

# Chapter 22

## BREATH PLAY

**T**HE X-MEN DIDN'T make it through the winter.

Neil was the first to go, brought down by pneumonia. He looked pale one night, but when I asked he hugged himself and chattered he was fine. The next night he collapsed. Emergency at Women's College had him on an IV drip and oxygen in nothing flat.

Twelve hours later Brian, Shox and I went visiting. A trim man in a soft grey suit sat by his bed. We waited in the hallway till he left.

"My dad," Neil murmured from the sheets. "He wants me to come home."

"Where's that?" Brian asked.

"Ottawa. Rockcliffe Park."

"You gonna go?"

"Yeah." Neil coughed weakly. "He's a doctor, did I say?"

None of us felt comfortable. A nurse came in. We shuffled out with lame goodbyes.

"What the *fuck*?" Shox grouched. "You mean he's just some rich guy's brat?"

A few weeks later Brian wasn't out for three nights running. He showed up on the fourth in a down-filled winter coat and treated Shox and me to Fran's.

"I met this guy from Montreal," he bubbled, high on

something. “He’s crazy for me. Wants me to move in. Showed me pictures of his condo. Fucking awesome. And—you won’t believe this—he says it’s okay if I fool around.”

Brian had hooked up with that elusive hustlers’ dream, the smitten sugar daddy.

“Montreal?” Shox mumbled through his burger. “You speak French?”

Brian shrugged. “*Ban we*,” he said, or something like it.

I scarcely noticed Magic’s disappearance.

“Seen Magic recently?” Shox asked one snowy evening and I realized he hadn’t been around for weeks.

Shox himself got taken down in March. I came around the Grenville corner—Stretch’s former patch—and saw him up against a cruiser. No one had the scoop, so I checked the papers at the library. An item in the *Sun* said Shox MacLean had done some bad things in a town called Espanola. No quotes surrounded Shox. It must have been his real name.

Brian left the biggest hole. I didn’t have a place to crash. I’d kept in touch with Raymond, though, and asked about his basement rooms. He agreed to let me have them on condition I pay rent.

“You’re all grown up now. Free ride’s over.”

“Cowboy never paid,” I pointed out.

“Yes, but dear, he worked it off in other ways. And pretty as you are, we just don’t have the chemistry.”

It wasn’t all that much, but now I had to plan and budget, calculating tricks per week, subtracting what I owed. I wasn’t lacking customers, but with the X-Men gone the nights grew long. Obligation, not anticipation, carried me to Grosvenor-Grenville when the library went dim. The twilight of the block no longer called to me the way it had.

Hustling had become a way to pay the bills.



“Wanna make some money?”

Scott and Daryl had expanded into real business, setting up an agency, the kind that advertised with lots of triple-X's and *Discretion Guaranteed's*. The enterprise was going well. Both had lost their nerdy glasses and wore tailored leather coats. The Lincoln gleamed a little brighter, chamoised, I'd have bet, with rags made from discarded hoodies.

"What kind of scene?" I asked.

They had a stable culled from working boys who'd given up the street for bigger bucks and vetted clients. They'd wanted me but I'd refused, which didn't stop them asking me to freelance on occasion for their "specials"

"Heavy SM freak who's tired of balding leather queens."

"Looking for a top?"

"Mm-hm."

"How much?"

"Four hundred, straight to you."

*Four hundred?* That covered Raymond's rent, with some to spare, but no one paid that much.

"Which means he's paying twice that, total. What's the catch?"

"He's into breath play."

"With somebody he doesn't know?"

I'd learned a lot from specials, most of whom were happy to instruct me in the finer points of kink. Anything they hadn't taught me I'd picked up in books. Breath play meant asphyxiation by a partner to enhance erotic pleasure. Everything I'd read about it stressed the need for total trust.

Scott and Daryl shrugged in unison.

"Can you do it?" one or other of them asked.

I weighed the pros and cons: almost killing someone versus this month's rent.

"If it goes bad, you never heard of me, okay?"

"Sure. No problem."

The client's name was Eliot Pierce. He lived in Willowdale—nosebleed country if you lived downtown. He was going to pay my cab, and had passed along instructions. His back door would be

open. I'd find clothing just inside he wanted me to wear. Downstairs in his basement was a steel door. I was to open it. Pierce would be inside. Everything I'd need would be laid out.

It wasn't hard to guess what he was after: a heavy SM scene in which he didn't have to spell things out. A fantasy made real, in other words, like guys who hired "burglars" to break in and "overpower" them.

"What's his signal?"

Daryl looked at Scott. Or the other way around.

"None. That's what he said. No signal."

Specials always had a code that meant *Back off*. Always. It could be anything—a word, a gesture, sometimes just three blinks. No one went without, especially with a hired partner.

"I dunno," I said. "This guy sounds wacked."

"You got a rep, David. They say you get inside a client's head."

"Yeah—if I can see it. Some weirdo in a latex hood doesn't give me much to work with."

"We hear otherwise. But if you don't want to do it . . ."

They were right. I could do without a signal. I knew when limits had been reached. It's why they'd come to me.

"No, it's cool. I'll take it. How's he going to pay?"

"The money'll be out when you get there."

"When's he want me?"

"Tomorrow night. Any time after ten."



A storm brewed up next evening, detonating just before I hailed my cab. Lightning cracked. Thunder growled. Hard rain sizzled off the pavement all the way to Willowdale. Sheets of water curtained down the streets of Pierce's neighbourhood.

I paid the cab and dashed around the small suburban backsplit. The metal awning at the back door was a cataract. By the time I got inside my hair was soaked and puddles spread out at my feet. I shook my head and swiped the water from my face.

Pierce had laid out leather chaps, a leather vest and muddy motorcycle boots. Generic stuff. Whatever he was into, costumes weren't important. I peeled off my T-shirt, donned the vest, and sat down on the basement steps to try the boots. They weren't easy to get into but they fit. Afterwards, I zipped the chaps over my jeans.

The steps led to a rec room—Lay-Z-Boys, cheap broadloom, flat-screen TV, hockey posters on the walls. Mr. Normal. Lots of clients lived this way, getting off on getting fucked while wifey and the kids were with the relatives.

The steel door was bolted with a Yale lock. Bolted on the *outside*. The key to open it hung from a hook. If Pierce were on the inside—and I had no doubt he was—he had no way of getting out unless he had a spare.

I pocketed the key and turned the knob.

*Hot moist smell of piss and mildew. Walls all brick and painted black. Concrete floor. A drain. Dim red lights in iron sconces. Chains from brackets mounted in the ceiling. A rope and pulley in between. Racks of toys—whips and paddles, cuffs and collars, gags and gas masks, lengths of rope and leather thongs. A dog cage in the corner.*

A shelf above the dog cage had some smaller items: bamboo skewers, nipple clamps and poppers—butyl nitrate. A nearby shelf held dildos. A wad of bills was tucked between the smallest two.

Pierce was sitting on the floor against the wall, dressed in chaps, a pair of knee-high Docs, and nothing else. By the clear light from the rec-room he looked trim and fit. Curly, dark hair covered both his head and chest. Gold rings glittered at at his nipples. I went up and cupped his chin. Black eyes rose without surprise. The dilation came from more than just dim light. He'd taken drugs—E, or something like it.

I dropped his chin and looked around for other exits. None. He really was prepared to go the limit. I tried the lock. The key fit smoothly. Reassured, I left it in and pulled the steel door shut.

The ruby lightbulbs cast no shadows. Everything looked flat. Objects lost their mass. Distances became impossible to gauge. I

leaned against the door and let my eyes adjust. I could feel Pierce watching me but took my time. I had to know the contents of the room. Specials always told me what they wanted. Pierce's silence meant his kinks would have to be divined.

Nothing spoke to me except the obvious. I couldn't seem to focus properly. The red lights jammed the nexus between seeing and interpreting. Clues refused to gel the way they should.

I closed my eyes. A crimson after-image smeared behind my eyelids. The dungeon's stench turned rich and intimate. A dark, charged presence grew inside me, spreading out, exciting nerves that made my body sing.

*Pierce.*

"How long have you been in here, asshole?" I asked him, opening my eyes.

He didn't answer. I crossed the room and struck him with the backside of my hand. He shook his head. He'd scarcely felt the blow. I raised my other hand and struck again.

"How long?"

His head snapped sideways this time. He was smirking when he looked at me again. I sank my fingers in his hair and yanked.

*"How long?"*

The smirk remained. I stuck my nose up close to his.

"This is how you want to play it? Fine by me. I don't want to hear a sound from you. Not a fucking peep. You so much as breathe too loud you're going to hurt. *Turn around!*"

He kneeled with his face toward the wall. I grabbed his arm and twisted it behind his back. He gasped.

"I said, not a fucking peep! Do that again, I'll break your arm."

Seconds passed.

"Okay," he drawled, insolent and daring.

I wrenched his arm. A millimetre further, it would dislocate. I held it there until his shoulder was a blaze of pain then let him go. He slumped toward the wall.

"When I give an order," I said softly, "I expect you to obey. When I ask a question, I expect you to reply. You think I care how

long you've been in this stinking pit? I don't give a rat's ass. But I asked you something and you didn't answer. Now you're going to hurt. Hurt bad until you tell me. Is that clear?"

He raised his head and nodded. He had his signal now—anything to indicate a stretch of time.

"Turn around."

He pivoted on one foot.

"These your boots?"

He nodded again.

"And you gave them to me looking like this? They're fucking disgusting. Lick them clean. Wash them with your tongue until they're fucking spotless, you got that?"

He bent forward, glancing upward like a naughty puppy. I jammed a toe beneath his chin.

"Do it!"

His tongue poked out and touched the muddy leather. Daintily at first, then with gusto, he attacked the boots, reaming seams, exploring cracks, lapping at the uppers. His slurping filled the dungeon. I drew my foot away and planted it between his shoulder blades.

"No noise!"

I leaned forward on my heel until his chin was grinding on the floor. His breath came out in wheezing gasps. I held him there a minute then eased off. He lifted himself up and clasped the boot.

"Hands off!" I barked. "I'll tell you when to touch me."

He clasped his hands behind him and began to lick submissively. The slurping started again. I hooked him underneath the armpit and flipped him on his side toward the corner with the cage.

"That's how you want it, cocksucker? Test my limits? See how far I'll go? Bad mistake. I haven't even started. In the cage!"

Pierce crawled over on his hands and knees while I dragged the rattling pen from underneath the shelf of toys. The phials of poppers gave me an idea.

"Stop right there, fuckface!"

I unscrewed a little bottle. A smell like dirty socks and bleach

rose out. I crouched and held it to his nose.

“Take a hit,” I ordered.

His *Whatcha gonna do to make me?* smirk returned. I jammed the phial in a nostril.

“Do it, fucker!”

He inhaled long and noisily. Butyl nitrate gives an instantaneous but short-lived rush. Blood pounded in his ears. The space inside his skull blew up. The room went bright and echo-y. His head felt huge and hollow.

I waited for the rush to peak then cuffed his ear. The lighting in the dungeon flared. His vision filled with scarlet.

“Again!”

He snorted hard. I waited for the peak and struck his other ear. The lighting flared again.

I kept at it till he sank down on his elbows, practically insensate, then screwed the bottle shut and stood.

“In the cage, asshole. *Now!*”

He wriggled in.

I latched the door. “You know what’s coming next?”

He wagged his head.

I undid my fly. “You’re going to be my toilet.”

He moaned; this wasn’t punishment. I kicked the cage to silence him, then waited for my stream to build and loosed it on his back. He writhed beneath it, revelling.

“Turn your head.”

He did.

“Open your mouth.”

I pissed out what was left. The urine struck his cheek and dribbled in his mouth. He smacked his lips and swallowed.

“Piss-drinking little cocksucker. You like that? You like the taste of piss?”

I kicked the cage and zippered up.

The popper stink and ruby light were making me lightheaded. Everything seemed insubstantial. I watched my urine snake toward the drain. For a moment only it was real.



I unlatched the cage.

*“Out!”*

Pierce wriggled backwards.

*“Sit!”*

He sank down Japanese-style—legs folded, buttocks resting on his upturned feet. His cock was rising from the cut-out in his chaps. Mine was stirring in my jeans.

I squatted down.

“You liked that, eh?” I asked him nicely.

He licked his lips and nodded.

“Maybe just a bit too much?”

More steel in my voice this time. His head went up and down again.

I slapped him. “You’re a sick fuck, you know that? Lie down.”

He made to stretch out on his stomach.

“On your back!”

I found a length of rope and coiled it tight around his thighs. His scrotum mounded like a tumour in his crotch between them. I went over to the shelf of toys and got a bamboo skewer. The sharp end, when I fingered it, proved duller than it looked. It wouldn’t break the skin.

Leather thongs were hanging from a coat hook on the wall. I picked out one about a metre and a half in length and took it back. His erection hadn’t dwindled and mine had grown full-size. I freed it from my jeans, then, kneeling from behind with my legs astride his head, I set the skewer down, fed the thong through both his nipple rings and tied it in a granny knot.

Balancing on one arm I bent doggie-style over him. My cock loomed just above his mouth. I started pumping slowly. The primal urge for contact proved too strong. His lips fell open and his tongue slid out.

*“Don’t touch!”*

I picked the skewer off the floor and dragged it up his side. The sensation was like steel cutting flesh. He twitched convulsively.

I returned to playing with myself, teasing, lowering my cock so

close a quiver of his lips would brush the skin. Every time they did I used the skewer—on his belly, through his chest hair, up his sides. His breath grew ragged and his abdomen began to heave. The tang of sweat and urine formed a bond between us, one so intimate I wasn't sure where I left off and he began. Shocks ran through me every time I scraped.

The stirrings of ejaculation forced me to back off. I put the skewer down and grasped the leather thong. Looping it around my neck, I leaned over Pierce's genitals and exhaled on his cock. It slapped against my mouth. I sat up fast. The thong went taut. Pierce yelped.

"Don't touch means don't touch!" I growled. "Do that again, I'll rip your fucking nipples off."

I bent low again and blew a stream of a warm air on his shaft. He quivered with the effort at control. I blew again. My own cock danced but his stayed still. A bead of liquid pearled at its tip.

"Good," I drawled. "Let's see how you do with this."

I grabbed the skewer once again, exhaled, and drew it up his balls. He gasped in short, sharp, spastic breaths, each one a small explosion in my groin. His cock bobbed up against my face. I sat upright as before. His nipples tented. He hissed and clenched his fists.

I sank forward on my arms and let relief flood over him, then started with the skewer in a different way. Instead of playing rough, I tickled. I traced the sharp point through his pubes, up his shaft, through the crease between his scrotum and his thighs.

With a howl of frustration, he grabbed himself and started beating off.

*"Silence!"*

I sat up quicker than I meant to. I felt a second's burning, then the rings were out of Pierce's nipples and the thong was hanging loosely round my neck. The dungeon light flared scarlet. Pierce's chest heaved up and down. Blood began to pool on his ribs.

He didn't make a sound, but his cry beforehand couldn't go unpunished.

I stood and stuffed my cock back in my jeans. A ball gag hung beside the rack with hoods and gas-masks. I retrieved it and went back to Pierce, unbound his thighs and ordered him to sit.

His eyes were blacker than before. I grasped his jaw and forced it open with my thumb. The gag's hard ball was huge, but I got it past his teeth and cinched the strap behind his head. He couldn't speak the signal, but his level of endurance—he hadn't made a peep—made me think he didn't need it.

"Thought I was kidding, didn't you?" I whispered in his ear. "Guess you haven't learned. Get up."

He struggled to his feet, but his legs gave out from under him. I used a boot to prod him up. He tried again and crumpled.

*"Weakling."*

I dragged him by the shoulders to the middle of the room.

The chains depending from the ceiling ended in a pair of leather cuffs. I unhooked them, fastened them around his wrists, hoisted him two-thirds upright and re-attached the chains. When I was done, I kicked his legs from under him so that he hung suspended with his head inclined.

The ball gag bothered me. It made him look grotesque. I took a leather hood and zipped it on his head.

The dildos by the toy shelf were identical except for size—from human up to donkey. I picked one somewhere in between. It felt slippery but left no residue. Probably some high-tech silicone. The bottom didn't flare, the way most dildos do. Instead, it ended in a braided cord.

I crouched behind him, in between his legs, and pushed the dildo at his rectum. The tip slid in. I shoved a little harder, then started shallow fucking him. He arched his spine. I teased him for a while, then rammed the whole thing in. Pain detonated in his bowels and his head jerked back.

I got to my feet and walked around him. His hard-on was still there.

"You like that thing stuffed up your ass?"

His head, inside the hood, stayed motionless.

I took a paddle from the wall with canes and straps. All black, it looked as if it might have been a cricket bat. I slapped it on my chaps.

“You like that thing?” I asked again, positioning myself behind him.

Still no response.

I moved to one side, hefted up the paddle, and whacked his thighs above the knees.

“Do... you... like... it?”

I took the paddle in both hands and swung it at his buttocks. The crack of wood against bare skin brought water to my eyes. The room swam red.

I blinked and swung again.

“Answer me!”

He nodded weakly.

“Twisted little freak. You’re not supposed to *like* it.”

I started whacking randomly—thighs, back, ass—keeping at it till his never-quit erection flagged. The workout left me panting. I put the paddle back and leaned against the wall.

The rope that dangled from the pulley in between the chains had a carabiner on the end. The rope itself looped through an eye-hook in the ceiling to a large cleat on the wall. A studded leather collar hung beside the cleat.

I unwound the rope until the carabiner brushed the back of Pierce’s neck. He flinched but made no sound. I took the collar, noting it was lined with felt, and tightened it on Pierce’s neck. I stuck two fingers underneath to check for give, then snapped the carabiner through the collar’s ring.

Pierce’s penis stirred. I bent down and licked his neck. The softness of my tongue came unexpectedly. He jerked as if I’d slapped him.

I unhooked one of his wrists, went back to the cleat, unwound the cord remaining and handed it to Piece. He knew what to do, grasping hard and tugging at it so the collar lifted to his chin and blocked his breathing.

Breath play isn't about pain. Partial asphyxiation mixes deadly risk with dizzy pleasure. For Pierce to get his money's worth, I had to get the pleasure started. I knelt in front and took him in my mouth. An erotic charge coursed through him but he couldn't gasp or moan; the charge stayed locked inside, like current with no ground. Gooseflesh rippled on his skin. Both our cocks grew stiff.

I went at him gently, just enough to stimulate, not enough to get him off. I flicked my tongue around his cockhead, licked the slit, massaged his scrotum. Pierce tugged at the rope. The collar rose and snugged against his larynx, choking off his air. His brain reacted swiftly. Luminescent dizziness swirled in his head. His body sang with imminent unconsciousness. His grip relaxed; the collar settled down around his throat. Air hissed in his nostrils as his ribcage belled in and out. He tugged the rope again.

His cock was leaking pre-cum when we stopped. Mine was slippery inside my jeans. I pried the rope out of his hand, removed the hood and gag, and unbound his other wrist.

He sank down to the floor.

*"On your knees."*

He grasped a swinging chain and pulled himself upright. His eyes were glazed, his face ecstatic like the saints I'd seen in books of paintings.

I laid a finger on his lips to remind him that the silence rule still held. He tracked me with his eyes as I put the hood and gag back on their racks and lifted off a scary-looking gas-mask. The intake vent was sealed with a plastic disk that had been fitted with a fifteen centimetre rubber tube of drinking straw diameter.

The mask gave me some trouble once I got it over Pierce's head. I fiddled in the hard-to-focus-in red light, disguising inexperience with roughness as I figured out which clasps to slide, which straps to buckle. The mask grew hot inside. Pierce's face broke out in sweat. Blood roared in his ears. The dungeon through the thin glass of the eyeholes looked unreal and far away. I blocked the tube with my thumb and felt the pull of suction. Pierce could breathe, but whatever air was in the mask would give out fast.

I took my thumb away and placed his free hand on his cock. He started pumping slowly. Eyes on his, I stuck the tube end on his stomach. He struggled to inhale and stroked himself more rapidly. The room began to spin. His pupils clouded and his eyelids fluttered. The muscles in his abdomen gave way. Unerect, he might have pissed. Or shit, without the dildo.

I pulled the tube away. It whistled as he drew in air. A circular discolouration, black in the red light, had risen on his skin. I rubbed it with my thumb and checked his eyes, glittering behind the oval lenses. He wanted more.

His nipples had stopped bleeding so I placed the tube on one of them. He stiffened as his breath sucked in the wounded flesh. The dizziness came swiftly afterwards. The pain became a depth charge ready to explode. His hand beat faster on his cock.

I couldn't stand it anymore. I yanked my zipper down and started pumping just as fast. Our hands became a blur. The room began to swirl. Pierce's eyes crept backward in his head. Reeling darkness filled the room. He'd reached the point of no return. In seconds now, we'd blow.

I closed my eyes and headed for release.

Even with my eyes shut, I knew something had gone wrong. Inside my head a switch got thrown, cutting off the power. One moment, current crackled between Pierce and me. The next, it wasn't there. The urgency inside me died, snuffed out like a sizzling fuse.

Frustration flared, a flash of selfish anger. My eyes flew open. Pierce's hand was on his cock, but motionless and limp. His other hand no longer clutched the chain. He swayed and toppled forward. I tried to break his fall and tumbled backwards. The gas-mask landed on my stomach. No air whistled through the tube.

I scrambled up and fumbled with the mask. My fingers trembled in the aftermath of near ejaculation. I couldn't get the fucking straps undone. Why weren't they quick release? I glanced around for something sharp. Nothing. The dungeon was a fake—a playpen, not the real thing. There were no blades. I forced myself to work by

feel, pulling here, tugging there, until the gas mask played enough to rip it over Pierce's head.

I flipped him over. Wide eyes stared at nothing. No breath stirred his ribs. I touched his neck. No pulse. A sour smell came off him. Something dribbled from his mouth.

A fist of panic slammed me in the guts. I grabbed a chain and staggered up. The blood rushed from my head. Nausea swept over me. The dim red light and foul air just made it worse. I tottered to the door and turned the key.

The rec-room light exploded in my eyes. I made it to the stairs but tripped on my way up. The shock of falling killed the nausea but didn't slow me down. I stumbled to the kitchen and, not pausing for my shoes and T-shirt, launched myself outside.

Water sluiced off Pierce's metal awning. Rain battered me from every side, slashing at my chest, seeping down my jeans, raising stink off Pierce's leathers.

How did I get out of here? I hadn't paid attention in the cab. The cab... *Oh, God.* The driver could identify me. The icy fist of panic struck again. I lurched around the house and careened toward the street. The cab had pulled up left, so I knew which way to head. But where to after that? Pierce's suburb was a maze of courts and crescents.

A gust of wind attacked me from behind and pitched me forward. Recovering, I took a step. Then another. Then another. My legs picked up momentum. I broke into a trot. The heels of Pierce's boots sent shockwaves up my calves. I didn't care. I started running, sprinting left, splashing down the empty street, oblivious to everything except the need to flee.



The townhouse's three storeys were in darkness. It had to be near four a.m. The rain had given way to drizzle, dripping off the birch leaves overhead.

I'd made it out of Willowdale and found my way to Yonge.

Shirtless in a vest and chaps, a sodden lone pedestrian, I'd stuck to empty side streets for the long, wet trek downtown. I hadn't stopped to think if downtown was the place to be. My legs had carried me, one squelching footstep at a time.

Pierce had courted danger for erotic thrills. Perhaps he'd thought he'd never have to pay the piper, but he had, and I'd been it. I'd been the one to torture him. I'd been the one to kill him. I'd been the one who jerked off while he died.

And I'd been the one who'd left his fee behind.

Money on the dildo shelf of some guy's kinky playroom—it wouldn't take two seconds to connect the dots. How long would it be before the cops checked Pierce's calls and discovered one to Scott and Daryl's agency? They had too many irons in the bootleg fire not to trade my skin for theirs. Even if they didn't, the police would sweep the hustlers' block, searching for the green-eyed fare some cabbie had dropped off at Pierce's house. The driver might not give a good description, might not even contact the police. But Grosvenor-Grenville was the last place I could ever show my face again.

I had to hide, but where? I couldn't leave Toronto. The only cash I had was in my wallet, nowhere near enough to get away. I couldn't stay at Raymond's. The risk of being traced was far too great. How was I going to live? Hustling was out. And with no bank account, no school diploma, no ID, I couldn't even get a burger-flipping job.

I rang the bell. I should have called beforehand. The chimes might not be loud enough to reach the third-floor bedroom. I tried again and stepped back. A light came on. A curtain swayed.

Suddenly, I started shivering so violently I couldn't stand. I staggered to the door and dropped my head against the frame. A soft porch light winked on. I heard the thunk of deadbolts. The door cracked open, spilling out more light. I raised my head.

"David! What's the matter?"

The bathrobed figure looked and sounded wide awake.

"I... I need a place to stay. Please. I'm in trouble."

The door went wide.



“Of course, David. Come in, come in.”

With an ironic, courtly bow, Dr. Ferenc “Ferko” Anhalt ushered me into his home.