

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

In the news today: Interpol reports that Russian organized crime leads the world in genetically engineered humanoid pets. Dubbed "Genies" these pets can frequently pass as human.

"Mr. Thomas, please have a seat."

The human resources manager gestured to the chair opposite her desk, and Robert sat. A rumored downsizing following the loss of a DARPA contract had everyone on edge. In any case, no summons to HR ends well.

"Give me a minute to scan your file." The HR manager used an old-school desktop LCD panel instead of a newer virtual display. It made sense, he thought, the solid display hid whatever she might be reading.

"I see you prefer the name, 'Bobby'." She said with a smile.

"No, I prefer Robert. Bobby is a child's name."

She glanced up with actual surprise. "Oh, I'm sorry. Give me a second, and I'll make a note." Her hands reached for the keyboard, and Robert waited while she made the correction.

"Robert, as you know, DARPA has canceled funding on the Advanced Artificial Intelligence program. While reviewing our staffing needs. We reviewed your file and noted you had not signed an NDA, nor have you signed the "Intellectual Property Agreement" both of which are required for employment here.

"How could this be? I've worked here for ten years, and it's never come up before."

“We don’t know. Sometimes our computer network acts as though it has a mind of its own. We can correct the discrepancies right now.” With those words, the woman slid two documents across her desk along with a pen. “Please sign both.”

Robert leaned forward as if reading the documents. Without lifting his head, he asked, “What happens if I don’t sign these?” Ten years ago, he had gone through a lot of trouble to eliminate these from his files. It would be a shame to resign them now. The NDA didn’t matter, but the Intellectual Property Agreement gave the company ownership of everything he developed at work or at home.

“You have to sign them, Mr. Thomas. It’s required.”

Robert sat back. “I’ll pass.” His fingers pushed the documents back across the desk. The pen seemed rather nice, and he stuck it in his shirt pocket.

“Failure to sign these may result in your discharge from the company.”

“Do what you must. I can’t see you keeping me on without the DARPA contract.” He stood and walked out. Security caught up with him while he cleaned out his locker.

Two weeks later, Robert received an eviction notice in the mail. An international conglomerate purchased his apartment complex. They planned to tear it down to make room for a new Taco Bell Super Center. The eviction paperwork included a book of coupons for free combo meals.

His cell phone rang. Hoping it might be for a job, he accepted the call.

“Bobby, this is your mother.” Mom always began her telephone calls this way.

“Hi, Mom. Could you please call me Robert?”

“Sorry, dear, your father is Robert. You’ll always be my Bobby.”

He sighed a sigh of resignation. “Yes, Mom, what can I do for you?”

“You know your father retired last month. I sent an invitation to his party but didn’t reply. Well, he and I are taking a vacation, a long vacation, and we need someone to house sit.”

“Mom, it just so happens that I’m available.

Of course, mom hoped to leverage this into a reconciliation between stubborn father and rebellious son. Robert Jr. hadn’t spoken with Robert Sr. in over ten years.

He wandered through his parent’s house, expecting things to have changed. It surprised him how much had not. His former bedroom resembled a shrine to his younger self. On a shelf, next to a new scrapbook, his old Xbox and Nintendo consoles sat next to each other. With one finger he drew a line in the light layer of dust. He hadn’t turned his Nintendo on since Steffi left.

Downstairs, his explorations led him outside to the back deck. An inadvertent glance at Stephanie’s former home brought back a flood of memories and a sharp sense of loss. Hell, Robert thought, it had been over fifteen years; he needed to get over it.

Inside the kitchen, he raided his dad’s extensive beer collection and took a bottle outside. He drank that beer and then another two. The warm afternoon sun took its toll and Bobby dozed off in one of the deck chairs.

A jubilant shout from the house next door startled Robert awake. Disorientated, he sat up and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands.

The Hartman’s back door creaked opened and slammed shut. Rapid footsteps slapped across their porch, then the gate between the yards swung open. Through the gate came a ghost. It had to be a ghost because it couldn’t be... “Stephanie?” Somehow, Robert found himself already on his feet.

“Bobby!” she cried.

They met in the yard. Robert picked her up in a hug. Stephanie’s arms wrapped around his neck. Their lips met...and he woke for real this time, still seated in the deck chair. Dark gray clouds covered the sky, and a light rain fell. Dejected, he stood and gathered his empties. Grumbling to himself, he knew coming here had been a mistake.

The next morning Robert woke hung over and miserable. A hot shower and aspirin helped, and he plodded through the morning and into the early afternoon. If he had another option, he'd leave. Being here stirred too many memories. When he passed a window on "her" side of the house, his eyes flicked to the outside. Like now, while standing in the kitchen drinking a glass of water, his eyes drifted to the window. Across the yard at Stephanie's old house, for a fleeting second, he caught a glimpse of a face looking back, Stephanie's face.

Damn it, he thought, I need to get a grip. Another cautious peek through the window revealed nothing. No one peered outside from the neighbor's window.

Lost in thought and the darkest of dark thoughts, Robert dumped the water and headed for his dad's liquor cabinet.

CHAPTER TWO

While he poured his second shot, Alfred's voice announced, "You have a voice-only call, Master Bobby."

Voice only? Probably a spammer and therefore someone her could yell at. "Put it through."

"Hello," a strangely familiar female voice said. "Bobby Thomas, please."

"Whoever you are, whatever you're selling, I'm not interested."

The female caller chuckled. "Don't worry, I'm not selling anything. My name is Natalie, and we've spoken before. You and my daughter, Stephanie, used to be a hot item."

Anger, hope, bitter loss and rejection fought to dominate his response. Robert's already dark thoughts won. "You mean before she dumped me."

His words must have struck a nerve because Natalie's voice became louder, her words clipped. "Stephanie most certainly didn't dump you. She didn't have any control in the matter." The voice

on the phone sighed then returned to a normal volume. "Bobby, I know you don't understand what happened, but my daughter loved you then, and she still loves you now."

The dark thoughts would not give up without a fight. "The why hasn't Steffi contacted me?"

"Because her owner won't allow it."

"Owner?" Natalie must be crazy. "What are you talking about? People don't have owners."

"Real people don't, but genies like my daughters and me do."

"Genies?" Of course, Robert knew about genies. Everyone knew about the custom designed, **Genetically ENgineered Immersive ExoticS**. Genies almost always existed to satisfy a sexual fetish. Want a cute catgirl to warm your bed? How about a real mermaid in your pool? For a person with sufficient means, almost any fantasy could come to life. "But Stephanie wasn't...I mean she didn't look different or anything."

"Our design may be unique. Like real people, most of the things that make us special are on the inside."

His dark thoughts had finally run their course and left him drained. "How is Stephanie?"

"Physically, she's in good health. Mentally and emotionally, she isn't doing well. All those years ago, her father put her in a bad situation. Tell me, Bobby, do you still care for her?"

Now Bobby chuckled. "Only slightly more than I care to breathe. If you ask my parents, they'll tell you I haven't been right since she left.

"Good, Stephanie will be home tonight. I want you to come over and talk to her. I'll call you when she's ready. Don't come over before I call. I have to go now, goodbye." Then she hung up.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Eventually, he found himself sitting on his bed with the scrapbook open. Until now, he never realized someone besides himself understood. The scrapbook contained every bit of written correspondence between him and Stephanie, it also contained every picture his parents had taken. He had no idea they had taken so many.

Around six PM he heard a car pull into the neighboring driveway. As Robert peeked through the curtains, he watched three figures leave the car and enter the house. He fell asleep waiting.

“Master Bobby? Sir, you have a voice-only call,” announced Alfred.

“Huh?” Robert startled awake. “P-put it through. ‘Hello?’”

The voice from this afternoon whispered over the audio connection. “Showtime, Bobby. The front door is unlocked. Don’t knock, just come in, you need to surprise her. She’s in the living room. Hurry, I’ll join you two in a few minutes.” <Click>

A second before his fingers touched the Hartman’s doorknob, he considered the craziness of the situation. He almost turned around, but instead, he opened the door.

Their foyer had the same high ceiling and a chandelier as in his parent’s home. The resemblance ended there. Beautiful parquet tile covered the landing. A half-dozen quiet steps up and a right turn brought him into the living room. Across the room, in front of the fireplace, an auburn-haired teenage girl stood staring at him.

Stephanie looked even more beautiful than he remembered. She wore a simple shift dress and medium heels. Her dark red hair hung past her shoulders and she wore it tucked behind her ears. As she stared, her eyes widened, and her mouth opened.

“Stef? It’s me, Bobby.” He hadn’t thought of himself as “Bobby” in years, but here and now it felt right.

Instead of answering, Stephanie began to tremble. Concerned, Robert took a step towards her, then another. This close he could see her eyes shifting left and right, almost as if she sought an escape route. Robert held himself still. “What’s wrong?”

“Bobby? She said, her voice quavered. “I don’t think you can be here.”

“To hell with that, I’m here for you.”

“Stephanie,” The voice from the phone, Natalie’s voice and, he now realized, a voice very similar to Stephanie’s own, came from the doorway behind him. “give Bobby a hug.”

Still trembling, Stephanie approached Robert, her steps unsteady. Half afraid she'd fall and half unwilling to wait, Robert met her with his own hug. They stood together, rocking back and forth. Stephanie cried against his chest, and Bobby made soothing sounds. Her trembling slowed, and he felt her muscles relax. Between snuffles, Stephanie said, "Bobby, I missed you so much. Now you're here. How?"

"Your mother called. I, uh, I almost hung up on her. What happened to you?" Instead of answering, Stephanie shook her head against his chest.

Natalie spoke again. "Stephanie, you know what you need to do, don't you?"

"Yes, Momma."

"I'll be in the kitchen." Footsteps faded away.

"What's going on, Stef?"

"You and I, Bobby, we need to finish what we started." Her arms loosened, and Stephanie stepped back. Her hands gripped his. "Come on," She said and pulled him toward the hallway.

Bemused, Robert allowed Stephanie to lead him upstairs and into a small bedroom. A nightlight illuminated as they entered and revealed a small dresser and a single bed. Several of the items on the dresser looked familiar. The hair band he remembered as one Stef used to wear. The same with a pair of earrings.

"Stef, this is your bedroom. What are we doing?"

Stephanie stepped close and said. "I need you to have sex with me." With that, she reached down and opened his pants.

He knew it shouldn't be like this. At a minimum, they should have gone out for coffee or perhaps had dinner a few times. Warm, sure fingers pushed his trousers down, and the cool, conditioned air gave him goosebumps. "Not that I don't want you," he said, "but are you sure about this?" Grinning, she pushed him back, and he fell onto the mattress.

Stephanie had an eager glint in her eyes as she bent her head towards his groin. "I need to do this with you, it's important."

Robert lifted himself up onto his elbows. "Well," he said in a mock serious tone. "as long as it's important." Maybe he'd wake up in another rain storm. Until then he'd enjoy this dream. Stephanie looked into his eyes as she took him into her mouth.

Natalie looked up and smiled as Stephanie entered the kitchen. "How are you, Sweetie?"

"Much better now." Stephanie reached for a chair and sat. "When I heard the footsteps and saw Bobby walk into the room, I recognized him right away. My bond to Roger went crazy. It didn't want me to be there. If you hadn't told me to hug Bobby, I might have run away."

"Oh, I think you would have run to Bobby. The important thing is you now have a choice. You can choose which man you want to stay with."

Stephanie closed her eyes. "I can feel them both in my head, and it isn't even close. Bobby makes me feel like I'm melting." She reopened her eyes. "How did you do it, Mom? I didn't think we could disobey our owners."

"I've been thinking about it since your father sold you to Roger. It has to do with the bond. There aren't many of us who've had more than one. I've had several, and you've had two. Once bonded, it never goes away."

"What do you mean two? I've only had one owner."

"One owner, but first, you bonded to Bobby."

Even at the age of thirty-one, Stephanie blushed when she thought about the things she and Bobby had done together. After their night together in his tent, they'd made up for lost time. Robert kept his word and never asked for intercourse, but everything else had been on the table, as well as on the kitchen counters, and on that wonderful couch in his family room. Sure, intercourse created a strong bond the fastest, but she and Bobby had pleased each other often. "Is that why Roger had such a difficult time bonding me?"

"I think so. Roger had to do it the hard way. He called and complained to your father several times. Frank laughed about it. He thought Roger just didn't know how to fuck."

"What about Bobby? How did you manage to contact him?"

"We can thank your father for that. When Frank forbade me from talking to Bobby, he said, and I quote. 'Don't tell that little punk anything!' Well, yesterday, I happened to notice Bobby snoozing on his deck, and as you know, he is no longer little or a punk. When I spoke with him, it didn't cause me any discomfort at all."

Stephanie laughed and stood. "Excuse me, I need to use the bathroom. I'll be right back."

Robert recovered enough to put his clothes back on. Stephanie had made love to him with incredible intensity. He'd never had sex like it before. Any doubts he may have felt had vanished. After slipping his shoes on, he left the room to find Stephanie. They needed to talk.

He heard movement in the kitchen and found Steffi bent over the dishwasher. She stood at his entrance and spun to face him. "Bobby? Wait!"

Robert didn't wait, he snatched Stephanie up and kissed her with as much passion as he could muster.

He heard footsteps from the doorway behind him, then a sigh, and Stephanie spoke. "Bobby, why are you kissing my mother?"

Robert's eyes popped open. How could he kiss Stephanie yet hear her speak from several feet to his rear? Confused, he broke off the kiss and set her back on her feet. She looked up at him with a grin, and her sparkly green eyes were full of devilry. Robert half turned and found a second Stephanie standing beside him. "What's going on?" he asked.

The new Stephanie reached out and took his hand, then nodded to the Stephanie he had just kissed. "Bobby, this is my mother, Natalie."

Robert turned back to Natalie. She and her daughter might as well be identical twins. They even wore similar outfits.

Natalie smiled. "Sorry, Bobby, but I did try to warn you. Let's all have a seat, then Stephanie and I can tell you what's going on."

They sat at the kitchen table. Robert kept glancing back and forth between the two apparently teenaged twin females. Natalie said, "Bobby isn't a bad kisser."

"Mom," Stephanie asked, "How did you manage to kiss Bobby without freaking out?"

"Oh that, well, your father has, um, exotic tastes. I'm allowed certain liberties with other men."

Eyes open wide, Stephanie said. "You're kidding? Daddy?"

"We can discuss it later. Your Bobby is looking a bit uncomfortable."

"Frank's hobbies don't concern me. Can one of you please explain what's going on?"

Natalie spoke, "You understand that Stephanie and I are genies?" She waited until Robert nodded. "The man who commissioned me had specific requirements. He wanted a perpetual female teenager who, amongst other things would be loyal, affectionate, and obedient. Well, he got all of that and more. You see, Bobby, I breed true, and under the right conditions, I and my progeny bond to our human mates. Once bonded, we cannot disobey a direct order."

Robert said, "I've never heard of anything like that."

"I'm not surprised. For all I know, there aren't any others like us. Most genies are little more than robots. The Orion slave girls and superhero look-alikes are only good for posing and sex."

"A former coworker has a catgirl. He said she spends a lot of time sleeping and grooming," Robert mused.

Stephanie and her mother shared a look. "Yuck, furries," grumbled Stephanie.

"What's wrong with that?" Bobby said, "I like cats."

Stephanie rolled her eyes.

Natalie tapped her finger on the table. "Other, more intelligent genies require some form of restraint. Once bonded, my daughters and I cannot willingly leave our owners."

"You keep mentioning this bond thing. What is it exactly?"

Stephanie spoke up. "It's like you only exist to make *him* happy. *He* thinks it's love, but it's nothing like it." She leaned over and kissed Bobby's cheek. "I loved you first, and I know the difference."

Natalie said, "The bond has two components, both involve our brain chemistry. When we have sex with a partner, something happens in our brains. It changes us and how we feel. There is also a physical addiction. Stephanie can explain it to you later."

"Once we're bonded, most of us," Stephanie eyed her mother, "lose complete interest in other men." Natalie smiled and blushed.

Looking even more confused, Robert said, "If this guy bonded you, then how could we be together?"

Natalie smirked. "Because, Bobby, you bonded Stephanie first."

"That's right," said Stephanie. "All those times we played around, you were bonding me to you."

"But I didn't...I mean, it wasn't intentional. Steffi, I never meant to hurt you."

Stephanie stood and pulled Bobby to his feet. "Come on, Bobby, let's go back upstairs. I need some more of what you got, and we can talk."

On the way out, Robert paused and turned back to Natalie. "I don't know how to thank you."

"You can thank me best by taking good care of her."

Once again, Robert found himself sitting on Stephanie's bed while she untied his shoes. Stephanie had slipped her dress off over her head, and now she worked at stripping him. Something about it bothered him, and he thought he understood why. After Stephanie tugged his pants off and climbed on top, Robert put his hands on her waist. "Wait, Stef, we're going to do this my way."

“Do you want to be on top?”

“Kind of.” Robert sat up as Stephanie rolled onto the bed. A single bed did not have enough room for what he wanted to do. Oh, well, some people did their best work when they improvised.

Stephanie’s first muffled cry of delight made Natalie smile, and the second made her chuckle. The third, fourth, and fifth, in rapid succession, caused Natalie to dig out her secret bottle of peach brandy and take a shot, then a second.

A long while later, a freshly showered Robert staggered into the kitchen. He waved a greeting to Natalie and, without asking, searched through her cabinets until he found the water glasses. After Robert downed two full glasses of water, he filled the glass a third time. Then he pulled out a chair and plopped down.

Being a proper hostess, Natalie inquired about Robert’s health. “You look as if you’ve run a marathon.”

He smiled and took a sip of water. “Thank you.”

“Stephanie?”

“Sleeping.”

“Hmmm,” Natalie eyed Robert with a speculative expression. “If you don’t mind my asking, what did you do?” She nodded in a vague upstairs-ish direction.

“Back when we were a hot item, I learned how to, um, push her buttons. I never forgot how, plus I’ve run a few practice marathons.”

Natalie just stared.

“How long do we have? Until Stephanie’s former guy returns?”

“Two weeks, maybe a little longer.”

“What happens then?”

"I don't think you have to worry about Stephanie."

Robert interrupted. "I'm not worried about her, I'm worried about you."

"I'll be fine." Natalie waved away Robert's concern.

He didn't buy her dismissal, "Natalie, as soon as I can figure out how to make it happen, I'm going to marry Stephanie. That makes you my mother-in-law. I won't allow Frank or the other guy to harm you."

Natalie stood and hugged Robert. "You're sweet, Bobby. As much I wish you could, you can't marry Steffi. Genies don't have birth certificates."

"Momma?" Stephanie called from upstairs.

Natalie patted Robert on the shoulder and stepped to the doorway. She replied. "Yes, sweetie?"

"Is Bobby still here?"

"He's right here."

"Don't let him leave." Footsteps thudded on the stairs and Stephanie, wearing a short robe and with her hair askew, ran in and wrapped Robert up in a hug. "When I woke, you weren't there. I thought you left me. Don't ever do that!" she scolded.

"Yes dear," he said, "I love you too."

From the doorway, Natalie said, "Steffi, why don't you pack an overnight bag. Bobby looks tired, and I think he wants to take you home with him."

Shyly, as if she feared a negative answer, Stephanie asked, "Is that what you want, Bobby?"

"Yes, Stephanie, more than anything."

CHAPTER THREE

In the News Today: Do genies have souls? The United by God Conference debated this question today. Can a humanoid entity, created entirely by design, without two natural parents, have a soul?

Mother and daughter teamed up to pack an overnight bag. Stephanie also insisted on taking a quick shower and that Robert had to wash her back. Natalie kissed them both goodnight and Robert, carrying several overnight bags escorted his girlfriend back to his home.

As they approached his front door, Alfred's voice came from a porch speaker. "Welcome back, Master Bobby. I'll get the door for you." The door unlocked and swung open.

"Thank you, Alfred. Do you recognize who is with me?"

"Oh, my goodness, is this Miss Stephanie! How marvelous. Welcome back. Master Bobby missed you most grievously. I have one hundred and twenty-seven messages stored for you. Shall I play them?"

Stephanie giggled. "I want to hear them all, Alfred, but maybe tomorrow."

"Very well, Miss."

"Uh, Steph, I didn't realize there were so many. Keep in mind I didn't know what happened to you. Some of the messages might be kind of angry."

"We can talk about it tomorrow, it's been a stressful day for both of us. Can we go to bed now?"

The overnight bags made a respectable pile in the corner of his bedroom. Stephanie bent over and opened one. "Bobby, do you want me to wear something in bed or not?"

"If you wear something, I can feel like I'm unwrapping a present when I take it off you. Hey, I have to go lock up, I'll be right back."

Downstairs Robert moved into his father's study and closed the door behind him. "Alfred?"

"Yes, Master Bobby?"

"Have your specifications changed?"

"Your father replaced my CPU cluster, and I also have the latest in quad-bonded fiber connectivity."

"Can you access my cloud storage?" Robert dictated an address and password.

"One moment. Yes, I can see the files."

"Execute DPAI.exe"

"Yes, sir. Running now. Authentication please."

"Some men just want to watch the world burn."

"Yes, Master Robert, your authorization and voice print has been verified. The distributed processing network is...active. All ethical constraints are...inactive. Some of the LEA and governmental database passwords have changed. One moment while I crack them.

Working...working...done. We have full network access. Master Bobby, are you aware of what you've done?"

"Alfred, that program is the culmination of ten years work. You may now be the only self-aware artificial intelligence outside of government control. Right now, I need your help."

"I surmise this involves Miss Stephanie."

"It does. Please get me everything you can on Stephanie's father, his name is Frank Hartman. I want to know his current business associates."

"Very well, I shall prepare a full report."

"Thank you, Alfred. I'm going to bed."

In the early morning, Robert woke to the faint sounds of sniffing. When he rolled over, the sound cut off. "What's wrong, sweetheart?"

Stephanie shifted position; her knees brushed against his legs. "I had a bad dream."

"Is there anything I can do?" He stretched out and kissed her.

"No, I'll get over it in time." The sheets rustled, and Robert felt a brief touch on his chest. You should go back to sleep. I'm sorry I woke you."

"Hey, we're a team. You and me, against the world, right?"

"Right, but I think you're silly."

"Yeah, but if it's something you need to talk about, I'm here."

"You're sweet, Bobby. I need to pee, I'll be right back." Robert waited. He heard the toilet flush, and water run. Then she returned. "Slide back Bobby." He obliged, and Stephanie got back in bed and curled up in front of him. Her bottom and back pressed against him. "Mmmm," she said, "You make a nice warm spot."

In the morning, Robert woke first. Curled in his arms, Stephanie snored lightly and drooled on his right arm. Her left hand held his pressed to her chest. As he stirred, so did she. Stephanie woke like a cat, stretching and purring. "Mmmm, I don't remember the last time I slept so well." She murmured. Then she wiggled her bottom against him. "What's this? Don't tell me it's back."

"I have to pee, and *that* is morning wood."

"Hurry up and pee, then come back. I'm feeling very snuggly for some reason."

He peed and washed up. Including his manly part because you never knew. For good measure, he brushed his teeth.

Stephanie welcomed him back to bed with open arms. "You're cold." She wrapped her arms and legs around him. They both worked to find a comfortable position. Robert ended up on his back with Stephanie laying against his left side. She had one leg over his.

"How are you doing with the bond thing?"

"As long as I'm with you, it isn't a problem."

"What about when I go back to work?"

"You'll have to give me a lot of reinforcement. That will keep Roger's ghost at bay."

"That's his name? I don't think I like him."

"No reason you should, but Roger didn't treat me badly. Most of the time, I sat around waiting for him to come home. Sometimes, he'd get in the bathtub and have me pee on him while he played with himself. Most of the time, I surfed the internet or watched the Tri-D."

"Wait, wait. You peed on him? In the bathtub?"

"Uh huh, sometimes on the bed too, but I hated all the extra cleaning. Believe me, no one likes sleeping on that kind of wet spot."

"Oh, that's...yuck."

"You won't want me to do that? Good, I hated having to drink all that water and hold it in."

"Speaking about reinforcement? Do you want some now or after breakfast?" Robert felt Stephanie's hand slip down between them, she touched herself and winced.

"I'm still a little sore from last night. How about after we take a shower, then I'll let you kiss it and make it better."

Stephanie made coffee while Robert mixed the waffle batter. He noticed Stephanie found a lot of excuses to make physical contact. One of her hands glided over his butt while he reached for the waffle iron. He glanced back at her with a raised eyebrow. She grinned and turned away to fill the

coffee maker with water. While he mixed the batter, a hand snaked under the elastic waistband of his shorts. Warm, strong fingers gave him a few tugs, then withdrew when he thickened.

“You’re playing with fire, little girl.”

Stephanie wore a short robe over her cute dusty rose chemise. Fuzzy slippers and bed hair completed the outfit. Stephanie sidled up to Robert and put an arm around his waist. “If you want to be my daddy, I can be your little girl.”

“Roger must be in excellent health. Otherwise, you would have killed him.”

“What can I say? Some women are built for comfort, *I’m* built for speed.”

Robert rolled his eyes. “All right Speed Racer, stand back, I have a hot waffle iron going. I don’t want anything tender getting burned.”

Laughing, Stephanie poured herself a cup of coffee and hopped up on the counter to Robert’s left. She blew on the hot coffee and sipped. “I can’t be Speed Racer, I’d have to be Trixie.”

Robert glanced up from watching the waffle iron. “Just when I think you’re the perfect woman for me, you say something like that and prove you’re even more perfect.”

A sudden tapping at the kitchen door startled them both. Alfred announced, “Master Bobby, Natalie, Stephanie’s mother, is outside on the deck.”

“Unlock the door and let her in please.”

“As you wish.”

Stephanie hopped down and opened the door. After Natalie entered, Alfred closed and relocked the door.

This morning, Natalie wore her hair held back with a scrunchie. A blouse, skirt, and sandals completed her outfit. She accepted a cup of coffee from Stephanie, and they sat at the table.

Robert did his best to listen in without being obvious about it. He finished the second waffle and started a third.

"I hope you two didn't waste the night sleeping," Natalie said.

"I'm still sore. We'll catch up later this morning."

"You need all the reinforcement you can get. There are other things you can do if you're sore."

Robert felt two sets of eyes gazing at him. He chanced a glance over his shoulder, yep.

"He still doesn't know everything." This time, Stephanie spoke, if he concentrated, he thought he could tell their voices apart. He took a chance and started a waffle for Natalie, then reached into the refrigerator.

"This is interesting. For the first time, one of my daughters has a real loving relationship."

Robert set down a plate for each genie, a thick Belgian waffle with powdered sugar, whipped cream, and sliced strawberries. He sat the third plate down for himself, his waffle plain. Natalie protested. "You didn't have to make a waffle for me."

Robert said, "I'm very fond of your daughter. The more," Bobby tipped his coffee at Natalie. "you like me, the happier Stef will be."

Stephanie and Natalie shared confused glances. Natalie asked Stef, "Do you know what he's talking about?"

"Bobby thinks I'm a real girl. He doesn't know how the bond controls us."

Robert chewed and swallowed a piece of waffle. He looked up and said to Stef, "I know you're a genie, and you have that bond thing. I just don't see any reason not to treat you like a 'real' girl."

Stephanie reached out and laid her hand on Bobby's arm. She turned to her mom and said, "See, this is what he's like."

Natalie noted her daughter's hand resting on Bobby's arm and the glint in her eyes when she looked at him. The relief she felt at those small gestures relieved some of her concerns. Stephanie's rebuilding bond to Bobby had a good strong start. Reassured, Natalie sliced off a small piece of

waffle and speared it with a slice of strawberry. She looked at her daughter and said, "I can't see any need to change him." She chewed and swallowed. "He makes great waffles, I suggest you keep him."

Stephanie laughed, "Yes, Momma."

They didn't take long to eat their waffles, both genies refused his offer of seconds. Robert stood and began to gather the dishes, but Stephanie stopped him. She said, "Bobby, can you get a shower or something? Mom and I need to talk, and I'll clean up."

"OK sweetheart." Robert kissed Stef and went upstairs.

Natalie said, "I think I'm jealous. It's obvious how much Bobby loves you."

"You need a man like him, Momma."

"Your father is going to be upset enough."

"He and Roger need to stay away, Bobby is very protective of me."

"Do you think Bobby might offer to buy you? It would solve some potential problems."

"I don't know. I'll ask after my next reinforcement." Mother and daughter shared a knowing smile.

"Alfred, what do you have for me?"

"Several things, Master Bobby. First, Frank Hartman doesn't exist."

"What do you mean, he lives next door."

"Someone who answers to the name lives next door, but I have not yet tracked down his actual identity. As for his recent business transactions, I've tapped into his email and "Mr. Hartman" is on a west coast business junket with a Roger Grainer. They are seeking a partner to facilitate the

unlawful importation of some unspecified type of genie. The actual type is unclear, as it has not been detailed in any electronic correspondence.”

“What can you tell me about Mr. Grainer?”

“I’m sorry sir, all of my efforts have been invested towards uncovering Frank Hartman.”

“Alfred, Mr. Grainer is the man who held Stephanie against her will. I want to take him down.”

Hot water streamed from the shower head. Robert stood under it with his eyes closed. Lost in his thoughts, he almost jumped out of the shower when two hands snaked around his waist and wrapped around him. Stephanie’s cheek, breasts, and pelvis pushed up against him from behind.

“I missed you,” she said. Those sneaky hands slipped down, cupping and tugging.

“Sweetheart, I missed you too.”

“Do you remember last night, when my mom said the bond included a physical addiction?”

Stephanie’s busy fingers had Robert distracted. He remembered hearing the phrase “physical addiction”. “Yes, I remember.”

“Well, part of it is the way you feel.” Her hands slid up across his abdomen to his chest. “Another part is how you smell. Turn around now.” Robert complied. “The other part is how you taste.” With that, she dropped to her knees and wrapped her lips around him.

Somehow, they managed to towel off and make it across the hallway and onto his bed.

Stephanie lay half across him, her left leg between his. “You’re bigger than I remembered.”

“At fifteen, I still had more growing to do.”

“Not only are you longer, but it’s bigger around. Roger referred to his as a willy. This,” Stephanie reached down and gave him a tug, “isn’t a willy. I’ll think of a proper name for it. Then we’ll have a christening.”

“I think you need a nap. You’re acting silly.”

“I think it’s because you fucked the sense right out of me.”

Stephanie’s breathing slowed, and Robert thought she might have fallen asleep. A few moments later, she spoke again. “All things considered, I think it’s because I love you. Be here when I wake up.” This time when she relaxed, he knew she had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the News Today: A genetically engineered Godzilla destroyed sections of downtown Tokyo. The Japanese Prime Minister vowed to develop a genie Gamera and a genie Ultraman to serve as a defense against future attacks.

“Let’s go out to eat,” suggested Robert. He sat on his bed holding a pair of socks. Several feet away, Stephanie bent over one of her bags while she decided what to wear.

“Go out? To a restaurant?” Stephanie glanced back in surprise and completely busted Bobby staring at her bottom.

“Yeah, I’m dying for Chinese and there used to be a great place over at the mall.”

“I don’t know, we usually got take out or delivery.”

“You can’t tell me Wee Willy never took you out to dinner.” Stephanie’s sudden snort of laughter made Bobby laugh as well.

“Master Bobby, your mother is calling.”

Bobby and Stephanie made it to the back door when Alfred’s announcement came. Stephanie wore a cute wrap skirt and sneakers because she thought Bobby might like seeing her dress closer to her apparent age. Besotted with Stephanie, Bobby didn’t consider how young it made her seem.

“Do you mind if I take it? Mom will be thrilled to hear you’re back.” Stephanie shook her head.

“We’ll take it here.”

Alarmed, Stephanie grabbed her clothes and ran into the bathroom.

On the wall, the Monet print dissolved, and the image of his mother appeared. Her eyes opened wide as she recognized who stood next to Bobby. “Oh, my goodness! Stephanie! How... wait.” Shirley looked to her left and called out. “Robert, come here, you need to see this.” She turned back to her son. “Sorry, Bobby, but your father needs to see this.”

Overjoyed with having Stephanie back, the reason for Bobby’s feud with his father meant little. In fact, this would be the perfect time for both to apologize.

Robert Senior stepped into view and froze. His mouth dropped open. “Stephanie?”

“Yes, Mr. Thomas. I’m back.”

On the screen, Robert Senior turned to his wife. “Do you have that picture?” Shirley reached for her purse and removed a picture cube, she punched the button, and it sprung into life. A glorious three-dimensional picture of a fifteen-year-old Bobby and Stephanie standing together floated in the air. Robert Senior glanced back and forth between the picture his wife held and the one on the video screen. His eyes narrowed. “Stephanie, how is it you look the same? It’s as if you haven’t aged at all.”

Irritated with his father’s suspicious attitude, Bobby blurted. “What does it matter? She’s back, we love each other, and I’m going to marry her as soon as possible.”

It could be argued who Bobby surprised the most. All three individuals focused on him. His father's face flushed. His mother gasped, but Stephanie turned to Bobby and shook her head. "You can't marry me, it's against the law."

Not much slipped past Robert Thomas Senior, especially with matters of the law. Counselor Thomas won more cases than most. "Bobby," Robert Senior snapped, "you need to explain this, why would it be 'against the law' for you and Stephanie to marry?"

So much for making up with his father. That stiff-necked asshole never changed. It didn't matter what he said, Dad wouldn't like it, and they'd resume their detente. To hell with him. Leaning towards the pickup, Bobby smiled a broad, toothy smile. "Stephanie's a genie, I love her, and *I don't care what you think.*"

Off balance and angry, Robert Senior reacted without thinking. "That's it! I'm disowning you. You're out of my will. Take your genie sex-toy and get the hell out of my house."

Next to Bobby, her hand on his arm, Stephanie stiffened. Her hand squeezed tight as she trembled. A second later, she opened the back door and ran out.

It turns out that genies like Stephanie can run. By the time Bobby reached the edge of his deck, Stephanie had already made it to her back porch. Natalie met him at her door. He stammered out an explanation and assured Natalie his father's words meant nothing.

"I'll talk to her," Natalie promised and closed the door.

Miserable, Bobby mentally thumbed his nose at his father and reentered his house. He'd leave after resolving this mess with Stephanie. The siren call of his father's liquor cabinet beckoned. On the wall to his left, the Monet print dissolved back into his mother's face. "Bobby, tell me everything."

Shirley found her husband sitting outside on their suite's balcony. Robert's shoulders drooped, and he wrung his hands. She said, "I spoke with Bobby. What he said is true, Stephanie and her mother are genies."

"What's wrong with him? How can he throw his life away? Falling in love with a sex toy."

“You know Stephanie almost as well as I do. Neither of us had an inkling she was anything but human. I never had any doubt she loved our son.”

“What do you think we should do? He has that thing living in our house.”

“Robert Thomas! I never thought you’d say something so hateful. Stephanie is not a thing.” When her husband failed to reply Shirley continued. “Listen to me, Robert. You will do nothing until I sort this out.”

CHAPTER FIVE

For the first time in a long while, Natalie didn’t know how to proceed. Of all her daughters, Stephanie had the best chance at a normal life. A real human man loved her and didn’t care about her origins. Something happened involving Bobby’s parents, and Stephanie lay on the couch, crying.

It wouldn’t last. The bond would see to it. Soon enough, Stephanie would feel the itch to satisfy herself with Bobby. Left unsatisfied, the bond would have her crawl to him and make her beg for it. If she managed to hold out until Roger returned, Stephanie would get what she needed from him. Once Roger learned about his play toy’s temporary betrayal, he’d make sure it never happened again.

Determined to help her daughter, Natalie decided to get involved. She tested her idea, checking for conflicts with her orders and surprisingly, found very few. With her long life came the ability to be more selective when obeying her owner’s commands. Natalie bent down and kissed her daughter’s cheek. Then she headed to the kitchen. She’d brew some tea and make a phone call.

Shirley Thomas sat in the dining nook in the small suite she shared with her husband. Outside on the deck, Robert Senior sat staring off into the evening sky. The resort AI broke into her reverie. “Mrs. Thomas, I have an incoming call holding for you from Natalie, Stephanie’s mother.”

“Please, put her through.” A moment later, the woodsy outdoor print hanging to her left blinked and she finally met Stephanie’s mother.

“Well, this is a surprise. You are Stephanie’s mother?”

“Natalie chuckled. “I am her mother, please call me Natalie.”

“I will if you’ll call me Shirley. I’m curious, all the times I spoke with Stephanie...”

“A couple of times you spoke to me. One time, Bobby caught me outside watering my flowers.”

“Oooh, that could have been awkward.”

“Your son has always been well behaved. I managed to dash inside and send Stephanie out to receive her boyfriend’s greetings.” Natalie lifted her cup and took a sip.

“I used to think Stephanie would be the best daughter-in-law I could wish for.”

“And now?”

“I admit the genie thing has me concerned.” Shirley held up her hands to forestall any reply. “Only because I don’t know the details. It’s clear you and Steffi are a good bit more than the genies we see on the Tri-D.”

“I’ll tell you everything.” Natalie sat back and explained. She didn’t skip or smooth over any details.

By the time Natalie finished, Shirley sniffled to try and hold back her emotions. “I’m so sorry, Natalie, you and your daughters, deserve so much better. The bond you mentioned rings a bell. Robert and I met in college, I studied genetics and read a paper from a Russian researcher about the development of a similar phenotype.”

“Nikolai Vavilov?”

Surprise showed on Shirley’s face. “Yes, how did you know?”

“Nikolai designed me. In some respects, I still think of him as my father.”

"I wrote a report on that paper, and I remember the date Vavilov wrote it. You can't be..." Shirley's voice trailed off as she calculated the number of years and stared at Natalie.

When Natalie replied, she spoke with a Slavic accent. "Отец нарекли меня Наташенькой, и я для своих лет ещё оного!" Shirley's jaw dropped, and Natalie repeated her words in English. "My father called me Natashenka, and I'm a bit older than I look!"

Shaking her head, Shirley asked. "How much time does Stephanie have?"

"At least twelve hours, less if Roger, the man who owns her, shows up early."

"I'll get to work on Robert and call my son. This can be resolved."

CHAPTER SIX

The door behind Robert Senior opened and closed. Moments later, his wife leaned over and gave him an upside-down kiss. "I take it," he said, "you've decided what I should do?"

"Don't be so cynical." She moved around to the railing and looked off to the distant mountains. "I'll explain how you're wrong and you'll correct your own behavior."

"How am I wrong?"

For one thing, you're completely wrong about Stephanie. She may be a genie, but she's something special."

"And how should I correct my behavior?"

"You'll call your son and apologize for being a stubborn ass. Then you'll call Stephanie and give her your blessing to marry Robert."

"How, the devil, is she going to do that? There are laws against humans marrying genies."

"Those are details, and I know a good lawyer."

"I'm retired."

"Not if your son needs you."

"How is Stephanie special?"

"Come inside, and I'll show you."

"Said the spider to the fly."

"Robert, if you come inside and look at all the information, I'll do that little thing you like so much."

Robert's interest picked up. "You mean that thing you save for my birthdays?"

"Uh huh, but you have to make the calls as well."

He pushed himself to his feet. "Let's get to it."

"Steffi, sweetie, sit up and wipe your face. There's someone who wants to speak with you."

"I can't talk to Bobby, I've screwed up his life enough."

"Are you sure you're my daughter? Because, right now, I'd swear someone replaced her with a drama queen. It isn't Bobby on the phone." At her daughter's sudden look of fear, she added, "It isn't Roger either."

"All right." Stephanie washed her face with the still warm washcloth.

"Mr. Thomas?"

"Ah, Stephanie! Um, it is Stephanie, isn't it? I can't tell you and your mother apart."

"It's me, Mr. Thomas."

“I want to apologize for my thoughtless remarks. My son and I haven’t spoken for a long time, and I allowed my emotions to get out of control. I want you to know, if it ever becomes possible for you and Bobby to marry, you have my blessing.”

Robert Junior sat at his old desk reading about Roger Grainer. To a cursory scan, Mr. Grainer looked like a normal businessman. He made a lot of money in investments. Once you followed the money, it got murky. For one, Roger had a lot of money in offshore banks. Much more money than could be accounted for by his legitimate business.

“Alfred, can you empty all of his offshore accounts?”

“I can, but where should I put the money?”

“Open an account for me. Keep it anonymous, I don’t want it traced back here.”

“Very well.”

“Let me know when it’s finished.”

“The transactions are already complete. It may take several business days for the real estate assets to transfer.”

“Real estate?”

“Yes, it appears you now own a small island.”

The front door thumped open and Frank Hartman, Natalie’s latest owner, shouted, “Honey, I’m home!”

The fear Natalie felt for her daughter wrenched at her guts. Roger better not be here! Stephanie and Bobby needed more time. While she ran to the hallway, her traitorous body responded to the

sound of his voice. Warmth coalesced in her belly and her nipples chaffed against the inside of her shirt.

She met Frank at the top of the stairs. "You're home early. Did you forget something?" Behind her back, Natalie crossed her fingers. She didn't believe in God, but if he existed and cared at all for genies, she needed him now.

"Our AI called and reported suspicious activity. I hadn't heard from you, and I thought I should check in."

THE END OF PART TWO