

# The Parents

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**John Boston**

The first time Brian Ford saw Germaine Laroux, he was walking around the gallery hosting his exhibit. Brian had only recently discovered his little talent. He sold his first painting two years ago. He was making enough now to do it full-time. It wasn't just young kids with huge trust funds that bought them either. His last buyer was a 70-year-old grandmother. She walked by his painting and offered him a thousand dollars for it. It took him just over an hour to paint it.

Brian walked around, shook hands, smiled, and did whatever he had to do to sell himself and his paintings. All that went down the toilet, the moment he saw her. She was drop-dead gorgeous. Not like most of the women in this city who are so thin, they look like they have an eating disorder. No, this beauty had curves and very long blonde, almost orange hair. She was standing in front of his painting entitled "Cousins".

He said nothing for a moment, just pretending to admire the work. She then looked at him and looked back at the painting. Brian had no idea what she was doing, he just went along with it.

"You painted this, didn't you?" she asked without looking at him.

"I did, yes."

She continued to look over the painting, almost as if she were studying it.

"Most people think paying tons of money for these paintings is a giant waste of money. What they don't realize is that every day for the rest of your life, you can look at this painting and take something from it. How do you put a price tag on something like that?"

"Great art changes you, whether you realize it or not."

"The color scheme is unusual. Such a strong contrast. It's as if you were caught up in this magical moment. I look at art to try and decipher it, like it's a riddle or mystery, but this one isn't too difficult. It's unusual, but not difficult."

"It was never meant to be. It was just meant to be unusual," said Brian.

"Who was she?"

"She?"

"The girl in the painting?"

"She was my cousin."

"I see. Your first crush?"

"I guess you could say that."

"I like how simple and pure it is. Most people nowadays would just mess it up. Make it into something it isn't."

"It was meant to have a 'G' rating, not an 'R' one."

"That's why it's so beautiful. I wish we had more 'G' rating artists." said Germaine.

"I just wish we had more people who appreciated fine art."

"I'm Germaine Laroux," she said extending out her hand.

"Brian Ford. Very nice to meet you," he said shaking it.

"Would you walk with me? I'd love to hear your thoughts on some other works."

"Sure."

He bought her another glass of wine. They spent the next two hours discussing other paintings and sculptures. She stopped in front of a very unusual-looking sculpture. It was hideously deformed. Brian could tell at one point, it had been a rather impressive-looking sculpture. It looked like someone had taken a blowtorch to it."

"What do you think of this one?" she asked sipping her wine.

Brain took a moment to observe and try to listen to what the creator was trying to say.

"Something beautiful was destroyed. Something with talent and imagination. I think the little burnt pieces on the pedestal are very telling. It's as if the author was trying to pick up the pieces of whatever horrible tragedy happened to them. It was burnt. That means something. The flame is anger. Pure and simple. A rage that cannot be put out easily. I think that's what happens to all of us when we encounter tragedy and horror in our lives. It's so raw and honest. Most artists would never let themselves be that honest. Most people in general will never let themselves be that honest. Whoever created this masterpiece is an honest person. I don't know if they were trying to show the world how hurt they are, or how honest they are. I could spend the rest of my life looking at it and wonder which one it is."

"It's both," she said.

"How would you know?"

"I created it. That's my name on it," she said pointing to the fine print on the bottom. Brian hadn't even noticed. He was trying not to stare at her and her almost overpowering beauty.

"You're quite an artist."

"So are you," she said smiling.

Brian wasn't certain but, for a split second, he was certain this girl was actually flirting with him! He knew he had to play it cool. He was quite a bit older than she was and tried to use that age difference to his advantage.

*Play it cool here old boy. She likes you. Don't screw it up.* He thought to himself.

"You're the first person I've met in years who isn't completely full of shit. You're like a thunderstorm in a parched desert."

"Germaine, that is probably the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me."

Brian saw the gallery manager walking towards him. She didn't say a word, not wanting to interrupt them.

"Excuse me, Germaine.....could I steal Brian for just a moment?" she said taking Brian by the hand.

Once they were out of earshot, she gave Brian the good news.

"Your paintings are the hottest thing in here tonight. One of them just sold for five thousand," she said

Brian couldn't believe it. Another had sold for over three thousand. This night was turning into quite a surprise. As excited as he was about the money, he was more excited about meeting Germaine.

"Germaine's sculpture. I've got to have it. What's the asking price?" he asked

"You're the first one who has expressed interest, so I'm guessing not much. Of course, she is a *Laroux*, so that is going to complicate things."

"What do you mean?"

"Brain, that family has more money than the Treasury Department. Old world money. The kind of family that seems to have money trees. I want it sold, but I don't want to insult her either if you know what I mean."

"I see. Well, just ask her what she wants for it and we'll go from there."

"Okay, will do," she said and walked away.

Ten minutes later she was back. She had a smile on her face.

"Well, I spoke to her. You know what she asked?"

"What?"

"She wanted to know if you were the buyer."

"So, what did you tell her?"

"Normally, the buyer's identity is secret. However, since the family are my best customers, I thought it might be best in both our interests to tell her it was you. I think it was the right decision. She was grinning from ear to ear. The best part of this is the price. She said you can have it for free if you meet her for lunch tomorrow."

"Really....wow, okay. Tell her we have a deal," said Brian.

He couldn't believe it. The most beautiful woman he had ever met wanted to have lunch with him. It was like a dream come true.

He passed by her as the gallery was closing. She walked over to him, only now she was accompanied by a massive-looking dude sporting a crew cut. He was quite a bit older than she was. He thought perhaps he might be her father.

"Would you be so kind as to meet me tomorrow for lunch?" she asked.

"Of course. I'd be happy to."

"Wonderful. Here's the address," she said handing him a business card.

"Does noon time work for you?" he asked

"Of course. It was nice to meet you, Brian. I hope to see you tomorrow." she said as she handed her sweater to her.

Brian found the gallery manager. She told him she had gotten almost ten thousand dollars for his paintings. He was more interested in Germaine and that human room divider she was with.

"That would be Hans.....her bodyguard."

"Bodyguard?"

"Welcome to the world of the rich and famous. You're in the big leagues now, Brian. Don't screw it up." she said handing another glass of wine.

*Beautiful and rich.....I could get used to this.* He thought to himself as he walked out of the gallery that night. Everything about her was beautiful, from her hair to her copper skin color. She was like some kind of Greek goddess brought to life.....*and she wanted to have lunch with him.* This had turned out to be quite a night. Brian felt like he had just won the lottery.

The restaurant was located on the upper east side. Very chic, very expensive. He arrived five minutes early. Germaine was already seated. She looked incredible. He was trying not to show how excited he was. He knew she was calling all the shots. He figured the best thing he could do at this point was just shut up and let her do all the talking.

Her face lit up like a Christmas tree when she saw him. She walked over to him and threw her arms around him. She smelled amazing. How someone can smell like that was a mystery to him. The scent almost seemed to ooze out of her pores.

*That's how rich people smell. Just a cut above the rest of us.* He thought to himself.

She didn't order for him, just strongly recommended what they order. Brian had no idea what he was eating, not that it mattered. He would have eaten the napkin if she told him to.

They sipped wine and talked about art. Then they talked about her last boyfriend. He was from Paris. Things did not exactly end on a positive note.

"He just wasn't the person I thought he was. I was young and in love. That was three years ago. I haven't been with anybody since." she said sipping her wine.

*Three years? That almost seems like it should be a crime.*

She wanted to know about him. He told her he had been married, but like many marriages, they decided they were much better as friends than husband and wife.

"It just blows my mind. We talk and communicate much better now that we are divorced than when we were married. I felt like such a failure. I guess that's why I haven't been with anyone since then. I just don't want to experience that type of heartbreak again." he said as he grabbed a piece of bread from the table.

"No one is really interested in a person's mind or thoughts nowadays. It's like window dressing," she said

"Most people don't have real thoughts or emotions. It's almost like they're just....."

*"Shadows of real people,"* they said in unison.

There was a very awkward silence between them. They had completed each other's sentences. They both realized the significance of what had just happened. Germaine just looked away at him.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No, I just.....I just realized how much I like you and it was a little scary."

Brian was floored. He also realized how much he liked her. She was the whole package. Looks, brains, class.....*and money*. It shouldn't make any difference, but of course, it did. It always would, no matter how much they loved one another.

"Most people think that the rich are somehow different than the rest of us. We're not. We're just as screwed up like everyone else. We want to fall in love with someone. I guess as I get older, I realize that's what life is all about. If you aren't in love with someone and getting loved back.....you aren't really living." she said as the food arrived on the table.

Brain put his hand on hers. She put her other hand on his. They said nothing for a moment. He was trying really, really hard not to screw this up. He didn't just like her.....*he was head over heels for her*. He just didn't want her to know it yet.

"Do you want to tell me about your art piece? I looked at it this morning and the more I looked, the more curious I became," he said

"When I was twelve, my sister killed herself," she said between bites.

"Oh my God. I'm sorry."

"Some things hurt so bad, you never really get over them. Time doesn't heal anything, it just kind of scabs over it." she said with a tear in her eye.

"We have more in common than I realized. My brother drowned when I was sixteen."

She looked up at him. It was the strangest look he had ever seen. It was a mixture of both pity and raw sexual energy. He had no idea how exactly to take it.

"We both have tragedy in our lives. It makes us who we are. We are going to spend the rest of our time on Earth trying to get over it. It doesn't get any easier as time goes on, it almost seems to get harder." she said holding back the tears.

"I guess I tell myself that my brother is in a better place right now. Somewhere where there is no pain. I know sometimes he's watching me. I can almost feel it."

"I tell myself the same thing. Our family has never really gotten over it.....listen to me with my sob story. I don't want you to think I'm some kind of a hot mess."

"I think you are the most incredible woman I've ever met," he said.

"Brian....I seem to have lost my appetite. Would you mind if we walked around the city together? I have some places I'd like to show you." she said wiping away her tears.

They left the restaurant a few minutes later. Germaine took care of the bill even though Brian offered to pay. She wouldn't even hear of it. As soon as they had left the building, she took his hand as they walked.

Brian noticed that Hans was never far behind. He kept his distance but was never out of sight. He was her very own six foot six pitbull of a man. Brain did not want to get on his shit list. Some people are so scary, they don't have to say a word, just give you a look and that's enough. His look was crystal clear.

*Be on your best behavior with my little girl and I'll be on my best behavior.*

They walked hand in hand for hours. They talked and talked. He listened and listened. She was not just looking for a one night stand. She wanted to give her heart to someone. She just had to make sure he was the right one. Brian couldn't believe that women like her still existed in this

world. She was an anachronism of sorts in 21st century America. She belonged more in one of Shakespeare's stories than with him. They talked and laughed. Brian did not want her to get any more upset than she already was. He was twenty years older than she was, but at this moment in time, none of that mattered. She held his hand so tight, she was almost cutting off circulation. He wanted to kiss her, but he had to wait for the right time. Hans interrupted them and told her they had to return to Long Island. He gave them both a minute to say their goodbyes.

"Hans says I have to go," she said pulling him close.

"Do you have to do everything he says?"

"It's just much easier for me when I do," she said smiling.

He kissed her on the lips for what seemed like an eternity. She kissed him right back. It was the most passionate kiss he had ever given to a woman. The electricity between them was strong enough to power a city.

"Here's my number. Please don't lose it. I'd hate to lose you because you lost my number." she said as she handed him a small card.

"I might just get it tattooed on my hand, just to be safe," he said.

"I hope I see you again."

"You will definitely see me again. Not to worry," he said.

She gave him one quick kiss and let go of his hand. Hans took her from him and they walked away. She waved goodbye.

Just like that, she was gone. Disappeared in the millions of faces surrounding them. Brain felt a sadness he hadn't felt in quite some time. In the span of 24 hours, he went from a confirmed bachelor having a woman consume his every waking thought.

*This one's a keeper. No doubt about that.* He thought to himself as he hailed a taxi. He didn't feel like her father. He felt like her boyfriend, even though she was almost half his age. Love works in mysterious ways....or maybe it doesn't. When two people are meant to be together, it's obvious. In this case, it was very, very obvious.

Over the next three weeks, they saw more and more of one another. Brain hated cell phones, but he found himself using them more and more to stay in touch with Germaine. She went to Europe for some reason, she never disclosed. He hadn't heard from her in four days, then she showed up at the front door of his apartment one night. He went from depressed to feeling like the king of the world in just a few seconds.

"Did you miss me?" she asked.

"You have no idea," he said pulling her in for a kiss.

They spent the night together and made love several times. She told him that Hans was outside in the limo, so he better not try anything. By that, she meant not breaking her heart.

They slept very little that night. He passed out for a few hours and when he woke up, she was naked in his arms. Life really didn't get much better than this.

He made her some coffee and breakfast. They sat together in his kitchen, she wore one of his hockey jerseys. It looked much better on her. She told him she had to get back to her house. He understood. As hard as it was to see her go, he didn't want to disrupt her routine. When Hans said it was time to go, that was that.

After breakfast, she handed him a note in a sealed envelope.

"Don't open it until I leave."

"Okay. Not a problem. Can I walk you outside?"

"I'd be disappointed if you didn't."

They walked down the steps and into the street. They gave each other a very passionate kiss and she hopped in the limo. Brian didn't understand how a massive limousine like that could be parked in front of his apartment all night and not get a ticket.

*Hell Brian, laws are just for poor people.*

He took out the note she had given him from his coat pocket. It was short, sweet, and right to the point.

I'M SO IN LOVE WITH YOU, IT'S TERRIFYING!

Brian's heart almost skipped a beat. This was no longer just a fantasy, it had become very real, very quickly. Logically, they should not be a couple, but they were more alike than just about any two people on the planet. Brian really didn't know what to think. He was so much older and should have been in control, but he wasn't. He loved her back, just as strongly. He felt like he had finally found his person, after being alone for so many years. He had almost forgotten what it felt like to care for somebody, or to have somebody care for him. It made no sense, but it did to them. It didn't matter what the rest of the world thought. He felt like he had just been given a second lease on life. Perhaps just a chance, it was up to him to make something of it.

Germaine texted him that night and asked him if he wanted to go to an Opera with her. Brian would have watched heart surgery with her, as long as she was there. They were to meet tomorrow night at seven. This was a big night. Brian knew nothing about Opera and spent the rest of the day trying to get up to speed and learn as much as he could. It was a European Opera that was debuting in the states for the first time. Not only was it brand new to him.....*the Opera was in French. That was going to be a problem.* Most of what he knew about France and the French came from a smooth-talking cartoon skunk who just couldn't take no for an answer. He loved those old cartoons.



*They were trolling before anyone knew what trolling was.*

He figured the Opera was just an excuse to get dressed up and drink too much. The fact that he didn't understand a word of what was said didn't matter. She held his hand the entire time. She even put her head on his shoulder. They were pretty much a certified couple at this point.

When it was over, they found themselves on the streets of the theater district, just enjoying the cool night and being with one another. It had been years since Brian had been in this situation. Never in a million years did he think it would have been with someone like Germaine.

"Nights like this, you never want them to end," he said.

She smiled and put her head on his shoulder.

They walked around the Granite White Way, past the little shops and boutiques that tailored their hours around the times of the plays. They stopped and looked at the windows that were elaborately decorated and filled with all kinds of food.

They walked on West 46th Street, past the musicians playing in the streets. They got a coffee at a small café and sat outside. She looked down at her phone.

"My curfew is almost up. I was hoping to spend the night with you and watch the sunrise. I've never seen it rise with anyone. I love watching the sun come up. It's like anything is possible that day. The day is just one big giant blank slate for us to do whatever we want." she said.

"Curfew huh? Aren't you a little too old to have a curfew?" he asked

"Probably, but I have rules I have to live by. I don't like them, but I really don't have a choice."

"I don't want to argue with Hans. It's just that I love spending time with you. I want to make every second of it count."

"Me too," she said and put her hand on his.

Brian couldn't help but notice that Germaine certainly did have some very unusual rules to live by. She rarely ever ate when she was with him. She drank coffee and tea, but never ate in front of him. Brian just figured it was a girl thing at first, but they had been dating now for almost two months and he had yet to see her eat anything. The other night he practically forced her to eat and she refused. He couldn't figure it out. She must go home and just pig out. With curves like hers, she certainly had to be eating something.

She also never talked about her family or her past. Like, nothing, at all. She would just avoid the question or start making out with him. One night, after dinner, he asked her about her family. She didn't answer anything, just took her clothes off and started making love to him. It worked. Ten minutes later, he had completely forgotten about it.

He had to get information on her from his friend, who was also a gallery manager. She didn't offer much, just to say that the family was loaded and bought art like they were groceries. She

didn't know much about Germaine and she never went anywhere without Hans. He had to use the internet maps to find her house on Long Island. It was located in one of the richest zip codes in the country.

He understood a woman like her is going to come with strings attached. Most girls with her money would have let it go straight to their heads. Germaine told him she spent most of her teen years at a boarding school in Switzerland. She did an internship at her father's company. They owned almost thirty massive cargo ships which moved products all over the world. She had even spent a summer on one of them to learn the operation. They were a majority shareholder in the largest airline in Europe and owned several other companies which spanned the globe. Clearly, the girl was not hurting for money. A woman like her would be an easy target for a kidnapping, which is why Hans was never out of sight. He saw him sit down at a table nearby. He always kept an eye on her. He had tried to make small talk with him a few times, but it never went anywhere. He wasn't rude, he just wasn't a talker. He was on duty all the time when he was with Germaine. He didn't let her out of his sight.

The relationship between Hans and Germaine was odd, for lack of a better word. *Tense* might better describe it. They never argued, but they never really interacted with one another either. She told him that Hans had been with their family for decades. One would think if you spent that much time around someone since you were a child, you would treat them like family. Germaine just treated him like her bodyguard. It was a very strange relationship. He could almost feel her dislike for him. Clearly, a whole hell of a lot had gone on between them. Brain knew better than to pry. When she was ready, she would tell him everything.

He also figured her family had investigated him. They probably knew more about him than his mother did. Rich people cannot afford to take chances. Their relationship was getting serious. Her family was going to have to decide what to do next.

She did say one afternoon that growing up in that giant mansion was not all it was cracked up to be. It was more like a prison than a house. Her parents were almost never home, constantly working and jet-setting around the world. She was raised by her older sister, with whom she was very close. He could tell it weighed heavy on her heart. It was almost as if she had just died yesterday.

"Everyone thinks being super-rich is some kind of a blessing. It isn't. It's like a curse. You can't just do what you want to do. Everything has already been decided for you, the moment you are born. I would give anything just to be like you. So free and able to do whatever you like. It would be like dying and going to heaven." she said.

"Being poor isn't anything to be desired either. You see all these wonderful things and places and know you will never get to experience any of them. It's like you're alive, but not living." he replied.

"That's how I feel some days. Let's go back to your place. I want you inside of me." she said looking into his eyes.

Brian was more than happy to oblige. He paid the bill and as they were walking down the street. The couple quickly caught the eye of a panhandler, who began to follow them. Brian tried to ignore him, but the guy was desperate.....*and obviously quite hungry.*

*"Please mister, please, just a dollar so I can get something to eat. I'm starving for God's sake!"* he said

Brain stopped and reached into his pocket. He gave the man a five-dollar bill.

"Here, go get something to eat," he said handing the man his money.

Just as he was about to put the bill in the man's hand, Hans grabbed the beggar and slammed him into the side of the building. The man got up and swung at Hans, who quickly moved and slammed him again into the side of the building.

"HANS, JESUS....RELAX!" shouted Brian, who tried to get in the middle of them.

"Du Idiot, er hat nur um geld gebeten!" Germaine said in German.

Hans quickly realized his mistake and helped the man to his feet.

"Let's go," Hans said.

"No, I'm spending the night with Brian," she said tersely.

"Germaine."

"Go ahead, tell my father. I don't care. I'm leaving that house and moving in with Brian."

Brian and Hans looked at one another. Somehow, Hans had managed to find an open parking space and had parked the limo only ten feet from where they were standing. Hans must have accumulated a small fortune in parking tickets by now. He opened the door and pointed to the inside. Germaine didn't move.

"Bring deinen arsch ins auto!" he said.

"You know where to find me. Come and get me in the morning."

Hans was clearly very angry. Brian wasn't sure how to play this one. He knew he had to take her side and show her he was on his side.

"Hans.....I'll bring her home tomorrow morning. Right now, I think we all just need to calm down."

"Bring her home in what? You don't even own a car," he said

"Getting a car will not be a problem. Go home, get some sleep. I'll have her home by noon.

"You know I cannot leave you alone. Why are you making this so difficult?" he asked

"Love makes us do crazy things," she said putting her arm around him.

"What the hell am I going to tell your father?" he asked

"Make something up. Lie if you have to. Our family is good at that." she said and pulled Brian away.

The poor beggar that Hans had manhandled was threatening to call the cops. Hans quickly calmed him down and apologized, handing some money and telling him to go get something to eat. The guy's attitude did a complete 180. He calmed down and started counting the money in his hands.

They took a taxi back to Brian's apartment. Within minutes, she was completely naked and riding him. She didn't even want to talk about what had happened. Brian knew better than to bring it up. He was having the time of his life with her.

He finished not once, but twice. They were both covered in sweat when they finished. She pulled out a cigarette and lit it up.

"I didn't know you smoked."

"Brain, there's probably a whole hell of a lot you don't know bout me," she said taking a deep drag.

"I see that."

They didn't say anything else for the rest of the night. Brian tried to make sense of all this. Clearly, Germaine was rebelling against something, he just didn't know what. She had some major issues at home. Brian sensed this had something to do with the death of her sister. That was almost ten years ago. There was quite a bit more going on here than she was telling him. He knew she was still awake. He rolled over and caressed her hair. She opened her eyes and kissed him back. He was falling madly in love with her and she with him.

"Did you really mean what you said, about moving in with me?" he asked.

"Yes. I know it seems like we are moving too fast, but I don't want to be in that house for another second."

"Is it really that bad?"

"You don't understand Brian.....you could never understand."

"When you love someone, their problems become your problems. I don't want you to have to go through this alone. You need to know you have somebody on your side."

Germaine just started to cry. She buried her head in his arms. He held her for a minute before she stopped.

"I don't deserve someone like you."

"Of course you do."

"Brian, you don't understand my family. We aren't who you think we are. We're nothing like you think we are. We are not nice people."

"No one's perfect. Look, all that matters is that we are here together. Fuck the rest of the world. When I'm with you, nothing else matters."

"I love you so much. I am going to leave tomorrow morning. I'm going to be done with them once and for all."

"Is it going to be that simple? I mean they are your family after all."

"They are also monsters," she said softly.

Brian didn't know exactly what was going on here, but this went way beyond just a domestic dispute. Brian wanted to help her, but he didn't want to make the situation any worse than it already was.

"Whatever you're going through, we do it together, okay?"

"I've never told anyone I love them before. I felt like I was dead inside before I met you," she said as she fell asleep in his arms.

"By the way, when did you learn to speak German so well?" he asked, but she was already asleep.

Brian asked his neighbor, who was also a close friend if he could borrow his car. Brian had been the one who brought him his groceries and ran errands for him while he was doing chemo. He gave Brian the keys without even thinking. He didn't even care to ask why Brian needed the car.

"Just bring it back when you're done," his neighbor told him.

He and Germaine drove out to her house in Long Island. They stopped and bought coffees. Germaine still would not eat. Brian had had enough. This wasn't just odd.....*it was nucking futs!*

"Germaine.....since we have been together, I have yet to see you eat anything. Just coffee and cigarettes. Don't you get hungry?" he asked once they were back in the car.

"You'll understand soon enough," she said looking out the window.

Brian just got back on the highway and sipped his coffee. He wanted answers and wanted them quickly. What the hell did not eating anything have to do with a family dispute? He looked over at her. Even with her hair in a bun and clothes she slept in, she was still drop-dead gorgeous. Everywhere they went, he could feel men's eyes on her. It was just something he would have to get used to.

Her house was just on the outskirts of Oyster Bay. Brian couldn't believe some of these houses. They were more like mansions than houses. Immaculate gardens and lawns, incredible fencing,

and sculptures. It was like the richest of the richest decided to all live in one town. Brian knew Long Island was home to some very rich people, but he had no idea, they were this rich.

*This is what a billion dollars buys you, Brian.* he thought to himself.

He pulled into her house, which was rather secluded. He pulled up to the gate. Germaine got out and punched in a code at the keypad. The massive gates swung open. There was also a spike strip on the ground which was pulled to the side. It would shred anyone's tires if they tried to ram through the gate. Rich people think of everything.

He pulled up to the front of the house. They both got out. It was starting to rain. It was almost like an omen of what was about to come.

"Are you sure you want to do this? You might not like what you find," she said holding his hand.

"You aren't married are you?"

"No....I am definitely not married," she said leading him up to the front door.

Brian knew he was in the big leagues. The house was gigantic. It had to be a few hundred years old and had been lavishly restored. Germaine told him her ancestors had built the house over two hundred years ago. They had been it's only occupant since. She opened the front door and was greeted by Hans and another man.

"Told you I'd have her back by noon," Brian said as he walked past them.

Hans and Germaine spoke in German. Brian couldn't understand a word. He didn't know what they were saying, but it was very heated.

"I'm going to get some things, Brian, I'll be right back," she said as she headed up the massive staircase.

Brian and the two men just stood in a very uncomfortable silence.

"Hell of a place you guys have here. What are the property taxes like this house?" said Brian trying to break the ice.

"A lot," said Hans.

Another man walked into the room. He looked at the two men and gave them a very icy look. They both turned their heads away. He walked right over to Brian.

"You must be Brian. I'm Julian Laroux, Germaine's father," he said shaking Brian's hand.

"Nice to finally meet you," said Brian shaking his hand.

"Brian.....I know this must be very awkward. I think it's time perhaps we let you in on what is really going on here. Germaine is head over heels in love with you, as I'm sure you know by now."

"Well, I love your daughter too. It goes both ways," said Brian.

"I never thought that my daughter's art hobby would turn into this. Never in a million years did I think....."

He cut himself off as Germane came down the stairs holding a large duffel bag. She said nothing as she walked right past them."

"So you're leaving the house for good dear?" asked Julian.

"Yes," she said as she took Brian's hand.

"I see. Tell me, dear, what are you going to eat once you leave the house?" asked her father.

Germaine stopped as she put her hand on the door. She dropped her bag and looked right at her father.

"I don't know. Maybe cereal, or pasta, or eggs, or maybe even a candy bar," she said

"I see.....and when you realize you can't eat those things, then what?"

"I'll figure it out."

"You tried it once before. It didn't work then and it won't work now." her father said.

"I never asked to be like you. I was never given the choice. You and mom made me this way." she said.

"You know what will happen if you leave this house. If you love Brian, why would you want to put him through something like that?"

"Goddamn, you. I'm not going to be your prisoner anymore. I'm leaving here and never coming back." she said defiantly

"That's the same thing your sister said."

"Germaine looked like she was going to lunge right at her father. Brian stepped in between them. He had seen enough. He had to get some straight answers.

"Guys, I realize I'm the new kid on the block here, but would somebody just fill me in.....please. I think at this point, I have earned the right to know," he said.

"Yes, dear. Why don't you fill in the blanks for Brian here." said her father.

"I hate you. Daphne hated you too. She hated you so much she killed herself rather than be like you."

"WOULD SOMEBODY JUST TELL ME WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?" shouted Brian.

No one said a word for a second. Brian could almost smell the tension in the room.

"Brian, let's all sit down and talk this out like adults." said her father as he led them into the opulent living room. He sat down on a sofa. Germaine sat so close to him. Hans sat down across from them. An elderly man who Brian assumed to be the butler came into the room pushing a small wheeled cart with drinks and snacks on it.

"Please Brian, help yourself.....Brian, how much do you love Germaine?" he asked.

"I'd storm the gates of hell for her, sir."

"I see. You know you can't really love someone unless you accept their faults and shortcomings as well, would you agree?"

"Of course," said Brian

"What I am going to tell you does not leave this room. You talk and by talk, I mean tell another living soul about what I am going to tell you and you die. Understood?"

"Understood."

"Good. Now that we have that out of the way. Germaine, this is your mess, you should be the one to clean it up." he said sipping some tea.

"We eat people," she said softly.

"I'm sorry.....what?" said Brian dumbfounded.

"We are cannibals. We eat other people, nothing else."

"What do you mean you eat people? Like you just cook them and eat them like a steak?" he asked not really certain he understood her correctly.

"Pretty much."

Brian stood up. He looked at all of them. He was hoping this was kind of a sick joke, only he could see no one was laughing. They were deadly serious.

*These homeboys and homegirls really eat other people? This couldn't possibly be real, no way.*

"You eat people? Are they still alive when you eat them?"

"Of course not. They are killed first," said Germaine.

"Wait.....so you don't just eat people....you kill them too. So your murderers and cannibals.....that's great, just freaking great," said Brian as he got up to leave.

Germaine grabbed him and held onto him. Brian just pushed her away.



"I've made mistakes in my life. I've done some things I'm ashamed of, but never and I mean never have I killed someone. At least I can hang my hat on that. I may not have done much with my life, but at least I'm not a murderer. All your money and power and fancy cars.....you people are the lowest form of life I have ever seen. I'd kill myself too before I became like you.....why, why do you do this?" he asked almost hysterical.

"Germaine, have you told Brian how old you are? I mean your real age?" asked her father.

Brian just looked over at Germaine.

"What do you mean your real age? I thought you said you were twenty-six?"

"Brian, she was born right here in this house in 1972." said her father.

"Come on Julian. That would put her at fifty years old. We can all see there's no way she's fifty years old."

"Tell him, dear. Tell him about the night you were born. Why you seem so much older than you look."

"Germaine, what is he talking about?"

"It's true. I am fifty years old. I have a fake license. I have to get them every few years to make sure that no one finds out."

"For God's sake, this is ridiculous. No way can you be fifty years old, that's older than I am."

"I am older than you honey. I just don't look it," she said softly.

"You guys are nuts. How the hell can she look fifty years old? I know rich people always look better than the rest of us, but they don't shave twenty years off their life.....Germaine, look me in the eye and tell me how old you really are!" he said grabbing her.

"We don't age like everyone else because of the flesh. The stem cells in our bodies are what keep us young. We have a way of saving them and preparing them. They fix whatever is wrong with us. They fix our broken DNA so we don't age like everyone else. That's how we look so young."

Brain sat back down on the sofa. Just when he thought he had heard enough, she drops this bombshell on him.

"My father is ninety eight years old. Hans is like over a hundred," she said.

"Julian you don't look much older than I am. How the hell can you be ninety eight years old? Is this a joke? Have you guys been planning this? Just to see what my reaction will be? Cause this is the most fucked up thing I have ever heard.....pardon my French."

"Brian....do you know where I was on June 6th, 1944 at around six-thirty AM?"

"I don't know, probably not born yet."

"I was storming the beaches at Normandy along with the rest of the 1st Infantry Division. I was one of six in my company who survived. Later on in the war, I met Mr. Hans and his good friends in the German Army. We were captured. Their sadistic leader could have killed us, but Hans let us escape. I have been in his gratitude ever since. After the war, I was delighted to find him alive and offered him a job. He has been with my family ever since. Our family arrived in France around the time of Julius Cesar. We learned about the old religion from the mysterious Druids that lived in the area. Even though they didn't know what stem cells were, they knew about their abilities. Many of the important Romans were cannibals.

"This is crazy. You are all crazy. I'm sorry Germaine. I love you more than anything, but I can't do this. I can't eat other people. I just can't."

Germaine said nothing as a single tear rolled down her cheek. She hugged Brian.

"I love you, Brian."

"Did she happen to mention the fact that she's pregnant?" said Julian.

"What?"

"Hans found the test in the trash the other morning."

"Of course he did. Thanks, dad, I was hoping to break the news to him myself," said Germaine.

"How is that possible if you're fifty years old?"

"Because biologically she's only twenty four, that's how."

"No, no....my kids are not going to grow up to be cannibals. No way. You better not be lying to me."

"I'm not lying Brian. I went to the doctor yesterday. He confirmed it. We are having twins."

Brian collapsed on the sofa. He didn't know what to say or what to do. This was just a little too much for him to digest at the moment.

"This is not the news I was expecting to hear. Did he really force this on you, or did you choose to be like this?" asked Brian.

"Tell him the truth dear, he deserves to know," said Julian.

"My sister killed herself rather than become like us. I chose it when I was a teenager. I was an ugly duckling with no boobs. I guess I got what I wanted. Problem is, you can't make a little deal with the devil. I didn't realize how powerful stem cells were. I was just tired of being ugly. I was young and foolish. I'd give anything to take it back. I might look beautiful on the outside, but I'm not so beautiful on the inside." she said crying.

"I never made my daughters accept the flesh. They made their own choices. It was too much for one of them. I would never force it on you either. You have to decide if it's for you. I can't make you do anything." said Julian.

"So, this is like a package deal. I become a cannibal, I get the girl of my dreams and a family of my dreams. Never have to worry about money again and we won't age. How do I say no to that? All I have to do is just eat another human being every day."

"That's the catch," said Germaine.

"I need some time to think about it."

"Of course."

"Can I talk to Germaine in private?"

Julian and Hans left the room. It was just he and Germaine. He really didn't know quite what to say.

"What have you been doing for the past fifty years?" he asked

"Not being with you," she said getting closer to him.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was afraid of losing you. I'd rather die than go on without you in my life."

"Are you really pregnant?"

"Yes, I am really pregnant."

"Am I the father?"

"Yes, don't ask me stupid questions like that."

"I have to become someone I despise to be with you. Hardly seems like it would be worth it," he said.

"I will make it worth it."

"Why don't we just leave here? Walk away from all of this. We can start our own life, one where we don't have to eat anyone."

"I can't. I've been eating the flesh so long, my body will reject anything else. Believe me, I tried. I'll starve to death."

"I feel like I'm becoming a vampire."

"I guess in some ways you kind of are," she said holding his hand.

"I love you so much, Germaine. I just don't know if I can do this."

"I didn't think I could either. It's not so bad after a while. We don't eat just anybody. Bums and criminals. Bad people who are not going to be missed. We don't eat good people." she said.

"I guess there's that. Let me be alone for a while. I've got to think this out." he said and started wandering through the house. He saw art that was worth millions. He passed by Hans in one of the hallways. He wasn't sure what to make of him now.

"Were you really in Hitler's Army?" asked Brian.

"Yes."

"Why did you follow a madman?"

"I guess because everyone else was doing it. It seemed like the right thing to do," he said and walked away.

He walked out to the garage and saw a row of luxury SUVs and exotic cars. He walked out back and saw the immaculate lawns and hedges. He passed by two guest cottages. He went back into the house and walked upstairs and finally saw Germaine's room. She had decided to turn her room into a nursery. He passed by her sister's room, which was kept as a shrine, just the way it was on the day she died.

He passed by a massive library, filled with priceless books and antiques. This is all his for the taking. All he had to do was sell his soul.

*Everyone sells a little of their soul to get ahead in life Brian, why should you be any different? All you got to do is eat somebody who wasn't going to amount to much anyway. Seems like a pretty fair trade. He thought to himself.*

A few hours later, he walked up to Germaine's room. She was sitting on her bed, smoking a cigarette. He walked over to her and yanked it out of her mouth.

"You're pregnant. What the hell are you doing smoking?" he asked as he put it out.

They looked at one another. He shook his head in disbelief. He couldn't believe this was what his life had come to.

"I guess love really does make us do crazy things," he said smiling.

Germaine shot up and kissed him. They tore their clothes off and made love on her bed. When it was over, they got dressed and went downstairs. They had a big announcement to make.

*"I am going to eat another human being. I am going to eat another human being.....I am going to stop being a human being. I am going to become something right out of a horror movie."* he thought to himself.

"Dad.....I think Bryan is ready," she said.

"Bryan, the last thing in the world we want is for you to think we ever forced this on you. You have to make your own choices. You are choosing to do this. I just hope you understand what it means." said Julian.

"Germaine explained it all to me. I know what I'm giving up. I just want to be with Germaine. It just wouldn't be the same unless I started eating the flesh also."

"Do you need some more time to think about it? I don't want to rush you."

"No, no, I'm ready. I'm ready for my first meal," said Bryan.

"Are you sure? Your first meal is going to be a very big deal here. It's a very big day in our religion.

"Germaine explained it all to me. I'm ready," he said.

"Well, alright then. I've got some calls to make. Things are going to happen very quickly for you. Are you sure this is what you want?" asked Julian.

"Yes," he said holding Germaine's hand.

She reached over and kissed him like no woman had ever kissed him before. He knew she was the one he was meant to be with. She was the one he was meant to go through time with.

Four days later, there were over a hundred people at the Laroux house. Bryan recognized some of them. They were VIPs and celebrities. This was not just a motley collection of whackos, these were the upper crust of society. The movers and shakers. The kind of people that ate caviar. That kind of rich.

*The kind of people that don't even ask about the price type of rich.*

Everyone was wearing these strange robes. Some were even adorned in costumes. They all gathered around this massive dining table out back. Bryan noticed that there were many men dressed in all black wearing earpieces. This was the security. They were probably all armed and not too shy about shooting. Rich people don't screw around.

This was it, this was for all the marbles. Once he crossed this bridge, there would be no going back. He looked over at Germaine. He had never seen her so happy. She had found her person, her soul mate. She loved him so much it scared her. Up until she met Bryan, she had no idea what love really was. She was only half alive, just trying her damndest to get through the day. Now, she actually looked forward to waking up in the morning. It was all because of him. He had made it possible and was about to make the ultimate sacrifice for her. If that doesn't say love, what does?

The prayers were recited. The appetizers were brought out. Human eyeballs in horseradish sauce, cooked to perfection. Bryan would be the first one to eat. He picked up an eyeball and put it in his mouth. He chewed and did his best not to gag. He swallowed it and then reached for another. He passed the plate to the man seated next to him. Bryan was reasonably sure that man was their

governor. Once the appetizers and wine were finished, it was time to bring on the main course. The flesh had been cut and prepared just the way he wanted it, with the bones removed. The waiter took off the covering, exposing the head of the victim. Bryan was surprised to see it was the homeless man who had asked them for change a few months back. Guess he wasn't doing any more panhandling these days. Brian took an arm and began to eat. He tried not to think about what he was doing and did his best not to vomit. He just couldn't get over how beautiful Germaine looked. He was doing this all for her, he would have done anything for her, because love makes us all do crazy things, *like eating another human being and keeping their bones as a souvenir type crazy.*