

Old Enough to Know Better

by shosier

When the man of a fanfiction writer's fantasy becomes an all-too-real temptation,
Melanie Morganstern's life begins to spin out of control

The Encounter

Chapter 1 of 1

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Happy Valentine's Day! The following is an excerpt from my newly self-published book, **Old Enough To Know Better**. As a gesture of thanks to the TPP community for all you've done to encourage and support my dream of becoming a writer, I'm making the ebook available to you at a 30% discount (only \$2.09US!) until March 14, 2012. Just visit my [Smashwords](#) page and use the coupon code AA25Z.

Chapter 1: The Encounter

Oh, he thought the moment he laid eyes on her. Not what I expected. At all.

But then again, what exactly had he expected? A hormones-raging teenage misfit with wretched skin and metal-clad teeth? Some troglodyte of a spinster? Surely he'd known better than that. Starryeyedgirl89 was something else entirely.

James Swain had been playing the role of Thorpe for eight years and met thousands of fans of the four already released films (soon to be five the monstrous publicity machine was firing up once more). The beloved series of Malleus comic books had spawned a money-spinning series of movies, and he was along for the ride: not as the leading star, but popular enough of a character to have a bit of a dedicated following himself.

Fans of the Malleus comic books had long been indulging themselves in the world of fanfiction well before he'd ever been cast as Thorpe, in fact but the thing had taken on the mantle of phenomenon since the release of the first movie. Early on, he and his castmates sometimes perused the fanfiction websites for amusement and a bit of an ego-stroke during the downtime on the set. Most of the stories revolved around the male and female leads, whose ever-present, unresolved romantic tension it was a prolonged will-they-won't-they thing fueled legions of fans to pen pornographic resolutions to the matter.

A smaller fraction of the stories featured his character, who otherwise served as the rather one-dimensional, smart-mouthed prankster of the group. The majority of these were rather masturbatory attempts by fans (male or female, interestingly enough) to insert themselves into Thorpe's life usually in a sexual fashion and teach him a lesson in manners. Something about his onscreen personality attracted S&M fetishists, apparently, and some of them really creeped him out. After all, ever since the movies had come out, it was his face that was now universally recognized as Thorpe's. Therefore, he reckoned it was *his* face people pictured when they read the stories, *his* voice uttering the dialogue, *his* body that was the one being abused or fucked. *Ugh.*

So it was with a massive amount of reluctance that he'd even read Starryeyedgirl89's story. It wasn't that he didn't have the time his usual excuse for anything because, in truth, there were loads of mind-numbing hours spent waiting to be called to the set, especially when you weren't one of the leads. So much so that he'd taught himself to play the guitar during the time, for fuck's sake. But after half a dozen of his personal fan sites began recommending the thing, he figured he'd better take a look.

He'd been sucked in instantly, amazed by the complicated yet believable backstory she'd given his character something the original comic series' author hadn't bothered to do. She'd captured all the biting sarcasm of Thorpe's typical dialogue, but managed to illuminate a depth of character through it, rather than merely pimping it as superficial comic relief. She'd transformed his character into an actual human being, rather than a cardboard prop spewing jokes and insults in the midst of action scenes.

And then there was Yza. Like pretty much every other fanfic author, Starryeyedgirl89 had given Thorpe a sex partner of her own creation. But unlike the rest of the dross, this was a real relationship with a real woman. She was conflicted, full of personal faults (just as Thorpe was), and yet Yza was his perfect complement. It was impossible not to get swept up into their love affair; they were meant for each other.

It was for this reason that Jamie currently found himself here in a hotel bar, against the advice of his agent, for the sole purpose of meeting the author of the story. An acquaintance of his and, coincidentally, a friend of hers had concocted the silly setup: Starryeyedgirl89 apparently didn't know he was coming, and the go-between assured him it would be a highly appreciated and likely very entertaining surprise. He planned to be in New York anyway, having agreed to appear at a conference for urban fantasy film fans.

From his spot at the bar, he watched as the woman he was due to meet was carefully herded into a booth by their mutual acquaintance, Karen Abrams. Slight and stereotypically bookish behind her overlarge glasses, Karen was the administrator of the fanfiction website where the story was archived. She was on good terms with several of the movies' cast members, supportively linking to their personal websites and social networking pages and running a remarkably efficient grassroots publicity machine herself. He and his fellow actors provided her with signed memorabilia from time to time to use as prizes for her story-writing competitions, thereby encouraging online traffic for everyone involved.

Karen surreptitiously caught his eye and winked. He nodded back and smiled reassuringly, then raised one hand to display five fingers *Give me five minutes more*. He wanted to finish his beer first.

Karen turned back to her friend, and they began to chat. The two of them got on easily the other woman had a ready smile and an engaging laugh he could hear from across the bar. An enjoyable sound, he decided. Intrigued, he began to make a closer inspection of the authoress in question.

Starryeyedgirl89 wasn't a *girl*, precisely. But then again, judging from the story she'd written, it had been obvious she wasn't the typical horny teenage virgin fantasizing her own deflowering by a fictional character the sort who usually posted fanfiction drivel, he imagined. She'd actually experienced something of life, of love not just imagined it from her cloister-like bedroom. It wasn't immediately clear by her appearance, however, just how old she was, but he felt reasonably sure she was older than he, though a good bit younger than her companion.

She'd kept herself well, he thought. She had a woman's figure and understood how to dress it to her advantage, wearing a skirt and clingy top that flattered appealing breasts, which were well matched with an attractive arse. But unlike so many women he'd met, including most of those here in the bar, she seemed comfortable with her *realness*: he'd be willing to bet her brunette hair was her natural color, and if she was wearing any makeup, it was a light application.

She was sipping on a bottle of beer, and he found himself oddly aggravated when their waiter blocked his view, handing them menus and flirtatiously chatting them up. "Wanker," he muttered to himself. *Shameless whoring for a tip like that*

Jamie checked his watch; his time was up. He grabbed his fresh pint and sauntered over to the women's table once the waiter left.

"Oh, hello," Karen greeted him theatrically, smiling smugly at the *fait accompli*. "Fancy meeting you here."

Starryeyedgirl89 was shocked, to say the least. The bottle hung in midair on its way to her lips for another sip, her jaw hung slack, and she stared at him for several silent moments. Then she turned to her friend. "You. Fucking. *Bitch*," she hissed. "James goddamn Swain, Karen? You're a dead woman, you know that?"

He might have been made nervous by the exchange if she hadn't been smiling as she threatened her friend with bodily harm, or if Karen hadn't been giggling hysterically. "Mind if I join you, then?" he chuckled.

"Of course not, Mr. Swain. Please do," she laughed. As he slid into the booth beside her, she said, "Don't mind us foul-mouthed old crabs. We can behave politely when the occasion requires it."

"We won't bite," Karen cackled, eyeing him with mock perversion, "unless you ask us nicely."

Starryeyedgirl89 rolled her eyes. "I'm sorry, Mr. Swain. She's incorrigible, but she's not worth the hassle of a restraining order."

"I don't mind, and please call me Jamie," he insisted, enjoying the jovial, profane banter between them. "And you are? I mean, unless you'd prefer I call you Starryeyedgirl89? Quite a mouthful, that."

She laughed, and the sound drew him in further. "Mel. Mel Morganstern."

He felt an inexplicable, instantaneous rapport with her perhaps because she seemed to know Thorpe so well in her writing, he was lured into feeling that, just maybe, the same might be true for him. He assumed Thorpe's razor-edged dialogue in her story had taken months to craft but it coursed from her as if sarcasm was her native tongue. He never imagined a warmth and generous openness like Yza's could be real, yet here it was seated next to him, and he basked in it like a cold-blooded animal. And how the woman managed to combine the two oppositional traits into such a perfect amalgamation was beyond his understanding.

"Do you live here in New York?" he asked, keen to know more about this enticing woman.

Karen cackled, highly amused by the question. "A hayseed like Mel?"

"No," Mel replied gently, yet also amused. "I live in Phoenix now... by way of the Midwest."

Jamie did his best to dredge up his woeful recollection of American geography. Too embarrassed to display his ignorance, he made a mental note to look it up on a map later. "Are you in town for the conference, then?" he asked. It pleased him to think he might see her again tomorrow.

She smiled again, and he decided to make a game of it: how many times could he get her to smile at him like that?

"No, that sort of bat-shit craziness is not really my thing," she replied. "I prefer to be creepily obsessed in a more remote, isolated way. I suppose it's the coward in me."

He laughed. "You're not crazy or creepy, believe me. I've seen true creepiness up close and in person."

"I'll bet," she laughed in return, and he added a new aspect to the game: more points were awarded for a laugh than for a smile. "Seriously, though, some of those stories must just make your skin crawl."

Karen pursed her lips, folding her arms across her chest defensively and lifting an eyebrow.

But Jamie didn't care; he nodded. "Erm... yeah," he agreed, noting how deftly she'd just shifted the focus off of herself and onto him. So he tried his own hand at it. "How long have you been a writer?"

"I'm not a *real* writer," she demurred.

"Hell, yeah, you are," he insisted. "Obviously." Her work was as polished and competent as any of the scripts he'd read. And it wasn't just his lone opinion the story she'd

written had thousands of readers now.

"Watch it, Mel. I'll get offended," Karen chimed in. "Surely you're not insinuating there's a lack of quality writing on my archive?"

"Of course not," Mel retorted with a roll of her eyes. "I just don't really think of myself as a writer."

"Why not?" Jamie asked, baffled.

"What do you think of yourself as? A housewife with a hobby?" Karen countered.

Housewife!? His eyes darted to her left hand for confirmation. And there it was: the ring. How had he not thought to check for that first? *Fuck. She's married.*

But his mood was buoyed by his next train of thought: she appeared to be alone in town, no husband in tow. *And rings don't always mean no*, he found himself thinking, realizing with a jolt that he was going to make a move on her at the first opportunity. *Holy shit... but yeah, I am. Fuck, yeah.*

While Jamie was still mentally scrambling to collect his thoughts in the wake of this epiphany, Mel shrugged. "That's nothing to be ashamed of, is it?"

"What would it take to get you to think of yourself as a writer?" Karen demanded. "Getting published?"

"That would be a nice start," Mel replied with a laugh. "Money does help convince a lot of people of a lot of things."

"So start sending out your original stuff. Find an agent," Karen suggested.

"You've written something of your own?" Jamie asked, intrigued.

"It's fantastic. You should read it," Karen offered wickedly.

Mel shot a playful glare across the table at her friend.

"I'd love to," Jamie said, leaping at an excuse to maintain contact with this woman.

Mel sighed. "All right. I'll send you some, if you really want to read it."

He held out his hand, leaned in a bit closer to her and said, "Hand me your mobile. I'll add myself to your contact list." *Jesus... I'm really flirting with her? And yet I couldn't come up with anything smoother? Prick!*

Mel looked at him then, dubious, amused, but most importantly flattered. "Okay," she mumbled, then started fishing through her purse.

Karen coughed. "I think I need to visit the ladies' room," she said, barely stifling a laugh.

Well spotted, Karen, he cheered the sweet old girl as he caught a wink from her. *Lots of pretty autographed snaps in your future, love*

"I'll join you," Mel offered, setting her phone in his hand in a manner that somehow avoided actual contact, much to Jamie's frustration. He planted himself more firmly in his seat, blocking her exit.

"I can manage on my own," Karen replied helpfully and darted off as fast as her skinny little legs could carry her.

Alone with Mel, Jamie started snooping a bit through her contacts, mumbling things like, "How does this work on yours?" to cover his tracks. Realizing he had no clue what, if anything, the names and numbers told him, he created a new entry for himself.

"You know, you could just tell me your email address, and I could enter it myself," she suggested, picking up on his delaying tactics.

"Tell me about all those rings you wear," he countered, stalling for time and nosing for information. He half-hoped she'd say something along the lines of being recently divorced. He knew of a woman on the set crew who'd worn hers for nearly a year after her divorce had been final. Perhaps that ring might be one of many things he coaxed Mel into taking off tonight.

"All right. There's quite a story behind them, actually," she replied, her voice soft. Sultry. Sexy.

He looked up from her phone and into her deeply brown eyes. Melty cocoa velvet, and so very fuckable. Desire for her slammed through him, the impact leaving him reeling.

The connection lasted a moment, then she looked down at her hands on the table. Spinning the rather smallish diamond solitaire around her finger, she said, "This one tells you I fell in love with him when he was still poor, fresh out of school."

She twisted the engraved golden band below it, a fraction of an inch closer to her heart. "This one tells you the promise we made to each other: you and no other."

Shifting to her right hand, she spun another gold band, this one studded with a row of tiny diamond chips. "This one tells you we've been married for more than a decade. It's an anniversary band."

Finally, she tapped another gold band bearing two small, differently colored stones mounted side by side. "And this one tells you how many children we have together and what months of the year they were born."

Jamie swallowed hard. His disappointment increased with every line she uttered, his resentment of his nameless, faceless rival growing by the moment. *She's married. Been married for a while. With kids, no less. Fuck. What was I thinking?*

"Congratulations," he mumbled without enthusiasm.

"Thank you," she replied, sounding disappointingly sincere.

Karen returned from the loo then, and he began taking his leave, unwilling to have his nose rubbed in it whatever this situation of his own making was turning out to be. Karen pleaded with him to stay longer, but he refused, claiming jet lag and an early morning commitment.

"It was lovely to meet you," he confessed, offering his hand to Mel.

She took it. Her grip was firm, but her hand was soft and warm. He could feel the smallness of the bones within, her delicate fingers curled around his sturdier ones.

"It was really wonderful to meet you, Jamie," she replied, smiling genuinely. And not just with her mouth, but with her eyes as well.

Fucking hell, he groaned inwardly as his body responded. "Promise you'll send me the other story?" he blurted out without thinking.

Her face lit up even further upon his request, and it was becoming more and more difficult to resist the urge to kiss her, to hold on to her hand and pull her along with him

back to his hotel room.

"I promise," she said.

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