lost his footing and fell to the ground. Mirth acted on instinct and kicked him in the face. With that, the young agent was able to calm down and her powers subsided. The glow around her eyes faded alongside the vibrations. She carefully slid her feet around her back, managing to get her legs through the loop formed by her bound arms. With her arms now in front of her, she took the handcuffs' keys from the guard's belt. She freed herself from the restraints and rested for a moment on the floor.

"Mirth? Mirth? Are you alright?" Starlight spoke into her earpiece.

"Oh, I'm just taking a break," Mirth managed to reply.

Starlight turned her attention back to Trishna. She presented one of the electric toothbrushes to the young girl as a reminder of what would happen if she were to lie again. "The PIN, the right one this time," she demanded.

Trishna let out a sharp sigh, as if declaring defeat, and said "1-1-2-8-0."

"You got that? 1-1-2-8-0," repeated Starlight.

"Yeah. 1-1-2-8-0," Mirth mumbled.

The teen slowly made her way onto her feet and limped to the vault. She entered the PIN into the touch-screen and, to her relief, received an "access granted" response. With that, she opened the vault and grabbed the Three-Eyed Tiger mask.

"That's it. Mission accomplished." With that, she slipped out of the mansion through the same ceiling vent she had entered through.

Back in the van, Starlight pinched a nerve in Trishna's neck to knock the younger woman out. "Let's get you back inside, your highness," she muttered scathingly.

In the ballroom, Raaj's panicked guests began to get back on their feet and step out of their hiding spaces.

"Is everyone okay?" Raaj asked as entered the ballroom. "Those crazy Los Angeles earthquakes, right? Don't let them ruin your fun! Get this party restarted!"

The guests went back to their partying as if almost nothing happened.

Raaj exited the ballroom and was confronted by Succubus. “Was that to your liking, my love?” he asked.

“Ah, good enough.” She slid the waiting handkerchief over his mouth and nose. “Now go to sleep.”

She left him on a couch in the living room, an empty bottle of wine in his arms.

After cleaning off Trishna’s skin, Starlight deposited the young woman in her bedroom. Despite what she’d been through, she seemed to be sleeping peacefully as Starlight snuck out. *Maybe she’ll think it was all just some an odd dream*, the agent mused as she slipped into the mansion’s shadows once again.

* * *

Several hours later, Starlight, Mirth, and Succubus were back in the Agency’s conference room, handing the Three-Eyed Tiger Mask to Mr. Nathan.

“Well done, agents,” the Agency Director said. “Did all go according to plan?”

“There were some minor hiccups here and there, but nothing we couldn’t handle,” replied Mirth.

“Excellent! We’ll soon crack the mysteries of this mask.” He looked up and, seeing the dubious expressions of the agents, cracked a smile. “Well, if there are any to be found.

“As a reward,” Mr. Nathan continued, “I think the three of you deserve some R&R time. As of this moment, you are off-duty. One of our company aircraft will be waiting for you at the airfield in the hour, with orders to fly you to Hawaii!”

The agents all squealed with glee at the announcement.

* * *

One plane ride later, Starlight, Mirth, and Succubus were on the island of Hawaii, visiting the local beaches. While Succubus was off flirting with surfer boys, Starlight and Mirth relaxed in their bikinis, sunbathing.

Something troubled Starlight as she turned to see Mirth lying in a position very similar to the one Starlight had seen in her premonition.

“Mirth? Are you sleeping?” she asked.

“Nah, I’m up. What is it?” replied Mirth.

“Remember how Mr. Nathan caught me sleeping in the conference room the other day?”

“Yeah.” Mirth smirked. “That was kind of hilarious.”

“While I was asleep... well, I was having a dream about you.”

“A dream about me? I’m flattered. What were we doing?” The younger woman’s voice was laced with innuendo.

“Not *that* kind of dream,” Starlight said in deadly serious tone. “It was one of my premonitions. I dreamt that you were captured and tortured by an enemy of the Agency. And at the end... well, you joined them.”

“An enemy? Who?” Mirth’s tone suddenly became just as serious.

“I don’t know. I woke up before that part was revealed to me,” Starlight explained. “My power works in vague ways. The visions I have can be events that will happen days, months, or even years from now. I can never tell. It just worries me that there is a chance we might become bitter enemies.”

Mirth quickly shrugged off Starlight’s last remarks. “Hey, we’re in paradise right now. You know the saying, ‘Don’t worry, be happy.’ So be happy. I would never turn against the Agency, not in a million years.”

Starlight exhaled sharply. “I wish I could see the bright side of everything the way you do, Mirth.”

“I swear I will never, ever use my power against you, Starlight. We’re like sisters, and we’ve got each other’s backs,” Mirth promised.

That was enough to ease Starlight’s mind and both she and Mirth went back to resting in the sunlight.

But then, Starlight felt a strange tingle. *What is that?* she thought. She could feel it in her stomach, along her ribs and hip bones. It was vibrating, and it tickled. Starlight began to giggle. She rubbed her stomach to rid herself of the tickling sensation. She then turned to Mirth to see her wiggling her fingers. She was using her vibrations as a method to tickle Starlight.

Mirth raised her free hand to show her index and middle fingers were crossed. “Well, maybe not ‘never, ever.’”

Starlight said nothing. Instead, she reached over with her fingers and tickled Mirth’s stomach as revenge.

The Talisman written by Munchausen

A tickle torture story written in *The Ruthless* universe.

Edited by: Jonathan Essex



Transcript: Official Debrief of Detectives Angeline Drake and Frank Bannerman by Agent Colleen Sims, Re: Project 9. 6/3/20XX.

BANNERMAN: You realize what an awkward position this is for Detective Drake and me? Investigating some top secret paranormal phenomena without really knowing what we're doing ourselves?

SIMS: Of course we recognize that. I can only reassure you that you will be given as much information as we are able to divulge. But part of this, yes, is working assignments that you may never be allowed to understand fully.

DRAKE: So, you're willing to throw all this money at us, all this gear, security clearance, support, even certain legal immunities, but we don't qualify as need-to-know?

SIMS: That's it exactly, Detective.

BANNERMAN: Well, as long as we trust each other, right?

SIMS: Please understand, even I am not told everything. I don't know exactly how many people are, but I'm certain you could count them on the fingers of one hand. You should not read our secrecy as a sign of a lack of confidence or trust in you.

BANNERMAN: It literally is, though.

SIMS: What?

BANNERMAN: A lack of confidence. You are emphatically and pointedly not confiding in us.

SIMS: I concede that. I apologize. But we clearly think enough of the two of you to give you what amounts to a 70% pay raise, access to millions of dollars worth of top secret tech, and the kind of powers and clearances usually reserved for the very top levels of the NSA. And all to do work that will simultaneously be safer and potentially far more important than your work in Homicide.

DRAKE: But you can't, or won't, tell us precisely why it's so important?

SIMS: (Audible sigh). I can tell you that you will be dealing with forces and phenomena beyond the imagining of the population at large. Look, anybody who does what you do, on any level, knows that there are things going on that must remain secret, even from people whose work may influence them directly. As you go, you will undoubtedly come to discover more of what this is all about on your own. That is inevitable, and ultimately, no doubt, desirable. But there are some questions – many questions – that I will never be able to answer. Now, will you accept what is, by any measure, the opportunity of a lifetime?

One week later

"So what should we call ourselves?" Angeline asked.

Bannerman shrugged. "What's wrong with Angeline and Frank? Or, if we want to be formal, Agents Drake and Bannerman?"

To the eye, the two were a study in contrasts. Angeline Drake, tall, lithe, muscular, was all flowing, graceful motion. She moved effortlessly through some whirling, high-kicking kata that could just as well have been a dance. On the other side of their newly-acquired, lavish office, where the mats and martial arts gear transitioned into more conventional furnishings, Frank Bannerman sat motionless, his eyes hidden behind the dark glasses he wore indoors and out. His dark suit was impeccable; his freshly shaven head gleamed in the lamplight.

"We've got to call ourselves something," Angeline continued. "Sims and her people went to the trouble and expense to make us a special unit, put us up in these ridiculously swanky digs, outfit us with ridiculous tech. We can't just be us."

"Swanky?"

"Full of swank," Angeline said lightly. She wore yoga pants and a sports bra, her taut abs and strong arms and shoulders exposed, and she was barefoot. Her long, lustrous hair, black with natural deep brown highlights, was pulled back in a ponytail. Frank watched, expressionless, as she sprang from a somersault into a spinning kick. She wasn't even breathing hard.

"All right," Bannermand conceded. "How about the Paranormal Investigation Specialist Squad? Or the Agency of Supernatural Specialists?"

Angeline finished her workout with a flourish of kicks and then draped a towel over her shoulders. "How about you be Detective Inspector of Creepy....something with K, so it spells dick?" she said.

"Ha." Frank rarely laughed, but he sometimes gave a monosyllabic "ha" to indicate amusement. His phone buzzed once; he checked it. "You better get showered. We've got work."

Ten minutes later, Angeline emerged, toweling her waist-length hair. She was still barefoot, carrying a pair of black pumps in her hand, but she had changed into a sharp black jacket and short but businesslike skirt.

From his seat at one of the office's large, oak desks, Frank took a moment to appreciate her beauty: her high, sculpted cheekbones, her dark, long-lashed eyes, the distinctive cast that her Japanese grandmother gave her delicate features. Professional as he was, Frank Bannerman never entertained thoughts of a relationship with her; rather, he admired her with the detached composure of one regarding a particularly striking work of art.

"OK, what have we got?" she asked, plopping down on a black leather couch and propping her feet on an ottoman. Frank raised an eyebrow — she was clearly making the most of the plush new office space. She grinned, stuck out her tongue, and wiggled her toes.

"Remember Reginald Putigny?"

"How could I forget?" Angeline grimaced.

The year before, then-detectives Angeline and Frank had been partners in Homicide. Even though it had been their first assignment, the two had gelled immediately. Each was elite in every sense, standing head and shoulders above their colleagues. Working together, they had amplified each other's strengths even as their personalities had proved eminently, if unpredictably, compatible.

It was tempting to think of them as yin and yang, dark and light, though both would be quick to joke about the racial or ethnic overtones of both comparisons. At the core, they were very similar: driven, dedicated, motivated by an easily outraged sense of justice and

a desire to protect the weak from those who would victimize or exploit them. Beyond that, though, they were very different in bearing and approach. Angeline was intuitive and empathetic, able both to comfort victims and read suspects like a book. She radiated energy, both in her toned, muscular body and in her demeanor; she had a ready laugh and a streetwise air that made an intriguing contrast to her stunning beauty.

Frank, on the other hand, seemed to outsiders almost like a machine. Cool and unflappable, always impeccably dressed, he seemed never to waste a motion; he was a paragon of economy and control. His factual recall was astonishing, and while his strength was rationality and logic, he was also a keen reader of people's motivations. For all that he seemed the formal, buttoned-down intellectual, Angeline knew very well that he was a remarkable physical specimen, as well, all lean muscle beneath his tailored coats. For all her flashy combat acrobatics, she never for a moment underestimated Frank's abilities: she had once seen him take down five pool-cue-wielding skinheads by himself, barehanded, without so much as losing a cufflink.

Their real strength, of course, came in their ability to crack seemingly unsolvable cases. They quickly achieved something like superstar status with a series of high profile busts. Six months ago, when pretty, photogenic young women began to be abducted one by one, leading to a media frenzy, they were transferred to Missing Persons so the mayor could say he had his top cops on the case.

Their investigation led them to a seventy-two-year-old billionaire named Reginald Putigny. He'd had no criminal record, had owned an import/export company until his retirement, and had lived an entirely unassuming life by the standards of the super-wealthy. Then, suddenly, he had taken to paying local gang members enormous sums to bring him beautiful young women — from clubs, from college campuses, anywhere — that he kept locked up in a soundproofed basement in his sprawling mansion. By the time they caught up with him, he had five of them, taken over a span of three months. They had been well-treated and fed, kept them in relative comfort, allowed them to bathe and supplied with clean clothes.

Every night though, he would choose one, sometimes two, lock them into some elaborate, medieval-style bondage apparatus, and tickle them unmercifully with an array of tools. Their shrieks and screams of laughter had apparently filled him with bizarre, gleeful energy, and he kept it up for hours on end. When Frank and Angeline had broken down the door to the basement chambers and found the traumatized girls, Putigny had collapsed into a heap, sobbing and begging for forgiveness.

Angeline's toes curled involuntarily at the thought of what he'd put those girls through. "Isn't that creepy old bastard in some psych facility?" she asked.

"Yes, he is. He lost everything, even his house. But here's the thing: the Dingus Sims gave us is reading a strong supernatural signature originating at his address."

"The Dingus," as Frank called it, was a peculiar item they had been issued with the new office. Neither of them was entirely certain what it was. Their immediate superior, Federal Agent Sims, was characteristically taciturn about it. Still, it was apparently central to their operations. It was an ivory rod, ornately carved with various complex runes and ciphers. Frank, more familiar than most with ancient languages, could recognize bits and pieces of alphabets he'd encountered before, but they spanned continents, cultures, and centuries in a completely illogical and baffling way, and he could make no sense of any of them. The rod was encased in a sleek metallic sheath, which was in turn hooked in to the office mainframe. Whatever arcane signals it transmitted were somehow received and translated by the mainframe into intelligible messages: in this case, a mystical energy signature and a street address – Putigny's, in this case.

"Who's living there now?"

Frank looked back at the computer on the desk in front of him and clicked the mouse a couple of times. "According to this, the buyer is renting it out to two young women. Lindsey McCall, age 24, hostess at a downtown restaurant and part time personal trainer; and Valerie Martell, 25, law student. Neither seems to have any connection to Putigny."

"And this signal just showed up today?"

“About half an hour ago.”

Angeline pursed her lips, thinking. “So, what, we just go get it? Can we do that?”

Frank smiled. “We’re the Feds now. We can do lots of things, as long as we keep them quiet.”

“All right, then. Let’s go commandeer a magic doohickey.”

Three hours earlier

Lindsey McCall was just reflecting on how boring her day off was turning out to be when the doorbell rang. The petite blonde blew her bangs out of her eyes, switched off the *Notorious Housewives of Wherever* marathon she’d been mentally mocking, and bounced off the couch to investigate.

Valerie, her roommate, met her at the door. Tall and slender, with long, wavy, dark brown hair and a face graced with arch, intimidating beauty that bespoke intelligence and sensuality, Valerie naturally fell into a big sisterly role to Lindsey’s perky ingénue. Lindsey, with her shoulder-length, honey-blonde hair and gymnast’s body (despite her incongruously large breasts) seemed, in appearance and personality, the perpetual kid sister. The way they were dressed on a Saturday afternoon bore out the contrast: Lindsey was barefoot in a tight pair of white cotton shorts and a t-shirt that left her trim, toned belly exposed, while Valerie wore a flattering button-down shirt with the cuffs folded back, a pair of low-rise jeans that emphasized her slender waist, and black flip flops. She had been studying, and still wore the black-rimmed reading glasses that Lindsey joked made her look like a naughty librarian. She raised one eyebrow at her bounding roommate, gave a gently mocking smile, and made a little “after you” gesture toward the door.

Lindsey opened the door to find no one there. Puzzled, she looked down to find an odd package by her bubblegum-pink painted toes. “Hunh,” she said, picking it up. “Did you hear the UPS truck?”

“Nope. In fact, I was sitting right by the front picture window, and I never saw or heard anybody drive up,” Valerie said. She leaned past Lindsey to take a long look out the door in both directions. “That’s really weird.”

Lindsey pursed her lips and looked the parcel over. It was small, and quite light, wrapped in dark, brownish-green paper. It bore a variety of stamps and postmarks from a stunning array of locations: Jakarta, Antwerp, Chichen Itza. "This thing's been all over the world."

"That doesn't make any sense. Why would it pass through all these places unopened? Where did it come from, and why is it here?" Valerie stood behind Lindsey, regarding the package over her shoulder.

"Ugh. The paper feels kind of...oily. But it's not leaving any on my fingers," Lindsey said. "There's no name on it. Just this address."

"It's most likely for the guy who lived here before." They all knew the house's unpleasant recent history, of course. It was why they'd been able to get this beautiful old house in this venerable, wooded neighborhood so cheaply. Houses that had belonged to kidnapper/torturers were tough to rent for top dollar, but Lindsey and Valerie had jumped at the reduced rate. Neither of them was particularly easy to creep out, and the whole place had been renovated and repainted since it had all happened.

"Oooh," Lindsey said. "What kind of pervy stuff do you think a guy like that would have delivered?"

"We really shouldn't open this," Valerie said, raising an eyebrow. "It's not addressed to us."

"Sure it is. We live here. It's addressed here, to this house. No names. It's, like, 'current occupant.'" Lindsey was already tearing into the strange, slick paper. Valerie looked on, fascinated.

Inside was a small, unadorned lead box containing a small charm. The object was about the size of a half dollar coin. It was a pair of bare feet, carved in a silvery metal, soles facing out. They were side-by-side, with an opening where the arches formed a kind of elliptical bowl. The soles looked distinctly feminine, somehow, and were rendered in great detail, each wrinkle and contour lovingly represented. At the apex of the space between them, where the balls of the feet came together, was mounted a perfectly round, beautiful red gemstone. It seemed extraordinarily old, and was like nothing either of them had ever seen before.

“It’s so cute!” Lindsey chirped. “Look at the little feet! The bottoms even have little crinklies! They just make you want to tickle them!” She ran the tip of one fingernail over them and gave a little giggle.

Ordinarily, Valerie would have met Lindsey’s bubbleheaded assessment of what could well be a centuries-old artifact with derision. She had to admit, though, that the little carved, silver feet had evoked the same response in her. That response, and another which she would not ordinarily have expressed out loud, but now found herself speaking.

“It looks like something else, too,” she said, her voice a little husky. She traced the slim, oblong gap between the arches, surmounted by the small crimson gem.

Lindsey blushed. “What do you mean?” she asked, though she had a pretty good idea.

“It looks like a, um, pussy,” Valerie said, after a brief search for more agreeable synonyms had come up empty. “See? This little jewel here is the clit.” She gave it a loving little flick with her fingernail.

“You’re bad,” Lindsey said, giving her housemate a playful little shove. She had to admit, though, that Valerie’s observation was on target. It was one of those things that, once you had noticed it, you could then ignore.

Valerie was a little surprised at herself. The observation and language were not the kind of things she typically expressed, at least not without a couple of drinks in her. But the little charm struck a funny mood in her, stirred her up in ways she really didn’t have the time to indulge with the amount of studying she had to do. She shook her head as if to clear it and returned to the big plush chair by the window, where a pile of books awaited her on the ottoman. “Anyway, better leave it alone until we can find out more about it. It might be worth a lot of money or something. Or it might be stolen from a museum somewhere. I’d dig around online if I had the time, but I’m buried in work right now.” She sank into the chair, slipped out of her flip flops, and propped her bare feet, crossed at the ankles, on the ottoman. She opened a book and began to read, making notes in the margins.

Lindsey sat down across the room from Valerie and studied the little charm, turning it over in her hands. Part of her wanted to start Googling to try to figure out what it was and where it had come from. But she found herself oddly reluctant to move from where she was. She felt this vague, warm, buzzy feeling, faint, but growing. It seemed to flow from the little amulet through her fingers through her body, making her scalp tingle, her toes curl, and, she had to admit, her nipples stiffen. The rational part of her wanted to put the thing back in its box — however good it made her feel, anything that could affect her like this was likely to be trouble — but something compelled her to hold on.

As she sat there, studying the little charm, she felt her eyes strangely drawn, again and again, to the bottoms of Valerie's bare feet. Lindsey had never experienced any significant attraction to women, much less to their feet. During the six months that she had lived with Valerie, they had seen each other barefoot all the time. It had likely been more often than not, whether getting ready in the mornings, walking around wrapped in towels or robes after showers, or just relaxing around the house. In all that time, she had never given it a second thought, but she found herself fascinated. Valerie's feet were bigger than hers, slender and elegant, with high arches and long toes, their nails glistening with clear polish. They were golden-tanned, and as Valerie sat absorbed in her studies, she moved them expressively, sometimes spreading the toes of one foot, then the other, sometimes rubbing the sole of one across the top of the other. Lindsey watched the soft soles smooth and wrinkle as Valerie unconsciously flexed and relaxed them.

Little barefoot tease, she found herself thinking out of nowhere. The odd hypocrisy of this impulse didn't occur to her as she sat barefoot herself, glancing repeatedly, obsessively, at Valerie's bare soles. It was a thought so alien to her, so weirdly impulsive and erotic, but it seemed to flow organically from her own consciousness.

Valerie was absorbed in her reading. Occasionally, she would touch the tip of her pencil to her elegant lips, or toss her deep brown locks back out of her eyes. But her feet kept up a slow, steady, busy kind of movement; unconsciously, she rubbed them together, wiggled

or curled her toes tight, stretched and flexed them. It was all subtle, not at all the kind of thing Lindsey would have noticed on an ordinary day. But now, as she clutched the odd little charm in her hands, she found herself mesmerized. She was tingling all over, now, her panties wet.

Oooh, she needs it, Lindsey thought, though it again did not seem to come entirely from her own mind. Lindsey drew in her breath, putting the charm down on the sofa as Valerie's busy toes and flexing feet occupied her full attention. *Get her!!!*

And in an instant, Lindsey found herself fairly leaping across the room to seize the astonished Valerie's ankles under her arm in a death-grip.

"Lindsey? What the fu—
NANANANAHAHAHAHOOOO!!!"

Valerie's body jumped like she'd been hit with a cattleprod as Lindsey began scribbling her fingernails ravenously over the soles of her trapped, bare feet. Eyes wide with a mix of panic, bafflement, and hilarity, Valerie burst into giggles, her rich, slightly sultry voice raised in peals of ticklish laughter. She and Lindsey were friends, certainly, and enjoyed a good-humored and relaxed relationship, but they had met as adults, and had to this point never developed anything like the playfully physical relationship that would make an impromptu tickle-attack between twenty-something women seem normal. Part of Valerie's mind registered all of this while the majority lit up with uncontrollable tickle-response. She tried, occasionally, to blurt out words. "Linds—st-stahahahap—Pleeheheeease!!" Each halting monosyllable was inevitably drowned in a fresh peal of giggles and guffaws.

Lindsey was in a kind of ecstasy. She had thrilled to find Valerie's fetching, teasing, bare feet so delightfully ticklish. A kind of preorgasmic shudder had shot through her body like electricity when those toes had first clenched and wiggled in response to her nails skittering across the soft, smooth soles. Now she held on for all she was worth, and tormented those captive feet with a fiendish array of techniques that would likely not have occurred to her an hour before. She seemed to have tapped into an intuitive catalogue of foot-tickling

approaches, each of which proved more devastatingly effective than the last. When she walked two fingernails rapidly up and down Valerie's arches, Valerie whooped and struggled and clenched her toes; when her toes were clenched, Lindsey tickled the spaces between them from the tops, or ever-so-lightly skittered all four nails over Valerie's newly-wrinkly soles, evoking fresh shrieks of laughter and making her abandon the erstwhile toe-curling defense. When Valerie tried unsuccessfully to lessen the tickling by wiggling her long toes wildly, Lindsey took advantage by tickling up under her little toe-stems. She then grabbed both big toes in one hand and scribbled the fingertips of the other up and down her roommate's long, stretched-taut bare soles. She moved methodically from Valerie's slightly rough, but recently-pumiced heels (giggles), up to the bowl her high arches made as they pressed together (wild cackles). She moved to the prominent balls of her feet (squeals of laughter) to the undersides of her pinned-back toes (shrieks). Lindsey moved her fingers gradually back down in a station-to-station approach that reduced her dreadfully ticklish victim to a helpless, shuddering, giggling wreck.

By the time Valerie was writhing in silent laughter, tears streaming over her high, sculpted cheekbones, her soles pink with overstimulation, the urge became almost unbearable for Lindsey. She had been semi-consciously squeezing her thighs together as she had become more and more inflamed. Now, she felt an uncontrollable desire to thrust a hand inside her panties and finger herself to orgasm. She dropped Valerie's feet, leaving the other to collapse back in her chair, gasping and rubbing the over-tickled soles of her feet against the ottoman. Lindsey hesitated, panting. She couldn't bring herself to do it, not there in front of her friend, no matter out of it she was. The real Lindsey and the new, alien impulses struggled against one another.

"Lindsey.... What the hell?" Valerie croaked. She pushed her disheveled hair back from her face and picked up her glasses, which had become dislodged during her thrashing. "That was awful."

Lindsey's face flushed even more deeply than before. Her whole body was trembling; she was simultaneously mortified and quaking

with sexual excitement. “I’m...I’m so sorry. I don’t.... I... have to go.”

With that she ran up the stairs to her bedroom, leaving an exhausted and perplexed Valerie behind.

Valerie took a few deep breaths and managed to climb out of her seat. She felt bizarre, as well, and not just because she’d just been ambushed and foot-tickled out of her mind in the middle of studying. She was drained, exhausted, but as she recovered and caught her breath, she found that she was also increasingly horny. It wasn’t just the languorous arousal bred from boredom that leads so many college students to take the occasional masturbatory study break; she knew that well enough after three semesters of law school, and this was different. This was a kind of crackling energy that seemed to start in the still-tingling soles of her bare feet and course through her body, targeting predictable and familiar spots.

Why would having her feet tickled – and by another woman, albeit an undeniably cute one – make her feel this way? She had always been unwaveringly straight in terms of sexual preference, and she had certainly never felt any predilection for tickling or being tickled. But now, in this moment, she felt as turned on as she could remember ever being.

There was only one way she was going to get any work done, she told herself, and that was to deal with this. A few minutes with her vibrator and she’d be right back at it, refreshed and focused. She started to go back to her own room, approaching masturbation as she often did with an almost businesslike efficiency, when she saw the little charm gleaming at her from the sofa. She picked it up and turned it side to side in the light. She found herself stroking it gently – the feet, tops and bottoms, then the little gem, stroking it with a little circling motion she had often used on herself.

She was becoming more and more aroused, but her thoughts began to stray from the solitude of her bedroom. She began thinking about little Lindsey, alone in her room, and what she might do to that little tight body of hers. Her thoughts were her own, but not her own. There seemed to be another voice in her head, a voice like her own,

but laced with a kind of erotic menace. “*Little tramp,*” it said. “*How dare she? She needs a taste of her own medicine, that’s what she needs.*”

Lindsey’s whole personality gave the impression, somehow, of extreme ticklishness. She was bubbly, giggly, energetic, still very much the cheerleader she was in high school and college in terms of perkiness and pep. Suddenly Valerie’s mind went to one among perhaps a hundred innocuous, chirpy little Tweets from Lindsey the week before: “Mani/pedi...AAAAAH!!!! Torture!!! #ticklishfeet ☺.” Valerie felt a thrill of arousal shudder through her, imagining her blonde friend writhing and bouncing in the chair as some dead-eyed nail tech pumiced her arches.

None of this was characteristic of Valerie. The real Valerie didn’t get wet thinking about things like tickling, especially not tickling a girlfriend. The normal Valerie, on the rare occasion that she got powerfully horny when she had a mountain of studying to do, would have taken care of herself quickly and expeditiously and gotten back to it – the sexual equivalent of a smoke break. But today that wouldn’t be enough; she needed something different. She needed to make Lindsey giggle and squirm and gasp and scream.

Not quite yet. Look in the cellar first, the strange voice in her head said, for the first time not seeming to echo Valerie’s own unconscious notions. Puzzled but unable to resist, she opened the cellar door and, still barefoot, descended the cold stone steps into darkness.

* * *

Frank was driving. Angeline sat next to him, legal pad and pen in hand. She was often defiantly low-tech. At the top of the front page, she had written, “What We Know” and underlined it with a flourish. Beneath were the words, “Putigny. Kidnapper. Compulsive. Young women. Torture (tickling). Breakdown at capture. In psych ward, 300 miles from house.”

“What else have we got?” she asked. “Do we know if anything else among his possessions sets this thing off?”

“Nope. All we know is that something in his house, right now, started setting this off less than an hour ago, and that the signal has been getting stronger. I wouldn’t mind running by the storage facility where this guy’s stuff is impounded and run this thing by it. Somehow, though, I bet our new bosses would long since have picked anything like that up.”

“So we’ve got nothing else to go on? We don’t know whether we’re looking for a weapon, or a ring, or a book, or a... baboon?”

“I see a baboon with a weapon, I’m throwing down,” Frank said. “But you’re right; we don’t know. I did call his lead doctor at the psych facility while you were getting fresh as a daisy. Evidently Mr. Putigny, while he’s still deeply fucked up, is showing no signs of interest in or excitement about tickling. It’s like the drive, fetish, paraphilia, whatever, never even existed.”

“Like he was... possessed or something.”

“Yep.”

“Makes you feel real good about tracking down an unknown magical artifact at his old house, doesn’t it?”

“Doesn’t it just?”

* * *

Laden with the gear she had found behind a loose panel in the cellar wall, Valerie crept up to Lindsey’s bedroom door. Old Putigny had evidently hidden a cache of bondage gear that the police had missed. She could see why, as she would never have dreamed of finding it until the little voice in her head had told her where to look. Inside she had found various nylon ropes, padded cuffs, and other instruments of amorous restraint. The notion of using them on Lindsey made her positively gush.

Valerie had stripped down to her underwear – a rather modest but undeniably sexy white cotton bra and panties. It had seemed the natural thing to do. The crotch of her panties was soaked with her excitement; she was constantly fighting the urge to touch herself. *Not*

yet, the voice said. Clutched in her left hand, the little charm seemed to pulse with heat and life.

She paused a moment to listen at the door. She heard, predictably, Lindsey moaning softly, the bedsprings bouncing gently. Cracking the door, she peeked inside.

Lindsey had stripped to her panties, her tight, tanned body glistening with sweat. One arm was wrapped around her breasts, squeezing them against her; her erect nipples peeked out over her forearm. Her other hand was plunged inside her brief black panties, fingers alternately pinching and circling her clit. As Lindsey watched, aflame with arousal, Lindsey let out a little strangled cry, arched her back to thrust her crotch against her frantically massaging hand, and came in what must have been a seismic event. Every muscle of her body went taut; her toes curled tight; her fingers thrusting far inside her to deepen and prolong the waves of her coming. At last, she collapsed on the bed, spent.

At that moment, Valerie made her move, leaping upon the limp, sweaty form of her roommate. Lindsey squealed in alarm, but didn't fight as Valerie, with a bizarre instinct for bondage that belied her utter lack of experience, bound the other woman's wrists to the bedposts. Grabbing the honey-blonde vixen's ankles in a grip of uncharacteristic strength, Valerie tied her ankles together with a soft but strong nylon rope, then propped her little, bare feet on top of an extra pillow. There she was, all laid out for tickling – smooth shaven armpits, rippling abs, and crinkly bare soles on display. Valerie nearly growled with lust.

“And what were you doing in here, you little slut? You tickled poor Val half to death, then scampered off to finger yourself over it? That hardly seems fair, does it?”

Lindsey's cornflower-blue eyes were wild, her honey-blonde hair loose around her tanned shoulders, her firm bare breasts heaving with fear and excitement. She licked her lips. “What are you gonna do to me?” she asked, her voice simultaneously childish and husky with desire. She had always hated to be tickled, snapping her elbows to her sides with desperate force when someone grabbed at her sides, kicking out wildly at friends and boyfriends alike when they dared to run a

finger over her soles. Now, though, she felt decidedly different – even in the immediate aftermath of orgasm, she was hungry for a kind of touch she had never craved before. It was clear that a big part of her was quite eager to suffer Valerie’s revenge.

Valerie leapt on Lindsey like a wildwoman, beginning with her helpless, exposed underarms. She scrabbled her fingertips in their smooth hollows in a way that made Lindsey explode into helpless giggles. The headboard creaked as the tiny but surprisingly strong blonde wrenched against her bonds, striving in vain to close her armpits against the not-entirely unwelcome, but devastatingly tickly invaders. Without missing a beat, Valerie slid her hands to Lindsey’s waist, tickling her firm, taut, but still quite susceptible belly and sides with a combination of savage abandon and stunningly effective technique. Lindsey could only buck and heave, screaming with cute, hoarse-voiced laughter as Valerie tickled her upper body. Having come so recently had left Lindsey, who felt like a candidate for world’s most ticklish person on any given day, hyper-sensitized, and as Valerie’s dexterous hands danced from ticklish spot to ticklish spot, from her poor underarms to her ribs to her writhing belly, she threw her head back and howled with ticklish laughter. All the while it was as if each ticklish sensation somehow echoed in her nipples, in her clit, deep within the sopping wetness between her thighs.

The talisman glowed visibly on the bed where it had fallen during Valerie’s initial assault, throbbing in time with the women’s racing hearts.

Valerie couldn’t take any more. She desperately needed stimulation, but couldn’t bring herself to leave tickling Lindsey to finish herself off. With a burst of inspiration, she turned to face Lindsey’s squirming, bound feet. She straddled Lindsey’s legs, scissoring her crotch up against the blonde girl’s knee, and descended on her housemate’s helpless bare feet. She glanced back over her shoulder, her long brown hair hanging over her lust-crazed face, and savored the mixture of arousal and fear in Lindsey’s eyes.

“Oh, no,” Lindsey squeaked. “Not the feet!”

Lindsey squealed as Valerie’s nails went to work on her tiny, tender, ticklish bare soles. Valerie, fresh from a foot-tickling herself,

began by rehearsing Lindsey's greatest hits, hitting the spots and using the techniques that had driven her most thoroughly out of her mind. There were no un-ticklish spots on Lindsey's tiny feet; it was as if the need to fit all the ticklish nerves in such a small area had crowded out any zones of lesser sensitivity. Her soles were ticklish from heel to toes and Valerie, grinding herself vigorously against Lindsey's bouncing, struggling knee, lavished them with tickly attention. Lindsey, in excellent shape as an ex-cheerleader, gymnast, and current personal trainer, never seemed to run out of breath. She was a bottomless fount of hilarity, each new method of scratching, scribbling, or stroking on the wrinkly, soft bottoms of her very ticklish feet making her burst forth anew. Valerie had to clench her thighs tight around the blonde's knee to avoid taking a jarringly painful blow in a very sensitive place. But at the same time, those writhing, jumping, bouncing moves were coaxing her ever closer to climax...

Lindsey was lost in the luxury of total ticklish abandon. Her arousal, while powerful, was not the desperate, sharp need for orgasm that drove Valerie. Because she had just had a deep, thrashing cum, she could give herself over entirely to the tickling, for its own sake. The awful, thrilling sensations coming from the soles of her feet filled her with a kind of erotic buzz that resonated throughout her entire body. She blinked away tears of laughter to appreciate her tormentor. Valerie's beautiful light olive-skinned body was arched over her, her tight ass in the air, the muscles in her toned thighs tensed. Lindsey looked with longing at the soles of her bare feet, stretched taut as she rested on her toes, and remembered with a thrill how deliciously ticklish they had proved. Her fingers unconsciously clenched and wiggled as she imagined tickling those sweet bare soles again, even as her friend's nails on her own soles made her whoop and shriek.

Building on the unquestionable success of simply replicating what had reduced her to ticklish jelly, Valerie found certain variations especially effective on her bubbly victim. While Valerie's arches were her Achilles heel (and Lindsey's were certainly right up there) the blonde woman's toes were perhaps her ultimate weak spot. When Valerie probed a fingertip between those bubblegum digits, Lindsey's squeals hit a fever pitch. When she augmented that between-the-toes

assault with a single fingertip up and down the center of the sole, Lindsey simply exploded with hilarity.

It was this move, and the accompanying jerking of Lindsey's knee trapped between Valerie's quivering thighs, that set Valerie off. At long last, after so long at the trembling edge of orgasm, Valerie gasped aloud again and again as she came. Her toes curled tight, her hands grasped Lindsey's feet, involuntarily ceasing their tickling while she rode out the waves of her climax. Once the shocks and aftershocks had played out, she collapsed on top of her bound roommate, unthinkingly covering Lindsey's little feet with kisses.

Lindsey giggled.

And at that very moment, the doorbell rang.

Minutes earlier

Angelina frowned at the readings coming from The Dings, relayed from the office to her PDA. "Jesus," she said.

"What's up?" Frank asked.

"The signal from the house. It keeps getting stronger and stronger. Since we first detected it, it's increased by over 600%. What the hell is going on?"

"We'd best be very careful. I don't know if the residents are somehow using this thing, or whether it's building up to some kind of explosion, or what, but that kind of spike in any kind of energy makes me very nervous." Frank didn't look nervous, of course, but Angelina took him at his word.

"All right. We won't waste any time, but let's not panic, either. Surely if this were some kind of bomb or something, our trusted superiors would have let us in on it and maybe sent a bomb squad, right?"

"Surely," Frank said, and raised an eyebrow. He leaned a little more heavily on the accelerator. "Never liked being in the dark."

"All the more pleasure in figuring it out," Angelina replied as they cruised to a stop at the end of the Putigny house's driveway.

"Let me go in alone. It will probably be easier on two twenty-

something women if a big, scary black guy who wears sunglasses indoors doesn't show up to commandeer their mail."

"The sunglasses do come off, you know. But you're right. Watch yourself."

"I think I can handle a law student and a hostess."

"I think so too. But I'll be right here if things go south."

"Easy peasy," Angeline said, shooting him a wink before heading up the long, winding drive to the house.

As she approached the house, Angeline became conscious of a strange, unnatural silence. It seemed to fall suddenly as she came within about ten yards of the house, as if someone had flipped a switch. Suddenly there were no bird sounds, no rustle of wind in the trees. She could hear the heels of her pumps clicking on the concrete, but the ambient noises that always accompanied life in a quiet suburban neighborhood were simply gone. She paused for an instant, then continued up to the weathered porch and rang the bell.

She spent several minutes waiting on the porch, standing with a practiced stillness befitting a dark-suited, no-nonsense federal agent. As she waited, she eased into character – the perfect combination of professional and non-threatening. The demeanor of the civilians would determine a lot of how she approached the situation, of course, but those first few moments were crucial in setting the tone for the encounter. Her overall appearance struck a symbolic balance: conservative, tailored suit, but her shirt was open at the collar, her hair was down, and she wore her black pumps without stockings. Now, sunglasses on or off? She went with on, since, after all, this was her first official action in her new job.

The door opened with a squeak of old hinges and Angeline was immediately struck with a vibe of unquestionable strangeness. Two young women, both very pretty, stood in the doorway. They were in bathrobes and bare feet, and their hair was mussed and wild. They stared at her oddly, traces of giddy smiles playing about their faces.

"May we help you?" the taller, dark-haired one said, and the other giggled.

Mildly put off but eminently professional, Angeline smiled. "Good afternoon. I'm Agent Angeline Drake." She flashed her

credentials. The women looked at each other and giggled again. “I’m sorry about this, but it has come to our attention that an item of some importance was sent to you by mistake. It was never intended to come to you, and has no real market value; nevertheless, we will happily compensate you five hundred dollars for your cooperation in allowing us to retrieve it. Do you have the package that arrived this morning?”

More giggles from the two women. *Goofy chicks*, Angeline thought. Wasn’t one of them supposed to be a law student? She had come anticipating the possibility of a debate with an overzealous civil liberties advocate. Instead, here were the female equivalents of Beavis and Butthead.

“Please, come in,” the dark haired one said, stepping back from the door.

When Angeline crossed the threshold and the blonde closed the door behind her, the weirdness spiked exponentially. The house felt like sex, though it was hard to describe how. It was more than a smell, though that was part of it. There was a vague but powerful erotic hum that seemed to close in around her as she entered. A moment later, she gasped as a rush of whispers began to echo in her head. She couldn’t make out any words, but they somehow conveyed excitement, desperation, longing, lust, fear, and aggression, all at once. “What the hell?” she managed, staggering a bit with the force of it.

Suddenly, a damp handkerchief was over her mouth and nose. Ordinarily, she would have instinctively stopped breathing and put her assailant down in an effortless second, but, half-overcome by the whispers in her head and the strange, erotic, thrumming energy of the house, she was helpless. She slipped into darkness.

* * *

Angeline awoke abruptly, as if suddenly winning a willful tug of war with unconsciousness. The circumstances in which she found herself did not lend themselves to optimism.

She was strapped into a recliner in the living room, cranked back almost prone, with her feet elevated level with her head. Alarminglly,

she had been stripped to her black bra and panties, though her high heeled shoes were still on her feet. Oddly, her captors had left her sunglasses on. *Probably weren't interested in my eyes*, Angeline thought grimly. Her hands were bound behind her back in what felt like mink-lined cuffs – comfortable, but unquestionably a bad, bad sign. Perps didn't use mink cuffs for utility's sake. They used them when they were into bondage for pleasure. Heavy straps held her down at her shoulders, below her breasts, at her waist, at her thighs, and at her ankles. The fact that the chair and bonds were all physically quite comfortable did little to assuage her dread. How long had she been out? Long enough for Frank to come looking? For all he knew, she was enjoying a cup of coffee with the two housemates as she charmed them out of the doohickey. The shades on the big picture window were drawn, and had been when she had arrived. Fuck.

“Well, hello there, beautiful!” a voice said. The blonde padded into view on her right side; the brunette, on her left. They had shed their robes and were now bare-breasted, clad only in silk panties. Both were flushed with visible arousal.

“I'm so glad you're awake,” the brunette said, smiling (it seemed) genuinely. “I wasn't sure how much of the stuff in the little brown bottle from the cellar I was supposed to use. Do you feel okay?”

Survival instinct kicking in, Angeline was cool. “I'm fine. No harm done at all, at this point. To any of us. Now how about you cut me loose before my backup arrives and this becomes something that could send you to federal prison for a decade or two, yeah? Pretty girls like you shouldn't be turning 30, 40, 50 behind bars, all for some kind of joke.” It was wishful thinking on the last part, perhaps, but a solid negotiating strategy that downplayed what they had done and, implicitly, the consequences.

The two women giggled. There were few things more disconcerting than giggling when one was strapped to a recliner in a house that had belonged to a maniac. “Let's get her,” the blonde said, moving toward Angeline aggressively.

“Wait!” said the brunette. The blonde let out a little disappointed moan. “Let her drink,” she said. “She thirsts.”

Angeline prepared herself to lock her jaws shut against anything they might try to force down her throat. She realized, though, that the brunette hadn't meant her at all. She reached toward Angeline's taut, bare stomach, the abs clearly defined as she strained to sit up and see exactly what was happening. The brunette placed something against the skin and Angeline started. It was metallic, but oddly warm, and it pulsed with energy in a way that sent little tickly shivers through her belly. As she regarded the object – silver jewelry carved to resemble small feet, surmounted by a glowing crimson gem – she knew this was what she had been dispatched to retrieve. With curiosity and growing dread, she realized she was about to discover what made it special.

“Now, where do we start? It all looks so good,” joked the brunette. The blonde giggled, then reached for Angeline's toned, trim belly.

Angeline gritted her teeth, preparing for the worst, and then let out a tiny squawk as the blonde's fingers began to knead her tummy. Caught off guard and unable to resist, Angeline let out a hiss that dissolved into giggles. She wiggled in her bonds, and found that she could hardly move at all, much less avoid the tickling fingers. The brunette, eyes sparkling with amusement and lust, started in from the other side, playfully tickling Angeline's ribs. Angeline let out a little shriek of laughter.

It was deeply embarrassing. Angeline had never given much thought to being ticklish. It was just something she was, that nearly everybody was, to some degree or another. If she ate shellfish, she had a reaction. If she stubbed her toe, she said ouch. If someone tickled her, she laughed. That was how her body worked. Being ticklish was something that had never really mattered in her adult life. Now, though, on her first case as a federal agent, she was strapped to a chair, two girls were tickling her ribs and her tummy, and she was giggling her head off. The pulsing amulet rode her rippling abs like a surfer, and seemed to pulse all the more powerfully as she laughed, as if soaking her laughter from the air.

Her ticklers were clearly enjoying themselves. Their nipples stood stiff, and every now and again the brunette would caress one of hers and shudder. The blonde would likely have done the same, but

she was even more absorbed than the other in alternately flutter-teasing and deep-kneading Angeline's belly, making her titter and bellow, alternately, with laughter. Angeline tried to speak, to command them to stop, to threaten the full weight of her legal authority crashing down on them, but she never got out more than three words before some ticklish touch robbed her of the power of speech, cutting off her threats with a squeal or guffaw.

She had a moment's respite as the two left off tickling her now-aching stomach. "All right. That's...enough. Let me go now, and...we can show you leniency," she gasped. She still wore her sunglasses, which she now realized made her look all the more ridiculous. Had she been a uniformed cop, they might have left her hat on – a kind of prop to mark the identity of their otherwise scantily-clad victim.

Her relief at the break quickly transformed into dread, though, as she realized that they now stood at her feet. "Oh, shit," she said aloud, with a kind of resignation. The blonde gave a little squeal of glee; she reached down between her legs and gave herself a convulsive little squeeze. *Man, these chicks are really into this*, Angeline thought. The thing on her stomach gave a powerful throb.

Angeline tried ineffectually to grab something, anything, with her toes as the brunette slipped her pumps off her heels with two soft pops, then lifted them off of her bare feet with the air of a presenter unveiling a work of art. The blonde squealed again.

It was odd, given that she had already been stripped to her underwear, but being barefoot under these circumstances made Angeline feel acutely exposed. Most of her fitness regimen – yoga, martial arts, gymnastics – consisted of barefoot sports, and she had always been quite comfortable barefoot, defaulting to kicking off her shoes except when clearly inappropriate or impractical. She had certainly never associated bare feet with any particular vulnerability or weakness. Of course, she had never seriously considered the possibility of being tickled against her will by two crazed, nearly-naked nymphs.

Her feet were, admittedly, rather big – a size eleven, in most shoes – but they were well-proportioned and cared for, tanned and well-maintained like the rest of her. They were soft and smooth, if

slightly pink where the pumps had rubbed them. Her long toes cringed and bunched, and she semi-consciously hid the sole of one foot behind the other, though the futility of such a defense was obvious.

Grinning like a fiend, the brunette leaned in, showed her an extended index finger with a longish, manicured nail, and then drew it lightly and swiftly up Angeline's bare sole in a single stroke.

"Aaah!" Angeline cried out in spite of herself. She had tried to steel herself against the inevitable tickling, but the upper-body treatment she'd already gotten had reduced her defenses to nil.

"OOOH!" squeaked the blonde. "The big, bad Fed's big, bare feet are big-time ticklish!" She took Angeline's big toe between her finger and thumb, not quite tickling, but setting off anticipatory alarms all over her body. "This little piggy went to market..."

"Oh, come on. Fuck you," Angeline said, her voice breathy with exertion. The blonde only grinned, continuing her teasing countdown, toe by toe, to the assault that Angeline's cringing, wrinkling soles were already feeling. The brunette joined in, moving out from the big toe, giving each a little squeeze in time with the rhyme, until each held a pinky toe and Angeline was shutting her eyes tight and gritting her teeth.

"And... this... little... piggy...went..."

Angeline's shrieks drowned out the end of the awful recitation as twenty scribbling fingers blitzed her bare soles in an all-out, no-holds-barred tickle attack. Every ticklish sensation that could originate from her feet – fingers invading her toes; nails skating over the sturdy balls of her feet and heels; spider-walking assaults on her high, supremely ticklish arches – combined to drive the agent into absolute ticklish apoplexy. She screamed, bellowed, and howled with laughter. Her bare toes wiggled wildly, spread, curled, anything to try to guard her poor feet from the ticklish torture. She tried to curse them, beg them, threaten them, but her words dissolved into babbling as they found method after devastating method of wringing laughter out of her by the simple act of stimulating nerves in her helpless feet.

Angeline felt like a puppet, all control of her body wrenched away as it did what the tickling fingers commanded. Their endless

inventiveness meant that she never had the opportunity to become accustomed to a sensation. One might tickle her arches until she felt she couldn't laugh anymore; then switch to her wiggling toes, making her squeal afresh; and then return to the arches again to find them just as primed and sensitive as ever.

Worst of all were the other feelings she was becoming ever more conscious of. The amulet on her trembling stomach pulsed wildly, sending signals through her body that seemed to center increasingly on her nipples and sex. Rationally, there was no way this was at all arousing, rationally; it was torture, but she felt wildly aroused, nevertheless.

The blonde noticed Angeline's nipples straining against her disarrayed silk bra and squealed with excitement. She undid the clasp between Angeline's breasts and bared them. They were perfect, firm and round, capped with little gumdrop nipples. The blonde began to tickle them, producing thrilling sensations that tickled in an entirely different way than the brunette's devilish assault on her feet continued to do. And, for god's sake, Angeline found herself wanting her touch, craving those tickly fingers on her nipples, wanting them to touch the wetness between her thighs. That desire, against all logic, was somehow transforming the way she responded to the tickling of her feet. It was still unbearable, still wrenching wave after wave of torment, heaving laughter from her, but it had taken on an arousing quality, as well. She felt her logical mind slipping away, her desperation to escape replaced by a desire to be tickled, to tickle, and, above all else, to cum. She felt her body responding that way, her tension building toward a climax that could be triggered at any second by the combination of the blonde's feather-touch on her nipples, the brunette's tickling of her soles and toes, and her thighs rhythmically squeezing her engorged clit, rising, rising...

The door burst open. Through the haze of her tickle-crazy arousal, she could hear Frank's voice barking out commands. The tickling stopped an instant before she could ride the rising crest of her arousal into a cataclysmic orgasm.

* * *

*Transcript: Official Debrief of Agents Drake and Bannerman by Agent Sims,
Re: Reclamation of the Babylonian Piece. 6/14/20XX.*

SIMS: And then you secured the object, Agent Bannerman?

BANNERMAN: Yes, ma'am. After entering the room and assessing the situation, I immediately returned the item to its case. This seemed to render it inert.

SIMS: And then you released Agent Drake.

BANNERMAN: That's correct.

SIMS: What happened next?

DRAKE: Well, it took all of us – the three of us, the two residents and myself – a moment to come to our senses.

BANNERMAN: It was pretty clear that both Ms. McCall and Ms. Martell were immediately disoriented. The moment I snapped shut the case, it was like a switch had flipped. They seemed genuinely shocked at what they had been doing. Ashamed.

SIMS: And you, Agent Drake? How did you feel?

DRAKE: It's...difficult to explain, ma'am.

* * *

“Let me go, goddammit! Frank, you son of a bitch, you let me go!”

Frank's voice was as gentle as his grip on her wrists was unyielding. "Agent Drake... Angeline... come on. You're not yourself. Look at them," he said, nodding toward the two young women who stood paralyzed by a combination of confusion and fear, utterly disoriented. "They didn't mean to do this to you."

"I don't fucking care. I need to...I have to..." she shook her head, her long, lustrous dark hair the more beautiful for being disheveled. Suddenly, her dark eyes focused on Frank's strong, handsome face, so close to her own. An overpowering urge suddenly overtook her and she was shocked at her own, urgently whispered words. "Fine, forget them. But I need you, Frank. I need you to throw me down on those sweaty sheets and fuck me. Come on. It doesn't have to mean anything; I just need you inside me right fucking now!"

Frank's face was cool and impassive. "Angeline. I need you to take about five deep breaths and remember that you are acting in your capacity as an agent of the United States government."

Angeline's face, flushed with her recent ordeal and with the arousal that continued to inflame her entire body, took on a cast of confusion. Her eyes, narrowed with lust a moment before, flickered with uncertainty. With a shudder, her muscles slackened and she stopped struggling in Frank's grip.

"Oh, God. Oh, jeez... Frank, I..."

"It's all right. It's the object. It's what it does, apparently."

"Where-?"

"Don't worry. I put it back in its box." Frank nodded toward a small, metallic box that lay on a nearby sofa. Alongside it, Frank had cuffed her two torturers together; they sat on the sofa, robes draped over them, looking dazed and confused. "Found it upstairs on my way in. Figured it was important."

"You go get yourself together," he continued. "I'll take care of these two."

Chastened, humiliated, and not a little frightened, Angeline gathered up her clothing and padded barefoot down the stairs to a bathroom. Somewhat removed from the site of her torment, she

closed the door behind her and locked it with trembling fingers, then dropped the piled clothes on the counter and stared at herself in the mirror. She was a hot mess, her eye makeup streaked down her fine cheekbones with tears of laughter, her mounds of lush, silky black hair wild. She stood, breathing hard, feeling the waning traces of insanity fighting her eminently rational self.

Magically-induced or not, if she didn't do something about this she was going to spend the rest of the evening with a fierce case of "female blue balls," as she had come to think of it. "Fuck it," she hissed. Gazing at the wild, unkempt, almost feral woman who looked back at her from the mirror, she snaked a hand down over her tight, defined abs inside her sopping panties and swiftly, almost angrily, masturbated, jabbing at herself with an uncharacteristically violent intensity. When she came she had to bite back a guttural moan of pleasure that rose from her very core; then her knees gave way and she had to catch herself with her free hand, leaning heavily on the counter as her body shuddered and quaked.

The quick, brutal, but deeply satisfying orgasm was like an exorcism. As the last tremors rocked her, she could feel the strangeness that had possessed her dissipate. She stood, eyes closed, a beatific smile on her face, for a few moments. Then, she shook her head as if to clear it, stepped out of the soaked panties (which she folded strategically and put in her purse), washed her hands, and looked in the mirror again. Agent Angeline Drake looked back at her, a little embarrassed, perhaps, but together. Herself again. That was that. She picked up her skirt, took a deep, steadying breath, and began to get dressed.

* * *

Transcript of Debrief of Agents Drake and Bannerman, continued.

SIMS: Are you certain that is all you felt? Confusion and disorientation? It may be very important for us to know details.

BANNERMAN: Agent Drake likely does not recall clearly, Agent Sims. She was uneasy on her feet, a little loopy. She didn't say much until after we returned to headquarters, and at that point the whole experience was hazy. I don't think there's much to be learned from pushing the point.

SIMS: Are you certain, Agent Drake? Nothing more to add?

DRAKE: I am... confident, ma'am.

(Pause.)

SIMS: Very well, then. You've done excellent work on your first assignment and validated the Agency's trust in you. Dismissed.

DRAKE: Ma'am?

SIMS: Yes?

DRAKE: What will happen to the two young women? They clearly were not in control of their actions, and if it's a matter of my pressing charges, I don't have any interest in doing so.

SIMS: Duly noted. Officially, they will be released after debriefing. I should be quite surprised, though, if either has any clear recall of what happened today after that debriefing session. Is that a problem for you, agents?

BANNERMAN: What's a little memory wipe now and then?

SIMS: All for the greater good, agent. Rest assured, they will be undamaged and our operatives have already scoured their house of any evidence of what happened today. They will be back to their normal lives by Monday, with nothing but a vague recollection of a meeting with the County Clerk about some paperwork.

SIMS: This is the job, Agent Bannerman. We do these things not because we wish to, but because we must. We... I... trust you to understand that.

SIMS: Go home, both of you. I'm certain Agent Drake could use some rest and recuperation. We will be in touch.

* * *

Frank drove Angeline home, despite her protests that she was perfectly fine. A listless, grey rain was falling, transforming the city lights into luminous blobs as Angeline stared out the side window. The two were quiet until, uncharacteristically, Frank broke the silence.

“You know what bothers me about today?”

Angeline blew out her breath. “That a magical artifact took over two perfectly nice young women’s minds, or that our bosses scrubbed their brains all squeaky-clean of it? Maybe that I got tied up and tickle-tortured until I thought I’d die? Or maybe that when you cut me loose I begged you to fuck me in front of two civilians? Take your pick.”

“Well, sure, all of that, of course. But something else.”

Angeline’s intellectual curiosity began to win out over her exhaustion and outrage with the day’s events. “What? Because right now I can’t make any goddam sense out of any of it.”

“That’s the thing,” Frank said, easing the car onto Angeline’s street. “Making sense out of it. I started asking myself, why the hell would this thing do what it did? Drive women all tickle-crazy? I mean, it seemed to glow brighter and give off more and more powerful energy signatures the more they tickled each other, and, um, you.

“So maybe it’s a religious artifact or it’s connected to some kind of magic we don’t know anything about. But then I thought about what it did accomplish. The one clear outcome of all this lunacy today.”

“And that is?”

“It led us to it. And now, we put it in the hands of Agent Sims and, in turn, of whoever’s really in charge of this whole deal. And maybe that’s what this was all about – making sure it was found.”

They sat quietly, letting that sink in, as Frank’s car idled outside Angeline’s building. At long last, Angeline spoke.

“Thanks for, um, saving me today. I feel like the world’s biggest pussy. Two twenty-something girls tickled my tootsies until I nearly cried, and then the big bad man had to rush in and save me.”

“Don’t sweat it. You’ve saved my ass enough times to know we don’t keep score.”

Angeline smiled at him. “Admit it. When I was all mixed up and told you to fuck me, you thought about it.”

Frank gave her a rare, wry grin. “I’ll still be thinking about it when I’m 90 years old. Pick you up at 7:30 sharp.”

Angeline laughed. She reached over, gave his hand a squeeze, and darted off through the rain.