

Is It Tomorrow, or Just the End of Time?¹

By C. Elliot Ritter

Purple Haze All in My Brain

Brian Unis² woke nauseated with a sledgehammer headache³. He lay on the ground in a forest⁴. He'd say he was hung over, deciding to sleep it off on the side of the road, but Brian was a teetotaler.⁵ Easing himself up, Brian found that his strength was lacking⁶ like back in '92 while confined to a week's bed rest due to pneumonia. He fell down to his side, vomited⁷, and blacked out.

Rain woke Brian next, rain on his face.⁸ The sickening smell of vomit caused Brian nearly to throw up again.⁹ Unable to move, except to roll, Brian listened and thought.¹⁰ Radiation finally crossed his mind.¹¹ Brian was a medical doctor¹², a pharmaceutical researcher, and his condition matched radiation sickness. How? Nuclear war? No, that possibility was gone years ago. A Radiological weapon? True, Lexington, Massachusetts was near Boston, but in the suburbs. Downtown made a better target. Not to mention, realistic radiological bombs don't really have the immediate affect like the news hyped; they more likely cause cancer in twenty-years than kill you now by radiation. Other thoughts crossed his mind: radioactive medicines, radon, or a meltdown? All too small of a dose, a meltdown maybe, but

1 Right off the bat here. I was writing chapters, but yet I was naming them like this.

2 Adding the "Unis" right off just doesn't sit well with me anymore.

3 I really like "sledgehammer headache", though I've been using "jackhammer headache" recently.

4 Way too short.

5 I can't imagine the current version of Brian as a teetotaler. Now he doesn't drink, but he doesn't care if anyone else does.

6 I don't like "lacking" here.

7 "Vomited" is *way* too formal. Today I'd use something like "threw up" or "puked".

8 This just reads badly.

9 That's nice to know, but sounds mechanical.

10 Hmm ... what else could he do?

11 Why?

12 OK, I'll come clean. Brian was a doctor here because at the time I was in school for nursing. All of the medical info in this thing is winging it. I realistically know very little about medicine.

then why was he in the middle of a forest? Also, his hair was fine, no blood in his mouth from loose teeth, just fatigue and nausea. Low doses of radiation don't cause hair and tooth loss, but incapacitation requires a lot more. This thought followed Brian into unconsciousness.¹³

Something stalked Brian, something large. Glancing to either side he only saw twilight forest. The rustling came from the direction of his feet, out of sight in his still weak state. A blade crossed his throat, resting on his larynx.¹⁴ A female voice hissed: "Don't move."

"Who are you?" Brian said¹⁵ and a wolf head came into view and glared at him.

To his horror it spoke, "Shut up. You're under arrest, for trespassing on the Duke's land."

"What the...?" Brian mumbled as the wolf-woman tied his hands and feet, "who...what?"

"Shut," she cut his cheek with a bone knife¹⁶, "up." She whistled, a feat thought impossible by Brian¹⁷, and something large walked up. The wolf-thing lifted him onto the horse¹⁸, stuffed a rag in his mouth and put a burlap sack over his head.

The ride for Brian was as smooth as while possible bound and gagged. They stopped and the wolf talked with someone then dropped Brian and his foot ties cut¹⁹. Two people in chain mail aided him into a large, noisy room and removed Brian's hood.

A few years ago, an ex-girlfriend convinced Brian to go to a furry convention²⁰, which she was really in to. Brian went reluctantly, to indulge her. Her

13 Damn ... HUGE info dump. And just wait, it's not over yet!

14 Dammit, just say throat.

15 Is that wise? He has a goddamn knife on his throat, but he's challenging who ever is out there.

16 Bone knife? What the *hell* was I thinking? The setting is roughly middle medieval, but she's using a *bone* knife?

17 It really should read "... a feat which Brian thought would be impossible ..."

18 So he knows it's a horse suddenly? He hasn't seen it.

19 What the hell does that mean? Maybe "... cut his foot ties ..."?

20 OK, yeah, fuck that. Too goddamn overt. Today I would *never* make a reference to that. At all. Ever.

behavior became so odd while there it ended their relationship. What he saw now looked like that convention except in a Las Vegas medieval theme casino, with Jimi Hendrix as king, during the costume contest, and while on strong LSD²¹. In other words, Brian laughed before falling over.

“You've gotta be shittin’ me,” was all Brian said as they lifted him up before the Jimi Hendrix lion-manimal²².

“You were reportedly in my land when the licensed hunter Simonen²³ found you,” Jimi—as Brian mentally dubbed him, who sounded nothing like the singer, said in a regal tone²⁴, “Normally that's a week in jail, but my advisor tells me you may be...what did you call it?”

“Oomon,” said a goat-manimal in an overly elaborate robe. Brian labeled him Billy.

“Yes, Oomon, a legend or,” Jimi smiled a toothy grin and added slyly, “a myth. I do not believe you are an Oomon but there is protocol and I must bow to magic for now. Therefore, you will work for me, in the kitchens, until they prove, or disprove their claim. Any words ‘Oomon?’”

In a weak voice, Brian croaked some lines from “Purple Haze.” A repressed laugh echoed through the chamber as Brian said, “Scuse me while I kiss the sky,” in his best Hendrix. The guards, at the motion of Jimi, punched him in the gut. Brian didn’t feel the ground as he fell.

* * * * *

Brian awoke in a small, cool room with a weasel manimal dabbing his head with a damp cloth. The weasel wore a gilded white and purple robe with an odd

21 I don’t have a fucking clue where that came from. I should also note that I’ve never done LSD.

22 OK, yeah, no. I hate this word.

23 I have no idea where I got this name from, but it work. I recently decided, however, that the wolf-woman in Duke Andago’s household is named Simone.

24 So I describe his voice twice?

symbol repeated²⁵. A priest, Brian figured²⁶. “Father O'Mally” was his mental name, after Brian’s parish priest growing up.²⁷

“You've been in a fitful sleep for, I'd say going on three days, my son,” Father O'Mally said, “We even had to cut your,” the priest hesitated for a moment, dabbing furiously at Brian’s forehead, “hair for you became sick in it.”²⁸

“Did,” Brian strained as he sat up becoming woozy in the process, “I loose any hair before then?”

“No, and no teeth either,” Brian looked surprised as Father O’Mally said this adding, “You spoke of this, ray-dee-a-shun²⁹ that you believed caused your condition.”

“Oh,” is all Brian said, still dizzy.³⁰

“I assure you, in Jeshua’s name, that you lost no hair, no teeth as you may well see, and in a few days your strength will have returned fully,”³¹ the weasel-priest said.

“Okay, well,” Brian moaned and screwed up his face³² as he began to stand uneasily, “where do you want me?”

“You are still too weak, my son,” Father O'Mally pleaded.

“I want to work.³³ I'd be bored otherwise,” Brian cracked a smile.

“You must be of hardier material that first thought,” Father O'Mally paced to a bureau and removed a featureless brown robe, “for you. Nudity is not acceptable.”

“Where are my clothes?” Brian asked taking the robe.

“They have been destroyed, burned. They were terribly dirty and feared that

25 Repeated ... what?

26 Well golly Gomer! I could have told you that!

27 He’s doing this because it’s a recommended thing for people taken hostage to do so they can keep track of who’s who. Today I’d change that part completely.

28 Stilted language. Who the hell talks like that?

29 No. Spell it normally and then comment in narrative that he pronounced it carefully like he was unsure of the word.

30 Just make the paragraph read “Oh.”

31 I still hate the language here.

32 Who says that? “Screwed up his face”.

33 I’m too lazy to make a in-depth comment on this...

they may carry the sickness or perhaps the ray-dee-a-shun you spoke of,” Father O'Mally said as Brian put on the robe.³⁴

Burning clothes covered in fallout only spread it. Fire was a chemical reaction, not nuclear. Brian only mumbled, “Oh,” Brian sat again and looked around. The room was bare: a bed made of straw, a simple wooden chair that the priest currently sat in, a table with a tin plate with cheese and black bread and a wooden cup, the still open bureau with shelves containing clothing, paper and small personal effects of the monk who normally lived here.³⁵ Standing again Brian asked, “They want me in the kitchens, right?”

“Yes, yes,” the priest said standing.

“Where is it?” Brian asked.

“Out this door, out the chapel, then follow you nose!³⁶” Brian looked at the priest oddly then pressed the latch on the door. “Go in the name of Gahn and Jeshua, my son.” The priest said holding up a hand, thumb in palm with the opposite finger covering it.

Foxy Lady³⁷

The priest's benediction and hand disturbed Brian. The hand, with only three fingers and an opposable thumb appeared like a cartoon characters' where three fingers were easier to draw and express³⁸. The benediction was odd but familiar, Brian was a lapsed Catholic and it sounded like, not in word but phonically like a Catholic benediction: Gahn being similar to God and Jeshua... Brian vaguely

34 In the current version he gets there naked.

35 He knows a monk normally lives here?

36 OK. This line of dialog comes from the movie *Excalibur*. Galahad first comes to Camelot and is told to work in the kitchens. He runs into Merlin and asks where the kitchen is and Merlin says, “Oh, follow your nose!”

37 This spelling is from the Jimi Hendrix song, supposedly. I don't have a Hendrix CD to check it out on/

38 This is still when I had them with three fingers and a thumb and a reason I bullshitted. I don't really know why cartoonists do it.

remembered reading that Jesus of Nazareth had the name Jeshua, or something similar, in some early text³⁹. Ooman obvious seemed a corruption of Human⁴⁰. Brian shook his head and walked on keeping his eyes low. Something was wrong here. Brian felt like Charlton Heston in Planet of the Apes, landing on a planet where humans lived like apes and apes stood upright and were intelligent. Brian expected to find a half destroyed Statue of Liberty⁴¹.

The smells of food lead Brian through several wrong turns. The manimals⁴² spoke English but wrote in what appeared to be runes so only a handful of characters on a door were vaguely readable⁴³. One turn, very unexpectedly took him into an occupied female bathroom, the bathing women were not happy,⁴⁴ Brian just shook his head to clear the images of the sinuous cat-women out of his head.

Finally, the sounds of metal scraping metal and the smell of raw onions made Brian decide that this room was the kitchen. He walked in eyes shut, in case the room was another bath-room. “He's finally here,” said a deep female voice aggravated⁴⁵. Brian opened one eye to see a large, 300-pound, boar-woman looking at him wearing an apron and holding a dripping wooden spoon, “I've been waiting three days for you. We need the help and you sleep. Here,” “Miss Piggy”⁴⁶ shoved a bowel of potatoes into his hands, “peel and cut these and no back talk!”

Brian sat at a large plank table and started peeling the potatoes with a dull, wooden knife⁴⁷. Most of the kitchen workers were an odd bunch including a large bear, a haggard looking cat and some kind of rodent and didn't look at Brian, either

39 Duh!

40 Once again. Duh!

41 I really didn't need to explain that. Everyone has either seen, or know about, that movie. Not to mention I should have put the title in italics.

42 I hate this word. Dear God, why did I use it?

43 Now they use the Latin alphabet.

44 When in doubt, use a period!

45 No ... “a deep, aggravated female voice said.” And once again, who said he was supposed to be in the kitchen. And for that matter how did she know he was supposed to be coming right then at that moment?

46 I love skirting copyright issues ...

47 At the time I thought that wooden knives actually existed. Today I'm not so sure. Even if they did, he's a nobleman's palace, they'd have iron or steel knives.

busy or, maybe, disgusted. One though, a fox-woman, looked at him, no, stared at him. Brian briefly glanced at her several times and every time she was looking at him⁴⁸.

The knife, being wooden, was terribly dull.⁴⁹ “The potatoes would probably be easier to cut with another potato,” Brian said trying to lighten the mood. No one laughed, except the fox-woman⁵⁰ who giggled, then at the hard glare of “Miss Piggy” stopped.

Brian continued peeling potatoes and found himself looking at “Foxey Lady” more and more. Her eyes were odd; not like a fox’s with large yellow irises, slit pupils, and little to no sclera, instead her eyes were human-like with whites and blue or green irises depending on how the light fell on them, maybe blue-green⁵¹? Brian couldn't believe he was paying this kind of attention to a fox’s, essentially a dog’s, eye’s even if it was anthropomorphic⁵². The thought of the art he saw at that furry convention⁵³ came to mind; Brian quickly dismissed it. No, no, no! Brian thought. Then she sighed and her bosom⁵⁴ heaved the top of her low cut dress. Shit, no! Brian thought then felt sharp, warm sensation on his thumb.

“Damn!” Brian said looking at his bleeding thumb. Brian pressed the bleeding digit against his leg⁵⁵.

“That must be a sharp potato,” said the bear manimal⁵⁶.

Looking back at it, he knew that if he were home he’d be getting stitches. A brown furred hand touched his and gently pulled it up. Looking up Brian saw Foxey Lady looking at his thumb and said, “Let me, it's a trick I learned.” She placed his

48 This sentence would go today in a revision.

49 How many times do I need to say, Duh!

50 Everyone reading this probably knows who this and an in her current form she’s be scared shitless to make a sound.

51 Today they’re brown because I like brown eyes more.

52 Sorry. I would never make that kind of reference today. Anthropomorphic is a fairly specialized word actually.

53 OK, once again ... *hell* no! What the fuck was I thinking?

54 Who really says “bosom”?

55 Wordy! “Pressed it against his leg.”

56 Have I mentioned that I hate this word. On top of that if he had gone to a Furry con he’d call them Furrries.

thumb in her mouth and gently sucked it.⁵⁷

“No!” Brian shouted⁵⁸, and then when Foxy Lady dropped his hand and almost teared up. He realized he'd been too sharp.

“I'm sorry,” Foxy Lady, said weakly then repeated, her voice breaking, “I'm sorry,”⁵⁹ and began walking back her seat.

“No, wait,” Brian cried⁶⁰, “I'm sorry. That's an old wives' tale⁶¹.”

“I'm not an old wife,” Foxy Lady said sitting.

“No, I mean it's a folk remedy⁶². It doesn't really work,” Brian, explained pressing him thumb against his leg again. Foxy Lady looked at him with wet, round eyes as Brian continued, “The warmth of your mouth makes it bleed faster. Not to mention that the mouth is dirty, it could get infected.”

“Oh,” Foxy Lady said looking down, half-heartedly cutting a carrot. After a long pause, “I'm Susanne⁶³.”

“What?” Brian asked surprised.

“My name, it's Susanne,” the fox-woman said.

“Oh, um, what are you?” Brian asked timidly.

“Um,” Susanne said, brushing a hair from her eyes, “I'm a Vulpid.”

“Vulpid,” Brian repeated then realizing she meant only herself he added, “no I mean all of you, everyone?” Brian inquired.

“Genah,” Miss Piggy said certainly.

“Genah,” Brian repeated for memory.

“But, we prefer to be called by what we are,” The bear-man said, “I am an Ursid.”

57 You're going to hear this a lot: What the hell was I thinking?

58 Why? Goddamn, is Brian a complete asshole in this version?

59 Interestingly this is similar to how she'd react in the current version.

60 Who the hell uses “cried” like this in a modern story?

61 Actually it's a “folk remedy”.

62 OK, there we go! Why didn't he say that before?

63 Originally it was Suzzann. I was listening to a Suzanne Vega CD while I was writing this and decided to use her name.

“Wait, let me think,” Brian shut his eyes and tried to remember zoology. Pointing at the rat he said, “Rodentia.”

“Murid,” the old rat woman said proudly.

“Okay, right,” Brian said then, pointing at the cat, hazarded, “Felid,” the cat nodded, “all right, and Porcid,” to the boar. Then smiling at Susanne he said, “Vulpid.”⁶⁴

“How’d you know?” Susanne asked looking up at Brian.

“A little guessing and a little,” Brian stopped for a moment. He almost said “zoology” then the implication of them naming their races after the scientific name for their animal type struck him so he added modestly “luck.”

“What are you?” The Ursid asked pointing at Brian with his knife.

“Human,” Brian said confidently, “though your wizard called me, Ooman.”

“Oh,” the Ursid remarked as he cut and ate a piece of onion⁶⁵, “I’ve heard of them.”

“You have!” Brian exclaimed maybe there was hope to find other humans.

“Of course,” the Ursid laughed, “my mum told me stories.”

Brian had to chance it, “Tell be one.”

“What? I’m a chef not a storyteller⁶⁶,” the Ursid said, “and I don’t have time now.”

“Shit,” Brian mumbled and slowly peeled a short strip.

“How’s your thumb?” Susanne asked.

“Still bleeding,” Brian said checking his thumb.

“Oh,” Susanne added meekly, “can I do anything?”

“Yeah, come here,” Brian said and tore a small strip from a not quite so dirty rag.

64 Let’s all play guessing game! You first ... Goddamn what was I thinking?

65 My brother used to eat onions like apples, so I figured someone might do this. Personally I hate raw onions.

66 Damn Jim, I’m a doctor not a bricklayer!

Susanne walked over and sat on the bench next to Brian. “What do you need me to do?” She asked.

Brian wrapped his thumb with the cloth as Susanne watched then said, “Tie it.”⁶⁷

Susanne tied the cloth in several overhand knots then left her sepia-furred hand on Brian’s. Susanne's hands were calloused, but her gentle touch and... Damn! Brian tried repressing the thought but their eyes met and, for a moment, he connected. Miss Piggy shouted, “Get back to work,” adding in a grumble, “lovebirds.” Brian thought for a second about what his “furry”⁶⁸ friend, Barbara, would have said about his situation. She’d probably be jealous, and amused. Hell, she’d probably say Brian finally got “con-fur-ted.”⁶⁹ He wasn't so sure.

You Know You’re a Sweet Little Love Maker

Brian sat quietly peeling the potatoes, not looking at Susanne. Brian cooked at home for one, maybe two, but there were twenty-nine clean potatoes in front of him and one in his sore, shaking hands.⁷⁰ Brian's left thumb hurt from the still oozing cut, his right thumb had a blister and both hands were cramping.

⁷¹Last one peeled, Brian placed it on the table, dropped the knife and rubbed the muscles in his hands. The porcine⁷² looked at him and snorted as she placed the potatoes into a bowl, “I’ll cut them myself I guess. Merciful Gahn, you Oomon's

67 Was this an attempt at a tender scene? I can’t remember.

68 No, no, no, no, no, no!

69 Like Frylock on Aqua Teen Huger Force: Aw, *hell* no!

70 Today Brian’s back story has him about to be divorced.

71 “With the last one peeled ...”

72 “Porcine”? Porcid, yes!

must be worthless. No wonder you⁷³,” she stopped and thought for a second and shouted in a grating voice, “Vixen!”

“Yes,” Susanne said head and tail low obviously put down.⁷⁴

“Take your lover and get him ready to serve the Duke’s dinner,” Miss Piggy said condescendingly⁷⁵.

Susanne stood and took Brian’s hand lifting him and said, in the first angry, or at least pissed off, voice he heard from her, “come on.”⁷⁶

As they stepped out of the kitchen Miss Piggy cried, “And I better not catch you doing anything lewd!”

They walked in angered silence until the sounds of the kitchen died away then Susanne shouted, “Fuck you!”⁷⁷

“What?” Brian said in quiet surprise.

“Sorry, she gets to me,” Susanne said then shouted, “pig bitch!”⁷⁸

“Aren’t you worried about someone hearing?” Brian said concerned.

“No,” Susanne said curtly, “I’ve been here as long as I remember. They wouldn’t kick me out⁷⁹.” She grinned, grabbed Brian’s hand, and started running down the hall.⁸⁰ Brian only got out a startled yelp⁸¹.

She slowed as they reached a rough wooden door and said, “Here we are.” The echo of their feet died as she handled the latch and entered. The stench hit Brian first. If, by chance, the Genah's have a heightened sense of smell it must be

73 Ooh ... melodramatic mystery.

74 This has been retained to some extent. Calling a Vulpid woman a “Vixen” is an insult. Interestingly Canid women oddly don’t find “bitch” to be extra offensive.

75 Lots of adverbs. Adverbs are like adjectives and Mark Twain gave good advice when he said, “If you see an adjective, kill it!”

76 And today she would be worried about “Miss Piggy” a.k.a. Nell smacking her upside the head ... or worse.

77 Now ... Even in this version Susanne was being abused. However, I hadn’t studied up on it. In the current version she *might* do that under her breath, but to scream it? SMACK!

78 PIMP SLAP!

79 They wouldn’t kick you out but they’d beat the shit out of you and force you to stay!

80 Uh ... no. In the current version she lost the desire to play about the time she learned that acting like a kid meant pain.

81 I would probably use “shout” today. “Yelp” is to “Furry” and you’ve read my comments on that.

unbearable. The room wasn't exactly dirty but the pile of dirty clothes in the corner seemed to lurk. There were bunks, two high, with jury-rigged curtains, maybe ten in the room. "Maybe" because a short wooden wall that not quite reached the ceiling separated the room. In the corner where the wooden and stone walls met was a cabinet that appeared as if it was a hand-me-down from the monks.⁸²

"This is where we live. It's not great, I know, but there have been some good times here," Susanne pulled Brian in further and started the short tour, "this side is the men's and this," she pulled him into the opposite side, "is the women's."

"Short tour," Brian mumbled. The women's side, not surprising to Brian, looked slightly better. The curtains were white, where the men had sack and the dirty clothes were, at least, in a basket; they still lurked⁸³. Susanne pulled him in and pressed him against the stone wall,⁸⁴ between being strong for her sized and Brian being weak, it wasn't hard. The Vulpid's eyes had a fire in them, Brian noticed, not anger but ... Oh, God⁸⁵.

Susanne looked at him hard for a moment then her gaze softened as she leaned in, mouth opening slightly. Brian dropped, not an intentional maneuver but welcome, as his left leg gave out. "Whoa," Susanne cried as she fell, her grip on his arms pulling her, crumbling on top of Brian. "Ooh," she moaned then giggled, "Stancy⁸⁶ said not to, but if you-

"Damn," Brian shouted, "fuck! My leg!"

"You fell on this," Susanne said pulling out a candlestick, "But," she straddled him,

82 OK. Here we go. I've done more research on how people lived in castles. Today the castle staff pretty much sleep wherever their job is. Kitchen workers in the kitchen, etc. Not to mention there's like no privacy.

83 I got the idea of using this word from *Dirk Gently's Holositic Detective Agency* by Douglas Adams.

84 Period, or as the British say, full stop.

85 No your God won't help you here. He went out with the Goddess and are getting drunk as we speak. Chances are they're have sloppy unprotected sex in the backseat of his '60 Chevy around midnight and conceive himself. (Wicca references ... ignore it.)

86 OK, here we go. Stancy is now called "Nell". "Nell" is from a scene in *The Comedy of Error* Act III Scene 4 after Dromio of Syracuse enters about half way through.

“at least we’re ready,”⁸⁷ she pressed Brian down and without gravity to pull him away, kissed him. Brian refused. “Why don’t you? Don’t you like me?”

“I, I—“ Brian stammered and Susanne pressed his hand against her breast, slipping it into her blouse. The fur ended around the areola and, other than the fur, it felt like a normal human woman’s breast. Her eyes closed and Susanne exhaled slowly. “No, no! I can’t,” Brian said and pushed Susanne off him.⁸⁸

“Why not?” Susanne snapped. The breast Brian held had slipped outside the low cut blouse as his hand jerked out.⁸⁹ “I know,” she stood looking at him with a different fire, “I’m not Oomon, Right!”⁹⁰ Brian voicelessly tried to answer but Susanne, seething, continued, “Damn you! Damn all you Oomon’s!”⁹¹ In her ferocity, the neglected breast bounced, as she pointed, “No wonder you’re gone, you probably never fucked!” Susanne turned away from Brian, the tip of her tail twitching in anger.

“Susanne,” Brian said softly after walking behind her⁹² and placed his hand on her shoulder. She shrugged at his touch and he added, softly, into her ear, “We don’t,” Brian looked for an appropriate word, “mate just after we meet⁹³. Usually we do it after falling in love⁹⁴.”

“How can you love me?” Susanne asked, broken⁹⁵. Turning slightly to look at Brian and touching his hand she added, “We’re nothing alike.⁹⁶ You were repulsed by my kiss.”

87 Hello! Here we go. **NO!** Susanne is *not* that slutty.

88 OK. Where to begin? All right very descriptive, I’ll give myself that, but ... wait for it ... what the *hell* was I thinking?

89 I should mention that at the time Susanne would have worn around a D cup. Today she’s down to an A cup.

90 Exactly why!

91 “Damn you! Damn you all to hell!”

92 How the hell did he manage that? She’s pissed off at him and he gets *behind* her! Say it with me ... what the *hell* was I thinking?

93 Says who?

94 OK, let me just say that at the time I wrote this I was a virgin. Currently I’ve been with five or six women — depending on what you count as “sex” (or what your definition of “is”, is) — and I’ve never been in love.

95 OK, that’s just awkward.

96 You and me baby we’re nothing but mammals so let’s do it like they do on the Discovery Channel...

“You, you’re right, to me it seems wrong now, but,⁹⁷” Brian said softly.

“‘But.’ what?” Susanne asked turning to see Brian more fully and letting his hand drop.

Brian sighed then kneeled⁹⁸ and tore a six-inch strip of the tattered robe. Still kneeling he tied the pale brown strip to Susanne’s outermost finger⁹⁹ on her right hand then said, “This is a promise. When I feel that I could, love, someone here I’ll choose you.”¹⁰⁰

Susanne held a trembling to her face and, with a tear in her eye, choked, “Thank you.”¹⁰¹

Brian stood relieved. The sound of a throat clearing loudly and deliberately startled them both. “Susanne,” the Ursid said, “make yourself decent and go!” Susanne, embarrassed, put her bare breast back into her blouse and ran out.

“How long were you standing there?” Brian asked, himself embarrassed¹⁰².

“I came down to see how you were fairing and heard yelling. I saw enough to see you didn’t take advantage of her. That was decent of you. She’s young, naive, but still a fireball.¹⁰³ If I could see her as you could see her. I remember when she was this tall,” the Ursid placed his hand at his knee.

“How old is she?” Brian asked he believed that if she were too young he’d break this off¹⁰⁴ out of decency.

“Twenty, we think, this last winter. A Bordé vixen left her here, the father didn’t want her and Susanne was too old to hide any longer.¹⁰⁵ Just left her. We learned that much from a terrified four year-old who only wanted her mother.” The

97 Ellipsis time here “...”, not just a comma.

98 “Kneel”

99 Three fingers, remember?

100Aww, how cute ... Goddamn I don’t feel like saying it again...

101She doesn’t want love, she wants *fuck*! So why the hell is she choking up!

102“... Brian asked, embarrassed himself.”

103Today she’s young, but mature past her years due to being jaded by life and timid.

104Break what off? He’s done nothing!

105Very and dramatically different today! I won’t cover it here, but read her bio in the Summary or my writing blog. (You can reach it via a link on my webpage listed on VCL.)

Ursid signed in memory¹⁰⁶ then continued, “She must have grown up looking like her father and acting like her mother.¹⁰⁷ She’s beautiful but, well,” he shook his head like a concerned father, “we think she went to a Bordé at age of majority to...become a woman. No one here would do it, she was their little girl, but she apparently needed a man, even for an hour, to make her feel right. I’m sorry I said too much, I’m just old I guess.”

“No, I understand, she’s like your child,” Brian said then asked a question about the story, “What’s a Bordé?”

“What? Oh, well, er,” the bear rubbed the back of his neck, “when two Genah’s, of different types marry, they can’t have children so, they go to a Bordé¹⁰⁸. The woman can get pregnant or, if they desire the male's type, they can get a female to carry his child. The Bordés tend to not be very attractive¹⁰⁹ so while the ‘pleasure’ side exists, Hell thrives, it’s not as common.”

“That's monstrous! What if the woman doesn’t want to give up the child?” Brian asked horrified.

“They have to it’s the law. Any child of a Bordé is not the Bordé’s but its freeborn parent. If the child of a female is not wanted it goes to into the lord’s care, to do with what he wishes¹¹⁰,” the Ursid said as if reciting something learned long ago.

“My lord! In my world a nation that did that would be an outcast, denounce by every one else¹¹¹,” Brian said.

106What the hell does that mean? Probably “... sighed in memory ... “ Did I *ever* print this up and go over it in an Angry Red Pen?

107At the time I assumed that Bordé women were sluts.

108Typically only if they want a child of the father’s type since most people could easily find a man to impregnate their wife, they’re not likely to find a willing friend to be surrogate mother.

109Ahem ... Yes, now they are often attractive, or at least average looking. Often female prisoners are sentenced to it or as a particularly heinous use for women captured in a war campaign.

110OK, that is gone! Today Susanne is the first born child of a female Bordé with a male Bordé and was destined to become one herself. Out of desperation for her *not* to become one they told Bruse (the Ursid here) that if he didn’t take her they’d kill her.

111Actually I could see that going on, today. Especially if a similar biological situation existed somehow. Put yourself in their position and try to say you would do anything different.

“It's necessary,” the Ursid said defensively, “she's lucky with her looks the Duke didn't take her as a concubine.”¹¹²

“It's beastly,” Brian said quietly, shaking his head.

“Here,” the Ursid handed Brian a tunic and trousers, “this should fit. We're about the same size.”¹¹³

“Thanks,” said Brian sullenly, still upset about the Bordé subject. Even after such a conversation, Brian still didn't know the Ursid's name.¹¹⁴ The bear had left the room to give Brian privacy. The fit of the trousers was odd, mainly because of the hole just below the belt line for the tail; which on the Ursid was a just nub but on Brian, it recessed into the pelvis.¹¹⁵

After dressing, Brian stepped into the male section where the Ursid stood with a hand carved pipe, tamping it. Placing the pipe into his mouth, the Ursid spoke, “You're done? Good,” he added gesturing with the pipe, “do you?”

“Smoke? No, I don't touch the stuff, it'll kill you,” Brian remarked

“Oh, well. Come on, I'll take you back to the kitchen,” the Ursid said and led Brian out into the hall.

“Just a second,” Brian said stopping.

“What?” The Ursid said with a hint of agitation.

“What's your name?” Brian asked, realizing that if he didn't find out the Ursid would become, “Smokey.”

“Brutania, but everyone calls me Bruce¹¹⁶,” the newly dubbed Bruce said.

“I'm Brian, Brian Unis,” he replied. With too many question unanswered, and more to come, Brian¹¹⁷ followed.

112Eww, eww, eww, eww, EWW! That would be unheard of with the current Duke Andago! (Or even King Klinosh.)

113Actually I always imagined Bruse as being bigger.

114This really should either be omitted or moved a few paragraphs down.

115We all know that, you don't have to say it!

116Actually it's just Bruse now. (Note the spelling.)

117This really should be simply “he”.

Additional Comments:

I realized while re-reading this that I had an inconsistent capitalizing of race names. I also at one point called Nell (“Stancy”) as being a “porcine” instead of a Porcid. I corrected those problems in-line without commenting, but it’s worth mentioning here. I also made the quote all be shaped quotes instead of the mix of shaped and straight quotes that were in it and three periods “...” into an ellipsis character “...”. (I wasn’t using em-dashes “—“ yet.)

Overall my main problem is that I was winging it and I didn’t have a clear idea of the story, characters, nor setting. As I mentioned Susanne was the cliché “Furry Vixen”. Brian was simply there. Really every character was pretty two-dimensional. I wrote this and the next few “stories” in a manic rush at about one “story” a night over at most a week. (To give you an idea of how undeveloped the characters were, I decided on the spur of the moment to *not* make Brian a soldier like he had been in previous incarnations.

Besides that, taken as a whole, I’m surprised that I wrote this at all. It’s nearly as bad as any other “Furry” or “Fanfic” story I’ve seen out there and significantly worse than stuff I had written before it. (No offense to anyone here. I loathe fanfic in any form and I include the official stuff sold at bookstores.) Over the past two years I have more and more taken my writing seriously and refined my craft to where it is today. See my writing blog, (it’s linked from my webpage as listed on my VCL pages), my current Untitled “Brian and Susanne” (which is likely to be renamed to “Current”) and by emailing me and asking to read my non-Furry story *The Stolen Child* which is about mythological fairies in modern America.