

Svelka was surprised how banal, how mundane coming back to life ended up being. Honestly, it was no different than being jolted awake by a surprise. Yes, she was a bit stiff, and yes, she felt short of breath, but there was no reason to think anything was amiss.

Even if she didn't recognize the bedroom around her, she felt somewhat at ease. If she was in a bed, and not some ditch or shallow grave, it meant the last thing she remembered must have been a very, *very* vivid nightmare. If she was waking up, she obviously wasn't deceased.

Still, it was hard to shake the feeling that she'd somehow survived being murdered. She wanted to throw the bedding aside and look at her stomach, but her body refused to move. Beneath the comforter, trembling fingers hovered over where she remembered being stabbed.

What if there was a scar?

What if there wasn't?

She squeezed her eyes closed as if anticipating a blow, and put her fingertips to her skin. There was nothing out of the ordinary there so she searched up and down her left side as well as she could manage. All in all, she found no sign of injury. There were no bandages, no stitches, no scar.

Her sigh of relief turned into a fit of coughing that forced her to sit up. The stiffness made her muscles twinge, but her reflexes convinced her aching body to comply with their demands. After a moment, the coughing gave way to hiccups. Hiccups that continued until she was light-headed. Scooting back, she leaned into the headboard and brought her knees up so that she could rest her face on her crossed arms. She tried to ignore the spasms and control her breathing.

"Last night must've been a bad dream and nothing more," she whispered to herself. "As if he'd betray me with Vanna in our bed." If nothing else, her half-sister was better than that. Not

that Vanna wouldn't fuck her fiance—she'd do damn near *anything* to solidify her station—but she would've had the decency to do the deed somewhere discreet.

Then again, her betrothed was desperate—No! She refused to entertain rumors that were no doubt the work of her rivals seeking to sow discord. What if... What if one of them had set up the sordid affair? Anyone could buy a spell if they paid the price. So why not enthrall her sister and fiance in the throes of lust? Wait... Supposing that was true, did that mean her unfamiliar surroundings were part of some kidnapping plot? Or was there something else going on here? The only way she was going to find out was to get out of bed.

As Svelka pushed the covers back to swing her legs to the side, she could hear footsteps approaching from beyond the door. Someone was coming! She had to act fast! This was no time to deal with the fact that the legs she was looking at weren't hers. Wait—what?

Just above the hem of the long t-shirt she found herself wearing, neon purple stitching wrapped around both thighs with a pattern of tiny 'x's. On one side was her pale complexion. On the other, the skin was a disconcerting blue. The alien legs were way more muscular than the pair she'd had before going to sleep. They should have been more like over-sized boots than seamless tissue and yet, her muscles on the other side of the stitching had somehow grown to match.

Still reeling, Svelka froze as the door banged open and a figure with a glowing green eye stepped into the room. Their silhouette was no help in discerning their identity. Which meant her captor wasn't one of her rivals.

There was a click and the lights came on, revealing the stranger to be a woman of medium height in a long skirt and a finely tailored sport coat that had several large burns through it giving Svelka a peek at what seemed to be a black camisole. The volume of her bright blue hair should

have been impossible, but the way it moved was even more astonishing. It was like gravity had no effect on it.

“Oh, good. You’re up,” said the woman. Her tone was that of an energetic dog, she was practically vibrating with excitement. “I was starting to worry that something had gone wrong.”