

**Ecstasy**  
**Iulian Ionescu**

Sam stared at the wrinkled cactus with narrow eyes, wiggling his fingers near his waist. The green plan stood there like a sad John Wayne, its spiky hands up in the sky, begging for a shot. Sam hit his palms on his pockets, picked up an imaginary revolver, spun its invisible chamber a few times, and smashed his foot in the sand.

"Take that, punk," he said and a lightning bolt fired out of his index finger pulverizing the plant into a dust cloud, leaving a fuming stump behind.

As the light left his hand, a tickling vibration crept over Sam's body, as if the finest sand rolled under his skin, from his feet up to the top of his head, exciting every nerve ending and making his muscles spasm. His breath ran fast and he let the warmth engulf him, like a fluffy blanket wired with low-voltage current, crossing through his bones and going around like a never-ending wet tongue.

He fell on his knees, panting, and hugged himself with eyes closed, shivering, fully emerged into the orgasmic waves pinching his flesh.

He lifted his left arm and fired a flaming wave through a nearby boulder. The rock cracked like an eggshell and Sam felt the energy leaving his body, replaced by waves of pleasure munching through his insides and crawling like a million ants over his skin.

After a few minutes, he got up, knees shaking, shoulders soft like sponges. He was ready, ready for the big one.

"Here we go," Sam whispered through his dry lips.

He took a sideways step and glanced over the edge of the canyon. A tower of ice ran down his back and a thousand needles pinched his torso and fingers. The canyon's opening was a magnificent ravenous mouth, an angry beast ready to swallow anything that came its way.

He stopped at the edge, the tips of his shoes slightly over, balancing on his feet like a rope walker. A cool wind blew over his face, drying the rivers of sweat pouring over his forehead.

Sam shook his hands to the sides, took a deep breath, held it in for a while, and then exhaled it as slow as he could.

He was ready for this, he knew it. He pushed one foot forward, his hands extended sideways, for balance. He then bent the other foot under him and leaped forward, his head high, reaching for the endless sky.

After just a second of ascension, the gravity grabbed him like a leash. His body plunged toward the bottom of the canyon like a sack dropped out of a plane. He put his hands forward and stiffened his body to stay horizontal. As he accelerated, everything around him turned into a fast moving rainbow, the ground below spinning closer and closer.

He started to push away, and he felt the energy exploding out of his gut.

At first, his force beam didn't seem to do much, except a lot of light, but after a few seconds he started to slow down. Like a train pulling into a stop, he saw the canyon walls moving slower and slower. When the intensity peaked, he stopped, and with him everything else stopped as well. The wind, the clouds, the walls, even his heart.

It was just him, suspended one mile above ground, between the limestone canyon walls. He closed his eyes and let it all sip in.

As his energy depleted, the waves of carnal pleasure filed his every pore, surrounding his body with bliss. When the pleasure climaxed and his strength withered, his body started to descend. Slowly, inch by inch, like a leaf twirling down from a tree, kept in the air by a warm breeze.

When Sam opened his eyes, the ground was about two feet away. He fell flat on the bedrock with a grunt, his body convulsing in a rainbow of pain and pleasure. He immersed into the heat emanating from rock like a brick oven, brought his knees to his chest and grabbed them in a tight hug. He couldn't move any other muscle, he just left his body enjoy the complete ecstasy.

\* \* \*

"...We don't know how many days he was out there--"

The voices were muffled, and Sam couldn't tell if they were coming from left or right.

"--All we know is he was there and they found him--"

"But why did it take so long?"

*Sonya.* Sam swallowed a knot.

"You have to understand, it takes some time until we capture the waves, especially in the case of abuse--"

"And what now?"

"Well, he will be fined and probably will have to deal with the judge--"

"Great!"

Now Sam knew his sister's voice was very close. He opened his eyes slowly, and the bright neon light knifed his eyes. Sonya's manly arms pressed over his shoulders and her red face hovered over his.

"What the hell, Sam? What the hell?"

Her squeaky voice pinned needles through his eardrums, so he lifted his left hand and pushed her arms away.

"Oh, so this is how it's going to go, right? I have to take a day off to take care of your sorry ass, and you don't even have the decency to look me in the eyes, huh? Well, deal with the law then, Sam, and let's see who's bailing you out next time."

Sam pushed himself in a sitting position as Sonya stormed out of the room. His head pulsated like an overloaded speaker and his entire skin was a coat of burning pain.

There was a needle in each of his arms and his right hand was handcuffed to the bed. At the end of the bed, a police officer and a doctor stood in silence, looking at him, hands behind their back.

*Shit.*

\* \* \*

Sam sat on a folding chair and squeezed the pamphlet he got at the door deep inside his pocket.

*So dumb*, he thought and looked at the others, sitting quietly in their seats, avoiding each other's eyes. The circle was almost complete, just a couple of chairs were empty, and Sam noticed a blond woman who sat across from him, looking particularly bored. She had one lock of red hair she kept twisting around her index finger, while her eyes examined the nails on the other hand with an obsessive attention.

"Ahem." The man on Sam's right cleared his throat and arranged himself more comfortable in his much softer and fluffier chair.

*Prick*, Sam thought and yawned loudly.

"Everyone, welcome to our session. For those of you who are new today, my name is Archie Simmons, and I am your official moderator for today's session. We have a few new members, let's see--"

The man shuffled a few pieces of paper in his hands and looked around the room.

"--Yea, Jessica, Sam, and Anthony. Okay, why don't we start by letting them introduce themselves and hear why they have joined us today at the Wizards Anonymous."

Sam wanted to turn into smoke and fly out under the door, but he knew too well that the cops were probably on the other side, just waiting for a reason. His fingers were jittery from boredom, so he focused on the blondie with the red lock, assuming that some ad-hoc dirty thoughts would make the time fly faster.

When his turn came he coughed a few times and stood up. "I almost died floating over the Grand Canyon--"

"Levitation, we haven't had that in a while--"

"I'm also known to cast fire bolts, low voltage lightning, sometimes I can make little tornadoes, nothing big--"

"Nothing big, yet all against the law, right?"

Sam paused and lifted his hands. "I guess," he said and rolled his eyes.

"Okay, thank you, Sam. Also with us we have a few reformed members. Angela--"

The blond girl startled. She stood up and it took her about twenty seconds to untangle the lock of hair that got stuck to her silver ring. Sam smiled.

"Archie," Angela said and gave the man a nod. "Yes, I went through the treatment at the Sacramento clinic and I am now officially free of all powers--"

"How was that for you, Angie, share with us?"

"Well, it was difficult. I missed the high, I missed the emotions, the powerful feelings that I got from my magic. Suddenly it was all gone, so I had to go back and rediscover them in normal life, you know? I had to learn how to love, learn how to touch and be touched. I had to take it all from the start, and--"

She paused to catch her breath and looked around the room. For just a brief moment her eyes met Sam's. He winked with both eyes, which, he thought, was way less cool than he had imagined. He punched himself in the face, inside his head, and looked away.

"--it was hard," Angela continued. "You have to get used to actually get up and get the items that you need, you know, go outside if you want to eat and so on. On the other hand, once you do all of these, you do not find yourself half dead in your bed and sleep for three days straight trying to restore yourself. You know what I mean... a normal life."

*Pff, a normal life. Who needs that?*

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It was the fifth session when Sam finally decided to approach Angela after the meeting. He came behind her in the parking lot, trying to look as little as a creep as he could. Still, when he called her name she jumped and glued herself to her car.

"Oh!" Sam said and lifted his hands defensively.

Angela smiled and exhaled in relief. "Sorry, Sam, I am just on pins and needles--"

"I get that," he said and shrugged.

Her smile drove him nuts. He actually contemplated turning into her lipstick or one of those Tic-Tacs that she loved.

"I was going to ask you if one day, maybe this weekend, or something, you'd like to go for dinner sometime."

Angela lifted her brows and smiled again. "You were going to ask me, or are you actually asking me? Or are you telling me that you are going to ask me, you know, sometime... or something?"

Sam scoffed and covered his eyes. "Let me try that again. Would you like to go out for dinner?"

Angela approached him and put her palms on his chest. She took a deep breath and looked him directly in the eyes. "Sam, you're a great guy, you are. I just don't date wizards, I can't. I've been there, I know the path. I can't do it."

Sam nodded slowly and bit his lower lip. "I see."

"Maybe in a different life?"

He shrugged and scoffed. "Maybe."

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After a while, Sam lost count of the sessions. It was maybe after the fifteenth that he took a stroll on Main Street and stopped at a cafe for a cup o' joe. He resisted the urge to reheat the cup himself, or freeze the line just enough for him to get ahead. He waited with everybody else, got his coffee, stirred in the sugar and milk, and sat down.

When the coffee was done, he felt like its twin brother-- empty, and unclean. Not dirty, just not clean.

"Are you serious?"

Sam jumped in his seat and saw Angela, eyes wide open and jaw to the floor.

"I got your text and I jumped in a cab right away."

She pulled the chair and sat down. She grabbed Sam's hands and slowly caressed them with her thumbs. "Tell me."

Sam cleared his throat and pouted his lips. "I'm gonna do it," he said with a tremble in his voice. "I am. It's done."

"Sam, I am so proud of you right now."

He nodded and gave her a half smile. "So, I wanted to ask you, you know, how is it?"

Angela waved her hand in the air and shook her head. "It's nothing, really. They put you under, cut out a little piece of your brain, inject an inhibitor and you're done. You have to be on Magzap for a few months, and after that, you are free."

"Free?"

"Well," Angela rolled her eyes, "you know what I mean. You will feel weird. The urge will still be there, but you won't be able to control or activate it. I know a few who still have symptoms. Like I know a guy who can maybe light a piece of paper up, but it takes all his energy. You're basically done. You are no longer a--"

"Wizard."

"Right." Angela paused and looked at him with a tilted head. "It's okay, you can do it, you'll see. Just be aware that there could be some changes--"

"Changes?"

"You know, some said that they no longer enjoy the same tastes, or same colors, even same music. It's like a part of your entire being shifts sometimes. But it doesn't happen to everyone, just some isolated cases--"

Sam crossed his arms and exhaled deeply. "I don't know. I just don't believe this will work for me, you know?"

"The operation?" Angela gave him a sideways look. "They cut a part of your brain, did I make that part clear?"

Sam shook his head and looked to away. "No, I get that part. I just feel like it's so much a part of who I am. I am afraid it won't work and then there will be no place for me to go, you know?"

Angela tapped his finger on the table. "Hey, look at me when we talk. What do you mean no place?"

"You know," he shrugged, "what if I am half a wizard, would you still--"

"Half a wizard?" Angela burst into laughter. "That is the silliest thing I've ever

heard."

Sam smiled back at her pursed his lips. "Okay, but what if I can't do it?"

"What, live in the normal world?"

*Normal. Why does she have to use normal like that?*

"Yeah."

Angela reached over the table and grabbed his hand. "I'll be there, I'll be your normal." Angela gave him an ear to ear smile, the smile he loved, the only other thing that gave him butterflies in his belly. "So, if anything, you'll do it for me."

Sam laughed and shook his finger. "You are a horrible blackmailer, you know that, right?"

"Would you love me otherwise?"

"Probably not," he said and nodded.

Angela chuckled and gave him a peck on the cheek. "I'll let you prove it!"

\* \* \*

A week after the procedure, Sam returned home. He hasn't called Angela since she drove him to the clinic, so he wasn't that surprised when he found twenty two messages on his home machine.

*She missed me, he thought. Dammit.*

The house was a mess, and, of course, now he had no way to fix it, without actually cleaning it. He touched the back of his head and felt the bandages. Somehow he could feel the void, as if he was aware of a part of his brain being gone.

"So stupid," he said out loud and turned the oven on, using the lighter for the first time.

He drank a tea that tasted like dirty socks and picked up the phone. After a pause, he dialed the number.

"Babe?"

Her voice made him tear. Her face popped in his head and her soft skin's touch suddenly crawled over his back.

"It's done."

"Done? Babe, I've been worried... I, I... I wasn't able to get in touch with you. The clinic is like a fortress--"

"It's okay, it's done now. I'm done."

"What do you mean? Are you okay?"

Sam paused and clenched his teeth. "I don't know how I am, I just know I am

not... me. I don't feel me. I, I... I don't know."

"Sam, listen to me, I've been through this, remember? We can beat this, trust me. I'll be there in an hour, okay?"

Sam opened his mouth to say something but he felt a sudden jitter in his left hand. He lifted it up and looked at it up-close. The skin was a bit discolored and his fingers were vibrating. He extended his index finger toward the teapot and concentrated. A tiny lightning from his finger struck the teapot.

Sam pulled his hand back and clenched his fist.

*The skin crawling. The sensation. Could it be?*

"Sam? Are you there?"

He cleared his throat and swallowed a few times. "Yeah, yeah, I'm okay. Listen, before you get here--"

"Yes?"

"I... I need to take a quick drive."

Angela paused, probably waiting for a more detailed explanation. "Are you okay, Sam?" she asked.

"Yeah, yeah, I am okay. I just need to... I need to know something for sure."

"Okay," she said in a low voice. "I'm on my way, I should be there within an hour or so. We'll get through this together, right?"

"Right," Sam muttered.

"I love you."

Sam cleaned up his sweaty forehead. "I... I love you too, babe, see you later."

\* \* \*

Sam opened his arms wide and took a deep breath. The hot air burned the inside of his nose, but he didn't care. The Sun was up, drying the life out of everything around, except maybe the cacti. He walked slowly to the edge of the canyon. He balanced there for three seconds and then he jumped forward.

After a short ascend his body started to free fall. He stiffened his body, put his hands forward and pushed. The last thing he heard, fifteen seconds later, was the sound of his skull hitting the rocks.

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