

Chapter 27

For most of the next day, Andy kept to himself a bit, staying mostly in his office with the cats. Jenny had swung by to bring him lunch midday, and after he finished it, he decided it was time to talk with his best friend Xander Baker.

While Andy was a little chunky, Xander was the whole damn brick. Xander wasn't so much fat as just a mountain of a man. But also a bit fat, if people were being blunt. Xander stood some four inches taller than Andy but was at least a hundred pounds heavier, maybe more, a weird combination of muscle and blubber, much of his skin covered in tattoos. And god help him, Xander was still rocking a mullet, as out of fashion as ever. Much of the time, the back of the mullet was pulled into a rattish ponytail, but today it hung free over his shoulders.

He and Xander had grown up together, best friends since they were seven. They'd met playing Little League, something they'd both hated. The two of them had quit playing the next year, but they'd never stopped hanging out. They'd been roommates throughout college, and when Andy had moved to the West Coast, Xander had driven with him and then flown home one way. For years, Andy had been trying to convince Xander to abandon the Midwest, and it always felt like Xander was considering it, though it just never seemed to happen.

There had been a two year period where they'd stopped speaking, because Xander had gotten married and gotten divorced all within those two years. Xander's ex-wife had hated all of his friends and had driven them away, insisting none of them be invited to the wedding. She'd actually been living with Xander and Andy for the last year Andy lived in Cleveland. They'd gotten married six months after he left, and divorced two years to the day afterwards. On the very day that Xander had decided to divorce her, the first person he'd called was Andy, to apologize for the two years of radio silence. Andy hadn't been mad, and had welcomed his oldest friend back into his life with welcome arms.

Xander had drifted from job to job for a couple of years until he'd seemed to find his natural calling as an auto mechanic, one specifically focused on restoration and maintenance of classic and vintage cars, although he did work on pretty much anything to keep the bills paid. Some of Xander's restorations had won awards at car shows, though, and he'd done a few special commissions for some well known people that was starting to get him a little national recognition.

For the last six months, Xander had been living vicariously through Andy, when he wasn't working on cars. Thankfully, Xander's work backlog had been more than enough to keep him occupied for a couple of years. He'd even had a 3D printer delivered to help him make molds so he could smelt custom parts when he couldn't find what he needed via mail. It had been a frustratingly solitary life, so his contact with Andy had been what kept him going. They generally talked via FaceTime for an hour every week, like clockwork.

When Andy had first gotten Aisling in his life, he'd called Xander the next day to introduce her to him first, and they'd gotten along perfectly. Since then, generally the day after someone had been added to the household, he'd called Xander the day after to introduce them, although it had been about a week or so since they'd talked, simply because between the poker game, his brother's death and all the various arrivals. It had been an overwhelming week, and for the first half an hour of the videocall, Andy had literally simply relied all the various information.

Xander had been sad to hear about Matty's death, and had also told Andy that his Xander's own brother, Randy, also passed away, along with his father. Both of them had lost a lot of family in a very short period of time. So the two of them had shared a little cry for a bit, before they'd decided to just plow on.

From there, Andy had to inform Xander that not only was he getting married, he was getting married to multiple women, including two that he hadn't even been introduced to yet, but Xander had

been laughing at that point. He'd also asked Xander to be his best man, something he'd readily agreed to, even if he was a bit jealous of some of the women lined up to wed Andy. He had sent Xander the group photo shortly before the call, and Xander's immediate question was how the hell he'd ended up hooking up with not only Sarah Washington, but Emily Stevens as well.

That had turned into Andy relaying the entire poker story to Xander, who went through a roller coaster of emotions while Andy talked him through it. Xander had long been a Daggerfall Academy fan, not just of the movies but of the books as well, so he was understandably a little jealous of Andy's connection to Emily, but promised not to get too hung up on it when they finally did meet. Xander had still never forgiven him for not meeting E.F. Winston, but Andy had explained to him over and over again that she was simply too big a person to show up to conventions and do meet'n'greet.

And then, of course, Andy had needed to tell Xander that he was also going to be a father, and that both Niko and Aisling were pregnant, which resulted in the oddest moment ever, because Xander had just been grinning. Apparently, Niko had called Xander to tell him about it before they'd even told Andy, just to make sure that he'd really be cool with it.

Andy found himself a little annoyed with Niko and Aisling, but the moment was fleeting, and in the end, he also found it a little funny, knowing that Xander had had the news about the girls' pregnancies before he did.

The last thing they had to talk about was the previous day where the girls had spent hours pitching their friends and colleagues to him, and how overwhelmed by it all Andy was. That was why he'd called Xander, because while Andy had done some thinking about whittling it down, he wanted to talk it all over with his best friend, the person who knew him best in this world.

For the next hour or so, Andy and Xander had talked through all of the pitches one by one, covering all of the women, Andy's pros and cons (because of *course* Andy had made a pros and cons list) and where his head was at with each of them.

The call went on long enough that both men had been forced to plug their phones in and let them charge while they continued talking. Internet calling was truly a wonderful thing. It helped his state of mind, being able to talk it all out with someone. He'd thought about talking it all over with Aisling, but he felt like involving any of the girls in the actual decision making process might put undue stress on their relations, and he didn't want to put any of the girls in that kind of awkward position.

Xander had proven to be an excellent sounding board, as he always was, and Andy was able to talk himself through all of his decisions over the course of their conversation. At least a couple of times, Andy had joked that maybe it would be better if he didn't invite anyone in, to which point Xander had threatened to phone Niko, so she could slap Andy in the head for him, since Xander was still in Cleveland. He didn't doubt that Xander would do it in the least, and Andy joked that his friend was getting too reliant on one of Andy's soon-to-be wives to do his dirty work for him.

Which, of course, led Xander into dropping a bombshell of his own on Andy. As it turned out, once the quarantine was lifted, Xander was likely going to be moving out to Fresno, a city about an hour away from the Bay area, which meant the two best friends would be able to hang out and see each other regularly, something that made Andy cry a little more.

Xander also said, however, that there was also a decent chance the relocation might happen *much* sooner than that. One of the women he was getting paired up with was a Major in the Air Force, and so she was leaning on people to get him safely relocated across the country, where she could protect him. He'd laughed, saying it was weird to be treated as such precious cargo when just a year ago he was getting turned down by nearly every woman he approached at a bar.

Xander, like Andy, had lost most of his roots, especially after the deaths of his brother and father, so he didn't really have much keeping him in the Midwest. In fact, he'd actually been told to pack all of his things immediately, so that if the relocation came through, he'd be ready to move. That was why he felt like the relocation was going to happen much sooner than the "after quarantine" he'd

originally been told to expect. If anything, Xander seemed a little annoyed by his lack of information or control in his own relocation, but Andy gave him just enough information to make it all make sense, and after that, Xander seemed a lot more prepared to get to safe ground as fast as possible.

Andy had asked to see pictures of the women Xander was getting paired up with, but his friend didn't have those yet. Once he did, though, he would inform Andy and the two could hash it out then. Xander had originally been marked as a level 1, but what with the incredibly high male mortality rate in the country, even level 1s were suddenly moving up in terms of importance for protecting.

His friend had some excellent points about some of Andy's initial thoughts and in a few cases, was able to help Andy put his finger on what had been bothering him about a few of the pitches, as well as helping him get out of his own way on a few personal quirks.

The thing Xander had stressed to him, above all else, was that he needed to trust his instincts about whether or not the women would personally get along with him, and that if they wouldn't, that he would be doing them a disservice by mixing them into his family. He already had a couple of women whom he knew weren't very much into him beyond their needs, and the last thing he wanted to do was compound that problem.

His friend tried to settle his worries about disappointing some of the women, noting for him yet again that any of the women who didn't want to come would have the option of declining his invitation, something that Andy had to keep reminding himself of. The last thing he wanted was to be someone like Covington, abducting women against their will for his own desires. He didn't need any of that shit.

With the list finally settled on, and Andy caught up on all the news that Xander had to share, his best friend had asked him if he'd given much thought about who he was going to use his one personal choice on, which had made Andy smile. Andy pointed out that he suspected his invite would be turned down, but that he would be kicking himself if he didn't extend it to the one and only obvious choice, which made Xander punch the sky and cheer.

"She's going to say yes," Xander told him, the grin from ear to ear, while he danced around in his bedroom in Cleveland. "You know this. I know this. Everyone knows this. Why are you pretending to yourself that she won't?"

"Because," Andy said, in between laughs, "she and I haven't spoken in, what, ten, fifteen years? She could be married for all we know."

"Liar!" Xander cackled. "You and I *both* know you're lying, because we are both Facebook friends with her, and if she had gotten married, we absolutely would have been invited to the wedding, or at the very least heard about it! She's the kind of person who would've had that all over her social media, but she hasn't, which means she isn't, which means she's *going* to say yes to you, because she's still pining for you like you're still pining for her! I fucking knew you weren't over her, you goddamn liar! How many times did you tell me you were okay with it? How many times did I tell you that you were full of shit? She's going to say yes to you, my most righteous dude... "

"It's not *just* me she would have to say yes to, Xan! She's been living in DC for a decade now! I'm sure she's put roots down."

"She's *hated* living in DC for a decade now, you mean. She would hook up with a lemur if it got her out of DC. I doubt she's put any real roots down so that if she wanted to bail on that shithole cesspit of political vipers, she could."

"She works in DC. Her entire job is in DC. She's a political reporter. She may not be working at the White House any more, but she's a congressional reporter. She needs to be in DC to do that job."

Xander rolled his eyes. "She will take another option if there's one available, and if she moves out there with you, she'll just get into some other kind of reporting. Or maybe she'll just start writing political books. Or historical novels. Or fucking anything else. I never understood why you two didn't stay together in the first place."

"She wanted to be a White House reporter, and she actually got the job with the bureau, so she moved out there, and I got the job writing for Netflix and had to move out here," Andy said with a

shrug. "We talked about trying long distance, but it was the entire length of the country, and I didn't want to be a burden on her."

"You two have unfinished business, Andy," Xander said to him. "Extend the invite, and then we'll see who's right in the long run, huh?"

"That's what I'm going to do, Xan," Andy said. "Let her make her own mind up. My money's on her still being upset with how we ended things."

"Willing to make a little wager on that?"

"Sure, what did you have in mind for stakes?"

"Since you're mister moneybags now, when I win, you buy me a Tesla."

Andy laughed and nodded. "And if I win?"

"Then I owe you one complete restoration of a car, no matter what the state it's in, but it's never gonna happen."

"I'll remind you that you said that when you're having to completely rebuild a Ferrari from a busted frame."

Xander waggled a finger at him. "We'll see then, won't we?" He sighed a little bit. "Shit, brother, we've been talking for hours. You should probably get your list done and tell your girls so you can start that whole process, since your buddy Phil seemed to think you should get it started as soon as possible. How much shit are we going to be in next week?"

Andy shrugged slightly. "Let's just say if they show up to move you soon, Xan, *let them.* The sooner you can get settled in your new home, the better off you'll be."

His friend nodded. "Yeah, most definitely. Hey, you think you've got enough clout that you could get me and my ladies to move into New Eden with you guys?"

Andy rolled his eyes. "I doubt it, but shit, I can ask Phil. What's the name of the Major you're getting hooked up with? Maybe Phil can get her reassigned to the base here."

"Okay look, I'm gonna tell you, and you're gonna laugh, so get all your laughing done now, get all your jokes off your chest, and then do not tease her about it when you meet her, okay?"

Andy shot his best friend a dirty look. "C'mon. I'm usually above that kind of thing. You really think I'm going to take pot shots at her name?"

Xander looked at him dead on and said. "Her name is Captain Betsy Ross." While he waited for Andy to say something, he lifted both hands into the frame of the camera and flicked his fingers inward in a 'come at me' gesture.

Andy did his stoic best to hold as long as he could, but finally he couldn't hold it back any more. "Does that make you Xander Washington? Is she going to wear a flag for your wedding? Oh my god, are you going to take her last name and become Xanderous?"

"Finished?"

"Yeah, 'kay, I won't say shit about it to her, but I will talk to Phil and see if I can get all of you brought here. She's stationed in Fresno you said?"

"I assume so, considering that's where they're relocating me."

"Got it. I'll give you a call in a couple of days when I know what's going on."

"Cool. Cool cool cool. Anyway, congrats on all the things – the engagements, the pregnancies, the sudden wealth and the influx of beautiful women. Your life is such a struggle."

Andy chortled at the serious tone with which his friend Xander had delivered that. "Fuck you too, buddy. Hopefully I'll see you in person soon."

The two hung up and all that left was for Andy to write up the list. So he opened up a fresh document in Word and started typing.

At the top of the page he made a clear note that anyone he hadn't chosen would be recommended over to trusted friends, to see if they could be brought into the community at the very least. He also stressed that just invitations were being extended, and that if anyone didn't want to join the family, they certainly were not going to be compelled to on his behalf.

Beneath that, he wrote that the names were in alphabetical order, not in order of preference. The list did include one alternate, in case anyone said no. If multiple people said no, well, then they would have less people than originally planned.

He also said that anyone who was a friend of someone listed below had until tomorrow morning to craft an invitation video for their friend that would be delivered, along with a video invitation from Andy himself, to the women in question. Phil would be by for lunch tomorrow, so the deadline on recording an invitation video was hard set and non-negotiable.

Finally, if anyone was upset by his decisions, they could come and talk to him about it, and he would explain his reasoning to them, but he also hoped the girls would trust in his judgment on the matter and not try to convince him to change his mind, because as he wrote on the sheet, his decisions were final.

The List – staff

- Alexis Coleman (security)
- Dr. Morgan Fitch (pediatrics)
- Whitney Wells (technical support)

The List – family

- Fiona Smith
- Larissa Cotton
- Maya Summer Steele
- Tabitha Jefferson
- Tala Jordan

The List – alternate

- Jade Dillon

Andy looked over the list on his screen for a few minutes, making sure all of his decisions were final in his head, before he finally muttered to himself, “Yeah, fuck it.” He hit Control-P print, and a minute later, his laser printer hummed to life. As the printer vomited its single page, he considered for a moment the people he hadn't chosen.

He'd decided to pass on Olivia because she just felt like she and he wouldn't have had anything in common. He'd never say it aloud to Asha, but her friend struck him as a little vapid and self-centered, at least for his tastes. She did, however, seem like someone his friend Eric's first partner Lily could whip into shape, or at the very least would mesh well with Lily's friend (and another of Eric's partner) Jenny, who was not to be confused with his own chef, whom was also named Jenny.

Piper's friend Brooke had practically been tailor made for his best friend Xander, and since Xander was on his way out to California anyway, Andy was going to see if he could maneuver the two of them together. Their mutual love of classic cars would be an instant tie binding the two together. Of course, he hadn't told Xander about that, but he figured it didn't hurt to put some good into his friends world when he had the chance.

Taylor's friend Natalie had seemed nice enough, but she was also young, and Andy had to be honest with himself that he needed at least a few more women who were closer to his own age, people whom he could relate to a little better.

He also fully suspected at least one or two of his invitations would be declined, and that Jade would end up being extended an invitation in the end. He'd put her as an alternate simply because he liked the other options slightly better, but if (or rather when, he figured) someone said no, Jade would be invited and no one would ever mention that she hadn't been a first choice. Although, if he thought

about it, considering Jade's relentless positivity, she might not even care.

All of the staff pitches had made sense, and while he was a little nervous about how Dr. Fitch had been described as overly blunt, he had hopes that they could make it work, or if they couldn't that she would decline the invite. Lexi and Whitney had been slam dunks from the second they'd been presented.

Once the sheet was printed out, he opened the sheet of paper that Aisling had given him with her predictions, not having looked at it before then. It read: "In: Maya, Tabitha, Lexi, Jade, Whitney, Natalie. Alternate: Tala."

When he came out of his office with the paper in hand, he couldn't see anyone around, but was fairly certain he heard someone shuffling around a corner behind him as he started to walk down the hall towards the stairs.

He strode down the stairs and then down another hall before entering the downstairs living room area, where Aisling was sitting watching TV. She'd clearly been waiting in the room for him, to his amusement. That meant he still had the ability to surprise her, and he found himself delighted by that. However confident she'd pretended to be in her predictions, obviously she hadn't been *that* confident if she'd rushed to look at what the list said.

"That the list?" she asked him, as he strolled over towards a highly exposed section of the wall.

"It is."

"How'd I do on my predictions?"

"75%, so very well," he said, as he taped the list up to the wall, hearing the sound of some footsteps near the entrances of the room.

Aisling scooted over quickly to read it, as other girls were standing in the doorways, not yet ready to rush into the room. She nodded, then started walking with Andy out of the room, as the room was suddenly flooded behind him, various members of the house swarming in to read the list.

"Passed on the stripper, huh?" the redhead teased, as they headed back up to his office. "I suppose I'm not surprised, just a little disappointed. I wanted her to teach me some of those pole tricks."

Andy smirked. "I needed to make sure some of these women I can have a conversation with, Ash, and I just don't know that me and girls barely out of college are going to connect on that much. I'm going to recommend Natalie over to Eric, or, let's be honest, I'm going to recommend her over to Lily, and Lily will decide whether or not to bring her over for Eric."

The Irish girl snickered, nodding fiercely. "I'm sure Lily will bring her in, if for no other reason that to see Eric get all bashful about it. I wasn't sure if Tala's kink might have been a bit much for you, so I put her in as an alternate."

He waved a hand in the air. "I don't care about that one way or another, but she's a musician, she makes puzzle boxes and she's got a wicked sense of humor. How did you not think that would be a shoo-in for me?"

She grinned, shrugging. "I guess I gave a bit more weight to the virgin sacrifice, although I did see she was an alternate."

"Yeah. I'm betting either Tabitha or Larissa, or maybe both, will pass on joining the family, for whatever reason, and that Jade will get an invite in the end, but I have to admit, I'm a little nervous about the idea of being someone's first and only male partner."

"You'll do fine, love," she said, as they stepped into his office and closed the door behind them. "So now you have to tell me: Who's Fiona?"

Andy moved over to his arm chair, picking up the cat that had settled there, sliding in to sit down. He was about to put the cat into his lap, when Ash slid to sit on his lap, then took Huginn from his hands and set the black cat atop her own lap. "Fiona's my choice. She lives in Washington D.C."

"But who *is* she, Andy?"

"She's my ex. My college ex. So you know that Xander and I were roommates all five years of

college, but for the last half of it or so, both he and I had girlfriends living with us. Annie was living with Xander—”

“Wait, psycho bitch 'I found her cheating on me with two guys on my birthday' Xander's ex-wife Annie? *THAT* Annie?”

Andy laughed and nodded. “Yep. Annie never much liked me or, hell, anyone Xander was friends with. But she's gone from his life now, so thankfully you'll never meet her, because she's insane. Did I tell you that she tried to argue, in court, that Xander's lack of attention to her *forced* her to cheat on him with those two dudes?”

“What a *cunt*,” Aisling groaned. “Awright, so forget her. Tell me about Fiona! Why haven't you ever mentioned her before?”

“I haven't talked to her in at least a dozen years!” he chuckled. “She going to say no anyway, but if I had any major regrets in my life, it's that Fi and I split up, even though I don't see any way my life could've gone in which we didn't. We met as sophomores in a political science class together, and she was dating my boss at the newspaper at the time. She dumped him like two weeks after that, and just after I got back for Christmas, she asked me out and we started dating.”

“Awww!”

“About a year and a half or so later, her two roommates bailed on her like two weeks after the spring semester started, and she couldn't find someone to take their places. With no roommates she couldn't afford the rent on the three bedroom house she was renting, and breaking the lease was going to put her hard into debt, so she invited me and Xander, who were renting out a shitty apartment month-to-month, to leave our place and move into hers.”

“Why is this the first I'm hearing of any of this?”

“I didn't think it was important! It was a long, long time ago!” he sighed. “Anyway, when we graduated, Fiona had gotten a job offer to work in the DC Bureau of the Associated Press as a reporter, and I had gotten the offer to come out here for Netflix. I visited DC with her, and she visited SF with me, while we tried to figure out what we were going to do about it. Neither of us really liked DC all that much, but she very much wanted the job. I loved the Bay. I asked her to move out with me, but she insisted she wanted to give the DC job a chance, and so we parted ways.”

“What? Just like that?”

“Well, we tried having a long distance relationship for a few months, but this was like fifteen years ago, and after about six months, we agreed it wasn't working, and sort of fell out of touch. About three months later, I started dating Erin, and you know how that worked out, and she started dating some cop named Sam. After that, we basically just stopped talking to one another, although about two years ago, both Xander and I got Facebook friend requests from her, which we both accepted, although neither of us has had a conversation with her yet.”

“Why not?”

“Shit, Ash, I dunno. How do you even start that conversation? 'Hi, remember me? I know we were talking about getting married at one point, but we didn't and then we moved across the country from one another. I'm getting married to at least four women now and wondered if you might want to join us. Oh... how've you been?’”

“You have to start it somewhere, Andy.”

“Well, she's not married, at least she doesn't have herself marked as married on Facebook, and Xander's done a little internet stalking of her, I'm sure on my unwilling behalf, and says she doesn't even seem to have a regular boyfriend, and that she's spent most of the last several years bitching and moaning about how she *hates* living in DC, although considering she's more liberal than I am, I'm not all that surprised.”

“Do you think she's going to accept your invitation?”

“Ye— n— ... I really don't have a fucking *clue*, Ash,” he said with a laugh, which made her laugh as well. “I guess we'll just wait and see.”

Over the rest of the day and into the evening, the girls all came to thank him, even if he hadn't chosen the girl they'd put forth, and to see how he was doing, making sure he hadn't been too stressed out by the whole process. The rest of the time, everyone was recording their invitation videos. Each of the girls made a video for their friends, although a few of them recorded multiple videos, one for the person they'd put forth and one for someone they also knew. Andy himself recorded a unique video for each and every invitation, and also made sure to record one for Jade, in case it was needed.

The next day, Phil showed up for lunch, and had a bit of a grim look on his face.

"Why the dark cloud, friend?" Andy asked him, as the two walked out onto the back patio, where Jenny had set up a nice lunch for them.

"So we had our first death in New Eden yesterday," he sighed. "And it was absolutely unnecessary."

"I thought only vaccinated people were allowed into New Eden?"

"They are. A woman decided she didn't believe all the warnings we give them at the base about not partaking of a man's cum that she isn't paired with."

"Wait, what?"

"So some woman decided she wanted a bit of strange, so she was fooling around with some guy other than the one she was paired with."

"What the fuck happened? I thought there were early warnings that would've discouraged her."

"Apparently they were using a condom, and they were convinced because that seemed fine that everything we told them must be utter bullshit."

"Goddamn it."

Niko had filled him in on some of the details of how the vaccine paired people just after they'd arrived in New Eden, at least as how she understood it. If a woman came in contact with semen from a man other than the one she was paired with, it would cause her to break out in a violent rash. The rash happened almost immediately on skin contact, so even a tiny bit of precum would be enough to discourage anyone from going further.

"So she took off the condom right before the dude popped, and then swallowed his load, and it ate her open from the inside."

"Fuck, Phil!" Andy said, wincing a little. "I hate to say it, but you may need to show pictures of that to people so they understand what kind of danger they're in if they're unfaithful."

"I so don't want to, but it's up to the mayor now, and he's considering it."

"Who were the people?"

"Don't think it's anyone you know. The guy's name is Brian Morrison, a banker. He's in custody right now, because he might be guilty of manslaughter or murder, nobody's really sure."

"And who was the woman?"

"Veronica De La Cruz. She was part of that bastard Arthur Covington's house."

"Oh shit," Andy muttered. "I met her, briefly. She was supposed to be the dealer at the poker game. I thought it was particularly in poor taste that Covington made her be topless in front of a bunch of strangers, but I didn't realize she was quite that unhappy there."

"This new world is so utterly fucked up some days. Oh, also Audrey's pregnant, so I've apparently picked the best time to bring a new life into the world."

"You and me both, friend. Ash and Niko are both pregnant as well."

Phil grinned a little at that. "Well, at least our kids will grow up with good friends nearby. Anyway, you get your list and videos done?"

Andy slid across a thumb drive to him. "All on there, including contact information for everyone we have, or at least general location for the ones we don't. I'm not going crazy and asking for a bunch of celebrities like Covington did."

"Seemed like his requests worked out pretty well for you, though."

"Can't blame me if the dude's a shit card player."

“Well, I *can* but I won't, because fuck that guy. Anyone I might recognize on the list?”

“A couple of people. And, uh,” he said before lowering his voice to almost a whisper. “Fi's on there.”

“What was that? I believe your pride was stuck in your throat, or maybe that's just your foot,” the Filipino engineer laughed.

“I'm sending Fiona an invite, okay?”

“Good for you,” Phil said, as he finished his sandwich. “I've been telling you to reach out to that woman ever since she added you on Facebook, but you just kept avoiding it. Nothing like an apocalypse to get you to get off your ass, huh?”

“Yeah yeah, Phil, go fuck yourself.”

“Anyway, tell all your girls about the death, and prepare them that they may be shown some rather graphic autopsy photos in the near future if the mayor decides to go ahead with his discouragement campaign. I don't think any of your girls would fool around with other guys, but I think they're just gonna show everyone.”

“Oh, you know Xander, right?”

“Your friend from Ohio? Sure.”

“Apparently he's paired up with Captain Betsy Ross,” he said, raising a finger. “No jokes.” Phil was struggling not to laugh, but managed. “He was wondering if maybe you could relocate them to New Eden.”

“I'm not a goddamn genie, Rook.”

“You know you'd like having him around here. Besides, I've got a few recommendations for you and Eric on that thumb drive as well, so don't say I never gave you anything. There's also one in there who might be a great match for Xander. Plus, look at it this way – you get him out here, and he'll probably build you a classic car as a way of saying thank you.”

Phil smirked for a bit, picked up the thumb drive and walked away humming the “I Dream of Genie” theme song.

(Might take a few weeks off to recharge the batteries, but we'll see. Also, a few people have suggested I open a Patreon or an OnlyFans to allow people to have a tip jar to encourage me to do more. If I did that, I might even start another full novel length story that would exclusively be available there. Would that be something you'd be interested in? Lemme know. Feedback always welcome – corruptingpower@aol.com)