

Chapter 2 Zero Luck

“Gael, snap out of it,” says Meiomi, grabbing the anthro glaceon by the shoulders and giving him a firm shake, “This is no time to get high off of me!” It’s then she notices just how *excited* he is. She takes a step back as a shudder runs down her spine, her entire body shakes, “Eh...” She takes a deep breath and slowly releases it, “Remain calm. Nothing good is going to come from panicking.” She turns her attention back to her friend, “Gael can you hear me?”

He smiles and nods, “Yeah...”

“Can you focus for me?”

“I can do anything you want,” he says with puppy dog eyes.

“Did you take your pill?”

“Which pill was it again?”

“The one Netscheri has you take so this,” she gestures to his current state, “Doesn’t happen.”

“Oh, yeah, I took it. What about it?”

“That... I was not expecting. I knew when I evolved my pheromones would get stronger but this? Fuck, I have no time for this. Go outside and get some fresh air. I need you with a clear head.”

“Sure, sure. I can do that. I’ll be back with the clearest head you ever did see.”

“I appreciate the enthusiasm Gael, but you might be singing a different tune soon enough,” she sighs, watching him go outside as she pops open the windows, “Perhaps it was the closed confined space overnight. As much as I would *love* to manipulate that bastard, it won’t end well for me once his head is cleared,” she grumbles, “*I’ll need to get a handle on my own pace of toxicity. Other species are lucky. They get time to understand their changes. It hits us in the face like a ton of bricks.*”

Meiomi works to better understand and control her body’s natural ability when her blood ran colder than her friends, “Meiomi?” calls out the muffled voice of Netscheri, “Why is Gael outside in my backyard?”

“His pill was defective, and I wanted him to clear his head,” she yells, hear heart racing as knots form in her stomach.

“I see, and can you tell me why you are setting off my alarms? I told you to keep that to a minimum when on my property. Are you trying to pull something over me?”

“No! No! Definitely not that.”

“Come outside and explain yourself. I’d hate to fine you as is my right as your owner.”

Her body trembled, but she steeled herself just before stepping out. Her Master stands beside Gael who looks still under the influence of her aroma. His excitement is reduced, but the slight glaze over his eyes tells the story of his state of mind. Netscheri though has a gas mask over his face, his eyes locked onto her, and through the latex she can feel the smile creeping across his snout.

“Oh my, you finally evolved. Congratulations Meiomi, this calls for a celebration!”

“Actually, I would prefer to talk about my purchasing.”

His left ear twitches, “Is that so? Do you have the funds?”

“I do.”

“We should get that in order then. But to make sure we are on the up and up. Last thing you would want is anyone to assume you manipulated me, we’ll have to go through the proper channels and assessments. I’m sure you understand.”

She keeps her painted smile, “Will these assessments count against me?”

“If you are asking if you are going to be charged for them? I will assure you they will not be.”

“I appreciate it.”

He raises his hand, “Stay where you are. Gael, come with me.” He states taking a few steps before turning back to him, “Gael?”

The glaceon looks to Meiommi asking for permission with his eyes which she subtly nods too, “Coming trainer.”

“Remember who is in charge, Gael. We’ve spent so many years building up trust with one another. I hate for you to ruin our long-standing friendship because you couldn’t handle yourself,” he states.

Gael shivers as he regains some of his faculties, “O-of course. You’ve always treated us both right. I would never want to betray your trust.”

The bunny smirks, “What I thought,” he looks at Meiommi, “Relax. I have something to help you. Evolutions can be a confusing time, filling you with questions. And as your trainer and friend. I’m here to help you find those answers. We’ll be back. I have something to help you just in case this happens.”

“You’re always so well-prepared,” she replies, leaning in the door frame.

“To be the very best, you must be best prepared,” she says, her smile disappearing the moment he looks away, “*You best be prepared to deal with me being gone.*” she shifts, and tenses, feeling a dull throbbing pain, “*My injuries better have not fucked up my evolution.*”

They return a few minutes later, Gael wearing a gas mask, with another in his hands, “Here you go Meiommi.”

“*Just a few more hours,*” she thinks, “Thanks Gael. How are you feeling?” she asks as she puts on the hood designed to fit perfectly over her salazzle muzzle.

Netscheri calls out to them, “Lock the collar tight.”

“Go it!” Gael calls out, tightening the collar built into the mask so it's a nice tight-fitting choker, “I’m sorry about this Meiommi.”

“I understand. Are you feeling better?”

“Yeah. I think I’m good now. I’m sorry about that I just...”

She cuts him off, “It’s fine. But I need you to do something very important for me. Protect my money. I can only trust you with it while he has me run through these hoops.”

“Are you sure?”

She smiles through the mask, “Very sure. It’s under my pillow in a bag. Don’t mind the smell, I had it in a very secure but unconventional spot.”

“Say no more. I don’t want to know just in case.”

“Thanks,” she says, the mask gripping her head, inflating and deflating with every breath. Her own aroma floods the latex hood, as the filters work hard to keep her intoxicating fumes to herself. She resists the urge to feel the twin collars around her neck, “How’s this?”

“That will do. Necessary precautions, you understand.”

“Of course, Netscheri. You only want what’s best, I expect nothing less from you.”

“Gael, where are you going?”

The glaceon stops midway through the door, “Just grabbing something of mine before we go. Is that alright?”

The moment of silence felt like an eternity, “Go right ahead, but please be quick about it. This is an unexpected *yet* welcomed development. But it will hamper my plans for today.”

“I’m sorry to have put you in such an inconvenient position. I was not expecting this myself,” she explains, walking down the steps as Gael comes out with the bag.

“Barely an inconvenience, it is what friends are for. To help each other out in their time of need, wouldn’t you agree?” he asks, holding out his hand.

She reaches up to grab it, looking up at him, “I couldn’t agree more.” Pulled along by him with Gael in toe they head up in front where a limo awaits.

Once inside Netscheri gets himself comfortable sitting across from them, “Are you excited to learn about yourself?”

“I think I know myself well enough,” she replies, keeping one eye on him and another on her bag, which Gael holds tightly up against his chest.

“Don’t be so sure. You’ve always been unique on, and evolutions have resulted in some surprising changes to even normal pokémon,” he says looking out the window, “Gael, you may take off your mask.”

“Sure,” he replies, doing so, taking a deep breath of air conditioning.

“*He’s too calm about this,*” Meiomi thinks, “I know my particular shine is strange enough as it is. But I don’t think there is anything else unique or worthwhile about myself Netscheri.”

“You shouldn’t undervalue yourself like that. Its unbecoming of a salazzle. You should know your worth.”

“I know my current worth very well.”

He smirks, eyeing Gael, checking his wristwatch, tapping on the screen, “You’ve been frugal, to have earned enough to cover your debt? You must have been saving, and perhaps placing a few bets on yourself?”

Her fingers twitch, “You know I’m not allowed to bet on myself, all but negligible expenditures must be approved by you.”

“How very true. I pulled you off the streets. You have no financial sense. If I don’t look after you, who will?”

“I’ve been learning in my free time.”

“Free time you have because I take care of all your day-to-day worries.”

“Of which I am very appreciative of.”

He smirks, glancing at Gael then again back at his watch, “Still clear-headed Gael?”

“Yes sir, much better.”

The rabbit pulls off his rubber hood, “Good. Your mask is working well,” he says, pulling out a mirror and comb, fixing his hair, “Those things always mess up my fur.”

“I’m getting a handle on my new body. What happened to Gael was an accident.”

“I’ve never accused you of manipulating him on purpose, but you must understand as a young salazze, precautions must be made for your safety. I’m only thinking about you my darling, I only have your best interests at heart.”

“For which I am forever grateful for Netscheri.”

He smirks, “That, I have no doubt.” The limo eventually reaches the city, entering the underground parking garage of the Crazy Cretaceous Casino, “Just so you know, getting an evaluation for you under such short notice was not easy.”

“So not easy you managed to do it within an hour of discovering my evolution, unless....”

She keeps her hands to her sides, “I appreciate your efforts Netscheri. And I prefer to be no doubt that our agreement is fair and binding.”

“But of course, go right ahead. Gael, you can stand by me. After all she’s the salazze of the hour and deserves to be up in front.”

“There is more I deserve than you’ll ever know,” she thinks heading straight for a service elevator that is unlocked by a keycard kept on Netscheri’s person. They have taken up dozens of floors, the numbers climbing higher forty-eight... forty-nine, fifty, zero. The elevator stops, the doors open where two buff triceratopses dressed in matching black suits greet them.

Netscheri smiles and waves, “Hello boys, it’s a pleasure to see you again.”

One speaks with a deep voice, “The boss would like to talk to you.”

“Of course, please lead the way. It is an honor to be able to speak to him again in such a personal setting.

“This can’t be good,” thinks Meiommi, taking a single step off the elevator when she’s blocked by one of the guards. She looks up at him, her mask inflating.

“You will follow me,” he states, motioning her to go down the opposite hallway.

“Go ahead, Meiommi. I’m sure he’ll take good care of you,” says Netscheri.

The guard looks at the bunny, “Control over her collar.”

“She won’t be an issue, I assure you.”

“Boss’ orders.”

“Who am I to disagree with such a wise gentleman? How many hours do you require?” he asks, pulling out a device in his pocket.

“Six,” he replies, pulling out a similar looking handheld device. as they part ways.

The salazzle looks over her shoulder, reading the concern on Gael's face, but he puts on a tough facade the moment their eyes meet as he holds the bag even closer to his person, *"I know you can do it."*

"Move along," states the guard, pushing her along the hallway that grew less glamorous with each step.

"I am. It's been a long time since I have been here. You have me lead when I don't know the way."

"I'll tell you when to turn," he snorts, taking her to a pair of cold steel doors, which open via a keycard, "Inside."

"I hear you," she replies. Inside is a medical lab with three medical doctors in white lab coats, coated in a sheen of flame-retardant material. White gas masks with huge clear visor wraps around each of their heads, with long breathing tubes attached to them.

The one in charge a black and green striped scaled anthropomorphic Compsognathus, stands by the cold chrome examination table. "Ah, the specimen has arrived. Step up onto the table," he commands like a veterinarian would say to a common dog.

She gets climbs onto the table with a squeak that causes her to tense up in annoyance.

The doctor looks over her vitals, while another draws a sample of blood and despite the head doctor's comparatively small stature to those around him, even he has some height over her.

She eyes the doctor, passively letting him look over her. "I see you are doing well, Dr. Meloney."

The guard remarks with concern, "Shouldn't I get a mask?"

The compy waves off his concerns, "Just a simple precaution. New salazzles have poor control over their pheromone production. As long as she's masked you should be fine."

"Note the subject's luster is several grades above her contemporaries, and the variance within standard body colors is only slight, with a blue stripe surrounding their markings.

"My what now?" she mutters, looking down at herself, taking the moment to really notice *her* body. The blue markings surrounding her purple fire chest markings, along her tail, *"I was not expecting that."*

"The Pokémon's metamorphosis has created a salazzle with a height slightly above normal and their latex-like body qualities have only increased in intensity. Tests to understand if this has any effect on the subject's fighting capabilities is required."

She glares at him, "I was informed this was just a checkup, not a practice brawl."

The compy snaps his claws, "Obtain samples of subject's pheromones required," he states as a long rubber hose is attached to the front of gas mask, "Breathe normally."

"Are you going to ignore me on this fight?"

"Don't talk, just breathe."

She tenses, but relents, *"His table side manners haven't improved one bit in all this time. I won't make the same mistake again. I can't lose my chance, not now, when I am so close."*

“A good, good. Now take a deep breath and unleash your pheromones in a single breath.”

Meiomi follows through the doctor’s commands, going through dozens of examinations, probing, prodding, even having her mask pulled off to get a more intimate oral checkup. She tries her best to keep her new body in check as she eyes the guard with concern but nothing of note happens.

Dr. Meloney clears his throat, giving one last tender look over the salazzle’s body. His claws run across her smooth skin as he says, “We’ll get the results to the boss soon. She’s ready to be tested.”

The guard smirks, “Come,” he commands.

Restraining her desire to be sarcastic, “But of course,” he says looking up at him, “*He doesn’t look like he’s that influenced by me...*” She takes a deep breath in the mask, “Where to?”

He grins, the triceratops takes her through a series of doors to a staging area for a fight. “You know the rest. Remove your mask before you enter. And do your best. You wouldn’t want to disappoint.”

“I always do my best,” she huffs, inflating the mask.

“Good,” he states, leaving her to her small box.

She rips off the mask the moment she leaves, taking a deep breath of the cool air, “Having me fight on my first day as a salazzle? There should be rules against that,” she crosses her arms, gritting her teeth as she hears her own natural squeak, “*One day I will find a solution to that.*”

A minute later the door opens, and a small combat arena is before her. Far fancier than any she’s been in before. She steps into the ring, looking around to see on a raised viewing floor is Netscheri, talking to the boss.

The boss, an anthropomorphic Styracaceous. A dinosaur with a large red and brown frilled crest and a single horn, polished black as night with a golden capped tip. His green and brown scales are covered by his finely dressed and pressed business suit. His amber eyes glance at his golden wristwatch on his right then over at her.

She quickly looks away, “*Focus. We can thread this needle.*” She readies herself for combat, “*Let’s see how this new body works. I can always use that as a fallback plan,*” she thinks, the doors open and a shiny white, purple and pink salazzle steps into the ring.

“You?!” she exclaims.

The other salazzle smirks, resting a hand on her hip, “Who else to test fresh meat,” she puffs a little bit of fire, “Try to be entertaining and put up a fight, the boss is watching,” she states, turning to them, giving a cordial bow.

“I always do,” she turns and bows to them, keeping her gaze low, but out of the corner of her eye, she catches her opponent toss the first attack, which she barely manages to dodge. The sludge of purple bubbles and steams as it hits the ground, with a follow up flamethrower attack. She bobs and weaves barely able to do anything against her as she’s pushed back into a corner.

“Come on darling, you can do better than that can you? You’re salazzle. I’d expect more from you.”

She launches a resistance nullification attack; the purple goo hits her.

“You should know better, that doesn’t work on us. Or did you think I’d have an attraction to you?”

Meiomi moves in and round houses kicks, but the white salazzle dodges and hits her hard in the gut which she barely manages to block with her hands. She tumbles back, landing on all fours, her blue eyes narrowing on her as she pants heavily.

“I guess your looks are only just that looks,” she states, positioning herself for another blow, “I will admit you do look rather lovely...”

“I’d need weeks to adjust how my body works. Everything feels off,” she thinks, moving in for another melee strike unleashing a wave of fire, which her opponent just manages to dodge.

“What are you trying to do? Light me a cigar? Sorry darling, I don’t smoke those,” she taunts, puffing some smoke, “It’s bad for your health,” she unleashes a wave of her pheromones in her direction with a pink haze.

Meiomi’s nostrils flare, the sweet tantalizing aroma of the other salazzle is heavy in the air. A sweet intoxicating smell that sends pleasant shivers through her body. She shakes off the instinctual desire, delight, drive, getting low as her attacker strikes out from the fog around her. She manages to block the strike and head butt her back, her first clean blow.

The white salazzle leaps out of the cloud, “You bitch, how dare a new evolution like yourself manage to land a blow on me,” she growls, rubbing her head.

She steps out of the haze, seeing her opponent, panting heavily, legs shaking, *“I didn’t hit her that hard,”* she thinks, reading herself for the next round of combat.

The shiny salazzle readies herself, shaking her head, “What is wrong with me,” she grumbles, her body showing clearer signs that something is off.

Meiomi cocks her head to the side, “Is she... aroused?” she thinks, noticing her hot glistening sex, the sight of which stirs a warmth within her, but when her attacker moves in, all that is brushed to the wayside but after a few more minutes of close fighting, it becomes clear to everyone that something is wrong with the white salazzle.

“Stop!” commands a booming deep voice. The two salazzles jump back from one another, turning to look up at the one who spoke, the boss. “I’ve seen enough. Sierra, get yourself checked out. Your fighting has been terrible.”

She stiffens and bows, “Apologies Boss. I’ll get myself checked right away. I-I just have not been feeling myself for some reason.”

He stares down at her like a hawk, “No excuses.”

“Yes Boss,” she says, giving Meiomi a glare, the salazzle slinking off.

“As for you,” he says, his gaze focused on Meiomi, “Come up, there’s an agreement to discuss.”

“As you wish.” She heads out of the ring, grabbing the mask, making sure it's nice and snug, careful to not bump her collar before the guard escorts her up a set of stairs to an elegant

hallway that has iconography of the Boss and his greatness, “Gael!” she exclaims as she sees him standing outside of the double doors, bag still in his arms, with two guards standing nearby.

“Keep moving, the Boss is waiting,” states her guard.

“Everything is okay,” Gael assures her as the doors open, “Good luck.”

She smiles, “Thanks.”

The lounge that overlooks the arena. A marble water fountain showing off the Boss’ masculinity and strength sits in the middle. While the man himself lays back in a chair, being served food and drink by his servants, which he waves off as she arrives, “Come, sit,” he states in a way that it's far more than a command than a friendly suggestion.

Meiomi sits on the floor near Netscheri.

“You’ve trained your pokémon well, Netscheri.”

“You flatter me sir. I’m just a simple trainer that got lucky to have an incredibly delightful pair of partners to work with. And with the right motivation,” he looks at his salazzle, “Anything is possible.”

“Which is why you are here. Your pokémon states that she has the funds to purchase her contract, yes?”

“It's what she says, I have yet been able to count the money. By the way it smells. She’s kept it in rather... questionable location.”

“Money is money no matter how you look at it, smell it, taste it,” the Boss responds, “But money is useless without rules, structure, order to give it purpose, meaning, power. *Bring it.*”

Netscheri nods, whistling to Gael, who comes through the doors, “Where would you like it?”

“The table will be fine.”

The bunny nods to Gael, who begins to carefully pull-out wads of cash.

“You gave a price quote to Meiomi, and it was this amount?” he asks, pointing to it on an electronic PDF.

“Yes Sir.”

Meiomi catches the numbers, and she feels a slight relief, “*They are the same.*”

“That includes taxes and transaction fees.”

“It doesn’t.”

Meiomi keeps her composure, thinking, “*I already factored those in, you won’t get me that way you dumb rabbit.*”

Gael continues to put more money onto the table as the Boss continues, “It appears there might be enough to cover those expenses. It would appear that you have enough Meiomi.”

“*Yes, yes, yes! Fucking finally!*” she thinks, keeping her head low, “I appreciate the time spent.”

“There is only one issue...”

She tenses.

“This price quote is for a salandit. You’re a salazzle. That would be underhanded to make someone sell something they know it's worth *far* more than it's worth before the final transaction has occurred.”

Netscheri nods, “That would be underhanded. I offer fair deals to my pokémon. I would hope they’d have the courtesy to treat me fairly in kind. Wouldn’t you agree, Meiomimi?”

She bit her tongue, taking a long deep breath, her eyes remaining low, “Of course Netscheri. I completely agree.”

The Boss smirks, “Rules and order. But there’s one more thing, *trust*. Without trust, rules mean nothing, without rules there would be no order, and without that money holds no power. And that would be a shame.”

“What are you suggesting then Sir, to be fair between Meiomimi and I, as the arbiter of our contract.”

“I’ve looked over her stats, and the results of her little bout with Sierra, and I would put her new value at this,” he states, showing Netscheri the total, “Before transaction fees and taxes of course.”

Netscheri smiles, “I find that acceptable. How about you Meiomimi? We want to be fair now, don’t we?”

Her heart sinks down to her feet. She holds her hands still between her thighs, holding back the heat swelling up within her, “*That’s over twenty-times what I have saved up all these years.*”

“Meiomimi? Does this agreement displease you?”

She takes a deep breath, swallowing a lump in her throat, “N-no.”

“Are you surprised at just how much you are worth? You are a special salazzle Meiomimi, remember that.”

“I can never forget it sir.”

The Boss leans forward, “Are we in agreement then? This is your new value. Good for next month, open for future appraisal.”

“Sounds fair to me.”

Meiomimi remains silent.

“Meiomimi? Do you think the Boss gave you a bad appraisal?”

She shakes her head, “No. Not at all.”

“Then we are in agreement then?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. Let’s get this signed up and we can be on our way. Oh, and tack on any contract fees. I know Meiomimi wouldn’t want me after all I do for her to have me pay for it in the end.”

He nods, “Of course. Now please, enjoy my casino.”

“I think I will, I’m feeling lucky today.”

Meiomimi raises her head, “May I participate too.”

“Be my guest. As long as your trainer allows it.”

Netscheri nods, "Of course Meiomi. You've always been free to enjoy yourself. I see you have a bit of gambling money there. Who knows you might hit it big."

"Thank you. Gael, if you don't mind? Could you help me put my money back in the bag?" she asks, sliding over to the table.

"Y-yeah, sure," he replies, helping her.

As they are leaving the Boss says, "When you get down there. Remove your mask. I don't want my patrons thinking I run a sleazy establishment."

Netscheri replies, "What about her pheromones?"

"Make sure there is not an issue. There will not be an issue, right?"

He shakes his head, "No issue at all Sir," he replies the trio heading out. The rabbit remarks, "You better have gotten that musk of yours under control."

"I'll choose my words carefully."

"You better. The same clauses from the old contract still apply."

"I'm well aware," she replies as she gently bats Gael's attempt to give her a consoling hug, "I'm fine Gael. And I've told you, fire and ice don't mix."

"Sorry."

She sighs, "I know you are trying to help; I appreciate it."

Netscheri says, "I know it's been a big day for you and it's not over. How about later tonight we celebrate your evolution and the big fight you have coming up. With your new form, you'll be sure to win."

"If it's the same to you Netscheri, but I'd like to better focus on how my body works. I will need every advantage I can get."

"You know what they say about all work and no play."

"I'll play don't you worry," she says, holding her back close, parting ways with them, shoving her gas mask into the bag before she darts into the nearest bathroom, pulling the mask back over her head once inside the farthest away stall and lets out a muffled scream and a series of expletives. "I knew it... I knew it was too good to be true. He's going to keep me till..." she holds herself for a moment, tensing up.

She runs through her mind several ways she could get out of this, how she could earn more money, but each and every time there's the one issue, time. "No... No I just..." she grips herself tighter, "Fuck it, just fuck it all," she remarks, steeling herself as she storms her way out of the bathroom, having already having shoved the mask back into the bag. She looks at all the flashing lights and sounds of the casino floor, "Slots are a waste... I could do poker but if I win my pheromones could be used to say I cheated and nullify any winning. I need a game of chance that gives me high enough odds of winning..." It's then she hears the loud crackle and spin of the roulette ball.

"*I'm dead either way,*" she thinks walking up to one table where a blue scaled, black striped anthropomorphic female Utahraptor stood. Dressed in gold and black, she smiles at Meiomi, her name tag reads the name "Nargus."

"Hello, care for a game of chance?" she asks with a sweet raptoric purr.

She pauses for a moment, climbing up onto the stool.

“Are you okay? You look a little rough.”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she says with a sigh.

“I don’t know,” she says with concern, “I feel like you have something weighing you down.”

“I know the ploy of making me talk to play more.”

“If you aren’t in the right mind to play, I would recommend against it.”

She stares at the raptor.

“I mean it. You should play for fun not to get away with whatever is weighing you down.”

“Unfortunately, the only way for me to get away is to play,” she states, looking at the digital screen that gives the current odds of any number, recent numbers won. The roulette wheel with one through thirty-six in black and red and the dreaded green zero. She takes the bag, and places it onto the table, “All of it on zero.”

The raptor jumps when the bag hits the table, she opens it, “Ah... that is above our bet limit.”

“I don’t have time to get lucky more than once. Ask to see if I can put it all in. I’m sure the Boss would get a kick out of it.”

A visible shiver runs down the raptor’s spine, “If something is getting you. You don’t have to risk your life savings away.”

“And what makes you think it's your life savings?”

“I’ve seen many people bet it all and lose. And it always...” she trails off.

“You are in the wrong business.”

“Sometimes it's the only business I can get. I have to deal with the cards I’ve been dealt with.”

“And so am I. I’ve worked all my life, and today...” She stiffens, “I’ve risked...” she looks into the raptor’s eyes who show growing concern, but a hint of a glaze that comes with... “Please, check to see if it's okay.”

She sighs, “Don’t say I didn’t try to warn you,” she remarks, motioning for a security guard, a buff dark skinned human and after a quick conversation and call there’s a nod to go ahead. Nargus takes all the money, stuffing it down into a slot, giving her special chips with a high monetary value that have the Boss’ mug on them, “Last chance. You can still walk away.”

She points to her collar.

The raptor’s eyes widened in recognition.

“All in on zero.”

Nargus hangs her head, sliding the chips onto zero. She flicks the ball and after a spin she waves her hand over the table, “No more bets.”

The salazzle doesn’t look at the ball, hearing it slow and bounce across the table. She simply looks up at the cameras and then over to the guard, “This is going to be a story to tell either way.”

The guard says nothing.

“Zero.”

“Well there it is I...” the crash of reality and expectation hits her. She turns her head and there it is. The white little marble snug in the green slot, zero. She almost falls out of her seat, “Won?”

Nargus smiles, “Congratulations! We have a winner,” she opens a case, with more of the fancy chips, putting thirty-five times her bet onto the table.

Meiomi remains slack jawed, “I don’t believe it.”

Nargus giggles, “Take my advice and take the win and go.” She moves to slide the chips over but the guard stops her, “Is there a problem?”

“Fuck I knew that bastard wouldn’t... I should have gone to a different casino.”

The guard answers, “The Boss wants to congratulate the winner.”

“O-oh, he’s here in the building?”

“He’ll be here shortly.”

Nargus stiffens as Meiomi stews in her adrenaline, slowly processing the prospects of what could happen next, and after ten minutes she’s finally calm enough to comprehend what just happened, and then two guards the same Triceratops guards from earlier step up, holding a laptop in their hands. They hold the screen open for the Boss to appear on screen.

“Meiomi, congratulations. You have a bit of luck with you.”

She keeps her gaze averted, “I was not expecting to hear from you again so soon.”

“A big winner like this? I had to see. And it's all over the table.”

“I had your permission to play, so I played. I’m as surprised as you.”

“Yes... how about we make it a bit more exciting.”

She looks up at him, “Exciting?”

“One more bet. All in.”

“And what if I think I’m good. Or perhaps only a third of what I won?”

“Come on, where is your sense of adventure? Wouldn’t you rather have all the excitement now rather than *later*. It’s good to have a little bit of extra money just in case something bad happens and you need it, right?”

She lifts her head staring into the Boss’ eyes, “All in on zero.”

He chuckles, “Zero again?”

“It’s all the same odds to me.”

“Do it.”

Nargus jumps, “Yes Sir.” She spins the ball and after a moment she says, “No more bets.”

The sound of the ball spinning drowns out all other noises. The guards turn the screen toward the table, keeping the salazzle in view.

Meiomi switches her gaze to the ball, her world slowing with the ball. It hits the first groove. Heart skips a beat. The next, another skip. Bounce, bounce, bounce into different groove spots. One red, twenty-eight black, twenty-seven red, nine red.” The bounce slowing, the ball

ready to find its place and with it, her fate. The small crowd that gathered out of curiosity grows silent.

Nargus strains to say the words that clock in the results, “Zero Green. We have a winner.”