Myself, Too aka "Untitled Romantasy Project"

from the "A Few Dozen Monkeys" podcast

Chapter One: The First Chapter

by Crandall

May 11, 2025

Lulia Hawkthrone crouched in the bushes as the sunset painted the sky in vibrant hues. Hearing sticks snap, she knew he was on the path to the glade. Their secret path. Their hallowed glade. Her breath quickened as his steps neared. Then she saw him. Joppy Jampson, the tall, handsome man whose touch she dreamt of so often. A thrilling tingle rushed through her, knowing this time he would not reject her.

Joppy entered the glade, looking confused. He took in the hundred whimsical jars with fireflies that hung from the trees and the white blanket adorned with flower petals in the centre of the clearing.

"Lulia?" he said. She emerged, melting his shock into a soft, desiring gaze. They held hands and he kissed her on the cheek. "What is all this?" he asked.

In answer, Lulia gracefully undid the ribbon of her blouse and the silky fabric slid down past her chest, exposing her breasts. She quivered with anticipation.

"Don't, Lulia," he said and turned his head away. "Your letter said you wanted to see me about something important."

"This is important," Lulia said. She touched his chin, turning his head toward her. "We are important."

Joppy took her hand off his chin and clumsily tried to place the blouse back onto her shoulders. "This isn't right. I don't want to do this," Joppy said, blushing and stepping away as her blouse slipped back down to her waist.

Lulia was suddenly enraged. "You lied to me, Joppy!"

"I did not!"

Lulia sighed and retied her blouse, feeling stupid for exposing herself. "You did lie. When we were falling in love, you said you didn't want to have sex to make sure that our relationship wasn't JUST a physical one. I understood and respected that. But Joppy, we're engaged to be married, we're deeply in love, why not now?"

"You're obsessed with sex!" Joppy said.

"I'm obsessed with YOU!" Lulia yelled. "It's not just sex, you hardly even kiss me! I It HURTS me to feel so far away from you!"

Joppy put a comforting hand on Lulia's shoulder. "We'll have sex when we're married. For children."

"I never would have agreed to marry you if I knew you were not going to fulfill my desires."

"You're obsessed with desire!"

"Is a starving person OBSESSED with food?!" Lulia said boldly.

Joppy was silent for a moment, then said: "Don't you love me?"

"Joppy, I love you so much, but you are being cruel. This isn't the life I want. Only having sex to make children?"

"That's what sex is for!"

"No, Joppy. Not to me."

Joppy quickly left the glade, looking embarrassed and angry. Flower petals exploded out in all directions as Lulia snatched the blanket off the ground. She wrapped it around herself and fell to her knees. She screamed, letting out all her frustration and heartbreak. The fireflies flew about wildly in their jars, smashing their tiny bodies against the sides over and over until the jars started to crack, then to break. The bugs swarmed around Lulia. She threw her arms open and her head back and watched as the hundred scintillating bugs flew high above her, grouped, and then, as her first tears fell, dispersed like an explosion of shooting stars into the night.

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When Lulia entered her house, it was dark. She was dirty and exhausted from crying on the forest floor. She crept up the stairs and into her room, flopping on the bed.

So this was her life? Sex only a few times a year? It was impossible! She truly loved Joppy, but to demand both fidelity and celibacy was never going to work. She could hurt him now by running away or hurt him later by giving herself to the first person to tell her she was pretty and give her a kiss. And there could be children by then! Heartbroken, she packed her things up into a bindle. Lulia took off her engagement ring and placed it on a short note: "It would never work." She snuck out of her parents' house, headed to the main road, and walked all night to get to the big city.

As dawn broke, she felt a glimmer of hope in the bustling town. Wondering about her place in this new world, she pondered job opportunities in the many taverns. Just then, a small, dirty-faced girl touched her elbow.

"Please, miss," she said squeakily, "can you spare a few coins? I'm ever so hungry."

"Aw," said Lulia, touched, "I have a sandwich in my bindle."

The little girl nodded. Lulia took her bindle off her shoulder and suddenly a group of children rushed her and snatched it out of her hands. The little girl joined them as they ran off with her things. She could not stop them.

Maybe she was wrong. Maybe she should just go back home and marry Joppy. Maybe Joppy was right; maybe she was obsessed with sex. Maybe she needed to learn to ignore the gnawing emptiness and loneliness that a life of little to no sex made her feel. What were feelings anyway? Was this better than a warm bed with love but no passion?

Suddenly, music captured her attention. Following the sweet sound, Lulia found herself in a tavern called The Ladder and Mud. With the few coins left hidden on her, she ordered a scotch and turned to watch the performer on stage. It was a very handsome man and he played the instrument so well.

"Who's that?" she asked the bearded bartender.

"Cannon Dawdinstry," he answered unenthusiastically.

"He's wonderful." Lulia was transfixed. His instrument playing was entrancing, intoxicating. And when he began to sing, she swooned.

He sang about how hard it was to make it in the city, but how he was doing so well now because he didn't give up. Lulia, in her trance-like state, understood the message to be for her.

"Bartender," she said, "are you hiring?"

Chapter Two: Show Your Glow

by Magic Mike Writes Again

June 01, 2025

Lulia nursed her scotch in the flickering lamplight of The Ladder and Mud. Her eyes kept drifting back to the stage where Cannon Dawdinstry coaxed music out of his lute like it was a lover. But as the last chord faded, the haze lifted and reality returned. She still had no money, no belongings, no plan.

When the bartender came back to wipe the counter, she tapped her glass. Nevermind. I dont want to serve ale and pretend Im happy.

The bartender glanced up. He was gruff-looking, older than her by at least ten years, with streaks of silver in his dark beard. Smart choice, he muttered. This place eats people alive. Youd smile for drunks and cry yourself to

sleep.

I already cry myself to sleep, Lulia said softly, then laughed bitterly.

He paused, watching her. You got somewhere to stay?

No.

He nodded toward the stairs behind the bar. Ive got a room. Just one floor up. Its not much, but its warm.

She stared into her drink. Her heart screamed no, but her bodyit was too tired. Too lonely. She followed him up the creaky steps.

His room smelled like old wood and pipe smoke. Worn books lined crooked shelves. A cot with a wool blanket sat beneath a narrow window, and a fire crackled softly in a hearth.

They both stood looking akwardly at each other, her eyes drifted to a small side table near the window. There was a dusty frame there with a photo insidetwo men. One was clearly the bartender, younger and more hopeful. The other man wore a full cowboy outfit, but not in a gaudy way. His coat was earth-toned and practical, his boots scuffed, his hat tilted just slightly back. But his expression was what drew her in.

He was gazing at a night sky full of stars, and a single tear rolled down his cheek.

Whos that? she asked, pointing.

The bartender followed her gaze and smirked sadly. My brother. Hes a wanderer, a stargazer. Comes and goes. Thinks the stars have secrets.

They then refocused on each other, with a warm smile. Lulia took off her shoes, and offered up some small talk, what's your name?

The bartender said in a deep voice, "Wes, you?"

She said sheepishly "Lulia..."

He offered her his bed, but she stood close instead, reached for his hand, and pulled him in.

There was no music, no flower petals, just the raw heat of touch. They kissedawkward at first, then hungrily. His lips were firmer than Joppys, more urgent. She let herself sink into the moment, let the need rise up from where it had been buried beneath months of longing and loneliness. His hands explored her back, her hips, her thighs. She gasped when his beard brushed the slope of her neck.

He fumbled with the ties of her blouse, but she stopped him.

No, she said softly, let me.

She unfastened the blouse slowly, letting it slide off her shoulders with a practiced grace. As the fabric dropped to the floor, the air around her shimmered faintly. A warm, golden light pulsed just beneath her skin, like sunlight

passing through honeyed glass. The flickering firelight was suddenly matched by a second glowher.

Wes stepped back, stunned. What is that?

Lulias breath was quick, but her voice was steady. It happens sometimes. When I feel everything at once.

The light rippled gently across her bare chest and shoulders, then trailed down her spine in soft waves. She didnt command itit moved with her desire, her sorrow, her craving to be touched and wanted.

He reached out, hesitant, then placed his hands on her glowing skin. Youre like a lantern come to life, he murmured.

Their bodies found a rhythm. She climbed into his lap, legs wrapping around him, their movement urgent but not rushed. His fingers traced glowing lines across her back, her hips, and every place he touched seemed to thrum with light. The golden aura spread between them, softening shadows, illuminating dust motes in the air like drifting stars.

For a moment, she felt beautifulnot just in appearance, but in essence. She wasnt trying to please or seduce; she was radiant in her own right.

But as they reached their peak together, something cracked inside her. The light burst outward in a flash, then dimmed. Her body stilled, but her heart reeled.

She lay back on the cot, breathing hard, watching the ceiling as the warm glow around her faded completely.

The silence was heavy.

He rolled onto his side, reaching out to stroke her arm. That was something.

She nodded, but tears pricked her eyes. I feel horrible.

Wes blinked. Why?

I dont even know you. And I thinkI think I just used you. Because I feel empty.

He didnt look offended. He looked understanding. You wouldnt be the first. This citys full of people trying to fill a hole that cant be filled.

I left a man who loved me, she whispered. Maybe he wasnt right for me, but he never treated me badly. And now Im here. With my things stolen, sleeping with a stranger, glowing like a damn firefly.

You didnt use me, he said. You reached for something real. You just grabbed the closest warm thing. I get it.

Lulia turned her head to the side. I dont even know who I am anymore.

Wes propped himself on an elbow. I do. Youre a girl who glows when she feels things too deeply. And if youre planning to stay in this twisted city, I can show you how to survive it. You dont have to do it alone.

he looked over at him. And what if I dont want to just survive?

Then well figure out how you can live.

Chapter Three: No Way Back

by Pseudo Anonymous

June 22, 2025

The next morning, Lulia awoke in Wess cot, her body sore, her spirit dull. The room smelled like old smoke and regret. She dressed silently, descending the creaky stairs.

Downstairs, The Ladder and Mud was quiet, save for the faint strumming of a lute. Cannon Dawdinstry sat on the edge of the stage, tuning strings, humming softly. The same magnetic calm he had last night surrounded him like an aura.

She hovered near the bar, watching him.

She drifted closer.

They sat together on the stage steps, the tavern empty but alive with yesterdays echoes.

I saw you last night, he said. You walked into a strange city, got robbed, hit rock bottom, and still stood like the world hadnt beaten you. Thats something.

Lulia folded her hands in her lap. The world did beat me.

But youre still here.

She looked at him thenreally looked. His eyes werent just handsome; they were safe. Do you always notice broken people?

I notice people who dont pretend theyre whole, he said, quietly.

Their silence was soft. Easy.

You ever feel like your old life is behind glass? she asked. Like you can see it, but you cant touch it anymore?

Cannon nodded. Glass shatters easy. Sometimes thats the only way to start over.

Her breath hitched. She leaned in.

Their kiss was slow, warm, tasting of soot and sorrow. When it deepened, her hands gripped his thighs, urgent but unsure.

He pulled back slightly. Here?

She smiled. You have a dressing room?

He did. Backstage, behind a faded curtain, was a tiny nook barely big enough for a man and a dream. They squeezed in, and suddenly the air grew thick.

Her hands slid up his shirt, feeling heat, not magic. She kissed him againharder nowand sank to her knees. He looked down, dazed.

Are you sure? he asked.

She answered without words, she had a full bright glow around her, that lit up the entire room. His head tipped back, lips parted as her mouth worked him slowly, reverently. It wasnt just desireit was hunger.

He groaned softly, hand on her hair. Just as the tension in his breath threatened to break

A crash rang out in the tavern, followed by shouting.

They pulled apart fast.

Stay here, he said, buckling his belt as he ducked out the curtain.

Lulia, still catching her breath, stepped out behind him moments later.

The bar had transformed into chaos.

Joppy stood in the center, staggering drunk, shirt ripped at the collar, a bottle dangling from his hand like a weapon. His eyes burned red with fury.

LULIA! he bellowed. I asked every damn stable hand from here to the valley if theyd seen a pretty girl with too much want in her eyesthey all pointed me here! Joppy slurred, waving his bottle. You think you can run off and hide in some piss-soaked bard hole?!

Her stomach dropped. Oh no.

You ran away, Joppy slurred. You left me like I was nothing. And now yourewhat? A whore in a tavern?!

Stop it! Lulia said, stepping forward. Just go home.

Cannon stepped between them, his hand out. She said leave, Joppy. Walk away.

Joppy sneered, swaying slightly. Whos this? Her new ballad boy?

Joppy raised his bottle, muttering something slurry and gutturalTharn venik.

The glass flared green, then cracked with a pop. A gust of force burst from it, slamming into Cannons chest. He

flew back into a table with a grunt and crumpled to the floor, out cold.

Lulia screamed. Cannon!

Joppy turned, wild-eyed and swaying. Now. Where were we?

The tavern held its breath.

Wes stepped from behind the bar, slow and menacing. You need to leave, boy.

Wes pulled something from under his coata jagged chunk of obsidian bound in leather. He whispered a word that cracked the air. The stone pulsed, then howled like a wolf. A spectral beast burst from the crystal, slamming into Joppy and dragging him across the floor.

The patrons screamed. Tables flipped. When the ghost-beast vanished, Joppy lay brokenbleeding from the mouth, unmoving.

Lulia ran to him. Joppy?!

She dropped to her knees, hands glowing faintly nowpanicked instinct. She pressed her fingers to his chest. The light surged, flickered then sputtered out.

No, no, no

But there was nothing to save. Joppy was dead.

She sobbed once, ragged and real. I didnt want this.

No one in the bar spoke. The silence was suffocating.

Lulias body burst into radiant light, her features lost in the blaze. A scream tore from her, raw and primal, shaking the walls. A shockwave exploded from her chest, hurling people back and toppling tables. Lanterns shattered, sparks catching on curtainsflames leapt to life. She collapsed, limp and glowing faintly, sobbing as fire spread through the smoke-filled bar.

Wes knelt by Joppys body, while others rushed to put out the flames. The firelight danced off the pooling crimson, but his eyes were already on the door. We cant stay, he said, voice low and urgent. Joppys familys got gold, land, and a name that makes city guards bow. Theyll come askingloudly.

Lulia clutched Cannons arm, her face pale. I tried to save him. I tried.

You did more than most would, Wes said, rising to his feet. But it wont matter. Theyll say we lured him, robbed him, murdered him in cold blood.

Cannon looked toward the shattered door, then back at Wes. Where do we go?

Out the back, Wes said. Dont grab anything. Dont speak to anyone. From this moment on, none of us ever knew a man named Joppy Jampson.

Canon grabbed Lulia by the arm, looking around as the Ladder and Mud became engulfed in flames, they ran out the back door.

Chapter Four: The Stars Between Us

by Magic Mike Writes Again

August 03, 2025

The tavern roared behind them, smoke curling into the night like a spirit set loose. Lulia and Cannon stumbled onto the cobbled street, coughing, the fire lighting their backs in flickers of orange and gold.

From a side alley, Wess head appeared, silhouetted in the flames. Get out of here! he shouted, then tossed something toward them. A heavy bag hit the ground with a thud, dusty and clinking with metal.

What is it? Lulia asked, already grabbing it.

No time! Wes barked. Run! Joppy's family won't be far behind!

He vanished again, swallowed by smoke and shadow.

Cannon slung the bag over his shoulder, and they took off down the alley, boots echoing against stone. Around the corner, waiting like a secret, was a black stagecoach. Its wheels were rimmed with old iron, its wood etched with runes that shimmered faintly. At the reins stood a demon horse, its skin pitch-black and rippling like hot tar, eyes glowing like coals.

Was that Joppys? Cannon asked, stunned.

Yes, Lulia said, already reaching for the door. "His family is steeped in arcane dark magic."

The door creaked open on its own, revealing a plush, velvet-lined interior. Lulia hesitated only a moment before stepping in, her breath catching. Cannon followed. The door sealed shut behind them with a deep clunk, shutting out the fire, the world, the past.

Inside, the coach glided forward like it floated over dreams. Lulia sat down, exhaling deeply. The adrenaline crash hit her like a wave. She looked up at Cannon and noticed blood at his temple.

Youre hurt, she said, frowning.

He reached up and winced. Mustve happened when Joppy threw me against the bar. I didnt feel it until now.

Lulia leaned forward and brushed his hair back. Hold still.

Her palm hovered above the cut. A warm golden glow pulsed from her skin, washing over the wound. The bleeding stopped, the skin knit together, and Cannon exhaled slowly.

Youre a miracle, he murmured.

She gave a tired smile. Im just trying to hold it together. she said.

“Joppy always made me feel so small, always had ruleswhen I could speak, what I could wear, even how I should feel. Leaving him felt like peeling off chains I didnt know I was wearing.”

But your here now, leaving that all behind, in a new place. That kind of courage... its beautiful. Cannon added.

She glanced up, heart quickening. You think Im beautiful?

Cannon chuckled softly. Lulia, you glow. Literally. Youre not just beautiful. Youre radiant. And the way you take chargehow you own yourselfits... kind of a huge turn-on.

She laughed, the sound surprised and genuine. Youre not afraid of all this? She motioned to herself, the faint shimmer still lingering.

No. I admire it. You make me want to be braver too.

Lulia scooted closer. Youre already brave. You stood up for me when no one else did.

I didnt do it for heroics, he said, leaning in. I did it because I couldnt bear to see someone like you torn down.

They sat in the hush between breaths. Lulia touched his chest, fingers brushing his shirt.

I feel... safe with you, she said.

He kissed her softly, hands resting gently on her waist. The kiss lingered, deepened. Her glow began to rise again, a soft shimmer beneath her skin.

As they explored each other with slow kisses and murmured touches, Lulia paused.

Cannon... I want this. I want you. But not rushed. I want to feel all of it.

He nodded, kissing her cheek. Then let me show you how much I want you.

She eased back onto the plush velvet bench, skirt rising as he knelt between her legs. He took his time, kissing her thighs.

When his mouth met her, she gasped, the pleasure igniting her glow into soft golds and silvers. His tongue moved in steady rhythm, slow and reverent, and her body responded in waves.

The coach became a sanctuary of heat and magic, colors pulsing brighter as she neared her peak. Her fingers twisted into the seat, her back arched.

Just as her cry of release escaped her lips, the bag beside them burst open.

A beam of white-blue light soared upward. A glowing star map floated in the air, shifting and alive.

Lulia blinked, dazed. What is that?

Cannon sat beside her, equally stunned. Looks like a map of the stars. But not our sky.

They watched as constellations realigned themselves. One crescent cluster blinked brighter: **Moon Boat**.

Another flared red with deep, steady light: **Dakari Duskhollow**.

Beneath it glowed three words: *The Space Cowboy.*

The coach slowed. Outside, moonlit grass flowed like silk under windless skies. Ahead stood a ranch, glowing faintly beneath constellations.

At its gate was a tall figure, unmoving, cloaked in something not quite fabricdarkness stitched with starlight. His hat tilted back, his gaze like twin moons.

Lulia leaned forward, her breath catching. Thats him.

You know him? Cannon asked.

No... but something in me does.

They held each others gaze, uncertain.

Far behind, in the crumbled bones of the Mud and Ladder, shadows whispered and blood stained the stone.

Wes hung from chains, barely conscious, bruised and broken.

Before him stood three noblesJoppys kin. The eldest, a woman cloaked in purple and power, held a rune-stamped scroll.

She burns brighter every hour, she said, voice cold. Her light leaves a trail.

The youngest noble stepped forward, holding a glass orb. Inside shimmered golden lightstill pulsing, alive.

Shes near Dakari now, he said. And still she thinks shes safe.

Wes spat blood. Shes stronger than all of you.

Not for long, the woman murmured. Not when her love becomes her weakness.

Chapter Five: Gunsmoke and Starlight

By Pseudo Anonymous

August 24, 2025

The demon horse slowed as the black stagecoach rolled into Dakari Duskhollow. At the gate, a man in a patched vest grinned.

Well, Ill be damned. Joppys ride! He patted the wood like it was alive. Back for your regular, huh? Dark circles prepped, three sacrifices, and the girls are warmed up in the velvet room.

Lulia froze halfway out. His what?

The guard tilted his head, eyes narrowing. Wait. You aint Joppy. His hand slid to the blade on his hip. Who the hell are you?

Heat rose in Lulias chest. Her skin pulsed faint gold. Youre telling me Joppy murdered people andand her voice cracked, fucked strangers while I sat at home?! Power built in her hands, light rippling. Ill burn this place to the ground

Lulia! Cannon stepped in front. Easy. Listen, friend Joppys dead.

The guard blinked. Dead?

Bar fight at The Ladder and Mud. Didnt make it.

The man snorted. Figures. Always knew that bastard would die ugly. He spat into the dirt. You know Wes? Runs the bar?

Yeah, Cannon said.

Then you must know the Space Cowboy. Hes Wes brother. If youre rolling in with Joppys ride, youre no enemies of mine. I got a room. Aint much, but itll get you off the road.

He led them through the brothels velvet halls. Perfume, sweat, and old incense clung to the walls. As they passed a cracked door, a strobe light flashed over a man grinding badly for a girl who looked bored enough to fall asleep.

Lulia stifled a laugh. Who thinks thats romantic?

Cannon smirked. Someone very desperate.

Their room was small a bed, a warped lantern. Cannon sat with his lute. Want music to drown out that?

Lulia smiled faintly. His fingers brushed strings, soft notes filling the air. She sat beside him; their shoulders

touched. A kiss followed, gentle but hungry. Her glow stirred faintly as his hand traced her arm, smearing a faint streak of dust across her skin.

A crash split the air. A voice screamed:

WHERE IS LULIA HAWKTHRONE?!

The door burst open. Cloaked figures stormed in. Joppys family.

Cannon swung a chair. It shattered over a skull with a wet crack. Blood sprayed the wall in a thick arc.

Lulia ducked a slash; the blade nicked her cheek, hot crimson running down her jaw. She blasted the attacker; his chest smoked as flesh blistered and cracked. Another rushed. She punched his mouth. Teeth snapped; blood spattered her knuckles and painted the floor.

A snarl ripped the air. A spirit beast, black and lined with green fire, lunged at Cannon. Its teeth sank into his arm, ripping flesh to bone. Blood arced across the room in a steaming spray. Cannon screamed as dark magic burned into his veins like molten chains.

CANNON! Lulias glow flared, but another attacker slammed her into the wall. A blade carved her shoulder, splitting skin and soaking her sleeve with hot red. She roared and blasted him point blank. His skin split under the surge of light, blood boiling as the smell of scorched meat filled the air.

Lulias arms shook. Every blast drained her, sweat and blood slicking her palms.

I cant she gasped. NO!

Her body erupted in gold. The wave ripped through the brothel, vaporizing half the attackers instantly. The walls dripped with blood. Curtains ignited, casting a red haze over the carnage.

When the light dimmed, she was on her knees, chest heaving, arms trembling and slick with crimson.

More of Joppys kin stepped over the bodies, boots squelching in blood.

Then the air cracked.

Two gunshots split the night. Not lead starfire. Silver blue rounds tore through the room like comets, leaving glowing trails. One punched a hole through a mans chest; molten light bloomed where his heart had been. Another shattered a skull, starfire exploding out the back in a spray of red and silver sparks.

A figure stepped through the haze, coat stitched with starlight, guns spinning lazy arcs. Each shot birthed another bloom of blood and silver flame. The brothel became a galaxy of violencered and silver mingling in the smoke.

Lulias breath caught. That hat, that stance the man from Wess photo. But in person, he was more. Seeing him was like staring at the night sky and feeling it stare back, endless and alive.

The last attacker dropped. Smoke curled between them, heavy with iron and ozone. His eyes locked on hers not cold. They lingered, drinking in her glow, the streaks of blood across her skin.

He stepped forward, slow and deliberate, brushing the brim of his hat. A subtle gesture, but his gaze softened for a heartbeat, like her light touched something in him.

Lulia stood frozen, lips parting. You youre even more of a draw in person. The words slipped out in a hushed, awed breath as she smiled faintly.

His lips tilted in the faintest shadow of a smile. The interest in his eyes wasnt passing; it burned quiet and deep.

Reality snapped back like a whip. Lulia spun to Cannon. His skin was pale, arm shredded, blood pooling fast across the floorboards.

No, no, no She pressed glowing hands to the wound. Light surged, then fizzled against the curse.

Its not working, Cannon rasped, voice thin.

Tears blurred her vision. I need something stronger. An artifact. My magic cant touch this.

Behind her, the Space Cowboy stepped further in, boots crunching glass and blood. Starfire still glowed faintly in his guns, casting ghost light across his jaw. His eyes stayed on her not just curious. Interested.

And even through the fear, through the iron stink of blood, she felt it: the weight of his attention, the quiet gravity of a man who looked at her like she was both dangerous and holy.

Chapter Six: 50 Shades of Mischief

by Magic Mike Writes Again

September 14, 2025

Lulia woke in a wide bed layered with furs, the scent of smoke and leather heavy in the air. For a moment she forgot the chaos of the battle, the blood, the flames until the low murmur of voices reminded her. She shifted, rubbing her eyes. Across the room, in the glow of an oil lamp, Wes sat at a long table with the Space Cowboy.

Both looked tired, grim, but alive.

Youre awake, Wes said, relief washing across his face. Good. I wasnt sure youd pull through.

Lulia swung her legs over the side of the bed, surprised at the strength coursing through her body. The wounds from the fight were gone her healing gift had done its work while she slept. What happened? How did you get here?

Wes rubbed the back of his neck, eyes dark. They dragged me from the bar, Lulia. Tortured me I dont even know why Im still alive, I think they brought me here to make me watch your demise. But when the fighting started

outside, it gave me a chance. Chaos broke their guard. But theres more. Joppys family theyre tracking us. Not by footsteps. Not by horses. By you, your glowing. They can see it. Until you learn to control it, were all exposed.

Lulia laughed nervously. Control it? Ive never been able to.

You will, the Space Cowboy said simply, rising to his feet. His voice carried the kind of certainty that brooked no argument.

Her concern immediately went to Cannon. And Cannon? Is he?

Wes nodded. Hes resting down the hall. A magic artifact is coming for him a Breathglass shard. Its rare, old, and it will mend him completely. Youll see him soon.

Relief warmed her chest, but it mingled with confusion. She couldnt stop thinking about the Space Cowboy, the way his eyes had held her, the weight of him that pulled her even from across the room.

Come with me, he said gently, extending his hand. She hesitated, then placed hers in his. Heat traveled up her arm at the contact, soft and steady.

The corridor ahead was quiet, the walls lined with shadows. Lanterns flickered along the hallway, casting a golden glow that seemed to mirror her own pulse. This training, he said, voice low and inviting, is as much about connection as control. Youre not alone in it. I will guide, never force. Do you trust me?

Her gaze lifted to his. She felt a flutter of desire, a hint of fear, and a strange clarity all at once. I trust you, she said. I want to try.

He nodded, a faint smile touching the corners of his lips. Good. Then let us begin.

They entered a chamber that smelled faintly of cedar and iron, the walls carved with subtle sigils that shimmered in the soft light. Devices hung from delicate chains: feathers, straps, and polished implements, but none seemed threatening. The Space Cowboy moved with calm grace, drawing them into a shared rhythm.

Strip, he said softly, his eyes never leaving hers, not demanding, but asking an invitation. Her cheeks flushed, but she felt safe. She obeyed slowly, deliberately, until she stood bare before him, shivering slightly from the cool air and the anticipation coursing through her.

He stepped back, giving her space. Do you consent? he asked, voice low, husky.

She nodded, lips parting. Yes. I trust you.

Soft, invisible currents of magic stirred, brushing over her skin like phantom hands. She shivered as warmth and gentle pressure traced her curves, teasing, coaxing her into awareness of every nerve and pulse. Straps brushed her thighs; feathers traced her arms. Every touch was playful, intimate, an exploration without overstepping.

Breathe, he murmured, moving slowly around her. Feel it, but do not let it consume you.

Her glow began to ripple, responding to the sensation, a faint silver-gold light pulsing from her chest. Waves of ecstasy teased her senses, gentle and insistent. She leaned into the invisible touches, her back arching slightly,

breaths shallow and uneven.

Youre doing beautifully, he whispered near her ear. His words, soft and warm, made her tremble in ways the phantom touches alone could not. Control is yours. You own it.

Her body pulsed, responding to every sensation the magic, the feathered touches, the warmth of his presence until she could no longer contain it. Her glow erupted, flooding the room in soft patterns of light that painted intricate constellations across the walls.

Her cry was part awe, part surrender, a release of all tension and fear. She sagged against the wall, the cuffs supporting her, every nerve alive and buzzing.

The Space Cowboys eyes were wide but calm, absorbing the patterns she left in the glow. The Moon Boat, he whispered. This this is the path weve sought for so long. Your release revealed it.

Lulia collapsed against the wall, mind spinning. Cannon, Joppy, the Space Cowboy her heart stretched in every direction. Her glow dimmed but lingered faintly around her skin. Confusion mixed with desire, awe, and a strange sense of destiny.

She could feel it the pull toward the Space Cowboy was not fleeting. Yet her heart ached for Cannon, and the mystery of what had just happened left her dizzy with emotion.

He stepped closer, voice soft. Rest now. Youve given everything, and youve done it with courage. Ill stay near. Always.

Her pulse slowed, and for the first time in days, she felt a measure of peace. The room still shimmered faintly with her light, a memory of release and a key to something greater.

And though she could not yet untangle her feelings, she knew one thing: in this strange, dangerous world, she had found someone who saw her every glimmer, every fear, every spark and who would guide her safely through it.

Chapter Seven: The Fractured Note

by Pseudo Anonymous

October 05, 2025

Cannon woke choking on air that tasted of smoke and iron. His chest rose and fell in desperate, jagged pulls, each breath like claws dragging him from some abyss. Darkness peeled back in pieces, replaced by the glow of a fire that painted shadows across rough walls. His body was stiff, brittle, as if it had lain abandoned for centuries.

A voice broke the silence. Cannon?

Lulia knelt at his side, eyes wide, lips parted with disbelief and relief in equal measure. She reached for him, brushing sweat matted hair from his brow. Youre awake.

He tried to speak, but only a rasp came out. He forced himself upright, every muscle screaming. His head spun, stomach rolling. Then his gaze dropped to his arm.

His right hand trembled as if it belonged to someone else. The skin was a mess of puckered scars, two fingers stiff and half curled like dead twigs. When he tried to flex them, pain shot through nerves that no longer obeyed. For a heartbeat, faint black veins spidered up his wrist before fading into the flesh.

No. His voice cracked, raw and hollow. He tried again, the fingers refusing to move as they once had, nimble and sure. His whole body shook. The lute my songs theyre gone.

He stared at the hand as though it were a corpse nailed to him. His identity, his soul, had always lived in those strings. Without them, what was he?

Stop. Lulia grasped his uninjured hand, pressing it against her chest. Her eyes glistened, voice firm yet tender. I dont love you because of the lute. I love you because youre you.

But pity carried in her tone, and pity was a knife. His throat closed, grief crashing through him. He turned away, shoulders shaking in silence.

The fire popped, filling the void. At last he forced words past clenched teeth. How long?

Lulia hesitated. That hesitation was worse than any answer.

A month, she whispered.

His head whipped toward her. A month?

You were gone, she said softly. The blast, the curse you wouldnt wake. We thought you might never come back.

Cannons thoughts spun. Thirty days, maybe more, stolen from him. The world had moved forward, leaving him broken in its dust. He searched her face, and something there unsettled him: steadiness. As if she had built a new rhythm in his absence.

What happened while I rotted in the dark? he demanded.

Her lips pressed together, then parted. I trained. With him.

The name wasnt spoken, but it echoed clear as thunder: the Space Cowboy.

Cold spread through Cannons gut. Trained?

Lulias gaze flickered, ashamed yet defiant. He helped me master my power. I understand it now. Cannon Her voice trembled with awe. I can tap into the energy of the universe itself. Thats why impossible things have always followed me. It all makes sense.

Her face lit with conviction, beautiful and untouchable, and it twisted the knife.

A month. A whole month of her with another man. A month of intense sessions. While Cannon lay useless. Forgotten.

What exactly did he do to teach you? His voice dripped venom.

Lulia recoiled. Not what you think. He guided me. Pushed me to confront the fear inside me. Nothing more.

A whole month, Cannon muttered, words bitter as bile. His ruined hand clenched, scarred knuckles whitening.

The whisper came then, smooth as oil, curling behind his thoughts: Shes lying. She doesnt need you. Shes already chosen him.

Cannon flinched, pressing a palm to his chest as if to smother the sound. Shadows flickered across the wall though the fire burned steady. The archifact had healed most wounds, but something had remained. A shard of dark magic, lodged deep inside, whispering.

Lulia leaned closer, worry clouding her face. Cannon, please dont let this consume you. Youve survived the impossible. Youre here. With me.

Protect us? His laugh was sharp, brittle. Or protect yourself with him?

Pain flashed in her eyes. You think so little of me?

He looked away. If he met her gaze too long, he might break. Or he might scream. The whisper licked at his ears: Shes replaced you. They all have. You are nothing now.

He staggered to his feet, body weak, legs trembling. His vision swam, and for an instant his shadow moved ahead of him instead of behind, stretching toward Lulia with clawed fingers. He blinked, and it was gone.

Wess voice carried faintly from the next chamber, some casual remark about supplies. Cannon ignored it. His world had narrowed to the woman before him glowing with newfound power and the poison twisting in his veins.

Lulia reached for him again. Dont shut me out. Whatevers wrong, we face it together.

For a heartbeat, honesty clawed at his throat. He wanted to confess: the voices, the shadows, the darkness worming through him. But another thought smothered it what if they tried to cut it out? What if they abandoned him when they saw how far he had already fallen?

Secrets were safer. Secrets were power.

I promise, he said. Smooth. Convincing. A lie born of the corruption eating him alive.

Lulia smiled and nodded, but something seemed off, she turned to tend to the fire.

Desperate for clarity, she reached inward to the vast current of the universe. Usually threads of energy revealed truth, yet when she turned her sight toward Cannon, a dense fog smothered everything. His outline wavered,

obscured, unreachable. She gasped softly. Never before had anyone been hidden from her.

Cannon lowered his gaze to his mangled hand. The skin pulsed faintly, a thread of shadow coiling like a heartbeat. His lips curled into a smile he didnt mean, a smile she didnt see.

Soon, the whisper crooned. Theyll all see. The song isnt over. Its only changed key.

Chapter Eight: The Corruption Takes Hold

by Magic Mike Writes Again

October 26, 2025

The chamber of the Jampson estate, far removed from the brothel, hummed with a cold, precise form of dark magic. The elder noble ran a manicured finger over a polished skull resting on a table ringed with runes of obsidian. The air was thick with stale incense and the sickeningly sweet scent of simmering malice.

He is active, the elder murmured, his voice a low, satisfied rasp. The Spirit Snare did its work efficiently. Cannon Dawdinstrys wounded pride and his heart now beat to our rhythm. The darkness is singing to him, telling him everything he wants to hear about vengeance.

A younger woman peered into a scrying pool that showed the faint, erratic, but intensely tormented movements of a soul being devoured. The corruption is feeding on his brokenness and his abandonment issues. We judged correctly to lay off pursuing the girl directly; it gave the blight time to truly take root.

Good, the elder said, his smile cold and cruel. Let him fester. Let him gather what paltry information he can. His final, pathetic act will be to deliver her to us, willingly or not.

In a secluded, fire lit chamber miles away, Lulia was utterly lost in sensation. The air was close, scented with cedar and the warm musk of their skin. She lay on a bed layered with furs, her body arched in exquisite tension, a soft, golden glow spilling from her skin.

The Space Cowboy was a man of measured intensity, and their training had become a profound, shared ritual. He had strapped her gently to a sturdy, wooden frame, allowing her to heighten the glorious awareness of her own body. He knelt between her legs, his eyeslike twin moons reflecting starlightfocused entirely on her. His mouth was a velvet torture, tracing slow, wet lines against her inner thighs, his beard scratching delightfully.

You glow for me, Starlight, he murmured, his voice a warm vibration against her skin.

She gasped, fingers digging into the furs. Please, I cant wait

He didn't rush. He only intensified the exquisite teasing, drawing out the moment until she was breathless with need. His tongue and mouth began to devour her, pulling forth soft whimpers and cries that echoed her intense longing. This was Sensation, pure and prolonged.

Her hips began to rock uncontrollably, her light flaring brighter as the pressure built. She felt the Intensity risea sharp, dizzying climb that felt like tearing the fabric of reality itself.

He pulled back, his eyes dark with desire, and thrust his hard member, against her mouth. She took him in a rush of air, sucking him with desperate hunger, running her tongue all over. This was passion, and complete connection.

He climbed over her, positioning himself. His hands went to the straps that held her hips in a perfect, elevated arch. He entered herhard, fast, and deepa glorious invasion that connected them fully, body and spirit. He climbed on top of her, entering her, the rhythm was hypnotic, crushing, a physical manifestation of her yearning. Her glow was now a blinding pillar of gold in the center of the chamber.

And then, just as he was driving toward his own peak, her hips locked around him. The Nerve, the Deliverancea blinding white flash that ripped through her body, a scream caught in her throat. The golden light exploded outward in a shockwave of ecstatic energy, painting the carved walls with intricate, shimmering constellations. Her body collapsed, utterly spent, before the Space Cowboy finished with a guttural roar, collapsing onto the furs beneath her. Lulia said, while catching her breath "I guess I failed another lesson..", with a smart smile.

The golden glow had barely begun to dim when a figure stumbled into the main hall downstairs. Cannon, gaunt and pale, his shadow twisting unnaturally behind him, found Wes polishing mugs behind the bar.

Wes. Where is Lulia? Cannons voice trembled, his face drawn tight with effort to seem composed.

Wes barely looked up. Training with the Space Cowboylearning to control her glow. He smirked, oblivious to the venom coiling in Cannons gaze.

Cannons ruined hand clenched. The voices hissed: She replaced you. Shes giving him your power.

He stumbled toward the stairs, following the fading scent of sex and light. At the door, he pressed his eye to a crack in the wood.

Lulia moved beneath the Space Cowboy, her body glowing, her expression lost in ecstasy. The sight shattered him. She was radiantand she was his no longer.

The voices screamed. Kill him. Take her. Cannon staggered back, clutching his head as black rage flooded in.

A sudden cry tore through the building, followed by the electric crack of dark magic. Lulia and the Space Cowboy sprang up, dressing in frantic silence, and ran downstairs.

The hall was chaos. Tables splintered, patrons fled, and behind the bar Wes lay deadeyes blank, a hole burned through his chest, smoke curling from blackened flesh.

Cannon crouched nearby, rocking, muttering to unseen specters. It wasnt me the voices told me to stop it

Lulia approached, voice trembling. Cannon what happened?

He looked up, eyes hollow. Youre a whore, Lulia.

he words cut deeper than any blade. You killed him, she breathed.

He lunged. His hand clamped around her throat, dark energy pulsing through him. She struck back, wrenching free, stumbling into the far corner as the Space Cowboy drew his weapons.

They faced each otherLulia burning gold, Cannon seething black.

the Space Cowboys voice was low. Its the Spirit Snare. The Jampsons took him. Hes theirs now.

Lulias eyes filled with grief. No, she whispered, her glow hardening to fire. Hes gone.

The air between them trembledthe calm before the final battle.

Chapter Nine: Ash and Starlight

by Pseudo Anonymous

November 16, 2025

The air between them pulsed gold and black colliding, light trembling on the edge of rupture. Cannons eyes were voids now, pits of darkness threaded with crimson veins. The Space Cowboy stood opposite, revolvers drawn, breath steady but shallow.

Step aside, Cannon hissed, voice layered with something that wasnt entirely his. Shes mine.

She was never anyones, the Space Cowboy said, his tone calm, but his fingers twitched on the trigger.

Cannon lunged first, the Space Cowboy rolled, one revolver barking twin flashes of silver. The rounds tore through Cannons shoulder, but the wounds smoked, sealing with dark tendrils. Cannon roared, the Spirit Snare burning in his veins, his corrupted hand glowing like molten iron.

Lulia stepped back, light flaring from her skin. She could feel the threads of the Spirit Snare twisting through Cannons essence thousands of invisible hooks tethered to the Jampsons distant lair. She reached inward, into the universe within her, where constellations pulsed like a living nebula. Her voice echoed softly, trembling: Release him

Cannon swung his arm and a table shattered against the far wall. The Space Cowboy ducked low, grabbed Cannon by the wrist, and drove a knee into his ribs. Bone cracked. Cannon spat black blood that hissed when it hit the floor.

Fight it! Lulia cried. Cannon, please!

His reply was a snarl, his eyes rolling white as he slammed a fist into the Cowboys gut, sending him crashing through a bar counter. Bottles exploded. Liquor sprayed like rain. Fire caught the air.

And then reality itself buckled.

The far wall tore open with a shriek of runes. A portal bled into existence, its edges lined with the same obsidian glow that had surrounded the Jampsons ritual chamber. From it poured robed figures, their eyes like polished stone, blades dripping with shadow.

The Jampsons, Lulia gasped.

The brothel guards burst through the doors behind her rough men and women wielding sawed off rifles, cleavers, and anything they could grab. Chaos swallowed the room.

The Space Cowboy rose again, bleeding from his side, and met Cannon head on in a brutal exchange. The Cowboy ducked under a wild swing and drove his revolver butt into Cannons jaw, teeth flew, and Cannon barely flinched.

Lulia stood at the heart of it all, her glow expanding until the stars seemed to descend from the ceiling. Her power reached into the portal, into the corruption itself.

You dont own him! she screamed. Her voice rippled through the walls, and her glow tore into the snare like solar wind stripping a dying world.

The nearest Jampson acolyte screamed as his tether snapped. His flesh boiled away in streaks of light.

Cannon staggered, momentarily lucid eyes flickering blue. Lulia help me
Then the darkness swallowed him whole again.

The Space Cowboy tackled him through a wall. They crashed into a gambling room, shards of glass cutting deep. Cannons arm pulsed black fire, the Cowboys blade flashing silver as it slashed through the corrupted flesh. Both men screamed one from pain, one from defiance. Their blood painted the walls in spirals.

Downstairs, the brothel guards fought the Jampsons in a massacre of light and shadow. Limbs fell, bodies burned, the portal pulsed brighter with every death. The smell of iron and smoke consumed everything.

Lulias light began to crackle violently unstable, desperate. She felt the snare resisting her pull, saw Cannons soul tearing itself apart. There was only one way to end it.

She looked at the burning wreck of the brothel, at the men and women still fighting, at the Space Cowboy staggering beneath Cannons assault and she made her choice.

Im sorry, she whispered, palms rising. For all of it.

She drew the entire cosmos into her lungs and screamed.

The blast ripped through existence.

Golden light erupted, outward walls shattered, the portal imploded, and for an instant there was no sound, no air, just a blinding wave of pure annihilation. The explosion leveled the brothel and every structure within half a

mile. Then came silence, followed by the rain of ash and cinders.

When the smoke cleared, only ruins remained twisted beams, molten glass, bodies half buried in debris. Lulia stood at the center of the devastation, her glow flickering weakly, eyes hollow. The world was gray, the air thick with dust and sorrow.

She moved through the wreckage, each step heavy. Her hands shook as she brushed aside splintered wood and broken stone. Then she saw him, the Space Cowboy, pinned beneath a fallen beam, blood pooling beneath him. His chest rose shallowly.

Cowboy she knelt, trying to lift the beam, her power sputtering. Hold on.

He smiled faintly, one eye swollen shut. You you did it, Starlight. You ended it.

Her gaze drifted to the shadow beside him, Cannons body, twisted, lifeless, his eyes finally still. A faint wisp of black smoke rose from his mouth and vanished into the dusk.

Lulia stared, expression unreadable. Hes free now, she said softly. It wasnt clear whether it was grief or relief in her voice.

The Space Cowboy coughed, crimson staining his teeth. No time to mourn. The Moon Boat we need to reach it. It can heal me. His voice cracked. If its still there.

Lulia blinked, then remembered the constellations inside her. She stood shakily, turning toward the single wall still standing. Her body shimmered as the patterns ignited across her skin. She exhaled, projecting the light outward, and a web of constellations painted itself across the stone. There amid the astral lattice was the symbol of the Moon Boat, glowing in alignment with that nights sky.

Its waiting, she whispered.

She turned back to the Cowboy, firelight catching the tears on her cheeks. Lets get you there.

Chapter 10: The Light I Chose

By Magic Mike Writes Again

December 07, 2025

The Moon Boat drifted over its silver lake like a ghost, humming with ancient lunar magic. Its light glowed softer now, almost mournful. Lulia sat alone beside the crystalline slab alone, because the healing had failed.

The Space Cowboy lay still, the moonlight no longer knitting his wounds but merely soaking into cold skin. His chest had stopped rising hours ago. Shed stayed beside him long after the magic retreated, pressing her forehead to his cold shoulder, whispering apologies to a man who couldnt hear her.

You deserved more than war, she breathed.

The Moon Boat answered with a low, sorrowful vibration, as if acknowledging its failure.

She kissed his brow once the way he used to kiss her wrist and then turned away before grief collapsed her completely.

The boat hummed again.
Higher. Sharper.

Then the water at its center began to glowbrighter than she had ever seen it.

Her pulse quickened. No not again.

The surface rippled violently, and a shape rose through the moonlit pool.

A body.

A familiar one.

Cannon.

Her breath left her in a broken gasp. Impossible.

His form solidified slowly muscle, bone, skin woven together by lunar threads. A slow inhale rattled through his chest. He blinked awake, dazed, eyes wild with confusion.

Lulia? His voice was raw, like hed only just remembered he existed.

She fell to her knees beside him. You died. I watched you die.

His hand reached for her cheek, weak but warm. Then why am I here?

She laughed through tears. The Moon Boat it brought you back. Because your soul was tied to my power. Because I couldnt let you go.

He pulled her into his arms with sudden, desperate strength, burying his face in her shoulder.

You saved me, he whispered.

No. The Boat saved you. I just needed you.

He kissed her thennot gently, not hesitantly, but with a hunger born from losing everything and being returned to life. She clutched his face, his hair, pulling him closer until her breath mingled with his.

The grief, the relief, the shock it all snapped into a fierce, undeniable want.

Cannon exhaled against her lips. I thought the explosion I thought you were gone too.

She shook her head, eyes burning. Im here. Im right here.

He lifted her, carried her to the Moon Boats warm, glowing floor, and laid her down as if afraid shed vanish again.

His hands shook as they traced the lines of her body. I need to feel you alive, he murmured. I need to feel you.

Her clothes fell away under his touch, her skin glowing faintly gold, responding to his breath, his fingers, the heat of his body. He kissed down her throat, over her chest, tasting her like someone starved for days and suddenly given a feast.

Lulia arched into him, gasping as his mouth closed around her breast, teeth grazing lightly before softening into slow, hungry suction. Her fingers curled in his hair.

When he moved lower slowly, deliberately she trembled. His hands slid up her thighs, spreading them, grounding her. And then his mouth was on her, his tongue deep and relentless, worshipful and hungry all at once.

Oh Cannon Her back lifted off the floor, a sharp cry breaking from her as he devoured her like she was breath itself. Her glow intensified, pulsing with each wave of pleasure he drew out of her.

He didnt stop. Not when she gasped, not when she begged, not when her legs shook violently around his head. He held her hips, kept her open to him, groaning into her as she came again, light flickering bright enough to cast shadows on the ceiling.

When he finally lifted his head, his mouth was glistening, his eyes dark with want.

Lulia I need

She pulled him up, kissing him hard, tasting herself on his lips. I want you inside me.

He pushed into her slowly, deeply, and both of them cried out at the same time her warmth swallowing him, his body fitting against hers like something ancient and inevitable. He moved with a desperate rhythm at first, then slower, drawing her hips up to meet him.

Her fingers dug into his back. Youre alive, she whispered against his jaw.

And Im not wasting it, he growled softly, thrusting harder, deeper.

The Boats pale glow intensified around them, reacting to her inner light. Their bodies glowed where they touched hips, chest, throat two constellations colliding.

She wrapped her legs around him, locking him to her, pulling him in until their breaths shattered. His forehead pressed to hers, sweat dripping, their movements building into a furious, beautiful rhythm that felt like rebirth.

Her climax hit first, sharp and blinding, her light breaking outward in a gold-white flare that illuminated the entire Moon Boat like dawn exploding in a single breath. Cannon followed with a deep, guttural sound, spilling into her, his whole body shaking.

He collapsed against her chest, panting, holding her as if terrified she would disappear.

For a long time, neither spoke.

Then Cannon whispered, voice trembling, Wheres the Cowboy?

Lulia closed her eyes. Gone. The healing didnt work.

Cannon tightened his arms around her. Im sorry.

So am I. Her voice cracked, but she didnt cry again. She had no tears left.

The Moon Boat drifted silently across its silver lake, carrying the living and mourning the dead.

Cannon pulled her into his chest. Youre not alone, Lulia.

No, she whispered. Not anymore.

As the Moon Boat drifted, Lulia rested her palm over Cannons heart, feeling its steady, mortal rhythm beneath her fingers. I kept searching for something power, escape, danger, even destiny, she whispered. But it was always you. Not because you saved me, or because you died for mebut because you saw me. All of me. And I finally see myself too.