

How to Write a Novel



LESSON 16

DEMO NOVEL: Two Scenes

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Chapter 13

She had her packet. It was the backup identification, the real documents with real birth certificate, real driver's license, real work permit, real citizenship paper.

Not hers, of course. But real.

She could not change her body to match, change her footprint to match that of an infant dead years before.

She could not change her body – she and the others who had done so immediately after the Fall had made sure they had their monsters with them so that they could jack straight in, take over the bodies, lock away the parts of the mind that belonged to those who had made themselves lesser gods under the sole control of the man who'd named himself God.

She could not change her face.

She could not change her DNA or blood type.

But she could use the real documents she had to create impressive forgeries, could have the forgeries that did match her blood type, footprint, face, sent to her at a location she could choose. Could make herself transient, could play with records and registrations and connections through the International Records System so that she could appear to have been a real person in the new identity for years.

And as long as she kept her work small and unimportant, and herself minor and drab and unimpressive, no one would think to question her work permit or her documents.

Rich and famous, she would have been caught instantly.

Working menial jobs and manual labor, having unimpressive work records that made her eligible for only the lowest paying jobs, she would be able to disappear again.

The name of the dead infant who's existence she was coopting was Victoria Elizabeth Palmeretti.

Vicky, she decided.

Or perhaps Betti.

Betta.

But none of those sounded great with Palmeretti.

Tora. Tora Palmeretti.

She was from Old Ohio.

Her father had been named Kevin Palmeretti.

Her mother's maiden name had been Lisa Beans.

Both were deceased, dates uncertain, but almost certainly either during or after the Fall, because while their deaths were recorded, there were no records of funerals. Of mourners. Of people who were related.

Records during and after the fall went to hell for a while.

So no one would be looking for her, no one would say, "No, our daughter died a week after she was born."

Amanda closed her eyes. She had been Amanda for ten years. She had dreamed of working her little job, having Jaro walk through the doors, look at her, say the words, [TC- what was their secret call and response?] and she would just quit her job then and there, walk out of the truck stop with him, and live happily ever after.

Ten years, knowing he was looking for her, wondering how he hadn't yet found her.

She couldn't even know that he was still alive. She didn't dare check records to find him, and he would never have gone back into the Underworld, even if he could have.

He couldn't have, because she'd closed it to all but herself and the other AIs.

Circling, circling.. She could not get purchase on her fears, on her needs. She could not find her way to Jaro..

Or could she?

He was moving, and she had been stationary... but maybe there was something she could do as a normal human being to put herself in his path.

Something that didn't use tech, something that didn't put him at risk, something...

Circling, circling...

Ten years, and he'd managed to miss her, and she believed that he was still looking for her.

Ten years.

Circling, circling...

Identity...

Something about who she was, who she could be. Something risky – she had a hint of it at the back of her mind. That she wouldn't use the papers she had.

That she wouldn't become Tora Palmeretti.

That should wouldn't use the papers.

That she would do something dangerous, stupid, crazy, but that it would give her Jaro, it would give

her an advantage over Bill, it would wake people up, it would make her...

Visible.

And there it was.

The answer, if she wanted to be brave enough to take it.

People remembered Excalibur.

And she could prove she was Excalibur.

People knew she was the flaming sword that had freed them, cut them loose from slavery, gave them back their lives.

Most people appreciated that.

Most...

There would be a few survivors who before the Fall had been at the very top, of course, who would, like Bill, want to see her die in the most horrible way imaginable.

But if she were to come out, to let people know that she had been the one who had freed them from the

soul-stealing horror of the Underworld, and if she proved it, she could stand against Bill.

And Jaro could find her.

She'd gotten the last of her people clear.

She thought that she would rather risk everything for a chance to find Jaro than to disappear into safety, knowing that when she did, she was killing any hope of him ever finding her.

Whether he would want to have anything to do with her when she made herself the target of monsters was a separate question. It was one she decided not to ask.

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath.

If she was going to go public, she would have to prove her claims. Simple enough.

She would have to explain what made her do what she'd done.

Also simple.

She would have to tell people about the human being who had led her to care about humans, and who had made

her understand that freedom and safety were natural enemies. That would be more difficult.

And then she would have to tell them about Bill.

That Bill, the man who had created both her and the Underworld still lived. That not even she knew who he was. That he would be coming after her to destroy her.

That he would try to make all of them slaves again.

And that she had no idea who he was, or how to find him.

She exhaled slowly. Closed her eyes. Darkness lay in her future, fear worse than any she had ever known, danger far worse than her current danger.

But hope lay there, too.

She had thought she would lose everything she had ever hoped for, but if she dared to be brave, she would not face despair, but instead a real chance to bring Bill to the attention of people all over the country, to bring Jaro to her, or to get herself to him, and to let people everywhere know that just

because the world seemed to be getting back on its feet did not mean that the danger had passed.

She smiled. Dropped the packet of backup documents into the trash.

Gathered her chips, her other tech, took a deep breath.

She'd heard about "coming out." Back before the Fall, it had been something different.

But this... was that. She was going to admit that she wasn't really human. She could prove it.

She would prove it.

She just wondered how doing so would play.

* * *

Three days. It had taken Amanda three days to find appropriate clothing, to talk her way into free transportation to a big-city news station, to prove

beyond any doubt to the reporters who finally agreed to meet with her that she was both who and what she was.

She could not say she trusted them.

She remembered the part pre-Fall reporters had played in covering up the truth about the enslavement of humanity.

Post-Fall, the people who were responsible for giving humanity the heads-up about dangers that could affect them took their work seriously, though. They were, she was delighted to discover, real investigators who were not in the pay of special interests.

And when she demonstrated that her human skin was just that, and proved that she was Excalibur, they were both delighted to meet her, and happy to put her in front of the part of the world they could reach – knowing that her story would be picked up, spread further. Knowing that Bill, whom she described as best she could, including linking him to the murders of

specific people who had been smaller versions of what she was, would see her.

But knowing also that Jaro would.

And that, shielded by the truth, she would be able to turn the tables on Bill, would be able to have people on guard against him, looking for him, discovering tracks he'd left behind before anyone knew who he was for what he was doing.

She was going to be able to end this.

So she sat in the chair opposite the man who was interviewing her, and live on television, she said, "My name is Excalibur, and I am not human. The body I wear is that of the once-famous Madella Raceau, who no longer inhabits it. She was, before the Fall, famous, rich, and one of the Small Gods of the Underworld. You recognize my face because you knew her back then."

And she smiled at the interviewer, and said, "To prove that I am not her, I'm now going to demonstrate my true nature as an Artificial Intelligence."