

On Trial for Being Thirsty

by Kolik

Throw me in cuffs, no chance of parole
Back in the house, thirty days in the hole
Segregate me from the local population
Your love is (ungh!) incarceration

–Your Love is Incarceration, Clutch

I

Two men walked down a concrete hallway. The taller of them was a large bear with a bored look on his face. A badge on his chest identified him as a bailiff for the highest court in the land. The smaller and scrawnier man was dressed in prison clothes, complete with stripes and a skullcap.

“Arright, Mr. . . Kelly?” drawled the bailiff.

“I keep telling you, it’s *Kele. Mika Kele.*” He fidgeted with his hat. “Did they *have* to take my clothes when they made the arrest?”

The bailiff rolled his eyes. “Right. Now, Mr. Kelly, I’m gonna be honest with ya: y’ shoulda taken the plea bargain.”

Mika huffed and straightened up to his full height, which put him just about level with the bailiff’s chin. “It’s a free country. I’ll be out of these by the end of the day.” He jostled the handcuffs locked firmly around his wrists. The bailiff said nothing and took a drag on the cigarette which hung from his mouth like a fishhook. “I’m innocent.”

“Everybody’s innocent here, pal.” The bailiff grinned with one side of his mouth. “You’ll fit right in.”

They turned a corner and came to a holding cell, the kind where drunks and junkies cool off after heated nights. There was a single weak fluorescent bulb hiding behind a wire cage on the ceiling. It cast nervous light on two hulking figures inside.

The bailiff twisted a key in the lock and the door swung open with a grating electric beep. He shoved Mika into the cell. “Play nice, boys.”

Mika whirled around. “Hey, you said I was gonna talk to my lawyer!”

“Yer lawyer’s runnin’ late. Jes’ hold on fer a minnit.” The door slammed shut. Mika tried to complain again but the bailiff was already trundling away in search of doughnuts and a copy of *Hustler* magazine without too many stains.

“Heyyy, new fishie.”

Mika gulped as the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. He turned to observe his temporary cellmates. One was a giant shark covered in tattoos and scar tissue. The other was a fat pig who smelled like an outhouse on a summer day. “G-gentleman,” he managed.

“Whassamatta, fishie, you nervous? Why you gotta be *nervous*?” asked the shark. He leaned forward and flashed a winning smile with enough teeth for everyone in the cell. “Like the big guy says, we’re all innocent, see?”

“Yeah, innocent,” said the pig before breaking into a squeal of laughter. “We’ll all walk!”

Mika’s eyes darted between the two men. The cell felt tiny. “W-well, I can’t really comment on your chances, but—”

The shark leaned forward even more, pressing his giant, scaly head up against Mika’s to lock eyes with him. It almost worked; he was a hammerhead. “Oh, I’ll tell ya what my changes are: slim.”

“W-what did you do?”

“I *downloaded music without payin’ for it*.”

Mika blinked. “. . . Is that all?”

The shark huffed, which unfortunately meant Mika learned what he’d had for dinner the previous night (fish – what else?). “Oh, you’re a real *tough guy*, ain’tcha?” he said as Mika desperately tried not to gag. “Tell ‘im what you did, Al.”

The pig wobbled to his feet, waddled two steps towards Mika, and leaned heavily against the bars for a well-deserved rest. The metal pressed into the pudge of his arm, which continued down to become the pudge of his gut and then the pudge of his legs. “I killed a guy.”

Mika waited, but the pig just kept panting and wiping at his brow. “Well, that’s pretty hardcore.”

“In Minecraft.”

“Sorry, what?”

“I killed a guy . . .” the pig wheezed, “. . . in Minecraft. Took all his dyed cotton and diamond tools, too.”

“This is insane.” Mika turned back to the bars and stared at the stark concrete hall. “I can’t believe I’m locked up with animals like you. I committed a *civilized* fuckin’ crime, thank you very much.”

The shark’s teeth were an inch away from Mika’s neck. “And what exactly did *you* do, pal?” he growled like a cat who’d just found a lively mouse.

The light flickered, conveniently casting the smaller man’s face in dramatic shadow. “I was honest with myself.” The pig and shark were still howling with laughter when Mika’s lawyer arrived.

II

“I know it looks bad, but the jury will hear us out, right?” Mika asked his lawyer, a tall cougar named Mrs. Concord (he had never dared ask her first name) wearing a burgundy pencil skirt and a matching vest which covered a sensible-but-inviting blouse. Oh, and she was a mountain lion too.

They were sitting in a tiny waiting room. It had a table, two uncomfortable chairs, and a vending machine against one wall that dispensed truly vile instant coffee. “There is no jury.”

Mika nearly fell out of his chair. “What!? How the hell can’t there be a jury?”

“The legal precedent for the crime you’re accused of,” said Concord in a sultry, velvety voice that could make and break a hundred promises without wearing out its welcome, “states that the courts may disallow juries in cases of *extreme moral bankruptcy*.” She flicked her tail and ran a hand over the papers arranged before her on the table. “It’s a rare occurrence, but in the eyes of the state, some matters are simply too important to be left to public opinion.”

Mika was stunned. “Isn’t the point of the courts to serve public opinion?”

She chuckled, which was halfway between a purr and a growl. “Hmm-hmm. A hopeless romantic *and* hopelessly naïve. You are a card, Mr. Kele.”

“Hasn’t anyone ever tried to change this?”

“Well, overturning such *important moral protections* would naturally be an act of *extreme moral bankruptcy*.”

Mika spat. “At least you can get my name right,” he sighed. “Okay, look, what are my options here if one person’s gonna be my judge, jury, and executioner?”

“Oh, she wouldn’t handle your execution. She *could* if she wanted to, but the judge for this case doesn’t like to get her hands dirty.” Concord extended a claw and watched it glint under the naked yellow bulb. “A shame. I think she’d have a talent for it.”

Mika’s heels stamped onto the yellowing tiles as he shot to his feet and leaned forward over the desk. “I’m sorry to interrupt your *busy schedule* with an insignificant little case like mine, but this is my *life* we’re talking about. What can I do?”

Concord told him. He didn’t like it. “There’s got to be another way.”

The cougar had gone back to examining her claws. “Well, you could try pleading your case and throwing yourself upon the tender mercies of the court.”

“You think that’d work?”

“No. But you’d get to keep your dignity before they carted you off and disposed of you.”

A burning, romantic ember flared to life in Mika’s eye. “The whole reason I’m here is to protect my dignity. Let’s do it.”

She looked at him curiously before a smile crept onto her face. “I always did like having a bad boy.”

“For a client?”

“That too.”

III

The wheels of justice worked fast when there was a chance to make someone's life worse, and so Mika found himself walking into a courtroom scarcely a few minutes after he and Concord had made a plan. He had graciously been allowed to dress himself in a cheap grey suit that was at least two sizes too small.

The room was imposing and intimidating, with a tall judge's seat and a witness stand that loomed like only hundred-year oak can. There was an obligatory table for the defence, backed by seating for viewers behind a waist-high railing. Dusty sunlight filtered through narrow, old, warped windows that stood nearly the entire height of the room.

Mika had expected the room to be like that. He had not expected it to be full of people when he entered. "Where did everyone come from from?" He looked out over the crowd of animal people, who were growing more lively now that he had appeared.

"Fans of yours, apparently," said Concord.

"Really?" Mika turned back to the crowd and gave them a closer look. He'd thought there were a lot of women at first glance, but now he saw there wasn't a man among them. The ladies weren't young, either. A large alligator woman (or crocodile? he could never tell) blinked demurely while wiggling her fingers at him. She wasn't the only one. The attention made him gulp and pluck at his collar. "I-I had no idea I was popular enough for that."

"Seems that you aren't alone in your . . . proclivities," said Concord as they sat down.

Before Mika could wonder about that, a door on the far side of the room opened and the judge clacked in. She was a tall ewe with a black head and pale, soft-looking wool that puffed out the fabric of her muumuu. The black cloth swished with every step she took, which would

have looked preposterous on anyone else but looked elegant on her. Bright eyes looked out across the room as she ascended some scaffolding to take her spot in the judge's seat.

"Heh. Ewe in a muumuu," Mika mumbled.

"Did you expect the judge to be a kangaroo?" said Concord.

"Hey, I'm not racist." Mika leaned back in his seat. "She's kinda cute."

"Kinda gute, actually."

"What?"

The judge's gavel went CLACK as she struck it on the tiny wooden circle that was there to be struck by a gavel when the judge wanted to announce something. "I hereby announce," she said in a commanding voice, "that this court is in order, with the honourable judge Gertrude presiding." Her voice filled with disdain. "The defendant before us is one Mika Kele, accused of various depraved acts including but not limited to," she unfurled a scroll, the top of which promptly careened over the edge of her booth and unrolled all the way to the floor. It had lost a tenth of its diameter by the time it hit the ground.

"Immoral and amoral and antimoral behaviour, socially provocative acts, conjugal barbarism, public indecency, verbal arson, lincention, getting down, conspiracy to get down, attempted getting down, getting up, conspiracy to get up, attempted getting up—"

"T-that happens to every guy," Mika sulked and crossed his legs.

"Please, Mika, keep your eyes up. There's no need to behave like a schoolboy being disciplined by his teacher." Concord crossed her own legs in a considerably more mature manner, which gave Mika a good look at the deep red nylons she was wearing.

"Like a . . . what?"

“You’re acting like a naughty little boy who’s been caught doing something he shouldn’t.”

She looked at him. “It won’t look good.”

“Could you say that again?”

“It won’t look good.”

“No, before that. The middle part.” He tugged at his collar conspicuously.

She raised an eyebrow. “You’re . . . acting like a naughty little boy who’s been caught doing something he shouldn’t.”

A dopey grin floated across Mika’s face. “Again, please.”

“Mr. Kele, can you not hear me?”

“Oh, I can hear you *perfectly*.”

“THE DEFENDANT WILL REMAIN *SILENT!*” boomed the judge. “Unless he wishes to add contempt of court to the charges.”

Mika shrank. “N-no, Your Honour.”

“Good.” She continued. “Defloral larceny, corruption of a minor, Corruption of a miner, corruption of a mynah, jaywalking, and something involving a garden hose and a Yellow Pages phone book that I can’t bring myself to describe in polite company.” Gertrude tossed the scroll to the floor where it landed in a heap of vellum. “What do you have to say for yourself, Mr. Kele? *If* you can control yourself long enough to speak.”

Mika stood and drew in a deep breath. “My client,” Concord interrupted, “pleads not guilty on all charges and moves that the case be dismissed.” Mika stared at her. She winked.

“Quite a plea,” mused the judge. “What are your grounds for dismissal?”

Concord looked at Mika, encouraging him. “W-well, I didn’t hurt anyone.”

In the audience, a dozen big ladies swooned.

IV

Mika's case was *not* dismissed. The day dragged on, and the more it did, the more Mika began to realize he was in deep shit.

"Have you or have you not, Mr. Kele," asked the judge, "gone by the username, quote, 'ex ex MILF hunter ex ex,' endquote?" Mika nodded. "And what, Mr. Kele, is a MILF?"

He looked up glumly. "Do I *have* to say it?"

"Answer the question, Mr. Kele."

"It's an acronym. Stands for Mother I'd Like to . . . to Fuck," he finished weakly.

"And, according to your username, you endeavoured to *hunt* these 'mothers you'd like to f-word?'" Mika sighed.

The prosecution/judge/jury (Mika's blood pressure rose every time he thought about it) wheeled out witness after witness, who all seemed to answer questions in ways that made Mika sound like a deranged lunatic.

There were his childhood friends, who had known him when he started asking very pointed questions in sex ed class about how big an age gap was considered "acceptable" between a young man and a woman. There were his adult friends, who described him as "one of the quiet types" from their work together, and who were "very startled" to have seen his face in the newspaper following his escapades. There were his internet friends, whom he had met precisely because of their shared interests in certain types of women.

Okay, sure. Maybe he *did* spend the better part of his free time drawing mature, domineering animal women in tight clothing – but it wasn't an "all-consuming obsession." Maybe he *did* have a thing for snake chicks with fully articulated 30-foot tails that could grind

his bones to powder, but that was no “bizarre fascination with methods of predation and death.” He’d thought it wasn’t a crime to fantasize. Today he was learning differently.

The audience, by contrast, had become increasingly vocal about their feelings, which were unanimously positive and sometimes inflammatory. A full-figured bunny woman had already been asked to leave after she offered to “do it like rabbits” with Mika. Speaking to the defendant was one thing, but doing it without a shirt and with one’s panties hanging from one’s ear was a different matter.

Mika sometimes found himself in the witness box to verify something for the judge. “And on more than one occasion, you said you wanted to, quote, ‘go absolutely hog wild on a big momma,’ endquote-is-that-true?” The ewe idly scratched her ear.

“Yes,” Mika said numbly.

“And would you say that a woman with children and a husband would qualify as, quote, ‘a big momma,’ endquote-is-that-fair?”

“Yes.”

“So you have a desire to lose control of yourself with a married woman, is-that-correct?”

“It’s not like that!”

In the far back, one spectator leapt to her feet. She was a boar, and a large one. Once the room stopped shaking, she shouted “I LOVE YOU, MIKA!” and tried to muscle her way forward past the railing. She briefly succeeded before more bailiffs appeared and dragged her out of the courtroom with the help of a few tasers.

“Pretty foxy for a chick with a half-tonne waist,” Mika said distantly to himself. He failed to notice or appreciate the row of foxes who swooned delicately.

“Return to your seat, Mr. Kele,” Gertrude sneered. “You see the effect you have on these poor women.” Mika shuffled to his chair and slumped down. He was going to be found guilty; he was sure of it. “And speaking of that effect, we have one final witness to examine. Bring him in.”

The next witness was a short, balding muskrat man whom Mika had never seen before. He wore a fungus green shirt with a pocket protector that held several pens he would likely never use. The man waddled up to the witness stand. “State your name,” said the judge.

“Rudy Standofferson,” he said.

“And why are you here today, Mr. Standofferson?”

“Because that . . . that *predator*,” he pointed an accusing finger at Mika, “has influenced and corrupted my daughter! She’ll never be the same!”

Mika leaned over to Concord. “I don’t remember any rodent girl,” he whispered.

Rudy continued. “My eldest daughter, Suzie, was your average modern aged girl. She’d been exposed to the internet from a young age, and had seen hundreds of hours of hardcore pornography by the time she graduated middle school. She tied the entirety of her self-worth to how she looked, owning designer clothing, and following whatever trends were popular every month.” Love and other emotions crept into his voice. “She was probably going to start a career as an e-prostitute or a sex worker before using her body up and dying of a drug overdose or being beaten to death by an abusive boyfriend before her 30th birthday.” He sniffed.

Mika just stared.

Rudy was having trouble holding back tears. “And . . . and when she saw the first reports of *his* behaviour,” he glared at Mika, “she completely changed. Her personality pulled a one-eighty overnight. Instead of the usual teenage girl things like AI-generated Korean pop groups

and plastic surgery, she started reading about *home economics* and *early childhood education* and *the dynamics of married conversationalism*.” The man’s knuckles whitened as he gripped the edge of the witness stand.

“I believe we have some pictures of your daughter, correct?” asked Gertrude.

Rudy bit back a sob and nodded. A projector flicked to life and showed the image of a teenage girl covered in makeup, piercings, and not much else. Her hair was a wild mid of dye and bedhead. The index and middle fingers of one hand formed a V shape, while her other hand pretended to jerk off an invisible dick in front of her face. Her eyes were rolled back and her tongue lolled out of her mouth.

“She loved posing for pictures like that, pretending she was getting railed by five different men,” said Rudy wistfully. The slide deck whirled, displaying photos of the girl which showed her appearance changing. Her clothing grew to resemble actual clothes instead of scraps of cloth. Her piercings and hair dye disappeared. Her vulgarity vanished, replaced by a warm, genuine smile. Rudy couldn’t bring himself to look at it.

“And what is the last you heard from your daughter?”

“She . . . She found a man named Sam who treated her the way she wanted. They eloped a couple months ago. They send us postcards.” The slide deck whirled again, this time showing postcards. On the front of one were a young, happy couple doing the tango. Another whirl and the picture changed to them nibbling on bits of cheese and bacon. “She says she’s happy,” Rudy mumbled.

“Well, isn’t she?” asked Mika.

A shocked silence fell over the room. Gertrude puffed up in her seat. “Mr. Kele, you can cross-examine the witness once he has finished—”

“Screw that!” Mika hopped onto his chair and set one foot on the desk. “This whole system is fuckin’ rigged, and we both know you’re gonna find me guilty no matter what! So let me say something while this guy’s here to hear it.”

Concord grabbed his wrist. “Mika . . .” she warned.

Judge Gertrude steepled her fingers. “If your client wishes to dig himself deeper, he can go right ahead.”

“*Thank* you,” said Mika, adjusting his tiny collar and unbuttoning the top button. A canine woman in the back shrieked for him to take the rest off before being dogpiled by guards. “Man, that button was driving me crazy. Anyway.” He levelled a finger at the muskrat in the witness stand, who stared daggers back at him. “So let me get this straight: your daughter saw me expressing my desire for mature women, and that made her want to become a mature-minded woman to find herself a mature-minded man to start a family with?”

Rudy’s claws scraped grooves into the wood beneath them. “That’s exactly it.”

“So what the hell’s the problem?” Mika flung his arms open. “Shouldn’t you be *happy* she found a man who wants to love and care for her down in Muskrat Land or whatever?”

“My daughter was a perfectly normal product of her age! She wasn’t going to be enslaved to the same institution my wife and I are!”

“But *your* parents were married.”

“And it was damned irresponsible of them. Did I ever ask to be born?”

Mika just blinked. “But . . . *you* got married.”

“Worst mistake of my life,” Standofferson growled.

“But you *chose* to have kids!”

“And they wouldn’t have continued the chain of mortal suffering if it hadn’t been for you!” He leapt over the witness stand and onto Mika’s chest, which would have been threatening if he were more than three feet tall.

“BAILIFF!” shouted the judge.

“Well, he can *bite* like a motherfucker, I’ll give him that.” Mika winced as he finished bandaging the gash on his collarbone. He’d had to take off his shirt to do it, and it was good for the collective composure of the court he was doing it while standing in the tiny waiting room instead of at the head of a room full of hot and bothered women three times his size.

“I have to admit, your approach was novel,” Concord purred approvingly. She was sitting on the table in front of him, legs crossed and tail swishing pensively.

“Yeah, thanks. Fat lot of good it’ll do me.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure. The courts aren’t ironclad.”

Mika looked at her while reaching for his shirt. “What’s that mean?”

“They aren’t as subservient to public opinion as they should be, but that doesn’t mean they make their decisions in a vacuum. If you can convince them that ruling a certain way would be more trouble than it’s worth, then they’ll listen.”

“And how do I do that?” He was nearly ready to put his jacket on.

“Stop.”

“Huh?”

“Your shirt.” Concord reached forward and dexterously undid the top handful of buttons, leaving only the one at the bottom done up.

“Oh, give the audience something to look at? I don’t see how that would help?”

“No,” she purred. “Give the judge something to look at.”

Once everyone had returned to the courtroom, things began to draw to a close. “We have nearly reached the end of our proceedings,” Gertrude said, “and now we will hear closing statements. The court has already said all its needs to, so Mr. Kele will be allowed one last

chance to defend himself before judgement is rendered.” She grinned judgementally. “Make it count.”

Concord stepped forward. “Your Honour, my client would like to bare himself before the court and appeal to you.”

“Your client’s desire to bare himself is most of the reason we’re here, and he *doesn’t* appeal to me,” said the judge. She jumped in her seat as Concord nimbly darted up the sheer wooden face of the judge’s booth, hopped over the desk section, and landed in Gertrude’s lap. The cougar was much larger than the ewe, straddling her legs comfortably.

“I believe he can change your mind,” Concord said casually.

“W-what are you doing?”

Concord reached out a hand and idly ran her claws through the wool on the judge’s neck. “Waiting for my client to begin his statement, if there’s no objection.” She pushed against the desk with a foot, tilting the chair back so the judge’s gavel was out of her reach.

“Of *course* there’s an objection!” Gertrude flailed, but her face was full of cougar fluff and her authority may as well have been across the universe.

“Hmm? Strange. I don’t hear any of that nasty clack-clacking.” Concord winked down at Mika, who stepped to the centre of the room and began to speak.

“Ladies and . . . well, I guess it’s just ladies night tonight, huh?” He ran a hand across the back of his neck, looking nervous and adorable while showing off his bandages. The audience began to sweat and pant and whatever else animals do to expel heat. “Listen, I, uh, really appreciate your coming here tonight— I mean, your *attending* tonight,” he chuckled. A large reptilian woman in the front row stuck out her tongue invitingly while she laughed.

Mika got ahold of himself and shook his nerves straight. “Okay, look. You know I’m guilty. I know I’m guilty. That’s not what’s up for dispute here: I did what they said I did, and that’s a stone cold fact.” He looked around. “But that doesn’t mean I have to be punished for it. You’re all here today because we formed a special bond – even if it wasn’t always the same. Can any one of you say that your life was made worse because of what I did?”

As one, the women of the audience shook their heads. In the back, an elephant waved a heart-covered flag she had fashioned from lipstick and her bloomers. “That’s *exactly* what I’m saying here! I committed some crimes of passion, but if everyone involved was passionate, then where’s the crime?” Mika was getting worked up. It might have had something to do with the sea of eager ladies in front of him, but he chose to believe his speech was responsible. He started pumping his first in the air. “And if there’s no crime, then where’s the harm? And no harm, no foul! And, uh, no foulness begets no foulness, and . . . *quod era demonstrandum* and *lorem ipsum dolor*—”

“*Mister Kele!*” shrieked the judge. Mika snapped around and saw she had managed to partially free herself from Concord’s affections. “You will call off your overgrown housecat at once and allow this trial to conclude!”

Concord snarled and tightened the grip she had with her thighs. “Who are *you* calling overgrown, you—”

“Hey, it’s okay,” said Mika. “You can let her go. I’ve said all I need to.” Concord glanced at him before disentangling herself from the judge.

Gertrude flopped forward onto her desk, gasping for breath. “You could have killed me!” she panted.

Concord stepped languidly onto the railing around the booth, hiked up her skirt, and *stretched* in the way that cats do after they're done playing. "If I had wanted to do that, I would have." The cougar hopped down to the floor like water falling into a glass.

The judge gulped and weakly grasped her gavel. She knocked it against the wooden circle. "T-this court has decided," she began before her words stuck in her throat. Standing around the base of the judge's booth was the audience of women, many of whom were dishevelled and most of whom were only half dressed. They were all looking intently at the judge, daring her to go on. Gertrude threw a twitchy glance over to the side of the room where the bailiffs should have been pouring out of.

The bear who had escorted Mika to his cell was standing by the door. He looked up at the judge and shook his head. "Can't pay me 'nuff t' mess with that many women made up their minds," he said.

Gertrude felt a drop of sweat roll down her brow as she looked at the crowd. "T-this court r-rules . . ." They looked back at her, silent but speaking volumes with their eyes. "N-n-not guilty on all c-counts . . ." The gavel slipped down with a light tap.

The crowd erupted.

VI

Mika, his lawyer, and their adoring fans poured down the steps of the courthouse, bowling over the journalists who had gathered awaiting a verdict. Once everyone had gotten hold of their senses, the crowd began to disperse. “So,” said Concord. She was standing next to Mika with an arm curled protectively around his shoulders. “You got off scot-free. What do you think you’ll do now?”

Mika looked at the crowd around him, then down at his bandages. They were covered in phone numbers that had been hastily scrawled with lipstick and mascara. “I’m not sure where to start,” he chuckled.

“I can think of a good place,” Concord said commandingly as she stepped in front of him. “My house is just down the street.”

Mika looked up at her. “R-really?”

“Oh, yes.” She ran her claws through his hair delicately. “You know, I got a good look at some of the appendixes when I was on the judge’s lap. I thought she was exaggerating about the garden hose.” He could feel her purr threatening to spill into a roar.

He shivered. “O-oh, well, you know how it is . . .”

“The *entire* phone book? The *endurance* you must have . . .” Her voice was throaty, curious, and dangerous. “But why the garden hose?”

Mika forced his rattling teeth to grin. “L-lemme show ya.”

She grinned back carnivorously. “I have a trick I can do with a hose, too, you know.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

The cougar leaned in next to his ear. “Sucking golf balls through it.”

And they lived happily ever after.