

Quaranteam – Chapter 37

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Chapter 38

In a rather unusual turn of events, Andy woke the next morning on November 18th to an empty bed. It wasn't uncommon for him to awake with only a couple of the girls still in bed asleep with him, but a totally empty bed was almost an unheard of experience at this point. He glanced at his Apple Watch and saw that it was around 10:30, which meant he'd definitely slept in a bit. Like most writers, Andy was generally a nocturnal creature, staying up late and getting up late, which had put his schedule at odds with some members of the family, but they'd mostly learned to make it work.

He slipped on some boxers, pulled on his jeans and tugged on a t-shirt – this particular one a gift from some fantasy convention he'd been a guest speaker at – and headed over to the balcony, stepping out onto it with a smirk.

Down at the pool, most of the girls were nearly finishing their morning work out, being led by Sheridan, a sea of sports bras and yoga pants, doing the last part of their high intensity section of the workout, and Andy could vaguely hear Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby" being played from a portable speaker near them. (Andy still wasn't sure which bothered him more, the fact that they were listening to Vanilla Ice or the fact that Vanilla Ice opened that song with "Stop! Collaborate and listen!" and yet there were no signs of any collaboration going on. In fact, it didn't seem like Ice understood what the word collaborate *meant*. The writer in him just couldn't bear it.)

Lauren and Taylor weren't there as he expected they'd gone in to work today, especially since it was Taylor's first day of working in months. He hoped that she fit in well with the 49ers organization, but at this point, he wasn't entirely even sure who was working there.

Niko also wasn't working out as he figured she'd gone to work at the base today. He wasn't sure what her schedule was like these days so he trusted her to let him know when she was coming and going and when it would be important for him to know. She was more than capable enough to manage her own schedule.

It was nice to spot that both Fiona and Moira were in the group, between Ash and Sarah in the front row of three, and both seemed to be in good spirits. Moira's unruly mass of red curls had been braided into a tightly woven tail that whipped behind her as she danced to the beat of the music, occasionally slapping against either Fi or Sarah, both of whom laughed wildly when it did. It made Moira look a little like a redheaded version of the original polygon model of Tomb Raider, now that he thought about it.

The weather was still mostly overcast, and it looked like rain might even be on the schedule for later in the day, something he didn't mind one bit. California had mostly been in a drought for years, and any rain the state could get was seen as a blessing, particularly since they now lived in more densely wooded areas. The last thing Andy wanted was a wild fire to take his new home.

He leaned against the railing, just enjoying looking over both the estate and his family before Sheridan finally spotted him up on the higher floor balcony as the song came to an end. She pointed to Andy to draw the girls' attention to him, as all of them turned to look at him.

The words were out of his mouth before he even knew he was saying them.

"Good morning, angels," he shouted to them.

"Good morning Andy!" they shot back in matching cadence.

"You know, you really ought to join us some mornings, Andrew," Emily teased politely.

"Mmmm. I'd be worried about making a fool of myself."

"I can make sure we don't overwhelm you on your first work out, dude," Sheridan said to him with a wink and a grin. "Let's give it a go tomorrow, 'kay?"

Andy groaned a little bit. "God help me. Okay, I'll give it a try, but no making fun of me!"

All the girls made various catty comments and gestures as he rolled his eyes and headed back into the house. He had a little bit before any of them were back inside anyway, even if they were finished with their workout. While the pool house was being converted into Tala's workshop, it still had a large group shower room, and the girls tended to go and cool down in there before splitting off afterwards. A few of them would go and shower in their own individual bathrooms, but the majority of them enjoyed the communal experience, as it let them all continue to get to know each other.

Andy headed down to the kitchen and found that Jenny had made him a mini breakfast burrito that was waiting with a glass of pineapple juice on the little kitchen island, Katie also sort of milling around the room as both women bowed to him when he entered. He'd tried to get them to stop doing that, but he'd learned that attempting to discourage his staff of anything generally only resulted in them doing it even more than they were originally, so he was trying a new tactic now – let them burn themselves out on it and hope they'd stop on their own.

“Enjoy your breakfast, sir!” Jenny said, moving around the counter before dropping down onto her knees. “I know I'll enjoy mine!”

Her fingertips unbuttoned Andy's jeans and he was thankful he hadn't put on a belt this morning, as Jenny began to lick and suck on his cock, slowly running her tongue along it while her wife watched on, although there was an unusual expression on Katie's face, something Andy wasn't quite sure of.

“What's on your mind, Katie?” he said, feeling Jenny's lips slowly push down around his length. They had told him before that they wanted to make getting their needed dose as low impact for him as possible, and had stressed that they enjoyed this sort of casual acquisition. “You look like you're worried about something.”

The Hispanic girl sighed and nodded. “I... I wanted to discuss something with you, sir, but I wasn't sure quite how to bring it up. Shit, I'm nervous even thinking about it now.”

Andy nodded, chewing a mouthful of his food before taking a sip from the glass to wash it down. “Look, you don't *have* to tell me anything, Katie, but if something's on your mind, you'll probably feel better if you just get it out of your head. No matter how much worse you think it'll be if you say it, letting it rattle around your brain like a cage full of bees is only going to be worse.”

“I suppose that's fair, sir,” Katie said, chewing on her finger nervously. “It's just... this isn't the sort of thing I thought I'd ever say, sir, and it makes me feel strange. I think it's probably just part of whatever the treatment's doing to me, but it's... it feels like it's both a part of me and *not* a part of me, you know? Like some part of me I didn't know about but was lingering in the dark shadows of my mind the whole time?”

Andy frowned a little. “No, I can't say I *do* know what you're talking about.”

Jenny's mouth popped off his cock as she made an exasperated noise from his waistline. “Uuuugh! Just tell him already!” she said, frustration in her voice, before she pushed her lips back down around his dick once more.

“Sir, I think... I think I'd like for you to fuck me, maybe just the once, maybe just to see if maybe I might like it,” Katie said, her voice sounded terrified that he would reject her or yell at her.

“I mean, I don't have a problem with if both of you don't, but you certainly needn't do it on my behalf, Katie,” Andy told her, as Jenny started to suck harder, as if to pull the resistance out of him. “You made it very clear to me when I arrived that you were a lesbian, though, and I wouldn't dream of asking you to change that.”

Katie threw her hands up, her eyes widening a little bit, almost in shock at herself. “That's just it! I am! I know I am! I've always thought girls were the only sexy things in the world! The idea of being with dudes just made me uneasy! I imagine I felt about guys the same way you feel about guys – I don't want to be with that!”

“Then why—”

“I don't know, alright?! I don't fucking get it! Thinking about any *other* man just makes my stomach all queasy and nauseous, but the last few weeks, when I've been thinking about what it looks

like when I see you fucking Jenny... I don't *feel* like I do when I think about any other man, and I don't understand what's going on!" The woman looked like she was about to cry, and Andy reached over and grabbed her hand, pulling her over towards him, his fingertips curling around hers.

"I am *never* going to make you do anything you don't want to do, Katie," he said sternly. "But they did tell us that the serum was going to have some side effects, and that it was likely going to make some physiological changes to our bodies, some foreseen and some unforeseen."

Jenny had eased off the speed of the blowjob a bit, but hadn't stopped entirely.

"If you want to try actual sex with me, I'm not opposed to that, but—"

"But you don't want me to think I'm doing it on your account. I'm not, sir, I assure you! I don't even know where these thoughts are coming from, but I told Jenny about a week ago, I had a sex dream with you in it, and we were fucking, and in the dream, it seemed like I liked it quite a lot," Katie sighed. "I know that doesn't necessarily mean anything..."

"They say sex dreams generally aren't about sex."

"But... but when you were taking Whitney the other day? I found myself getting wet, thinking about what it would be like... what it would be like to be her... to be getting fucked by you... and... and I think I want to try that at some point... not the tying up or collaring or anything but... but I think I'd like for you to fuck me once, just to see, just to see if I really do feel differently about you than I do all the other men in the world..."

"And you're okay with this, Jenny?" he said, reaching down to stroke Jenny's hair back.

Jenny nodded, popping her lips off his cock with a loud smack. "I still want both of us to be there any time you dose either of us, sir, but if this is a thing she wants to try, well, it would be unfairly judgmental of me to fuck you myself and not allow her to do so as well. 'Sides, she told *me* about these feelings long before she told *you*, and that's all that really matters." She smiled at him kindly, then lowered her lips back down around his shaft once more, her eyes still looking up at when she did.

"Then it's fine with me, Katie," he said, looking back at the Hispanic woman, one of her hands being held by him, the other being held by Jenny from below.

"Thank you, sir," Katie said. "For being willing to do that with me, and for not judging me because of it."

"Katie, look. If you want to try it, that's fine. If you try it and you don't like it, that's fine. If you try and *do* like it and want it more regularly, that's fine. If you change your mind right before we're about to do it, that's fine. Whatever you want here, *it's fine*. I just want *you* to be satisfied with whatever decision you made, and I want it made because it's what *you* want, and not what you think *I* want, okay? I am surrounded by beautiful women, and I'm just trying to do everything I can to do right by all of you. So whatever you want, you just need to tell me."

She nodded, before looking down with a smile. "You were taking your time because I was talking to him, weren't you, Jen?"

The curvy girl between his legs giggled a little and nodded, then started thrusting her face into his lap faster and more intently, and Andy could feel that release building up inside of him, even as he finished the last bite of breakfast.

He was more than a little taken back when Katie leaned in and whispered into his ear, "My wife's such a good little cocksucker, isn't she? Give us *our* breakfast, Master, that fucking load of hot cum right into her fucking mouth."

The unexpected words made his cock throb and finally he pumped a few squirts of his cum into Jenny's mouth, as she shuddered at his feet. The woman kept her lips sealed just past the head of his cock while her fingers jerked along the rest of his length, making sure to milk out the last of it before she pulled her head back, keeping her lips pursed together before standing up and immediately kissing Katie, swapping that cum between them, Katie's form trembling as she leaned against Jenny, the Latina being held up by her wife for just a moment until the orgasm passed.

Both women pulled from the kiss, licking each others lips for just a moment before turning to

look over at Andy, almost as if they were ready for a second course right now. Katie winked at him. "You know, I know it's all chemical, but dios mio if that orgasm from tasting your cum doesn't leave one sweet ass high..."

Jenny moved to tuck his cock back into his pants, zipping them back up and buttoning them, as she glanced over at Katie. "Don't forget to update the Needs Board, hun," she told her wife, who nodded in response.

"Got it, babe. Anyway, sir, let me think about it, but next time, I think I'd like you to fuck Jenny with me there... and then fuck me with Jenny there... so I have some time to let it settle in my brain that I'm going to go through with it," Katie said to him. "You know, actually fucking a dude."

"Whatever you want, Katie."

"Thank you, sir. Oh, don't forget, you have a phone meeting at 2 with that director candidate, Erica Xiao."

He nodded. "Good. Yes. Thank you for reminding me. I might have forgotten if you hadn't."

Jenny snickered a little. "Em would've had your balls if you had."

"She's got them anyway," Katie shot back.

Andy arched an eyebrow at them. "Don't you two start." He drank the last of his pineapple juice then pushed the plate forward. "Thanks Jenny, for everything. I'm going to head to my office. Maybe send down lunch a little after one."

"Yes sir. Also, don't forget that Miss Steele will be here sometime today."

"Oh right," Andy said, chuckling. "Sometimes everything gets so busy, I can barely remember my own name, much less who's coming and going. Katie, can you set up a large portion of the back yard to fence off, so that Maya's dogs will have a place to run and play without us worrying about them getting into the pool if she wants to leave them outside?"

"Miss Steele's got dogs?" Katie said, groaning. "Great. Now I get to start having to watch the backyard for landmines."

"That's why I was thinking if we gave them their own area that's fenced off, at least we'd have it clearly marked that it's the part of the yard with occasional hazards, although Sarah insisted that Maya is known to always clean up after her dogs. Maybe put a bin outside for her to toss them all?"

Katie nodded. "I can spend the day prepping the yard so we're not all worried about stepping in dog shit when we're walking in the grass."

"Good on you."

"Did Miss Washington said what kinds of dogs they were, sir?" Jenny asked.

"Pomeranians, I think," Andy said.

"Those aren't dogs, those are animated dustmops," Katie said with an amused snort. "And here I was worried they would be Saint Bernards or Rottweilers."

As he headed down to his office, he was starting to run through the checklist of things he needed to do today in his head. He definitely wanted to talk to Moira now that she was up, but he figured he would let her come to him in her own time, as it had been so long since they'd really talked to one another. He would need to pair with Maya when she arrived, and he also needed to check on Lexi and see how she was doing. As much as he wanted to head over to Xander's and see his friend's new house and meet all the rest of his partners, Xander had asked him to wait until the weekend, so he would have more of a chance to get settled, both into the house and into the household.

He was almost at the door of his office when his iPhone began to ring, and he fished it out of his pocket, surprised to see Phil The Younger a.k.a. Lesser Phil a.k.a. Phil Pak (not Phil Marcos), on the screen, as he answered it. "Heya man, long time no talk!" Andy said to him. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Nothing good I'm afraid," Lesser Phil sighed. "I'm not going to be able to make poker night on Friday. In fact, I may not be able to make poker night for a while, I'm afraid."

"That sucks man. What's going on?"

“Well, me and the family were relocated, so we're quite a bit further from you now, and the place where we're at is *very* strict on quarantine procedures, so if we came and saw you and the rest of the gang for poker, we'd have to quarantine for a week before we would be allowed back in to our house, so while we'll try and do it a couple of times a year, for the foreseeable future, it's probably off the table.”

“Where's they move you to that's got such strict guidelines?”

“They're calling the place Valhalla Shores. They decided that they didn't want to put all their eggs in one basket and have New Eden be the only place for Level Fives in the Bay area, so they built a new one over closer to the coast. We're where Pacifica used to be, basically, although I think they tore almost all the old city down and put up this place, like a giant gated mansion community. It's a little snobby for my liking, personally, but you know how Brandy has always been in terms of keeping up with Joneses, so when the NSA offered to move us over to here, she made me jump on it immediately. It's mostly just spooks and techbros over here,” he sighed. “You'd fucking hate it. I know I do, but it keeps peace in my household, and that's about all I can ask.”

“Wait, techbros and spies crossbreeding? That sounds like a *horrible* idea, like, just the worst. On the other hand, if your quarantine protocols are that strict, it might mean I never have to deal with techbros again, and that might make the whole thing absolutely worth while. Hey, can I recommend a couple of dickish investors over here in New Eden to get transferred over there?”

Phil the Younger laughed. “You fuckin' wish, dude. Whole place is fucking creepy anyway. Brandy says some of the women are kind of Stepford-ish, and she feels like they're definitely an in-crowd and an out-crowd and she has zero interest in joining the in-crowd. They keep trying to get her to join one of their hot yoga classes, but she said they'd have to break her legs to get her to do that shit. I hope she was being figurative, but you know Brandy.”

“That I do. Well, we'll miss seeing you guys, but I get it. You're doing what you have to do to keep your family safe and sound. Keep us posted, but I appreciate you calling to tell me personally.”

“Copy that, man,” he said. “See you on the other side.”

After Lesser Phil had hung up, Andy wondered how many actual community hubs had formed in the Bay area since the cultural rebuilding had started. He also wondered how hard it would be for him or any members of his family to leave New Eden, even for a short while.

He'd been craving an animal style In-N-Out burger for nearly a year now, and while he could ask Jenny to make something equivalent, there was nothing quite like having the real deal. He was certain Niko would know what the current entrance/exit policy for New Eden was, and he resolved to ask her when he saw her. It couldn't be *that* strict, he realized, because Lauren had been coming and going to the training camp for over a week now. Maybe he *could* just get in the Tesla and drive down to an In-N-Out, assuming he could find one that was open.

When he walked into his office, he saw that his two cats, Muninn and Huginn, were curled together in a bundle in his writing chair, the two forming a sort of gray-black yin yang symbol. Also, as promised, atop of his desk was a brand new laptop, a silver MacBook, with a Post-It note on top of it. It was from Whitney (he could recognize her meticulous handwriting) and said “Try it. If you hate it, we'll get something different. -w”

As much as he wanted to move the two cats so he could sit down in the chair where he got his best work done, he decided it was okay to sit at the desk for a while, even though it felt way more formal, although he realized he wasn't doing much creative today, mostly just the assorted busywork that sprung up around the actual creative process.

The new laptop was set up with access to his emails and had all of his writing transferred onto it, so he could consult back to other things as he started answering questions from his agent and his editor, losing an hour or so before there was a knock at the door.

“Come on in,” he said.

The door opened and Moira and Fiona slipped in together, closing the door behind them. All of

their possessions clearly hadn't arrived from cross country yet, because he noticed each of them was wearing one of his t-shirts, the fabric hanging big and loose over them like an overcoat. Moira had on one of his Biffy Clyro shirts, which he found fitting, whereas Fiona had clearly dived way back into the depths of his closet and was wearing a Gin Blossoms t-shirt.

"It's good ta see ya again, Andrew," Moira said shyly, smiling across the room at him. "I've missed ye something fierce."

"How are you feeling, Moira? I knew the serum can react strangely to people who've had complicated medical history, and I imagine dengue fever isn't the only strange bug you've picked up over your wild and crazy life."

"I cannae tell ye how great I feel, Andrew," she said, starting to move across the room to him. "An' how thankful I am ye trusted Fi enough t' let her bring me in wit' her. Yer... nae mad, are ye?"

He shook his head. "Look, Moira. We had a wonderful time together, but that was decades ago. But I've always trusted Fi, and if you and her were together before now, there's no reason any of that should change."

"Of course it'll have t' change, ye big dummy," she giggled. "Ye know she's always loved ye, ye daft shite? E'en when I came inta her life, that has nae changed."

"Except she's changed and I've changed, so maybe it has changed too."

"You haven't changed *that* much, Andy," Fi said, "and neither have I. You still trusted me enough to offer me a place in your family, even when I had a condition I wouldn't tell you about."

"Were ye surprised when ye saw me?" Moira asked him.

"Well, I'd figured it out before I saw you. I figured it out as soon as I heard your voice, and that let me put two and two together. But I was very surprised when I heard your voice, yeah."

"Surprised inna good way, I kin hope?"

"Naturally, although I was hoping *you* were going to be happy with me, even with the weight I've put on and the hair I've lost," he chuckled.

"I think ye look sexy, ya galoot," Moira twittered. "Hold me hands, Fi. It's all I kin do t' keep from havin' a crack at him right now."

Fiona wrapped her arms around Moira's waist, shaking her head. "He's not going anywhere, Moira," she said with a kind ease.

"Aye, an' neither are we, an' I don' wannae be *too* far behind the other gare-ruls, an' two of 'em are already in th' lead."

"One day at a time, love. One day at a time."

"You two want to sit and have a chat?" Andy said. On the other side of his desk were two chairs, so he could entertain meetings in here if he needed, although the chairs held the cats more often than they held people.

"Oh aye, let's have a chinwaggle," Moira said, slipping from Fiona's arms, moving over towards Andy's desk, but instead of moving to sit in one of the chairs across the desk, she moved to slide herself up and into his lap, her legs dangling over one of the arms of the chair. Fi then moved across the room, and moved his laptop to one side, so she could scoot her ass up and onto his desk directly in front of him, making sure not to knock anything off.

"So tell m—" he started to say before Moira leaned in and kissed him hard, her body light in his lap, but the strength with which she pulled his lips onto her own was more than a bit forceful.

"I bloody love ye, Andy," Moira said to him. "And Jaysis, do you smell fookin' amazin'!"

Andy grinned a bit, arching an eyebrow. "Sounds like you may have picked up a little bit of Piper's superpower along the way. I wonder if that's a side effect of the dengue fever antibodies you have in your system."

"I cannae tell ye where it comes from, but Jaysis, you smell better'n any meal I've ever eaten in me life. I want ta *breathe* ye all day long..." She buried her face against the nape of his neck, as he looked to Fiona for sympathy, but saw only mirth on her face.

“So, Moira, tell me what you've been up to since we last saw each other.”

“School,” she said, pronouncing the word like 'skoo-will,' “then more school, then residency, then Doctors Without Borders, at least until I ran in ta Fi again in DC. It's no tha' excitin'.”

“Doctors Without Borders, tending to patience in the middle of warzones? That's the absolute definition of exciting to me.”

“Then you're a fool,” she giggled. “I mean, yeh, I was shot at now an' again, but that's a part o' life anyway, isn't it? I was tendin' to kids who needed doctors, an' while I loved tha' work, when I shacked up with Fi again, she wanted me to be safer, wha'ever th' hell tha' means.”

“It means you're saving lives without people trying to take yours, Mo,” Fiona scolded, kicking the Scottish lass with the tip of her leather boot. “She's still undecided whether she wants to take up private practice here in New Eden, or if she wants to go and work in the hospital they're finishing up alongside the base.”

“In a few years, anyway,” Moira said. “After I've given ye a son.”

Andy's head leaned back a little bit. “Little early to be thinking about stuff like that, isn't it, Moira?”

“Like hell, Andy,” Moira said, pulling her face back from his neck so she could look him in the eyes again. “You,” she said, tapping his chest with a fingertip, “need children. I,” she continued, tapping her own, “want tae have one or two before I get back to the medical life. So all we're doin' is just wastin' fookin' time until you get me ripe.”

“You still don't need to rush right into it, Moira,” Andy said, stroking his fingertips against the back of her neck. “Take some time to get settled and comfortable here in the household before you go rushing straight towards the respawning finish line.”

“Spoken like a laddie who doesnae realize our clocks 'r tickin',” she grumbled. “But, aye, I'll do me best nae to rush it too much. And all the other gare-ruls have bin sooo kind tae us. I didnae know what t' expect, 'specially wit' all th' famous faces y'got around these parts.”

“They're just people, like anyone else,” Andy replied. “Think how I feel, trying not to let anyone down.”

“Ach, yer daft, laddie,” Moira said, tickling him a flash. “Yer a good man, an' tha's all tha' matters.”

“Emily told us all about her experiences this morning, what with the poker game and how it felt being traded like cattle. She was horrified by what horrible things the few remaining men in power are up to, and Niko explained how she basically had to force you to get into the game to rescue Asha and her mother from Covington,” Fiona said. “I'm sure that must've been quite taxing.”

“You had to risk people to win people, and while I certainly didn't want my ex as part of my life, I didn't want to consign her to a life with someone horrible either,” he sighed. “I feel very fortunate that it all worked out in my favor, but it was such a gigantic risk.”

Fiona tugged his chair a little closer to the desk with her leather boot, shrugging. “Life's one colossal risk, Andy. You've always known that.”

“You think your mother's going to be okay with you being part of a polypod, Moira? I only met her the once, but she struck me as an especially stern Catholic.”

“When th' news comes out, she'll come 'round, 'specially since th' Pope's apparently okay wit' it, or so we were told a' th' base,” Moira shrugged. “Besides, it saves me th' trouble from havin' t' tell 'er I'm shacked up wit' Fi here. She's still nae comfortable wit' 'th' gays,” she said, making air quotes with her fingers. “Didnae know how t' break it t' her tha' her daughter's as queer as a two-dollar bill.”

“I hope I'm not coming between you two,” Andy said.

“Nah,” Fiona laughed. “We're both bi, and both need some dick in our life. Yours'll do. It was generally my favorite.”

“An' mine, although I didnae try tha' many.”

“Tell him how many, Mo.”

“I don' wanna.”

“C'mon.”

“Fi...”

“Mo...”

Moira sighed. “Fine, wha'ever. I've only had three dicks, Andy, an' yours was right smack dab in th' middle. Me first was a boy in school, and me most recent was another doctor jus' before I hooked up with Fi again. I generally prefer gare-ruls to lads, but ye always felt... felt like home t' me.”

“She was worried that her piercings were going to put you off her,” Fi said. “Between the nose stud and the pierced nipples, she told Niko that she felt too different than anyone else it sounded like you had in the family.”

“I'll admit, I'm not generally a big fan of excessive piercings, but the whole look works on you, Moira. I mean, if you'd had one of those septum piercings like a bull ring, I might have had some reservations, but who am I to tell someone what they do to their body?”

Fiona giggled slightly. “I jokingly suggested she get one of her eyebrows pierced once and she slugged me hard enough that she almost dislocated my shoulder.”

“Do I look like I wanna join bloody Evanescence?” Moira growled.

“Did you two decide if you want a bedroom to yourselves, or one each?”

Moira shook her head. “We're wit' you, laddie, no matter where y' lay yer head down.”

“Although I was thinking I might turn one of them into an office for me to work, if that's okay,” Fiona said. “Sort of like your little office here.”

“Yeah, of course,” Andy said. “Whatever you want. At some point, all the rooms will be spoken for, but until they are, they're fair game for whoever wants them.”

“At some point, some of them are going to have to be nurseries,” Fiona stressed. “Especially since you've already got two pregnant ladies in the house. How far along are they?”

“A couple of months,” Andy said. “So it's still early days, and we haven't really told many people outside of the family yet, since the first few months are the diciest.”

“When's th' big wedding gonnae be?” Moira asked.

“Niko told me her family wouldn't give two shits if the wedding happened after the kid was born, but Ash said her family might have some issues with it, so she and I might have a legal ceremony beforehand and then when the world is open again, when I have the giant wedding ceremony, she'd be part of that too.”

“Seems a fair compromise,” Fi agreed. “It would also mean you have someone to function as Head of Household if you were incapacitated and needed someone to make a decision on your behalf.”

“Don't go planning to have me put into a medical coma any time soon, Fi,” Andy joked. “That's still a few months down the way.”

“Good thing you've got yourself a doctor in the house now, hm?”

“How're you two feeling about all of this? I know it's a lot to process all at once.”

“It's a lot of bloody *names* ta learn,” Moira grumbled. “I almost want ta see nametags on e'eryone fer a few months.”

“You'll pick them up pretty quick,” Andy said. “And I was smart or lucky enough to not get any two partners with the same first name, thank god for that.”

“I dinnae find out if they tol' you, Andy,” Moira interrupted, “but jus' so ye know, my cycle's shorter than th' rest of th' gare-ruls. They kin go about ten days 'fore they cannae think clearly, but I kin only go about six.”

“Nobody told me that, no,” Andy said. “Any other differences I should know about?”

“Nothin' ye need concern yerself with,” she replied, kissing his cheek. “I'm sure all th' lasses have got their own quirks so ye need nae concern yerself.”

“Alright then, I'll try not to worry. Anyway, I appreciate you stopping by to say hello, but I do have an online meeting in just a little bit, so I hate to kick you out but—”

“No no! You've got work to do, so c'mon, Mo,” Fiona said, hopping off his desk, pulling Moira from his lap. “Let the man talk to the voices in his computer.”

Moira leaned down and kissed him one final time, resting her face against his for what felt like minutes before she smiled and pulled back. “I love ye, ye daft git.”

“Love you both,” he said, as they slipped out of his office.

The meeting went as well as could be expected, and Erica Xiao seemed like she might actually be a good choice for directing the first Druid Gunslinger movie, as she seemed to intuitively grasp the undercurrents of the story without having to explicitly call them out, something that was a refreshing change of pace from the first couple of candidates he'd interviewed. Of course, he didn't get the final say on who was directing the movie, but Working Title seemed to genuinely care that he liked the director, so that they would remain true to the books. They'd gone against authors' wishes before, and it hadn't gone well for them, so now they were trying to make sure the author approved of, or at least understood the reasoning for, any changes that were made in the process of translating it from a book to a movie.

After that, he decided he needed to go and check on Lexi. Even though Phil had told him that her imprinting process time would take a bit longer, he thought it wise to swing by and make sure that she wasn't in any pain, but when he arrived by her door, he found Niko sitting on a chair in front of it, a Lee Child book in her hands.

“Hey Niko,” Andy said, approaching her. “I thought you were on the base today?”

Niko shook her head, smiling at him as she tucked a slip of paper in as a bookmark before closing the paperback up, setting it on a table next to her. “With Lexi having a different reaction to the serum, Phil asked me to stay here and keep tabs on her, and report in what other irregularities she was going through, especially since I noticed a few right away.”

Andy's brow furrowed in worry. “How concerned should I be?”

Niko sort of tilted her head a little. “That's just the thing, babe. I don't think you need to be at all worried, but you are definitely going to have a challenge on your hands for the first few days after she wakes up. I think letting Jenny help with that, though, would be a wise move.”

“What the hell does *that* mean, Niko?”

She jerked her head over her shoulder. “C'mere and lemme show you.” After sliding off the chair, she opened the door and they both stepped into the room, and Andy immediately started to panic, but he felt Niko's hand take his and squeeze it reassuringly. “She's fine, Andy, regardless of how she looks.”

“What... what the hell is happening to her?”

There was a large growth on one side of her, a faded white swell over her body, and Andy didn't even know what exactly he was looking at.

“She's *healing*,” Niko said. “The reason you're going to want Jenny to help is that by the time she wakes up, I think Lexi's not going to have *any* scars left. It's almost like she's shedding the scarred layer of skin and replacing it with fresh, newly healed skin, like a snake molting. We've seen it in rare cases on the base. I told you early on that I knew the serum did some basic additional healing when it was first taken into the woman's body, but that level of healing varies a *lot* from patient to patient, more than anything else about it. When she was injected on the base, I knew there was a, call it ten to fifteen percent chance this might happen, that the serum might go into overdrive with her scars and began repairing the skin and the nerves, but I didn't want to get her hopes up in case it *didn't* happen, because we still don't know what does and doesn't cause the reaction.”

“And... and you're telling me her skin will just be back to normal?”

“Whoa, easy there. 'Normal' is a *very* flexible word, and one that we don't like using on the base,” Niko told him. “She's likely to be healed but considering all of those nerves will be freshly regrown, they are going to be *hyper* sensitive, and that means people are going to have to be careful around her, because it'll be easy to overwhelm her until those nerves have gotten accustomed to

working again and they know how to moderate their intake. We also have *no* idea what it's going to do to her PTSD, if anything, and that's what we need to keep an eye on.”

“But... she *is* going to be okay, right?”

“*This* isn't going to be a problem, Andy, but it's up to all of us to make sure that the repercussions of her sudden healing don't overwhelm her. But I think it'll be okay.”

Andy sighed, turning to press a kiss against Niko's cheek. “Is there anything else you aren't telling me?”

“Honey, what I'm not telling you could fill up Levi's Stadium, but you just have to trust me that I'm doing it all with your best interests at heart, okay?”

He chuckled, shaking his head. “You're lucky you're so cute.”

“It's one of my natural defense mechanisms,” she teased. “C'mon, let's leave her be.”

They stepped back out into the hallway and Niko closed the door behind her. “I figured I should be here when she wakes up, so I can explain to her all of what happened, and prepare her for what to expect. It's the least I can do.” She jerked her chin upward, to get Andy to look behind him. “Looks like you're up.”

Nicolette was walking down the hall, a soft smile on her face. “Just letting you know, Master, that Miss Steele's ride over just buzzed the gate and she should be at the front door any minute. Miss Washington and Miss Stevens said they would meet you there.”

Andy kissed Niko again before turning to walk with Nicolette towards the stairs, heading to the front door. “Showtime!”