

## Chapter Four – “Fucking Tourists”

There were lots of people I hated to go and visit. Usually it was because I didn't want to see them in the first place. Digger Wiig wasn't that way at all. In fact, the reservations I usually had about going and seeing Digger were more about being able to get away from him with some portion of my liver still functioning and a few brain cells rattling around inside of my head. You hear those stories about those folks were the life of the party? I've been convinced for as long as I've known him that Digger Wiig was, in fact, the living *embodiment* of all parties. Now, I know that he *isn't* – Digger's human, and I've had my both late father and my late uncle as well as my sister confirm that – but that doesn't mean that there's a party anywhere in the Bay Area that Digger's not only *at* but is likely closing down.

There is no party in the Bay Area worth going to that Digger Wiig isn't at.

No, I don't know how he does it, either.

Digger would've been an excellent wizard if he'd applied himself to it, but instead, he'd become casually known as 'The Hook Up,' because he'd become the Apothecary to The Parties, providing magical intoxication and inebriation to anyone with the money to pony up for it, and his work did not come cheap. It also meant he had access to pretty much anywhere or anything he wanted, and that he was one of the best sources of information around, whenever I wanted to tap into that particular streak of resources.

Now, normally I wouldn't go do Digger for this kind of thing, because Saoirse Staire wasn't a big party girl, but if the Queen knew who she was without me even so much as having to jog her memory much, there was a good chance that the girl had made an impression on other people in the party scene, and that meant Digger would at least know who she was, and he might have kept track if other people were asking about her.

The funny thing about Digger is that Digger's what's called “Protected Caste,” of which there are about two dozen of in the Bay Area at any one time, myself included. That means Digger's sort of got the magical equivalent of diplomatic immunity. More than anything, it means I don't generally have to worry about him saying the wrong thing at a party and turning up dead. But it also means his location is reported to me on a real-time basis, as the Druid Gunslinger. My sister has access to the same data, although she very rarely uses it, and even then, odds are better than most that she's simply checking on *my* location. I'm not so proud as to be unable to admit I've done the same on her myself.

Magic and technology have this weird sort of dislike of each other, but there's a handful of people who've made it work over the centuries, and the technoforgers are a class unto themselves, so it's worth noting that while the tracking technology exists, it's... finicky. Oh, it can find people, but it's terribly with verticality, which was why I found myself standing at the bottom of the W Hotel in San Francisco, looking upwards with a long sigh. He was probably at the top of the building in some sort of club or party atmosphere, but if he wasn't, it was going to be a bit of no fun trying to pinpoint his actual location down. I'd complained about it the representative of the Technoforger's Union, who insisted it was on 'her list of things to work on.' I suspected it was down near the bottom, below 'font choice' and just above 'dark mode.' It's practically criminal how little our input affected the development of the app. I'd suggested as much once, and Lady BitBolt had asked me if I had contributed any jewels or precious metals into their retirement fund within the last decade or so. All of which was a polite way of telling me that if I wanted a feature integrated into the app, I'd better put some money where my mouth was.

One of the many places I'd spent money *instead* was some place a lot more street level – I'd greased the palms of pretty much every nightclub manager, every late hotel shift chief, every struggling motel clerk and so many bartenders that I'd actually used a spell to keep all the names easily accessible in my mind. So as soon as I walked into the lobby, I recognized the night clerk's name was Eli. I headed over towards him with a slight smile. "Digger," I asked him. "You know if he's—"

"Top floor, Mr. Sexton," came back the response before I'd even finished with the question. "He's been up there with the AmperSandyDuncans album release party for a couple of hours, so I imagine he won't be up there for too much longer."

I dropped a twenty on the counter as I walked on by. "Thanks Eli, I'll take it from here."

On the elevator ride up, I had plenty of time to think what an absolutely *awful* name for a band 'AmperSandyDuncans' was. I mean, even now... Just... *Wow*. Like, I'm sure worse band names exist or have existed out there, but I couldn't think of any. In fact, I wasn't thinking about the case, the Queen, the sidhe, or anything even remotely related to our world, other than perhaps idly wondering if maybe someone had cursed this band to be forced to wear this moniker like a mark of shame that they weren't allowed to remove at any costs under penalty of death. There had to be some legitimate cause or trauma that was keeping them releasing albums under this name.

No one could hate themselves this much voluntarily.

I sort of changed my mind about that when the elevator doors opened and I *heard* the AmperSandyDuncans for the first time. It was somehow both sludge rock *and* speed rock all at the same time. Like, it was almost that mumbling 90s grunge era vocals played over these syrupy, almost droning guitars, and yet, the musicians were constantly changing chords, back and forth between an E and an E minor, and there was something so inescapably *dull* about it all. Maybe the name was doing a good thing, I thought to myself, steering people away from having to listen to this monumentally *piss poor* excuse for music in the first place.

That said, it seemed like most of the local scenesters were lingering around the place – label heads, PR managers, trade industry press, models wanting to get noticed, musicians wanting to get noticed, dancers wanting to get noticed... and then maybe a dozen or so people who seemed to genuinely love the sound of the band, and were out on the floor doing something no sane human being alive would describe as 'dancing.'

It was coming up on midnight, which meant this party would be going for another two to three hours, whether it wanted to or not. Those wise enough to leave had probably gotten out after taking half an hour to make appearances, make sure they were noticed and then slipped out the back, and everyone now was basically pot committed into losing the night.

Over at the bar was the person I was looking for. It was never all that hard to spot Digger. He's got to be like 6'5" and weighs over 300lbs. He's almost shaped like the Michelin Man, sort of like a swollen person, like there's water in every part of him. His hair's thinning, but to compensate for that, he's letting the rest of it grow long, pulled back into a hipster's rat tail. He had a pair of circular shaped Harry Potter style glasses that I'd always told him made him look ridiculous, but then again, he was always pulling women left and right, so who was I to tell him he was in the wrong. Not that I do so bad myself.

He was talking to an Indian woman who had certainly dolled herself up for a night out on the town, a dress that was basically two pieces of red fabric – one front and one back – with laces running

from the neckline all the way down to mid-thigh on each side, exposed windows of bare flesh on each side of her, sleeveless, with a very daring and plunging neckline down the front. Her black hair was pulled back tightly into a ponytail of onyx curls that basically exploded out of the back of her head. She had a gold ring through one nostril and a red bindi in the center of her forehead. The way she was smoothing her hand atop of Digger's forearm made it clear that they'd been in this conversation for a while.

"Hey Digger," I said, stepping up on the other side of him. "Who's your new friend?"

He turned to glance at me, and I noticed his eyes seemed a little bit glossy, something very much unlike Digger. "Oh, hey man. This is my new friend Navya. Navya, this is my old friend Dale."

For those kids at home keeping score, this was the moment where I screwed up, and it nearly cost me. But thankfully, some very ingrained defenses were about to kick in.

"Hey Navya," I said to her, not really giving her much more than a cursory glance. "I need to borrow Digger for a bit."

"Why don't you sit and join us for a bit first, Dale?" Navya said, as she reached over and placed her other hand on top of my forearm.

In that moment, my olfactory senses were hit with a very familiar blast, a combination of scents I'd not experienced for some time. It was sandalwood, a combination of orange and pineapple citrus and a hint of old school watch oil. It was a combination of scents designed to evoke a period in my life where I was my most trusting, my most open, my most honest...

*...my most vulnerable.*

In the space between heartbeats, I'd erected an illusion of normality around us with my left hand, stepped behind Navya, and drawn one of the SoulEnders and pressed the eldritch steel tip of the barrel to her throat, hearing her flesh sizzle in unwelcome response. The hammer was already back, and the slightest move would've sent the round in the chamber to action.

"You're *new in town*, aren't you, Navya?" I snarled.

"I don't—"

"You have a SoulEnders pressed against your neck right now, so I think you best reconsider that thought you were just having about lying to me," I said, absolutely zero fucks to be given in my tone of voice. "According to the Predator Accords, what's the first thing a Predator does when entering a new zone they intend to hunt in?"

"Dale," Digger said to me, trying to shake the confusion from his eyes. "What's—"

"Shut up, Digger," I told him. "I'll get to your ass in a minute. Go on, Navya, Rule #1 about a Predator entering a new zone. What is it?"

Navya swallowed a breath, wincing as she did, because the very act of swallowing made the gun barrel move and singe a different part of her exposed neckflesh. She was holding perfectly still, so I have a feeling the gun barrel against her neck had illuminated just how badly she'd fucked up to her. "Check in with the local captains."

"Gooooood," I sneered. "And *why* do you have to check in with the local captains?"

"To get the Protected List. So as to not upset the balance."

“And you didn’t do that because...?”

“I was hungry, human, and I think that trumps some silly list.”

I inhaled a *very* controlled breath then exhaled it. I would entirely within my rights to blow this damn succubus’s head off right here in the W, and the SoulEnder would only thank me for getting the chance to use its abilities once more in this world. “You really want to make that point with a SoulEnder against your throat?”

“You’re just *saying* it’s a SoulEnder,” she scoffed. “You’re far too *young* to be Lane Sexton.”

“You’re right about that, moron. I’m *Dale* Sexton, son of the late Lane Sexton, and current holder of the title of Druid Gunslinger,” I said, letting the barrel drag along her throat, making sure her flesh boiled and scabbed a little as it moved past. The moment the words left my lips, she knew they had to be true, and that made her start to quake in fear. “And you attempted to instigate a hunt on not one but *two* members of the Protected Caste here in the Bay. I *should* put you down on general fucking principal, and then call Sirena myself, let her know that somebody’s relative wasn’t going to making that first meeting any more, because they’d decided to try and go hunt the fucking *Druid Gunslinger*. Shit, I’d probably be doing you a *favor* by ending your soul, which is why I’m *not* going to do it.”

“W-w-w-w-what?”

I slowly eased the hammer back down into place, flicked the safety back on and brought the SoulEnder away from her neck. “You’re going to go tell Sirena how badly you fucked up, and we’ll see what sort of punishment she decides is fair. I’m sure she’s going to *love* how you’d been getting close to feeding on someone with immunity before you attempted to feed on one of the two people who’s legally permitted to *kill you* for your transgression.”

“I, I, I... I didn’t...”

“It’s remarkable how *stupid* Sirena is going to find you.”

“I’m... I’m sorry...”

I pulled the SoulEnder away from her neck and moved to holster it once more, shaking my head. “Not yet you aren’t,” I said to her. “But believe me... once you talk to Sirena, you *will* be.”

The woman reeled from me as quickly as she could once I’d released her, and she was sprinting towards the elevator, but then decided not to wait, and headed down the stairwell. Maybe she’d stopped part way down and hopped onto an elevator, but she wanted to get at least a few floors away from me.

Digger’s eyes started blinking quickly, faster and faster, then stopping suddenly, turning to look at me, shaking the confusion from his eyes. “Dale?”

“Yeah Digger?”

“Where the fuck am I?”

“The W Hotel. The album release party for someone called the AmperSandyDuncans.”

Digger frowned. “Really?”

I shrugged at him. “You chose to be here, man.”

“Why does my head feel all fucking fuzzy?”

“You were being warmed up by a succubus when I got here,” I told him, feeling my own head starting to clear.

Digger scowled at me. “That doesn’t sound right. I’m protected. They can’t hunt me.”

“It was an out-of-towner who hadn’t bothered to touch base with the local captain before she went out hunting.”

“Well *that* was the stupidest fucking idea I’ve ever heard.”

“Yeah, you ain’t kidding,” I agreed. “I’m certainly glad I showed up when I did, otherwise I’d have been investigating your murder instead.”

“You think she would’ve—”

“She tried to pick me up as well, which means she was planning on having a two-for-one deal, except both her choices were on the ‘do not touch’ portion of the menu.”

Digger’s eyes widened. “And you let her *walk*?”

I shrugged a little bit. “Maybe I’m getting soft. Maybe I’m more interested in what kind of punishment Sirena’s going to come up with.”

“What made you realize she was luring us?”

I shook my head. “Don’t worry about it. Anyway, I came to talk to you about leannán sídhe, hoping you’d know more than other people I’ve been bumping into, lots of whom have given me little bits of information, but nothing all that actionable.”

“Sure sure, I owe you that much for free anyway,” Digger said, shifting his jacket back onto his shoulders. “You mind if we ditch this place while we talk, though? It’s dead here anyway.”

I chuckled a little bit, hearing the album hit a few seconds of silence before spinning up and starting all over again. “The less time I have to spend listening to this shit, the better.” We were in the elevator before anyone really had a chance to catch Digger leaving the party, which was probably for the best, as most of the times he wanted to duck out, someone usually came up to him with some last-minute request for a hook up, which inevitably turned into a longer conversation, one that Digger had trouble getting himself out of.

“You’re not coming by for my skills as an Apothecary, Druid. So what do I owe the honor of the visit?”

“Saoirse Staire,” I said to him as the elevator began its slow descent down to the ground floor. “Name ring any bells?”

“You know it does,” he said to me with a wry smile. I relied on the fact that Digger never forgot a name or a face a lot, but it was part of the reason he’d *gotten* Protected Status in the first place. “She wasn’t a client for any of the hard stuff but she liked a little bit of the party drugs – Pixie Bliss, Wraith Euphoria – but she hasn’t been around much over the last couple of years. Although I did see her about a month ago. She wanted something different than my usual orders, so it took me a little bit to mix it up for her. It wasn’t the sort of thing I keep on hand, generally.”

“What’s that?” I asked as the elevator dinged and we both walked out into the lobby.

“Alexandrium,” Digger said to me.

I frowned a little bit at that. “The memory restorer? Yeah, I can imagine that’s not the sort of thing you need to keep in your usual bag of tricks. She say what it was for?”

Digger rolled his eyes at me. “You should know better, Dale. I don’t ask. She was willing to pay to get it faster than normal even, so I went home, brewed up a batch and met her the next day for delivery and payment. Haven’t seen her since then, so I assume whatever she wanted it for was concluded.”

“Nothing more since then?”

Digger shrugged, shaking his head. “If I haven’t seen her, Dale, I haven’t seen her. Anything else I can do for you?”

I sighed, shaking my head. “Not unless you happen to know anything about some rogue Atlantean lingering around the city,” I muttered as I started to walk away from him.

“You mean Nigel?”

That stopped me in my tracks, as I spun on one heel and started walking back towards him. “You *know* an Atlantean?”

“Well, sure, Nigel’s in town. He typically blows through every couple of years for a few months and then disappears back on the winds again like a tropical storm.”

“I thought none of the Atlanteans could get past the Veil and into our world,” I said, stepping in close so that we weren’t having the conversation with everyone in the lobby. “Am I wrong in believing that?”

“There’s about a dozen who can cross the Veil back and forth, and they’re mostly travelers, so they don’t tend to stay in one place for too long,” Digger said. “Besides, Nigel’s good people. He looks out for others, sort of like you do.”

An Atlantean with a habit of coming and going in my city and I didn’t know about it? More importantly, Dad hadn’t known about it, and my sister didn’t either. I didn’t care for that one bit. Keeping secrets from the Druids was an inherently bad idea, but it didn’t seem like Digger had *realized* it was a secret, so I decided to let him off without so much as a warning. “Yeah, okay. Well, thanks for the info, Digger. You continue to prove useful, as always. Don’t go getting nibbled on by any strangers before you see me next, yeah?”

I headed over towards Buster’s, figuring I’d get a cheesesteak and head back to the apartment. I don’t always spend all my time in the city – I’ve got a house over in El Cerrito that doesn’t see as much of me as it would like – but at least half the time, I’ve found it’s easier just to crash in the apartment than head back to the house.

If you’ve been to San Francisco and skipped Buster’s, I don’t know what to tell you other than you’re doing it wrong. They’re a goddamn institution at this point, open until about 2:30 am most nights, which might sound like an odd time point, but the bars and the strip clubs close at 2, so whenever people are at their neediest and most vulnerable, the promise of a warm, hot sandwich is awaiting just around the corner. It’s sort of genius if you ask me. And what’s funny is that the food didn’t have to be all that good, because of the opportunity benefits, but instead of being *good*, they went for fucking *amazing* instead. So

even people who *aren't* hanging around for the close of bars swing by, because it's the best food you can get. Sure sure, there's other *good* places to get a cheesesteak here in the Bay – the Cheesesteak Shop does fine ones, and so does Ib's – but if you want the best, accept no substitutes.

After I'd got my food, though, I usually didn't want to hang around, so I headed back to the building, making my way through the darkened halls up to my apartment above the wine store, flipping on the television to watch last night's Late Night With Stephen Colbert off my DVR when there was a buzzing at the back door to the building, my private entrance, meaning someone looking for me personally and not just hassling random doorways.

I grumbled, but then moved over to the CCTV camera screen I had by the buzzer. I was more than a little surprised to see Sirena Greznov, Bay Area Local Hunt Captain for the Succubi, looking up at me, heavy annoyance plain as day upon her face. I was more than a little surprised she'd gotten to my place so fast, and then, just before I was going to buzz her in, she leaned a little, and I could see she wasn't alone, with a couple of figures behind her.

"Gods, and I thought I was done with business for the day." I pressed the button to unlock the door to the stairs, which would let them come up and to the apartment. A few moments later, there was a knock on the door, so I moved to open it, and Sirena just marched right on, followed by two other familiar faces.

Sirena Greznov was more than easy on the eyes, a platinum blonde who looked like she was from Sweden or Norway or maybe some part of Russia where they grew them big and busty, but with a very youngish face. That was entirely by design, obviously. A lot of people remarked how much she resembled Taylor Swift. That was by design as well. She was dressed in a scanty black slip of a dress that looked like it was barely more than a suggestion of fabric. "You can be a real pain in my ass, Gunslinger," she said as she walked over towards my couch and sat down on it, making herself comfortable. "I'd rather you'd have put her down, honestly."

That was when I noticed the second person entering was Navya, who I'd nearly put in the ground just a few short hours ago, dressed just as she was then, although her face had a very frightened look upon it, as she realized exactly how openly the Local Captain was talking about my ability to murder her.

"Yeah, well, that would've put an even bigger toll in your ledge, 'Rina, and that's the last thing you'd have wanted," I said. "Think of how much a soul's weight would've cost you."

"Yeah yeah yeah," Sirena grumbled, as I glanced to see the third woman slipping in, and it was my turn to feel my heart drop a little bit as I saw someone who had no reason to be in my living room.

"Hey Gwen," I said to the third succubus. "What're you doing here?"

Gwen Nighttears and I had a very complicated history to say the least. In between bouts of making each other miserable, we'd had a few good spells of making each other extremely happy as well. She had a lineage I'd never been able to understand, a strange combination of Asian, Scottish and Spanish features all rolled into one – red hair, almond shaped eyes and a tanned skin that still somehow bore an immense number of freckles upon it. She was dressed in a short tartan pleated skirt and a white button-up Oxford shirt that told me she'd probably been out working tonight up until literally the worst possible things had gone down. "Navya's my fucking cousin," she sighed. "I told her when she said she was coming over for a visit that first thing, *first thing* she had to do was come talk to Sirena, to pick up the No Fly list and get the lay of the land."

“I was *hungry*, cousin,” Navya whimpered.

“Navya, shut the *fuck* up,” Sirena spat. “You didn’t just try and feed on someone on the No Fly list, you tried to exert your will against the literal fucking personification of Justice around these parts. I’ve seen some truly stupid fucking first moves, but trying to eat on the man who’s authorized to destroy your *soul* for doing so? Do you have any idea the fucking debt you’ve rung up in just a few hours?”

“It can’t be—”

“Shut the fuck *up*, Navya, unless you want me to keep raising your portion of this fucking debt crater you’ve thrown us into.”

The succubus fell deathly silent at that. Maybe it was dawning on her just how deep the hole she’d been digging was already getting, or maybe Sirena’s attitude was convincing her that I still had the option of murdering Navya on the table, which technically, I did.

“You want to tell me what you’re doing here, Sirena?”

“Settling up our score,” Sirena said before glancing over at Gwen. “Go on, strip down.”

“Hey wait a *minute*—” I started to say.

“One of us fucks up, we all pay the price,” Sirena grumbled. “You know the Predator Accords better than I do, Gunslinger, so you should’ve expected this.”

“It allows the debt to be *distributed* but that doesn’t make it *mandatory*, ‘Rena.”

“It’s the Hunt Captain’s discretion, and the last thing we’re doing is underpaying this debt.”

Gwen had stood up and shed the top, leaving her perky young tits exposed to my eyes. I, rationally, *knew* they weren’t as young as they appeared, but Gwen had always had a knack for knowing how to target whatever a man liked that he hadn’t indulged in for the longest of times, and apparently I’d been skewing towards older women lately. When she dropped the skirt, she had a nice generous patch of red curls above her pussy, her arms folded behind her back, her head tilted to one side, like she almost couldn’t look me in the eyes.

“Bringing a pair of succubi to my doorstep isn’t exactly paying off the debt, ‘Rena and you know that,” I scolded, although it was *damn* hard not to let my eyes keep drifting back to Gwen’s naked form standing in the middle of my living room.

“We’re not going to engage in a feeding, Dale,” Sirena sighed at me, like I was being deliberately dense. “We’re going to engage in a filling.”

“Oh. *Oh!* I’m not particularly injured right now, though.”

When I was young, my interest in the Predator Accords ran deep. How, I remember asking my father, could we let people hunt humans? His response was that the predators paid their price of admission like anyone else, and we prevented them from ever taking things too far. While succubi were known for their nature of feeding on humans, they could also *reverse* that process, engage in a filling, a transfer of vitae back *into* a human. They were typically used in cases of emergency healing or to repair the sort of catastrophic injuries that might otherwise be debilitating.

“It doesn’t matter. You’re getting one filling now, and each of the three of us owes you one more filling in the future, to be reclaimed at a point of your choosing,” Sirena said, moving to sit on the left



side of my couch, Navya on the right, as Gwen turned around and kneeled in the middle of it. “I could feel how *tangible* your anger was when I walked in tonight, and you’d better take all that out on Gwen here, so her cousin sees just how close she came to getting her light snuffed out.”

Gwen glanced over at me, and motioned for me to come closer, reaching up to caress my face, whispering quietly, “What memory did she use?”

I winced, tensing up a little bit, before I whispered back, “She used Jen’s scent.”

A single tear dropped from Gwen’s eye before she looked over at Navya, shaking her head. “You useless *bitch*,” she sneered. “I wish he’d just fucking *killed you instead*.” Gwen reached an arm up and wiped the back of her hand against her eyes. She knew exactly how deep the dagger Navya had driven into my heart had been in that moment. Then she looked back to me once more. “Make it hurt, Dale. You have the right to be angry, so fucking use me the way she needed to be treated.”

There wasn’t any way to get out of this other than to get through it, so I moved to get behind her, pulling my cock out, knowing that what we were about to do wasn’t much in line with how Gwen and I had done this back before we’d agreed not to do it anymore. But the expectations had been set, and if I didn’t play my part, it would only get worse a thousandfold for both Gwen and Navya.

My hips thrust forward, pushing my shaft into her pussy, and she let out a carnal moan, looking over her shoulder at me with almost a sneer. “That the best you got, Gunslinger?”

I hated that we’d been roped into this, but here we were, so I grabbed a fistful of her copper curls and yanked back on them hard like the reins of a show horse, as I started to ram my cock into her with reckless abandon, making sure the tip of my shaft hit the back of her womb each time, her left hand holding onto Navya’s, her right holding onto Sirena’s.

Gwen and I had had sex several times before, but this was just raw carnal fucking, and as pleasurable as the signals being sent through my brain were, I also just wanted it done.

“Fuck me, Lord Gunslinger! Fuck my worthless pussy! Hammer your pleasure from me, so that we might redeem ourselves! Take from me which is rightfully yours! Slake your thirst from my whorish body! Savage me!”

When my orgasm finally crescendoed, I felt the oddest sensation as instead of feeling energy flowing *out* of me, I could feel it come flooding *into* me, like licking a livewire. A few seconds later, my cock slipped triumphantly from Gwen’s still throbbing and pulsating snatch, her body looking drained and weak, as she slumped forward onto the couch, the other two succubi looking far less shiny than they had when they’d entered.

“May we sleep here until morning, Gunslinger?” Sirena asked me.

“You and Navya may,” I said, scooping up Gwen into my arms. “Gwen will rest alongside me.”

As I started to walk towards my bedroom, Sirena called to me one last time. “Dale?”

“Yeah?”

“I truly am sorry it came to this,” she said, genuine regret on her face.

“Let the word of just how close Navya came to getting her soul extinguished tonight spread,” I said to her. “And we’ll hope it’ll doesn’t happen again.”

Fucking *tourists*.