Summary

While looking for a hide out where he can lay low, Digger forms a weird friendship with his new neighbor.
Home Sweet Shithole

“Down is 1k, after that just 500 a month.”

Two men stood in the open warehouse, the man speaking was short with balding dark hair. He wore an expensive suit that barely fit him. His oxford cloth shirt was stretched around his belly, the buttons pulled taught. The gold chains in his wrists made a small sound in the great empty space as he gestured to the western corner where a small wooden structure was built against the wall. “You’d be over in the hut.”

The man he was speaking to was tall and stocky, wearing a large gray coat with the collar and lapels popped up covering his ears. The stranger scratched at his overgrown mutton chops as he considered the offer.

Looking around all he could see was abandoned projects. To the north was an old cadillac convertible. It sat on cinderblocks and looked to be more rust than car. About fifty feet away was a half decayed sailboat still propped up on stilts even though the keel had fallen off and laid on the ground under the hull. The whole building seemed to be deserted. The only signs of life came from a small room at the top of a rickety metal staircase.

The room looked like it had been built to be a monitoring station. It was about 40 feet in the air above the rest of the warehouse, and with windows lining the three outward facing walls. It would’ve been a good viewpoint once, but now each of the two dozen windows were plastered with aged newspaper. A warm light glowed from the room, caused by the paper defusing the brightness that was shining inside.

“Up there lives Claudia, she don’t like people,” The salesman explained after following the other’s gaze upwards.

The stranger turned around looking back at the hut again.

“If you take it, the only rules are no dead bodies. Other than that, I don’t give a shit what you do with it, and I don’t want to know neither.”

The tall stranger looked back grinning, “I’m sold,” he stated, his gold tooth glinting in the dim light as he pulled out a wad of bills from inside his coat. He counted off the exact amount and handed it over.

“Perfect,” the shorter man replied tucking the cash away into his inner breast pocket. He held out his hand which the brand new tenant took, giving a solid shake. “Pay your rent by giving it to Claudia through the mail slot in her door, she’ll make sure it gets to me. Doesn’t matter how you pay, cash or diamonds, just make sure you pay,” He warned pointing his finger at the other man.

With that the short, well dressed man turned on his heel and headed toward the door, “Oh and if you run into any problems, fix them yourself. I don’t wanna talk to you again.” He called over his shoulder.

Standing alone now, Captain Boomerang gazed at his new hideout.
It looked like a piece of shit.

He walked up to the opening between boards that served as a doorway, reaching to grab the blue tarp that hung in his way when the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end.

Quickly he spun around, looking up to the room at the top of the stairs, catching a small glimpse of a silhouette swiftly moving away from the window.

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It did not take long for Digger Harkness, also known as the infamous Captain Boomerang, to settle in. He didn’t have very many personal possessions. The space mostly served as a garage for him to work on his motorcycle and create new boomerangs from the scrap metal he found.

The open floor of the warehouse had shown to be perfect for testing out his weapons. It was a controlled environment where he could watch how they flew and handled without interference from things like trees and the wind. This made it very easy to fine tune his instruments.

Being alone usually made Digger anxious, but he started to enjoy the solitude… a little bit. During the day there’d be a few cars driving by going to the nearby factory or junkyards but at night there was no one around for miles.

Well besides Claudia, but most of the time he forgot she was there. Her lights were always on but he never saw her. Digger couldn’t understand why someone would shut themselves away like that. He figured she must look like the elephant man or something.

At the end of the month he walked up the metal stairs for the first time. Each step groaned under his weight, the sound echoing through the warehouse. He stood by the door tapping lightly on the window with the knuckle of his index finger, keeping his ear poised and listening closely for movement on the other side. But he could hear nothing. Crouching down he lifted the small door to the mail slot. He tried to look into the room but it was hard to see what exactly was in there. Grumbling to himself he shoved the cash for the rent into the slot and turned down the stairs. He had better things to do than worry about a hermit anyway.

Digger was ecstatic once he had got his harley up and running again. Though he understood the necessity of it, he hated lying low with nothing to do. He was itching to get back in the saddle and fuck up the day for a few bank tellers. He knew by now he had been kicking dust around the empty warehouse long enough that he could go back out without too much worry of strangers recognizing him from the papers. He couldn’t wait to hit up a few of his favorite haunts again. Bubba’s Smoky Lounge was always a good place to look for a partner for the his next job. He liked to get someone young, desperate to make a big mark and naive enough to trust him.

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Everything had gone wrong.

It was supposed to be a simple routine robbery but the kid –that goddamn kid– had fucked up everything.

Digger was livid as he paced around his small hut. That kid had said he knew what he was doing but he didn’t. The two of them hadn’t been 10 feet inside the building before that damn child tripped the first alarm.

That wasn’t even the worse part. Turns out he was the son of some mob boss back in Gotham
who’d gone rogue to try and prove himself. The only thing he’d proven was how good he was at getting shot. Digger was lucky to have gotten away without any bullet wounds himself. The cops had shown up instantly, like they knew what was going to happen.

Digger roared in fury as he lifted up a discarded porcelain sink that had sat in the dirt, tossing it aimlessly to his left. It flew into the wall, crashing through the plywood leaving behind a splintered hole. He could hear the sink breaking as it fell to the asphalt on the other side of the wall. He yelled again still enraged over the whole mess that night had been. He ripped a loose board from an old pallet and used it like a bat, bashing it against an old car bumper. He hammered on the metal until the board split in half with a loud crack.

He still felt no better. He reached for the pallet to take another board when he heard a voice behind him, “What THE FUCK is going on?!?” Digger whipped around, seeing a sawed off shotgun held by a small woman standing in his door way.

“What the fuck are you?” he asked her, completely taken aback. Who was she to point a gun at him in his home?

“Oh, uh,” she stammered, the look of concentration on her face fell to one of embarrassment as she lowered her gun, “I’m Claudia.”
Claudia had been watching him from the very beginning.

Once she heard the old rusted door squeak open, she immediately went to the window to see what was happening. No one ever came in here and she knew the stray cats couldn’t budge that door. She knew this because she could barely move that door.

The stranger had been the one opening it. She had watched as he walked in with Andrei, the man who owned the warehouse. She hadn’t seen him in about 7 months since he last tried to sell the building.

Looking through the small gaps in the torn paper on the window panes she watched as he gave the stranger a brief tour of the building. She continued to watch, crouched behind the wall out of sight, even as they looked towards her room. She could only guess what Andrei said to explain her presence.

She watched as they exchanged money, clasped hands, and Andrei left. The stranger looked towards the dilapidated structure that sat in the nearest corner. It seemed that she had a neighbor now. Should she go say ‘Hi’ to him? Is that what neighbors do?

While she was debating the dilemma of possible social interaction, the stranger whipped around looking directly at her. She jumped back, surprised by his sudden movements, slipping on a discarded t-shirt and falling back on her butt.

Andrei had e-mailed her later that day to explain the situation, mention the stranger’s name was Digger Harkness. That was all the information she needed to find everything she wanted to know. He was Australian, which explained the boomerangs he was constantly throwing around. And he was a felon at-large with a rap sheet longer than all the Harry Potter novels put together. Which explained why he was hiding out in a shack in the middle of an abandoned industrial park.

It wasn’t long before Claudia had a new habit of peeking out her window to see if Digger was out doing something. She wanted to go introduce herself, but each time she’d get nervous and just crouch next to the window, watching him practice.

She hadn’t realize how much she had locked herself away until now. Sure she talked to people online and she was always nice to the cashier at the bodega, but this was different. She wanted to be his friend.

Inside the shack was the closest exit from the warehouse to Claudia’s room. Before Digger had moved in she never thought twice about just strolling through. Now she mostly used the door on the far side. She’d wait until she was certain that he was inside the hut working, listening for the sound of metal on grinding stone, and when she was sure he was absorbed in his work she would sneak out quietly as she could.

One night Claudia had been drinking by herself and realized that all she wanted was some french fries. She wasn’t sure what time of day it was or even where Digger was. She crawled over to the window and looked out. As she had been sitting there watching him over time, she began to slowly pick away at the paper. What was once a small peephole was now a notable gap she could easily look through with both eyes.

He was asleep. He had taken to sleeping on the old discarded couch a few yards away from the hut.
No matter which exit she chose, she’d have to sneak by him. She shoved her feet into her boots, not bothering to lace them before grabbing some cash, preparing to head out.

Claudia couldn’t help but getting close to look at him. She’d only seen him from afar and his mug shots online. He slept sprawled out across the entire couch, with one arm above his head and the other across his belly. A small pink plush toy was tucked into the crook of his elbow, pinned to his side. She blushed when she noticed he was in nothing but boxers and a tank top.

He looked so peaceful laying there, almost innocent. Claudia chuckled at the thought, she’d read what he’d done, this man was anything but innocent.

He snored loudly, again causing her to trip backwards in surprise. She sat on the ground completely frozen, only two feet away from him as he rolled to his side. She was terrified she’d woken him as he shifted his arms so he was hugging his unicorn toy to his chest and continued to slumber. Claudia sighed, letting out the breath she’d been holding, before standing up to go get some munchies.

Ooo

Claudia nearly jumped out of her chair when she heard him climbing up the stairs. She panicked, why was coming up stairs? Did he think it was weird she hadn’t introduced herself yet and was coming to say something about it? Had he noticed she been watching him and was pissed at her?

She sat quietly the right of the door, holding her breath as he gently rapped on the window. A second later she saw the letter box open, and although she couldn’t see him, she could heard his low voice grumbling to himself. She was certain he hadn’t seen her when he shoved a stack of bills held together with rubber bands through the opening and left down the stairs. She leaned over, opening the letter slot and watching his form retreat out of view.

It took her a few minutes to realize he was paying his rent.

Claudia was sure she’d never get used the loud noises he made. The sound of a motorcycle revving jarred her from the trance she had fallen into while staring at the monitor. She when over to the small viewing spot she’d made. She had set a pillow on the floor her knees wouldn’t get sore.

She couldn’t see anything beside the light of the setting sun peaking through the hut’s doorway. She could heard the motorcycle though, the low rumble as it idled, she guessed he was backing it out through the garage door. Her suspicions were answered when she heard the clanging noise of the door being pulled shut, the beam of fading sunlight on the floor disappearing. She felt sad to think that he had left and wondered when he’d be back.

It soon became a regular thing for him to go out in the evening and not return for several hours until morning. He would come and go sporadically and Claudia would sit sullen at her computer until she heard the sound of him returning. She felt foolish being so attached when she’d never even spoken to him.

One night she noticed that he came home very early. She heard the sliding door slam on to the ground with force, much louder than when Digger usually closed it. She heard a loud yell from a man’s voice. She wasn’t sure if it was Digger or not, never having really heard him speak. Claudia jumped to her feet as a large sink ripped through the thin wall, crashing in two as it hit the ground.

She raced for the small shot gun she kept in the corner, and running out the door. Her hands shook as she opened the barrel to load the shots while racing down the stairs. A loud crashing noise was ringing out now, and she was certain someone was trashing his place. Her boots skidded in the dirt
as she stopped in the opening to the hut, pointing the gun at the intruder getting up the nerve to yell.

“What THE FUCK is going on?!” she shouted, catching his attention. Digger spun around his face tight with rage making eye contact with her.

“Who ta’ fuck are you?” he returned. He was terrifying, and she tried keep her hands still as she lowered the gun.

“Oh, uh,” she stammered losing the surge of confidence that drove her to run down here, “I’m Claudia.”

“Yer Claudia?” he asked bewildered, all anger gone from his face. “But yeh ain’t a scrubber at all.”

“Excuse me?” Claudia wasn’t sure if that was compliment or not, in fact she wasn’t sure what he had meant at all.

“I just mean yer a fit bird is all. If I’d know it’d get ya ta’ come down in yer knickers I would’ve started trashing this place a lot sooner,” He explained with a grin looking at her. She followed his gaze downwards to notice all she was wearing was an old, oversized t-shirt with a picture of Garfield holding a mug, saying 'I Hate Mondays.'

She took a small step back and tried to explain, “I just came down here, I thought someone had broken in.”

“Nah,” he stated turning around to a six pack of beer on the counter, “It’s just me blowing off steam.” He cracked open a can taking a big gulp of beer.

He let out a satisfied sigh before pulling a second can from the rings and turning towards her, “Catch,” he called as he tossed the beer. Claudia reacted quickly, stepping forward, reaching out to grab the can with both hands. She managed to catch the beer, while also dropping the shotgun.

“Careful with that,” Digger gulped down more beer as he walked over to pick up the gun off the floor, “This is a nice piece ya got,” he stated looking it over the barrel, “Where’d ya get it?”

“Just- just online,” Claudia muttered. Standing next to him now she could see he was easily two heads taller than her, and she was intimidated by his stature over her. She took the shotgun as he handed to her, hugging it to her chest with the beer.

“Ya doin’ anything, darl’?” His question made her head shoot up, looking to his face, “I had a bad day, I could really use some company,” he elaborated, giving a lopsided smile to her.

“No, no nothing really,” Claudia’s blush deepened under his gaze, “Would you want to watch a-a movie upstairs? I have quite a few to choose from.” She gestured over her shoulder.

“Anything from 'straya?” Digger asked taking another drink.

“Yeah, actually,” she perked up a little bit, always excited to discuss films, “Have you ever seen Romper Stomper?”

“Oh man, have I?” He scoffed throwing his head back, “It’s one of me favorites.”

Claudia grinned, excited he liked her suggestion.

“Lead the way,” he said as he grabbed the rest of his beer, throwing the empty can over his
shoulder.
The First Spark

Digger did not mind watching her climb up the stairs. Sometimes her shirt would shift and he’d get a glimpse of her panties.

Claudia appearing out of nowhere was the last thing he expected that night but he was more than happy to have her show up. He had just assumed she was a monstrosity like quasimoto, hiding away in her bell tower. That was the only reason that made sense to him. He could not imagine why the cute, albeit tiny, girl standing in front of him should not be out in the general populus.

He was quick to step over and pick up the gun she dropped, though he just wanted to get near her. Looking down her noticed her dark brown, almost black, eyes and decided he wanted her next.

She seemed timid and bashful, he wondered vaguely when the last time she spoke with a man was. He was more than excited when she mentioned Romper Stomper, it was genuinely one of his favorite films.

When they reached the top of the stairs, she set down her beer and gun the ground and turned to him, “The door’s locked, would you, uhm, give me a boost?” she asked pointing towards the roof of the room. He smiled and bent over lacing his fingers together. She placed her boot in his hands and he hoisted her up, she leaned on to the roof, before swinging up one leg and pulling herself all the way on to the tin sheeting. He got a full view of everything as she pulled herself up.

The roof to her room was separate from the ceiling of the warehouse, with only a few feet of space between them. Digger was sure he’d have to hunch over if he was up there, but she stood up perfectly straight, walking carefully across the metal before suddenly dropping out of view.

Digger stepped back trying to get a view of where’d she’d gone just as there were three loud clicks and Claudia stood in the doorway. She stepped aside letting him in before grabbing her gun and beer.

The inside of the room looked like a classic studio apartment. It was one large space, with a bed to one end and a kitchenette to the other. He noticed in the far corner was a large computer setup. In fact while the rest of the room looked haphazard, the elaborate set up of wires and monitors appeared very intentional and calculated.

Across the room was a mattress set sitting on the floor pushed against the wall. He noticed above the bed there was a conspicuously large gap in the ceiling. He guess that’s where she’d jumped down. Directly in front of the bed was a single kitchen chair with an older, larger television stacked on top of various media players. There was something weird about this room he couldn’t put his finger on. She had everything here she could need, and he had to use a generator just to run his metal grinder.

“You should put the beer in the fridge,” Claudia mentioned catching his attention, “You can take a cold one too, if you want,” she offered.

Digger was more than excited by the idea of a cold beer, it’d been months that he’d be living in the hut without a fridge. He grabbed one of the bottles, slamming the door behind him he went to flop down on to the old mattress.

Claudia was hunched over the expansive pile of DVDs, VHS, and even Betamax, studying the spines looking for the right title. Soon she pulled a box from one of the larger towers. As she
walked over to the television, which sat on chair in the middle of the room, the screen blinked on to a bright blue. She put in the tape and it started to play. Something still felt very off to Digger but he didn’t know what.

She walked to the fridge getting herself a beer, but as she walked back towards the mattress, where he sat, she passed the TV. He noticed as she moved near it, the image on the left side of the screen near her started go fuzzy, the image was slightly awry.

“Stop,” he commanded and she froze, more out of shock than obedience, “Just take a step back.”

Nervously Claudia did as he requested, stepping back so she was next to the TV. The image went haywire, becoming more distorted the longer she stood there. Digger was confused more than he was before. That was, until he looked down to the floor at the base of the chair.

Claudia knew he had finally noticed. She should’ve been more careful and made it look normal but now he knew. He could see that while the VHS player was hooked to the TV, neither were plugged into the wall.

“How’re yew doin’ tha’?” he questioned nodding towards the television set up.

“I, uh,” she stammered again, reach up to rubb her right arm, a nervous habit, “I can control electricity, kind of, mostly just electronics really,” Claudia stared intently at her feet waiting for him to call her a freak like all the others.

But all Digger said was, “Wha’?”

She stepped forward hesitantly, “I can make things like the TV work without plugging them in,” She blushed. Looking towards him she made direct eye contact before looking away at the television. As her eyes made contact with the screen, she sent out an impulse from her mind, which ran down her legs through the ground and into the TV, causing the screen to click off. When she looked back at Digger his eyes were wide still looking forward.

“Wow,” was all he said.

“I know, I’m a freak, it’s ok if you want to leave,” Claudia spoke quickly as she stood next to the mattress where he lounged, pinching her harm waiting for his judgement. It felt like eon passed before something happened.

“I’ve known others like yeh,” he finally mentioned with a bitter tone, “Mostly they’re a pain in me ass.”

“Really?” She asked, sitting down looking to him.

“Yeah yer not so special, darl’,” he added noticing that he had her full attention. “Come ‘ere,” he suggested, holding out his arm in invitation.

Claudia tried to keep her grin to herself, and not let him know how excited she was to curl up next to him and watch a movie. He rested his arm around her shoulders, his calloused thumb rubbing circles on her shoulder as she looked to the TV, willing the film to begin.
In the Morning

The light sound of cat paws tapping across the roof of her room had always served as a morning alarm for Claudia. Soon the orange stray she called Snoopy would hop down on to her bed and sit on her head waiting for her to fill his food bowl. There was something different about this morning though Snoop showed up right on schedule, of course.

Claudia had slept in the same bed alone for years. Well, sometimes she passed out in her chair by the computers, but even then when she woke up, she would be alone. Today as she opened her eyes, the remnants of her dreams fading away in the morning light, she couldn’t help but notice that her pillow was very hard and kinda warm.

Snoopy hopped on to her hip and sat waiting for her to stir. Claudia rubbed her eyes and realized where exactly she was. She was still in her bed as she expected, but she was curled up next to Digger’s sleeping body. He laid on his back snoring lightly as she rested her chin on his chest, studying his features.

She laid there drinking in the moment, the quiet stillness of the morning before the day had started. Reveling in the opportunity to watch him without the fear of being caught she noticed he had almost a full beard now, the shaved gaps of his muttonchops having mostly grown in.

Claudia didn’t want the moment to end, but Snoopy did. He was growing impatient, meowing to demand food. Carefully she climbed over the sleeping man trying not to disturb him. She yawned and stretched before scooping some kibble into the small dish by the door.

After grabbing a bowl of cereal for herself, Claudia climbed into the plush chair in front of the monitors, settling in to see what was new with the world. She looked to each monitor as it blinked to life, automatically scrolling through the feeds and posts listed on each.

Claudia couldn’t remember a time when she wasn’t able to control computers and tvs, or anything that needed a spark to work. Hotwiring a car was nothing for her, even if the battery was dead. When she was younger she would have to be touch the object, feeling the tingling sensation of an electric pulse moving down her arm into the screen. As she grew older she found she could control anything as long as they were both grounded, even if she was across the room. The more she practiced the more minute control she had, no longer needing to touch the mouse to move the cursor.

Computers were open books to Claudia, inviting her into test her power. She developed a special skill for maneuvering her way through the cyber landscape. Passing through encrypted barriers and fire walls were a game. They were a logic puzzle, akin to a rubik’s cube, that she could solve without touching anything. There was no information she couldn’t find, she quickly learned there were people who pay a handsome sum to have her work her magic.

The hum of the extra energy was always inside of her, like a tingle in the back of her mind. To an outsider it looked like magic, she would blink and shut down everything. But she could feel it, the energy moving from her to the targets. The surge of power escaping through her limbs jumping to whatever was closest and conductive.

Living in solitude for the past few years had been great for her to learn to control her powers. It the reason why she decided to hide away, also because she knew when alone she couldn’t hurt anyone else.
Looking over her shoulder, she watched Digger. It had been years since she had spent so much time close to another person. Snoopy had curled up on his chest, the loud purrs mixing with his soft snores. She couldn’t believe that this stranger had just shown up and found his way into her world.

Looking back to the monitors her eyes flicked from one news article to the next taking in the rapid fire information. She understood now, why he had such bad day yesterday. Gnawing on her bottom lip, she wondered if she should wake Digger up and show him, but decided against it. No one wants bad news first thing in the morning. She resigned to wait and let him slumber as long as he needed.

Leaning back in her chair she grabbed a small pipe that sat on the counter to her left. Checking the bowl she saw it was still half full. Smiling she relaxed contently puffing on the smoke, watching the screens and letting her mind drift.

By the time that Digger began to stir it was already mid afternoon. The day had be hot and sticky even with the beat up AC Claudia had running. She could still feel the barometric pressure dropping, making her uncomfortable. She always had trouble with thunderstorms, the atmospheric changes made it difficult to control the ambient energy inside of her. She wasn’t paying attention as Digger rose, crossing the room and placing a hand on her shoulder.

“Shit!” he cursed suddenly receiving a small shock as he made contact.

“Oh sorry,” Claudia blushed as she turned to face him, “How’d you sleep?” she asked offering the small glass bowl to him.

“Like a fuck’n babe,” he grinned putting the piece to his lips, inhaling as he held the lighter over the crushed herbs. “I haven’t slept like that since I was back at me nan’s place,” he expressed, exhaling smoke.

Claudia chuckled lightly, amused by his word choices. “Not to burst your bubble but I have some bad news,” she began as he passed the piece back to her. She looked to the monitor pulling up the front page of the Gotham Gazette.

Staring back at Digger was himself. A blown up version of his latest mugshot was next to a grainy image from a security camera of him running out a back door. In bold words above the pictures it read ‘THREE DEAD IN ATTEMPTED ROBBERY’

Digger’s face was stern as he looked to the screen, skimming the text of the article. “Fuck,” he mumbled under his breath as Claudia pulled up a video of the latest news broadcast.

The news anchor behind the desk was a very normal looking woman, wearing a plain blazer with her hair pulled back tight, “On to our top story today,” she began with a serious tone, “Two civilians are dead after a shoot out at the Gotham National Bank. One of the robbers was also shot and pronounced dead at the scene. It believed that young Nikolai Petrov had been working with the notorious Captain Boomerang who managed to avoid police custody. We go live now to the press conference with Commissioner Gordon,”

The image changed to an older man who looked tired and worn but resilient. The mustache under his nose wiggled as he spoke, his brow furrowed with either anger or worry, Claudia wasn’t sure, “Captain Boomerang is a very dangerous man who has proven time and time again he cares not for basic human decency. If you see him do no approach or engage with him in anyway. Anyone with information please call the GPD.”

The screen went black as the video ended and she looked to Digger. He stood leaning against the
counter staring at the monitor intently with a large grin. “Ya ‘ear tha’?” he said turning his head slowly to look at Claudia, “I’m dangerous,” he winked at her as his grin widened, the single gold tooth sparkling, “That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said about me,” he scoffed standing up.

“You gotta be careful though,” Claudia warned, spinning in her chair towards him as he sat on the bed to pull his boots on.

“And why’s tha’?” He asked in a light tone, entertained by the thought that this girl was worried for him, as he hooked the laces through the eyelets of his boots.

“That kid, Nikolai, his dad’s the head of the Petrov crime family,” Claudia could tell it was not taking this as seriously as he should.

“I knew tha’, but found out too late to do something about it,” he commented gathering his jacket.

“Andrei, the guy who owns this place works for him, for Petrov,” she finally stated as Digger looked to her, “I’ve been monitoring his email all day and he hasn’t said anything yet, but I’m sure he’d be more than happy to sell out your exact location.”

She watched the understanding wash over his face, this might not be a safe hiding spot anymore.

“Ta’ for the warning, darl’,” he finally said after a long pause, “I’m going out. If people come snooping around, ya hide, ok? Don’t get all ballsy with yer shotgun.”

Claudia bit her lip nodding, she didn’t want him to go away. He winked at her before undoing the various locks to the door and heading out. She hurried across the room, kneeling on the pillow as she watched him walk out into the warehouse and leave.
The Smell Before Rain

Digger stood in the doorway of the warehouse. Pulling out the half burned stump of a gas station cigar he bit into the end and used his zippo to relight it. He could not think of a single time he had spent the night in a woman’s bed and didn’t fuck her. Until last night that is.

As he had climbed the stairs behind Claudia, watching her move, he had every intention of pinning her to the mattress and having his way no matter how much she squirmed. But that’s not what happened. Walking into her room was like stepping into a bubble. Inside there was no one watching, as if the newspaper on the windows kept out not only the light but also reality. The only thing that mattered was watching a movie with her.

For so much of Digger’s life he felt he it was essential for him to put on a front. Eventually the emotional mask slowly became who he was, a gruff man who didn’t make close ties and didn’t have friends. He knew all too well from past experiences that people could not be trusted, but there was something different about Claudia, something that was comfortable.

Digger had always kept himself detached, putting up emotional walls to stay safe. He never cared for anything in fear that it could be used against him. Once he was in her room the walls didn’t matter, she knew what he had done and what he could do but that didn’t phase her. Claudia just cared that he was sitting with her. He didn’t have to act around her because she wanted nothing from him besides his presence. It was a new feeling for him, the freedom to say what he wanted and not worry who she was going to tell, because he knew she had no one to tell. He’d never met someone who’d been so excited to have him near, even if he did nothing but drink all of her beer. Still, she was always happy to hop up and grab him a new bottle.

Digger climbed on to his motorcycle, revving the engine as he looked up at the dark clouds. He knew it was going to rain soon, he could smell it in the air. He gazed over his shoulder at the warehouse, no one but him knew she was in there. He worried for a second, what if Petrov’s thugs did show up and they found her? He shook the thought from his head. She could deal with it. Claudia wasn’t scared of him, so he knew she could take care of herself.

Still gnawing on the butt of the cigar he accelerated, willing the bike to go faster leaving the bad thoughts behind him in the wind.

Claudia stretched as she stood up. The storm was getting closer. Reaching to scratch her head, she could feel that her hair was starting to stand up. She tried to flatten it but the strands just bounced back into place, charged by the static from within and around her.

Though she hated going on to the roof, she knew the collection buckets needed to be set out. She sighed deeply, flopping unceremoniously on to the bed to deal with tying her shoes. As she sat down something small and pointy poked her buttcheek. Laying on the bed underneath her was a blue letterman’s jersey with ‘CAPTAIN’ across the front in bold type. Claudia studied the jacket, the zipper was standing up like it had been waiting for her. Gnawing on her lip she picked it up, the material was soft almost satin like, but well worn.

Cautiously, she brought it closer to her face. She looked to the door over her shoulder, scared that Digger was going to burst in any second and yell at her for touching his things. Nothing in the room moved as she smiled to herself, smelling the jacket. It had a bit of funky sent, like smoke and old sweat but she loved it. It smelt just like him. Her smile grew as she pulled it over her head, letting the fabric fall to her shoulders as she slipped her arms into the sleeves.
The jacket was like a tent on her, the bottom lining hit only a few inches above her knees. She held her arms up, shaking them slightly making the cloth slide down her forearms to reveal her hands. The cuff of the sleeves had to be rolled back four times before they rested as her wrists, leaving her hands free.

In order to bathe Claudia had jerry-rigged a setup where rainwater was collected in a series of buckets and barrels on the roof of the warehouse. The only way to get up there was to climb an old rusted ladder on the side of the bulding. She barely trusted it as she put her weight onto each rung. The gravel crunched under her boots as she crossed the roof, placing out about twenty buckets in rows well spaced from each other.

The sky above her was completely gray, covered in storm clouds. She wished the storm would just happen already. After checking the water level in the large barrel she looked out across the streets.

From the so high up she could see a fair distance away, but there wasn’t much to look at. Most of the lots that surrounded her were abandoned and overgrown with weeds. As Claudia stood gazing towards the horizon she felt the first raindrop hit her head. The next raindrops came quickly after, like the clouds were a giant sponge being wrung out.

As she turned to head inside something caught her eye. While the moving object was quite far away she was certain that it was a nice white car heading directly towards the warehouse. Hurrying across the roof Claudia ran to the hatch door, quickly jumping through to land on the roof of her room inside. The tin sheeting made a loud crash as she dropped on to it, the sound echoing off the brick walls. She jumped downwards again, landing on her soft bed she turned her head upwards shutting of the light and monitors, darkening the room as she hid and waited.
When It Rains, It Storms

Digger learned to fight by getting into fights. He never had a sensei and never trained in a dojo. He also never bowed or shook hands before a fight. The first thing Digger Harkness does in a fight is punch the other guy.

He had spent the afternoon drinking and was lucky he didn’t die driving home. Especially since there were men waiting at his home who wanted to kill him themselves. Lightning crashed across the sky as he left his bike parked outside in the pouring rain and stumbled to the door. With his right hand he brought the glass liquor bottle to his lips, sucking down the last dregs while he twisted the doorknob with his left hand. Leaning into the solid metal door, it swung wide open and he found himself looking at two very angry, and very russian men who were trashing his space.

Growing up Digger had always admired Han Solo. Digger was raised by women, by his mother, his grandmother, and his aunts, so he didn’t have many active examples of how to be a man in his early life. From a young age Digger hailed Han Solo as the epitome of what a man should be. He was everything Dig dreamed to be. Han made money outside of the law and did what he wanted when he wanted. Han also did not get sappy and hung up over women. When she exclaims ‘I love you,’ he simply responds with, ‘I know.’ Besides all that, what Digger admired most about Han Solo was that when the door opened to reveal Darth Vader he didn’t stop to ask questions. The first thing he does is try to shoot his ultimate enemy in the face.

The two burly men wore matching black and red adidas tracksuits. They stopped their acts of the petty destruction of his personal space and looked up. Digger stood in the doorway, drunk with his arms wide open. Without thinking the aussie spun the heavy glass bottle his hand, grabbing the neck as he stepped forward to build momentum and swinging his arm. The bottle slipped through his fingers, making a straight trajectory for the man in the red jacket’s forehead. The force of the impact knocked the man backwards, his head crashing into the asphalt as he fell. A loud clap of thunder struck as the glass shattered on the floor and the whole building shook.

Digger wasted no time. As the first man looked to his fallen partner, Digger crossed the room in two strides, reached out and grabbed the gold chains from the thug’s chest. Violently he yanked on the metal, bringing the man’s face forward as he swung his fist. Digger could feel the crunch of the hired grunt’s nose breaking against his knuckles. Without hesitation he reared his arm back and smashed his fist back into the man’s nose again, worsening the fracture.

As he battered his sinuses, blood spilled downwards onto the man’s chest staining the black track suit and Digger’s fist. The man reached out blindly scratching at his assailant’s face, leaving sporadic gashes in the skin with his nails. Due to the slick blood on his hand, Digger’s grip on the gold chains slipped and thug was able to escape. Trying just to back away, the man stumbled through the doorway into the open area of the warehouse.

Digger followed as the man fell on all fours. Pulling his leg back, he prepared to smash the front of his steel toed boots into the fallen thug’s gut. Before Digger could strike he was suddenly knocked off balanced by a wooden board colliding with his skull from behind. As he fell to the ground he was vaguely aware of his arms being wrenched backwards into an awkward angle and pinned behind his head, leaving his belly exposed. The man in front of him aimed as the blood spilled from the gash the bottle left on his forehead. The pouring blood only deepening the red tone of his clothing. He held the splintered wooden board like a baseball bat ready beat Digger until he resembled a pile of ground beef.

“Stop!” A small voice cried out causing the three men to halt and turn their heads.
Usually Claudia was about as intimidating as a flower petal, but now as Digger looked to her he felt a twinge of fear deep in his gut. She looked like a mad woman standing there. Her hair stood on end as she braced the gun which, quite frankly, looked over sized in her hands. She stood there pointing it at them while wearing nothing but—wait was that his jacket?

Back when Digger saw Claudia for the very first time, she had looked small and weak. Her entire body shook with nerves as she confronted him, thinking he was an intruder. Now she stood in almost the same spot still shaking, but this time out of fury instead of fear.

She also was lit up light a human Tesla Coil.

Bright beams of electricity arched out from her body making a buzzing noise like electronic cicadas. The white streaks of pure energy shot sporadically outward from her torso, attaching to anything conductive object they could grab onto, though they seemed to favor the metal of her shot gun. As she clutched the weapon, small flashes of miniature lightning bolts escaped from her fingertips quickly moving, circling down the two black barrels.

The three men stood frozen watching a smaller version of the lightning storm outside happen in front of them. Digger freed his arms as the man behind him relaxed his grip, distracted by the human light show.

“G-get out!” She shouted as a large arc of electricity erupted from her chest, running between her arms to the gun, making a sound that was minimized by the crack of thunder from the sky. The two intruders shuffled backwards, cautiously stepping away. When another beam cracked and sparked on the top of her head they spun around and ran out through the door leaving the warehouse behind them.

Digger exhaled, still processing what had just happened. He felt much more sober than before, though the edges of his vision were still blurred. He looked to to Claudia who stood a few feet from him. Though her hair continued to stand on end, there were no more arms of lightning arcing out from her temples. Like him she inhaled deeply, gazing off as if in a trance, trying to calm down.

He felt dizzy as he looked to her, watching her small chest rise and fall under the letters of his jacket. She turned her head looking to him, her eyes wide as saucers so the white completely circled her dark irises.

“Y-you’re bleeding,” she remarked, reaching towards his face before hesitating, “Come up stairs,” she offered, taking his hand to lead him up the metal steps to the room.

She hadn’t meant for that to happen. She had no control as the arcs of electricity escaped past her skin. Once she realized they were hurting Digger the constant buzz inside of her, the one she struggled to control every day, burst out and sparked around her. For a moment she lost herself and enjoyed the tingle that started in her belly and rapidly moved outwards through her limbs. She felt like all the emotions about Digger where suddenly bubbling to the surface and, quite literally, they were.

Once the men had left she felt her energy drop. All the sparks that stormed around her were gone as she took deep breaths while looking to her right, catching Digger’s eye.

They stood for a moment, still processing what happened, before Claudia commented, “Y-you’re bleeding,” Digger took a sharp inhale of breath, still trying to recover. He wasn’t sure if it was because of the beam to the head, or the bottle of liquor he drank earlier, but he felt dizzy. He didn’t argue for a moment as Claudia reached out. She slid her slender fingers between his and tugged,
willing him towards the stairs to her room.
Claudia held the large bowl under the faucet, filling it with collected rainwater. She placed a clean rag in the bowl to soak as she walked back to Digger. He sat on the edge of the bed with his elbows resting on his knees, his shoulders still shaking with adrenaline.

Carefully, she set the bowl on the ground between his feet and knelt in front of him. She took his left hand, holding it in hers as she began to scrub the stranger’s blood from his knuckles.

A feeling of tension in his chest gripped Digger as he watched her clean his knuckles, kneeling in front of him while wearing his clothes, his name broad across her chest. He smiled to himself as she dipped the rag in the bowl, the clear water suddenly blooming with pink clouds of blood mixing in it. She wrung the cloth between her hand and continued to mop his fists.

Hiding away from people had been Claudia’s choice. Throughout school and adolescence she had been mock and ridiculed for her differences. It wasn’t long before she dropped out and ran away. She learned quickly how to short out ATMs so they spit out hundreds of bills. Eventually she met Andrei at a small bar by chance. He was softened by her story. Having recently acquired the warehouse with no use for it, he offered it to her. His rent was pretty steep for an a dilapidated structure with no amenities but she was so eager for a roof. She was able to settle in quickly, getting what she needed through the internet. She didn’t even worry about the rent after setting up an automatic payment from one Andrei’s off shore account to the primary. She made it so he literally paid himself to let her live there. Once she had settled in, she was able to live comfortably with no worries. She felt she needed nothing, that is until she met Digger.

She rinsed the cloth in the bowl again, the pink tones of the water growing deeper. She stood up, standing between Digger’s knees and placing her fingers under his chin. Next to his fist her hand had looked miniscule but against his face, each fingertip felt enormous. No other sensation he felt was more important than the contact of her fingers on his jaw.

He followed the light push from her hand, tilting his head up towards her. Gently she began to wipe at the wounds on his face as she conspicuously avoided his intent gaze. While he sat on the bed she stood only an inch or so taller to him, so her eyes fell just level with his. Before now he had grown used to looking downwards at her, enjoying as she would turn away and blush under his scrutiny. Now he grew to like this new view. He grinned inwardly as the blood flowed into her cheeks.

Claudia focused on cleaning his scratches, embarrassed at the the effect just his gaze had upon her. She felt tingling inside her, not dissimilar to the feel of ambient energy in her head, but this one sat low in her gut. She felt the rough calluses from his fingertips rub against the bare skin above her left knee and quickly bit her lip, fighting to keep the noise of surprise inside of her.

She blushed as he rubbed circles with his thumb on the inside of her knee while she finished cleaning his wounds. She stood for a second gathering courage to look at him. When she finally let her eyes gaze across his, her stomach flipped. His steely blue eyes were heavy lidded and a small smirk sat on his lips. Quickly he moved his thumb, slowly inching up her inner thigh.

Claudia hesitated wondering if he should stop him, but as his rough fingertips moved on to a new piece of skin she decided to throw caution to the wind.

She moved her fingers, which still rested on his jawbone, up his cheek and into his beard as she cautiously leaned forward. He felt her before she made contact as small static shocks of electricity connected with his lips, tongue, and gold tooth. As her lips came to rest on his, he groaned. The
contrast between the quick burning sensation from the shocks and her soft flesh made his pants grow uncomfortable. He tugged at the inside of her knee, willing her to bend her leg onto his lap resting part of her weight on him as he moved his hand further up her thigh. She moved her hand to the back of his head scratching his the scalp under his hair as her other hand moved to rest on his chest.

Digger lost his patience when she gasped against his mouth as his hand moved. Quickly he grabbed her leg, yanking her to his left as he pushed the right side of her hip with his hand. Before Claudia understood what had happened she was laying on her back looking up at Digger as he violently pulled at the zipper to his coat she still wore. He lifted her shirt, palming her breast as he eagerly leaned forward taking her mouth with force. With one fist he held down both of her arms above her head as his other hand slowly moved down across her belly.

Claudia hiccoughed slightly as he cupped his hand between her legs. He released her arms and leaned in to bite and gnaw at her neck while letting his fingers play with her flesh. She reached up wrapping her arms over his shoulders while she let her legs fall open. With one hand she scratched at his shoulder blades and the other tugged at his blond curls.

Digger grinned to himself at the noise she made while he sunk his fingers into simultaneously moving his thumb, making circles on her bud of nerves. As he moved his hand back and forth, he curled his fingers looking for that spot. His ego swelled as her hips started to jump sporadically towards his hand and her eyes clenched shut.

He leaned forward taking her mouth but she was far too distracted to kiss him back. The pressure in her stomach was unbearable as it grew. She knew he could make it end and unconsciously jerked into his grip seeking release.

Finally with his careful ministrations, he hit the spot inside of her and she came undone. White flashed before her eyes as her knees jerked together involuntarily and she she heard a loud crash. All the tension inside her escaped as she saw black. She laid there inhaling deeply as the last few pangs of joy shuddered through her. She blinked a few times before realizing the darkness was not just her vision.

“Digger?” She asked sitting up, reaching forward. Her hand hit his bare chest –when had he taken his shirt off?– She felt a low rumbling in him as he burst out laughing.

“You blew the fucking light out,” he said between gasps of breath as he sat back on his haunches.

“You shut up, she shot at him, slapping his chest. She sent a pulse from her mind to the light as she had a hundred times before, but she felt the energy fizzle out as it reached the end of the wire. The bulb really was blown. She sent a pulse to the TV and the screen clicked on to the plain blue screen, illuminating the pair.

Digger sat back on his heels between her legs staring intently at her, bathed in blue light. He flexed his hands, both of which had been on her when she sent out the large shock. He was trying to bring the feeling back to his fingertips.

“Are you ok?” She asked hesitantly looking had his wild expression.

“I’m fucking fantastic,” He chuckled leaning in towards Claudia, willing her to fall backwards to the mattress, “I can’t wait to feel that on me cock,” He stated, as he dove forward, taking her lips while undoing his belt buckle.
Dreaming of You as My Lover

Waking, Claudia felt like there was a boulder on her chest. As her mind shifted from dreams to reality she realized it was just Digger. She had woken up like this, trapped by his frame, for a few weeks now. She’d never get used to it and she didn’t want to. He layed on his stomach, his large form flattening her to the bed, while his face rested near her neck.

She reached to his shoulder and shook it, “Di-ig-ge-er,” she whined in his ear stretching the syllables out in a way she had recently discovered really annoyed him, while tugging at the curls on the back of his head. Half awake he responded, letting out a low groan which she could feel through his chest. He shifted his head so his face became buried in the corner of her neck and shoulders. His left arm snaked under her torso and tightened around her middle. A moment ago she probably could’ve slipped away, but now that was impossible.

“I was going to get up and go buy some more beer,” she explained, trying to entice him to letting her go.

He made a noise into the side of her neck that sounded a lot like, ‘no don’t.’

Claudia laughed lightly, still trying to move her legs from with under him, “Am I hearing you right? Do you really want me to not go get beer?” The idea of Digger turning down booze seemed absurd.

“No,” he groaned turning his head upwards, “I don’t want yeh t’move,” he corrected, pulling her closer, “Go back t’sleep, I’ll get beer later,” He stated. Claudia smiled, satisfied with his offer. She curled into him, wrapping her limbs around his torso, pulling herself closer. Nothing else mattered.

Eventually Claudia rolled back over, yawning and stretching as she finally climbed out of the bed. She wandered over to her computers, lighting the half smoked bowl from last night at she sat down. She briefly remembered that Digger had left earlier, though she wasn’t sure how long ago that was. Had she slept for 20 minutes or 5 hours?

As she sat looking at the monitors, the question of Digger began to eat at her. She eventually rose from her seat to checked the fridge. It was still as empty as it had been the night before. She pulled on her boots and walked down to the hut.

“Digger?” She asked into the darkness, receiving no response. She back tracked and looked around the rest of the warehouse. She check in the alley and even looked inside the old sailboat.

Of all the years that Claudia had spent by herself, she never felt more alone than this moment. Looking at the space around her she felt the penny drop within her. She realized Digger was gone.
There isn’t much to do in solitary confinement. That’s what it was designed for; to lock you in a
small room with yourself. His first time in the hole had been hell, even if it had just been for a day.
Afterwards he was always anxious and jittery. He jumped at everyone who looked at him, even the
most passing glances. Soon Digger found a way to cope, a way to keep himself distracted from the
ever looming, ever growing, demon of self-hatred.

One day while sitting in the yard under the small sliver of shade cast by the giant stone wall that
surrounded them, he found a small stone in the dirt. Unlike most of the gravel this stone was well
worn, each of the corners rounded into curves by time. It felt soft in his hand as he examined it.
The stone was a dark brown with a single white line bisecting it. The stone’s warm tones stood out
in contrast to the gray asphalt that surrounded him. He slipped it into his pocket knowing it was
small enough to hold onto without question from the guards.

Eventually the stone came to serve as a totem for Digger, grounding him when he thought he was
going to explode. Well, he would still explode but he’d only punch the fellow convict about five
times rather than twenty-five times.

After punching the other guy five times, Digger was thrown back in solitary confinement. Where
he sat alone toyed with his stone. Mind you he felt no emotional attachment to the stone, and had
definitely not given the stone a name and if he had given it one, that name definitely did not begin
with a ‘C’. As he tilted his hand, willing the rock to roll across his palm, he had a passing thought
that he could easily recognize the stone by touch.

He closed his eyes shut and quickly tossed the stone aimlessly while he covered his ears so he
couldn’t hear where it landed. He then got down on all fours and started in the corner. He kept his
eyes closed as he palmed his hands across the ground, feeling for the familiar curve of his stone.

He took his time, slowly crawling across the floor, inspecting every inch and speck of dust. After
an hour of searching he moved his left hand he felt the stone -his stone- brush against the side of
his palm. His eyes quickly snapped open as he inspected it. It was his stone, it had the small white
stripe through the deep earthen tones. He smiled to himself and stood again, closing his eyes as he
tossed the stone away over his shoulder to start the process again. He continued this way,
beginning again and again. When his knees began to bleed, he would simply shift his weight and
carry on. He ate away the hours on the ground playing his game.

The other challenge he faced was trying to fall asleep. Laying still in bed he couldn’t distract
himself from his thoughts by searching for his stone. That’s when his mind would drift back to
Claudia’s room. Just the thought of her name pained him. He had only known her for a short time,
 a little under a month, but in those few short weeks that he spent laying naked in bed with her, he
had been happy.

Late at night, while lying in his cell, he’d let himself reminisce on being with her. He could see her
perfectly in his mind’s eye. Watching the way she would absentmindedly brush her hair back as
she kneeled next to him excitedly describing some Russian film. She didn’t even mind that he
would spend the whole time staring at her bare chest while she rambled on about the beauty and
subtlety behind Tarkovsky’s cinematography.

Being inside of her room was a feeling he’d never forget, and he meant that in both the most literal
and vulgar sense. Sometimes when it was pitch black at night, when he was sure all his cellmates
were well asleep, he would close his eyes he would try to imagine the feeling of being there.
He had always found various places to have a marked difference in the feeling of being there. While couldn’t coherently explain it, there was something ethereal in the ambient nature he could feel between locations that her very much enjoyed.

He first noticed this when he left Australia, traveling to America stowed away in the hold of a cargo ship. Though he transitioned to a new time zone and country quite easily, he still had moments of homesickness. He would lay out at night in various grassy fields, curled up in a stolen sleeping bag, staring at the stars. Like recalling a memory he would close his eyes and imagine he was back home, pulling at the feeling from within him. As long as his eyes were closed he could momentarily forget where he really was. Fooling himself to believe for a minute he was camping in the dry air of the outback rather than the forest of the pacific northwest.

As he laid in his bunk, trying to ignore the lumpy mattress below him, he let the emotional floodgates within him open. Only when he was alone in the dark did he feel safe thinking about Claudia. He thought of the way she would smile at him as he agreed to watch a movie, though she warned it was weird and he might not like it. Many of the films she showed him were very weird, but he always enjoyed them.

Digger had never been big on watching movies before. He always had something more important to take care of but when he was alone in the room with her, there was nothing better to do. She adored films and would talk endlessly about her favorites, and even ones she didn’t like. Once he said, ‘yeah sure’ to her suggestions she would excitedly hop up to grab the tape, turning on the tv. Most of the time she would give him a running narrative, explaining why she thought each shot was important, and why such a simple detail made the story better.

She made the films interesting for him. He would’ve never considered sitting through a seven hour, black and white film from Japan on his own. Once he saw the way her eyes lit up as she said ‘Kurosawa,’ he knew he’d watch the film three times over for her, no matter the length.

Time didn’t matter in the room. Living in a building that was inside of another building, they never saw the sun rise or fall. The conspicuous lack of clocks in the room didn’t help either. They would wake, watch a film or two until the pair got distracted by each other, then fall asleep again only to repeat the process when they next woke.

As Digger laid in his cell, trying to escape his reality through his memories, he would recall every detail of each film she showed him. One of the films he felt his mind drift to most often was Days of Heaven. The story was about migrant workers during the dust bowl, and while he’d never worked on a farm he found himself relating to their search for stability and consistency. He yearned for those careless days with her where nothing else mattered. He thought of his time in Claudia’s room as his own days of heaven.

Ooo

If you had asked Digger after the very first suicide squad mission, if they’d ever get the band back together for another fight, he would’ve laughed in your face.

But there he stood, in the center of a pile of rubble with Harley Quinn, Deadshot, Killer Croc, and Rick Flag. This was the fourth time in two years they had been collected for duty, but just like every single mission before now, it had gone to shit. Waller had promised it was a simple job, explaining that the squad didn’t have to worry about saving the data they were after, just destroy it. Sounded easy enough. Right on schedule, everything got fucked. It turned out that Flag’s information was wrong. They were unable to locate the server and found themselves in an office building with a small army of mercenaries waiting for them.
“Shut UP!” Flag yelled as he stepped between Harley and Deadshot, who were bickering over what move to make next, “We’re not doing anything now. We’re going to make camp and rest, then re-access the situation in the morning.” Flag’s face looked tired and stressed, same as everyone else.

“Where?” Floyd shot at Rick, “Here?” He asked incredulously, gesturing to the rubble that surrounded the group. So maybe Digger’s exploding boomerangs weren’t necessary, but they had solved the problem. While also destroying most of the building’s brick facade.

“No not here,” Flag threw back at him, annoyed with the assassin’s attitude.

“Then where?” Floyd asked again with more force behind his words.

“I don’t know!” Flag finally shouted in defeat.

These arguments were a regular occurrence and Captain Boomerang had made a habit of sitting back with Croc, waiting for the fight to blow over. He hated speaking up at these times and cursed himself as he finally said, “I know somewhere.”

The three heads of Floyd, Rick, and Harley snapped to look at him. Once they had followed the trail out of Gotham to the north, he couldn’t fight the feeling of excitement in his gut as he realized where they were. Or more, who they were near. He had spent the last hour waiting for the opportune moment to slip away from the group. If he could get away, it’d only be a 10 minute walk for him. He didn’t care if his head got blown off by Waller as long as he got to see her again.

“You know somewhere?” Floyd questioned getting into Digger’s face. He made an affirmative grunt and nod in response while standing nose to nose with Floyd.

“And why should I trust you?” He asked, getting a mumbled agreement from the rest of the group as Digger’s expression fell slightly.

“You’re kind of an asshole,” Harley chimed in, as she crossed her arms.

Digger took a deep breath and looked at the group, “Ok, yeh don’t trust me,” he began and everyone nodded in agreement, “Tha’s why yeh can trust her,” he looked to the others faces reading their confusion.

He coughed slightly looking down, “She, ah,” he paused to quickly think of of pseudonym, “Sparky, she’s a good person. She’s nuthin’ like me.”

Digger avoided eye contact with the others while they conferred, looking at each other.

“Okay,” Harley’s cheerful voices finally said, speaking for everyone.

“What?” Digger asked, stunned they had agreed.

“We said ok. So where does she live?” Harley asked as the others began to gather their packs, ready to move to the new location.

Ooo

Even though two years had passed, the warehouse looked the same to Digger. He felt a warmness flood through his chest as he fought the urge to run inside. He shook his head, focusing on his usual scowl before any of the others saw him smile.

“You sure someone lives here?” Deadshot asked as they filed into the empty space. He and Harley
both looked skeptical. Croc didn’t seem to mind as he hopped onto the beat up cadillac, stretching out to take up the entire back seat.

“Ya,” Digger grumbled back, “She’ll show up in a minute.” As he said this Digger realized the possibility that she might not be here. What if she had packed up and moved on? He had never said goodbye and had no way of contacting her before now. The idea that the warehouse might actually be empty pained him. He couldn’t bring himself to turn around and look at the stairs that lead up to the room.

Flag walked over, his forearm resting on the rifle across his chest. “Even if there’s no one here, this is a good place to camp,” he stated, clapping Digger on the shoulder. The Aussie reeled at the small display of gratitude.

The group milled about and rested. As Croc was lounging in the car, Harley had taken up the driver’s seat, playing with the wheel while calling Croc ‘Miss Daisy.’ Floyd and Rick both sat on top of small stack of discarded pallets, looking over their guns and taking inventory on bullets. Digger stood stiff as a board with his hand shoved deep into his pocket. Nervously, he fiddled with his stone, unable to relax.

The quiet air that had settled around the group was suddenly broken. A loud yell had come from somewhere behind Digger. Everyone’s heads shot up. Tense and ready for a fight, they reached for their weapons. Digger turned around as something half his size slammed into his belly, knocking him off balance.

Taking a step back, he steadied himself. He could feel the tingle of her arms wrapped around his torso. He fought the urge to return her embrace. Instead he placed a stern hand on her shoulder, squeezing as he gently pushing her back and looking to the rest of the squad.

“So this here is, er, Sparky,” he introduced Claudia to the group, keeping his hand on her shoulder.
The Return

It was Snoopy who first noticed that there were intruders.

He had taken to sitting on Claudia’s lap while she spent hours staring unblinkingly at the monitors as information flashed across them. She would occasionally feel his fur under her fingertips and pet his back, but most often she would sit motionless sucked into the electronics. When Digger left Claudia escaped into cyberspace, submerging herself deeper than ever before. She had learned to do so much in a short period of time.

She was elated the first time she finally figured out the mouse hole like entrance she could use to get into closed circuit servers. She was also now able to reach out across the country, to places as far away as louisiana, finding a way into the protected servers and archives of various government facilities. Like Belle Reve.

Once Digger left Claudia had begun to search for him. Part of her hoped so desperately that he had not disappeared voluntarily that she actually went into Gotham. She traveled into the city center, to the main police station to look for him. She didn’t talk to anyone, just sat alone in the office’s waiting room and quickly scanned every computer in the building. She easily found the information she needed. He was indeed in police custody.

What surprised her was that when she arrived home to the room, she could still feel the connection to the police station. It was like she had unconsciously left an electric trail of breadcrumbs through the wires of the city to lead her back.

In order to reach the prison from the warehouse it felt like she had to leave her body. Her flesh would stay motionless and limp in her chair as she reached further than she ever had before, looking for every detail about Digger she could find.

Claudia didn’t like what she saw. She watched through the digital files as guard after guard filed reports about him starting fights and being thrown in solitary confinement. It became easy for her to zone out, her mind plugged into the wires miles away, looking at the security footage of him obsessively shuffling around on the floor alone in the small space.

It wasn’t long before Claudia learned she needed to close her eyes before tapping into the wires. She had developed a slight problem with her eyes drying out and constantly needed to use eyedrops now. Her body would slump back in the chair, the only cognitive connection she had to her physical reality would be the feeling of Snoopy’s fur under her hand as she would absentmindedly pet him. Sometimes she wondered if she’d lose herself in the wires without snoopy but she chose not to dwell on that idea.

This particular day as she was lost in the web with her hand on his fur, Snoopy suddenly sat up. The movement snapped Claudia out of space, like a diver being suddenly yanked back to the surface. She had been looking through the accounting records of a chinese law firm, collecting data for a paid commission as she felt him sit up under her palm. She blinked a few times bringing herself back to the present as Snoop hopped off her lap and headed towards the door. She opened the door a crack, taking a moment to set back the various blots so it wouldn’t automatically lock behind her.

Once Snoopy had the chance he slipped through the opening, heading out as if he was a marine scouter. Claudia cautiously poked her head out to inspect the situation. As she surveyed the open warehouse she noticed a man in a long gray coat with his back to her.
It was him.

He was here!

And it’s him! She couldn’t contain herself as she barreled down the metal steps, rocketing towards him.

He was here!

He was back!

Digger turned just as she collided with him. Wrapping her arms around him she could feel the low voltage release of energy that escaped from her into him. She was just that happy. It felt like a dream, she couldn’t wait to feel the security of his large arms protectively wrapping around her frame, returning the loving embrace.

But that didn’t happen.

Instead he felt stiff as he paced a hand on her shoulder, pushing her back. Claudia was confused, and tried to look up at his face. She saw he was avoiding her eyes and followed his gaze to the right. That’s when she noticed the others.

There were four of them, two men, a woman and a… thing? She wasn’t sure how to refer to the creature lounging in the cadillac. She stood stiff, still very aware of Digger’s hand on her shoulder. It had been a long since since she’d talked to anyone besides him.

The woman burst forward, holding out her hand as her pigtails bounced, “Harley Quinn, Nice to meet ‘cha,” she exclaimed. Claudia was filled with nerves but feeling a small squeeze to her shoulder from Digger she hesitantly reached out and took Harley’s hand. There was a loud ‘ZAP’ as Harley quickly let go with a swear. She reached forward taking Claudia’s hand, holding it palm out for inspection.

“How’d You do that?” Harley questioned, studying Claudia’s small hand, looking for a buzzer similar to her Puddin’s.

“I, uh,” Claudia stammered as she looked to Digger.

He maintained eye contact with the others, and away from her as he explained, “Hence the name Sparky,” He coughed slightly, still avoiding Claudia’s gaze, “She’s like Diablo.” The rest of the group seemed to accept this answer, each suddenly becoming less eager to shake her hand.

Flag then stepped forward and made an official explanation, “We need somewhere to camp,” he began, giving Claudia only the information she needed about why they were there, which was barely any.

When he finally officially asked for permission, Claudia looked to Digger, who gave her a slight nod and she mumbled, “Ok, I guess, I don’t care.”

With that, each of the group set out to make camp. They undid their bed rolls on top of aged pallets rather than the hard earth, making themselves comfortable for the night.

As everyone was distracted, Claudia tugged a digger’s sleeve. He finally looked down to her as she said quietly, “I saved your motorcycle.”

It had been years since he thought about the bike, “Really?” he asked her as he rose one eyebrow.
Claudia took a step back, towards the hut as she pulled on his arm, “Yeah.”

Quietly he followed her. His eyes locked with hers as she walked backwards through the opening to the hut, leading him by his arm and never breaking eye contact. Part of him hoped the others didn’t notice, but a bigger part of him didn’t care.

Claudia looked away towards the motorcycle before Digger grabbed at her small frame. He spun her around and pinned her to the counter with his hips. He cupped her jaw with his hand as he dove in for a bruising kiss. Claudia returned his affections, tugging on the lapels of his jacket, she pulled herself up so she sat the counter. He leaned back for a breath as she pushed his jacket and coat down his arms.

“I missed yeh,” he commented, running his hands up her thighs as she wrapped her legs around his waist.

“I know,” she remarked, grinning as she pulled him back into a another deep kiss. His hands soon spread across her bottom, pulling her hips forward to grind against his. Digger groaned at the feeling of the smalls shocks between their tongues as they wrestled.

At first, Harley was the only one who had noticed with the pair had slipped away. A few moments later when the rhythmic thumping started from the other side of the plywood wall, Floyd looked up from cleaning his gun. He looked to Harley who was in the car reading. She wiggled her eyebrows, obviously entertained by the notion of why Boomer might’ve actually suggested they come to the warehouse. Deadshot chuckled lightly, shaking his head as he returned his attention to his rifple.

It wasn’t long before Digger returned, wandering back to the group without his jackets. He scratched at his head as he looked at Floyd, Harley and Croc. The three of them all wore matching, knowing grins.

“That was fast,” Harley commented trying to fight back her giggles.

“Have fun?” Deadshot added. Croc said nothing as he gave the aussie a thumbs up.

“Fuck off,” Boomer grumbled at the trio as Claudia walked up behind him, his blue captain’s jacket around her shoulders.

“I thought you already did,” Harley chided as they all dissolved into a fit of laughter. Digger sighed annoyed with their antics, as Claudia blushed realizing what they were teasing him about.

Once everyone had calmed down he asked, “Where’s Flag?” noticing his bed roll was empty.

“He went to look around,” Floyd filled in as he wiped a tear from his eye, “I think he went up stairs,” he added gesturing towards the room.

“What?” Claudia asked before whipping around to hurry back to her room. Digger followed, taking two steps at a time trying to catch up with her.

Wrenching open the unlocked door, Claudia was greeted with the view of Flag leaning over her computers, studying the blinking monitors.

As Boomer stood behind her, Flag turned around holding up a piece of paper from an old dot matrix printer, “How did you get this?”

“Is that me mugshot?” Digger asked stepping forward to look closer at the sheet.
“I didn’t have a picture of you,” Claudia began to explain, grabbing at his elbow.

“It’s not just your picture, it’s your entire federal record,” Flag stated, interrupting her. “It is a confidential government file that should only be accessible by those with high level clearance,” he elaborated noticing that Digger didn’t quite follow what was so important.

“So I ask you again, how did you get this?” Flag directed to Claudia.

Claudia bit her lip and shuffled so she stood closer behind Digger. “I got it myself,” she began quietly, “I can go into computers, no matter where they are.”

Boomer could see the wheels in the soldier’s head as his jaw tensed.

“You’re going to help us,” Flag finally stated.

“No she ain’t, she got nuthin’ to do with this shit, you got no leverage over her,” Boomer shot back gesturing towards Flag.

“Yes she is,” Flag commanded before looking at Claudia, “You’re going to help us or I will insure that Boomer here spends the rest of his life in solitary.”

Digger clenched his fist at the other man’s words, “Yeh been spendin’ too much time with Waller.”

Claudia paused for a moment before quietly saying, “Ok, I’ll help.”

“Good,” Flag said with a satisfied smirk as he walked past the pair towards the door adding, “I’ll brief you in the morning, make sure you get a good night’s rest,” before he left.
The first thing Claudia noticed when she woke up was the smell. She didn’t need to open her eyes to know Digger was there. It wasn’t what you’d call a ‘beautiful’ smell like flowers, vanilla, or fresh laundry - he definitely did not smell like fresh laundry- but he smelled like him. It was a musky mix of smoke and sweat. Sometimes there was a hint of cinnamon from all the fire whiskey he drank.

He laid on his stomach, with one arm across her middle. She had fallen asleep still wearing his coat. In the pocket she found a small brown stone, with a single white stripe through the center. Rolling on to her side she faced Digger, watching him sleep as she played with the rock. She curled in closer to him setting the stone on his back. Gently, she pushed it across his skin, following the contours of the muscles around his shoulder blades.

“Mm, tha’ feels nice,” Digger spoke in a low growl. The moment before he had been completely still with his eyes closed. Claudia hadn’t even realized he was awake, “Oh, I like tha’,” he added as she pushed harder on the stone, moving it further down his back.

Digger finally blinked, smiling as he looked at Claudia, “G’Morn’.”

“Hello,” she responded, returning his smile. She held the stone up between their faces, “I found this in your pocket.”

“Tha’s ma’ pebble,” Digger explained as he turned over to lay on his back, getting a better look at the stone as Claudia rested her chin on his chest, “It kept me from losin’ me self in the hole. I’d look for it on the floor with m’eyes closed.”

“Is that why you’d crawl on the ground?” She asked as he furrowed his brow in confusion, “I watched you sometimes. When I got into the Belle Reve computers, to look at your file and find a picture, I was able to watch all the archived security footage of you.”

“So you were watching me?” he mused as he reached up scratching his sideburn, “Like a movie?”

Claudia smiled to herself, looking away from him, “Yeah,” she hesitated for a second, “but then again I’ve always been watching you.” She had never admitted this to him before, “Since you first moved in, I’d watch you from the windows.”

She gnawed on her lip, anxious as he processed the information.

“I had a feeling yeh were watchin’,” Digger said after a moment, “Why didn’t you come say ‘hi’?”

“I wanted to,” Claudia sighed looking back at him, turning her head so her cheek rested flat on his chest, “but I didn’t know how to.”

“I guess it doesn’t matter,” he eventually summated as he absent mindedly ran his thumb across the fabric on her back.

They laid there quietly for a while, content to just be together.

“We should probably get up,” Claudia finally mentioned breaking the silence.

“No,” Digger groaned as he wrapped his arm tightly around her, “Flag will come yell at us when it’s time to get up.”
“Oh, right,” Claudia responded quietly, having forgotten about the others, “Do you know what Flag wants me to do?” She asked looking up at him.

He already had his eyes closed, “No idea,” he sighed, “Dun’ worry abou’ it, just rest while yeh can.”

OoO

Digger was not happy. This was probably the first time in his life that he genuinely regretted something. He was a very impulsive person and he had learned early on not to think twice about the decisions he made. He wouldn’t let those ideas plague him. He often made choices without consideration either before or after, but now as he stood in Claudia’s room looking at the other members of task force X he deeply regretted speaking up the day before. He was so intent on getting to see Claudia that he didn’t realise the possibility that the others would get to see her too.

He was a selfish person, he like to keep things just for himself. Things like Diamonds. Things like Claudia. Sharing was not something Digger did.

He stood in her room, brooding. Croc and Floyd sat waiting on the stairs, Harley was crouch over looking at the collection of films and Flag was briefing Claudia. He had taken her to speak alone at first, far away from where the others could overhear him. He still only gave her the most basic information she needed. He wanted her to find where the server they needed to destroy was. He knew it was in Gotham but no idea exactly where. Claudia nodded as she listened taking in the facts before rejoining the others.

“Ok, I can find it, just-,” She hesitated shifting to the left in her chair, looking up to Digger, “Don’t like freak out when I go in,” before turning back to Flag. She wasn’t sure how it explain what would happen because she honestly wasn’t sure what her body did when she left. She knew at least it would be jarring to see without warning.

“Will you,” she began speaking quietly to Digger, “Will you hold my hand?” Claudia knew that there was no way Snoopy would show up with all these people around and she was scared to dive into the wires without some sort of anchor. Without response Boomer laced his fingers with hers.

Digger had watch Claudia manipulate computers before, but it was nothing like this. He expected her to go rigid, her eyes glazed over as the screens flickered. This time he watched as her eyes rolled back into her head, her body going slack in the chair like a rag doll. He fought the impulse to reach out and shake her, to try and wake her up. He figured she must know what she was doing.

The room was silent for several moments. No one spoke as he clutched her limp hand. Digger grew more worried by the second. All he wanted was to be alone with her but now he stood there watching her lifeless body with the others.

To Claudia it felt like slipping away. The thought of Digger’s hand holding hers still rested in the back of her head, but her main focus was finding a way forward. She had never spent much time around the ocean but she sometimes wondered if this is what if felt like to try and swim deeper, grabbing at arms of seaweed, pulling herself forward to get a better view of whatever laid just ahead.

Digger clenched and unclenched his jaw trying to keep the panic inside. She had sat motionless for quite some time now. Everyone around him stood quiet and waiting. It was quite often that he found himself wishing he was alone. Though, mostly, it was while robbing banks. In those situations he wouldn’t blink before killing the others once they had served their usefulness. He
would always go with the impulsive first choice and not question any other option. That was normal. That was how things worked for him, and so far it had worked well.

Now he found himself genuinely caring about a person. A fact he could barely admit to himself, let alone anyone else.

Before, when he had watch Claudia navigate the web with her mind he was able to see flashes of what she was seeing on the screens. Each of the monitors had been positioned to fit together to make a larger cohesive image, though it didn’t always line up perfectly. He would see flashes of headlines as she scanned through the local newspapers, a different headline on each of the nine screens for only an instant as she processed the information four times as fast as he could.

Now the screens remained blank. He assumed it cost her less energy to bring information up to the monitors when she didn’t need to, but he still wished he had some kind of sign that she was active and not just limp in the chair.

After several moments of silence among the squad the computer screens blinked to life, showing the picture of earth from google world staggered across the monitors. Slowly the distorted image shifted, zooming into Gotham, then closer to a small specific building in the city. A small circle blinked around the satellite photo of the top of building as Claudia woke up.

She sat up, reaching up to her eyes, clenching them shut and using her knuckles to rub her tear ducts.

“Hand me the eye drops,” She asked, gesturing out vaguely to were she remembered leaving them last.

Digger took the small bottle and placed it in her palm. She easily put two drops in each eye, obviously having done this hundreds of times before.

“Is that where it is?” Rick asked, eager to get back to business. Hearing Flag’s voice, Deadshot and Croc moved to stand in the doorway to see what was happening.

Digger felt himself tense, but Claudia responded first, “Yeah I think it’s some kind of gambling den but the server with the,” she stumbled over her words, remembering what Rick had said to her when they were alone. After briefing her, he explained in detail what would happen if she let slip the more sensitive details around the others, especially Digger. “Uh, the stuff you were talking about definitely is there,” She explained as she repeatedly blinked, helping to spread the soothing liquid across her eyes.

“So how to get in,” Rick asked speaking more to himself than anyone around.

OoO

Claudia had never gambled before, let alone even been to a casino. Though she wasn’t sure if this place could be called just that. She felt herself constantly looking around the room, examining everyone around her mimicking them and they way they acted to better blend in.

It wasn’t only the strange environment that was bothered Claudia, but also her attire. The dress she had been lended made her intensely self conscious, thought out the night she was constantly tugging at the straps of her dress without intending to or even realizing it. She was constantly blinking, completely unused to wearing mascara. She could see her elongated eyelashes like a fuzzy dark gray halo around her vision.

She shifted slightly, moving closer to that man next to her for warmth, her dress providing little to
no protection from the oen air. He nudged her with his elbow before holding two dice out in front of her. He was the one she was blending in with.

“Blow on ’em,” he said as she dutifully pursed her lips, exhaling quickly on the two cubes. She watched the way his facial hair wiggled as he gnawed on inside of his cheek before throwing the dice across the green clad table.

It had been Flag’s original idea that Deadshot escort Claudia.

The plan was for them to infiltrate the target location in disguise. She would lead him to the hidden server and he’d do everything he could to destroy it.

As Claudia sat there on the plush stool she knew more than ever that she needed to be more assertive. The game being played in front of her failed to hold her attention and her thoughts drifted back to that afternoon. Replaying the scene in her head over and over, she examined every detail, trying to pinpoint every moment she could’ve done something, anything differently so as to prevent her being here where she was now.

It started when Flag walked back into the room. After she’d shown him the map he had left abruptly to confer with Waller, leaving the group to mill about amongst themselves. After watching her go limp at the computer, Harley had become very curious of what other skills Claudia had.

Using her own home computers had become so easy for Claudia so much so that she merely had to look at the screens in order to bring up the most popular cat videos, all playing at once with two to each screen creating a cacophony of meowing. Claudia smiled inwardly at the looks on their faces.

“I can also do this!” She added excitedly holding up her right hand in a peace sign while a small blue beam of electricity flashed, arcing between her fingers like a taser, “It works well for lightning blunts.”

“When yeh learn tha’?” Digger questioned nodding towards her hand with his chin as he leaned against the wall with his arms crossed. He had seen her let out sparks many times, but never in an intentional, controlled way such as this.

“Well after the second time you made me, uh, I mean when I broke the tv,” She paused for a second, looking back to the others who were all intently listening. She suddenly found herself unsure of how much she wanted them to know about the specific details of what Digger had been doing that made her to release a pulse strong enough that it blew up her old cathode ray television, “I started practicing after that, it was just before you left.”

The truth of the matter was that controlling the beams was very taxing and easily wore her out, thus taking a very long time to master even just the slightest bit of constraint. She was proud of the little that she could do, and she felt an unfamiliar kind of joy at having an enrapt audience to show off something she had hidden all her life.

But then Flag returned and ruined everything. Immediately he asked her if she could lead someone to the exact location. Now in reflection, she wished she had just offered to write down directions and not agreed to go herself, but here she sat in the middle of the dingy gambling hall.

The room was dim and nondescript. It was one of the most unremarkable places Claudia had ever seen. It was in the basement of a halal market, the entrance in the back under a winding set of stairs leading to a heavy door. Inside the floors were aged wood panels, the walls a color that may have been white at one point in time, but that was long ago. Now the they were a patchy yellow, tinged by age and clouds of smoke. The baseboard was a dark green panel skirting that ran the length of
the wall and reminded Claudia vaguely of a classroom she hadn’t thought of since she was little. The area was crowded and dark making it hard to see across the room, which give the space an infinite feel, as if you could walk forward forever and continue to encounter green felt table as you approached the shadows.

Most of the people who sat hunched over the tables studying cards or bathed in the florescent lights of the slot machines, were men. They all seemed to be well dressed, wearing suits of dark gray with ties hanging slack under their collars. Many of them had young women hanging off their arms. The women were beautiful and eager. They laughed at every joke and were quick to pull out a lighter whenever a new cigarette appeared. For a moment Claudia questioned if they were all really so enthralled by their date, or just the paycheck at the end of the night. Looking down at her own dress she was momentarily thankful for Harley’s outfit choice, she blended right in. Though she was still worried about her partner’s look.

Once it was revealed that her wardrobe contained little more than a handful of aged t-shirts and one solitary pair of jeans, Flag asked Harley to help Claudia look the part for going out.

No one beside Claudia was surprised by the contents of Harley’s overnight bag. It was well known among the group that she had a pretty loose idea of what constituted as logical and necessary supplies to pack for missions. Though none of them complained when she pulled out the blow up sex doll to use as a flotation device during their last outing when they almost drowned.

Harley was ecstatic about the idea of a makeover and excitedly pushed Claudia to sit on the side of the bed as she began to pull miscellaneous objects from her bag as she searched for, “That one right dress I have, it’ll look perfect on you,” She explained before leaning in closer to Claudia’s ear, “It’ll drive Boomer nuts, promise,” she added with a wink

That comment caught Claudia’s attention bring her to snap her head back to look at Harley, blushing at the thought of what she just might have in store for her.

Claudia had been distracted by the arguing men across the room. Once Flag had expressed the idea of Deadshot traveling with Claudia, Boomer became quite vocally opposed.

“You are too much of an outlier, I can’t trust you,” Flag explained, his brow furrowed in annoyance as he stood face to face with Boomer. It was obvious that both were tense.

Harley gently tugged on Claudia’s chin, turning her to face forward, “Keep ya eyes closed.” She prompted before diving in with an eyeliner pencil.

“I can trust Floyd to at least not make a mess of the whole scene if I send him in,” Rick continued, “Remember last time when you solved the problem by blowing up the whole damn building?”

“And now I’m all out of exploding boomerangs,” Digger interjected.

“Doesn’t matter,” Flag stated, gesturing with his hand in a way that heavily suggested the conversation was over and they were sticking to his plan, but Boomer was incessant and continued to argue.

Claudia did not enjoy listening to them fight. She kept trying to watch as Harley applied her lipstick. Each time she ventured for a glimpse of the men to her left, Harley would quickly grab her chin, pulling it to face her, using a bit more force each time.

“I should go,” Boomer insisted. As the tensions grew between the men Claudia could feel the anxiety bubble up inside of her. She wanted to just yell, to do something to make them stop but she
was too nervous to do even that. She tried to be mindful and quell the building kinetic energy inside of her, but it was so hard to focus with the men fighting and Harley’s mounting annoyance.

She didn’t mean for it to happen.

It had been a complete accident.

She had wanted to make sure that Digger was ok, and as Harley reached again to tug on her chin, Claudia accidentally let out a pulse.

The unfortunate variable was Harley’s necklace. She was leaning in so close to Claudia that when the beam of pure electricity left, escaping past her skin, it was immediately attracted to the nearest, most conductible object. This object happened to be the large gold lettering on Harley’s choker. The extreme charge connecting directly to her neck caused the blonde to convulse before collapse backwards, momentarily stunned.

Everyone in the room turned at the crashing sound of Harley landing in the pile of VHS next to the mattress.

Deadshot was the first to hurry to Harley’s aid. Claudia sat on the bed, shaking while tears stream down her cheeks. She sputtered about how she didn’t mean to, she was sorry, it was an accident and she didn’t mean to.

Boomer quickly moved to Claudia, standing between her and the others as he clasped his hand around her shoulders, holding her as she cried into his shirt.

As she shook, he looked back to Flag who was helping Harley stand up, regaining her bearings. Without anyone speaking it was agreed that Digger would accompany Claudia, whether Rick trusted him or not.

While at the time his opinion meant little to nothing, when later asked about the subject, Floyd would insist that he refused to work with Claudia for his own safety, but was too polite to say that directly to her face. Normally would be hesitant to admit he was terrified by such a small and unseeming girl, but after watching her almost stop Harley’s heart on accident, he would begin to question what power could look like.

Claudia watched the dealer as they used the small wooden arm to collect the dice from the center of the table. She wondered vaguely how this girl had come to work for an underground operation such as this parlor. The girl had medium length hair that was neither blonde nor brown, but balanced somewhere in between. The tag pinned to her chest read ‘Charlie’ but Claudia had noticed that every dealer wore the same badge, all going by the the same affable name.

Claudia wrapped her arms around Digger’s elbow, “The double doors to the left,” She whispered into his ear. The past few games had been more than enough time for her to locate the target. She could feel every electronic in the building, and had to fight the compassionate urge to make each of the slot machines attended to by an elderly individual strike jackpot as she passed, the server was a different sensation entirely. Though unsure of how to get there, she could feel the exact location like there was a string tied to her mind, with gentled tugs coming from the other end, encouraging her to seek it out.

From their seat at the table, she could see both Floyd and Flag on either sides of the room. They were strategically placed as back up while Harley and Croc stayed behind at the warehouse, both being too easily recognizable for a covert operation. They each sat at a blackjack table waiting for either Digger or Claudia to call for their help, if needed.
For the majority of the past decade, Claudia had spent most of her time in an over sized t-shirt (when you have a miniscule frame like hers, all t-shirts are oversize) and not much else. Now she found herself in a sparkly black dress which was about as long as any of her t-shirts, stopping at the same point mid thigh, but still felt so much more revealing. Thin bands of silver snaked across her shoulders holding up the fabric before continuing down her back, multiplying and overlapping to create a web like design across her bare skin.

When Harley had first sang her praises of the dress, boasting how Digger would react, Claudia assumed she was being hyperbolistic. Then she finally stepped out from the room after changing on to the stairs, and she felt like a cliche from a teenage romantic comedy descending to her her prom date who gapes, open mouthed at her transformation. Except Claudia was not going to prom, she was going to an illegal gambling den to destroy their property and hopefully not get killed.

Claudia tried to avoid Digger’s burning gaze as everyone but Harley and Croc climbed into the humvee. Once inside the vehicle, he quickly pulled her across the seats, closer to him.

He was also in costume -if you could call it that. He wore some old clothes from the 70’s that had been in a trunk Claudia had tucked away. There wasn’t an exact reason why she had saved the chest and it’s contents when she found it. It was full of polyester fabrics and and since she had no intended use for them, she just pushed the case into the back of her closet and forgot about it, incase maybe some day she needed it.

Flag had been adamant that Digger not wear his own clothing. Apparently having, 'Captain’ emboldened across his front was too much of a give away. Claudia suggested looking in the the old case almost as a joke, but it quickly came to be the only option.

Everyone was attacked by laughter after Boomer had changed into the disco attire. The shirt had a pinkish paisley design, and very oversized lapels. Even though he had buttoned the shirt all the way, there was still and ample amount of exposed chest hair. He wore a pair of maroon polyester slacks with a matching jacket. The ensemble was accented with his usual chains and watch, which actually fit the look quite well. The only part of that looked out of place where his duct taped boots, the toes of which peeked out from under the bellbottoms’ hem.

“You look like you just walked off the set of a 70’s porno,” Floyd commented when he first saw Digger’s transformation.

“And, like, not even one of the good ones,” Harley added.

Boomer was very clear about how much he opposed the costume but Flag refused to let him change. Thanks to his short attention span, by the time they were in and throwing dice he didn’t seem to notice what he was wearing in the least.

Digger nodded, acknowledging what Claudia had whispered to him about doorways. She held on to his arm, waiting to follow him when the time came.

As the round finished Digger leaned forward and collected his winnings, Claudia followed picking up each chip that he had missed. She followed close by as he walked to the cashier nearest the door she had previously specified. He was more than friendly with the girl, Charlie, behind the counter as she counted out his winning as if she was a cashier at an arcade, counting tokens. Charlie handed him a receipt with a specific barcode, telling him to take it to the counter by the entrance for check out.

“Ta’ luv,” Digger said as he took the slip, “I will lata’,” He wrapped his arm around Claudia,
pressing his palm flat against the exposed skin of her back as he added, “She’s got a date,” with a nod of his head.

The Charlie behind the counter seemed nonplussed at the prospect of prostitutes and waved them on, allowing the pair to pass through the doors without question. Once they were across the threshold and alone, Digger lost his signature swagger instantaneously as he looked to Claudia, “Which way?” he asked looking around the space. It wasn’t quite a hallway nor a lobby but there were many different doorways to choose from.

“Left,” she said as he quickly took her hand and continued in the suggested direction.

As she guided Digger through the maze of hallways, Claudia felt a slight apprehension. “Do-,” she started as he tugged at her arm, it was obvious he just wanted to get the necessary work done and over with. “Do you know what you’re looking for?” She asked trying to speak above the sound of their footsteps in the empty hallway.

Digger stopped to look back at her confused, “Yeh said it be a room wit bunch o’ wires an’ shit.”

“Well yeah, but I mean,” She paused thinking back to what Rick had told her, to the threats he made. It just didn’t seem right to her why the rest of the group shouldn’t know about something that involved them, “Flag never told you exactly what the files were about?”

“Nah, they tell us fuck all, just point at what they want gone,” he explained as he looked over her. He had been well aware of that fact that she had been anxious all day, he could feel the shocks whenever he touched her. He had figured it was from being around strangers but now as he watched her absentmindedly pinch her arm, he wonder if it was more. “Wha’ he tell yeh, luv,” he asked in a calm voice he rarely used.

“The files are about you, about the whole group. Every classified detail about Task Force X,” Claudia took a breath before continuing, “That’s all he told me, but when I found the server I also found the plans of what they plan to do with the information. They’re going to release it to the public like Snowden. It would instantly bring half of the military leaders under scrutiny, completely halting the system with investigation.”

Digger never thought about how high the chain of command went on above him, but he knew Waller was pretty far up by the power she wielded, and the promises she made.

She reached out gently taking his hand as she watched him process the news, “You’d be thrown back in jail and forgotten about. These people want to cripple the military and don’t care what happens to acheive that.”

The possibilities of the future weighed on Digger. He did not like Waller, but at least she’d occasionally let him out to play. A new thought fledged across his mind that at least with Waller he could hope work out a deal so he could see Claudia again. The scars on his knees ached, the memory of crawling around till they bleed just for a distraction burned his mind like a flame. He did not want that forever.

“Guess we should go destroy it, huh?” He finally stated. He did not like the idea of voluntarily doing the government’s dirty work, but now the ends were self serving enough that he had no qualms moving forward.

The ability to sense near by electronics was second nature to Claudia. Unfortunately that skill did not work on humans. Claudia pointed to a door on their right, “One more through there,” she added as he turned the doorknob. The door opened the pair were greeted by a man who looked big and
Digger acted without thought reaching for the boomerangs he had concealed in the lining of his leisure suit. The motion of swinging his arm to release the sharpened projectile was easy and familiar for him. The blade buried itself into the man’s skull, his eyes rolling back as he fell to the ground. Walking across the room, Digger retrieved his boomerang, wiping the blood on the thigh of his pant leg, not paying attention until Claudia screamed.

Another identical bald thug stood looming over her, having taken her by surprise, coming through the doorway behind them. Startled and terrified she instinctively reached out with her arm to shield herself. The man was close enough that her hands his his chest and on contact she let out an unintentional pulse of electrified terror which passed directly from her into him.

The second goon dropped to the ground in a similar fashion as his colleague. Digger approached Claudia as she stood hugging herself looking at the mass on the floor in front of her. She felt completely exhausted, unable to move away and ready to collapse.

“I’m sorry I didn’t see him,” He paused for a second as he approached her before he quickly dismissed the thought and hesitation, wrapping his arms around her shoulders.

“Is-is he dead?” She asked, her eyes trained on the body as she shook against his frame.

Digger nudged the man with the toe of his boot before he turned Claudia to face the opposite wall. He reached out and, using the boomerang still in his hand, he sliced open the man’s throat, blood pouring on to the hardwood floor from the exposed arteries. He stood, wrapping one arm around Claudia’ shoulder as he lead her to the next door, preventing her from looking back.

Digger wasn’t sure what he had expected the mythic ‘server’ to look like. He had a pretty basic grasp on digital gadgets like cellphones, he knew enough to get by at least. Claudia had explained to him that it would probably look like a room with metal boxes stacked on shelves with wires connecting everything. This was at most a guess on her part, having no idea what the outside of it actually looked like, just the data within. Digger wasn’t sure he could explain the scene better than just ‘bunch o’ fuckin’ wires.’ He wasn’t sure where to step without tripping.

“So ‘ow do we gon’ destroy it?” he asked looking to her, “I lied earlier about havin’ run outa explodin’ boomerangs,” he added.

“I fear that would draw too much attention,” Claudia mentioned, remember that how they were to escape was still up for question. “If only I could,” she began before trailing off, unsure of the idea.

“What? Could you fry it?” He asked, guessing at her plan.

“Maybe I could’ve but after,” She looked back towards the closed the door unable to bring herself to say, ’after i killed that man,’ she bit her lip, “I’m too tired now I don’t think i could create a spark like that again.” She looked to Digger hoping he’d understand but he stood there with a lopsided smirk.

“Yeh can’t make a spark,” He said stepping closer to her as his voice dropped an octave, “But I bet I can.”

“What?” Claudia asked, her eyes going wide as a familiar warmth grew inside of her under his scrutiny.

“Are yeh still embarrassed in front of me, luv?” he teased, chuckling as he placed a hand on her hip. Leaning in, his warm breath tickled her ear as he spoke, “After all the time yeh and I’ve spent
naked and alone togetha’?”

Claudia felt red as a beet as she stammered over her words, “But, but we’re, we aren’t in the-the room,” she pointed out, pushing slightly against his chest.

“I dun care where I am,” he purred to her, as he slowly shifted their positions, pushing her against a rack of wires. The cords poking into her back encouraged her to push her chest forward towards him as he continued, “As long as I’m wit yeh.”

He leaned forward taking her lips with force as he had hundreds of times before. Digger had never been a gentle kisser, everything he did in bed was eager and manic, whereas Claudia was more slow and methodic. She almost melted into his embrace as their mouths tangled together.

Abruptly she broke away, pushing back, “Wait, we can’t, not here,” she said in a soft breathy voice.

He leaned his forehead against hers as he supported half her weight, holding her left thigh as it sat, wrapped tightly around his waist. He never wanted to let her go, doubly so in this moment.

“Dun’ think about where we are, just think about meh,” He whispered before taking back her attention. There was something he had realized and she hadn’t. Digger had seen her release hundreds of volts of electricity, now both intentionally and not, but this morning as she mention breaking the tv, it occurred to him that the most destructive, albeit always accidental, pulse she released have always been directly caused by him. The idea that her powers were connected to her mood seemed like a no brainer, but it was he who had figured out which emotions had the strongest reactions.

Claudia tried to think of something that didn’t remind her why she was here. She thought to this morning as she laid with him in bed, but that still lead her thoughts back to Flag. She tried to think past two years of loneliness and anguish without him. She thought back to that brief, glorious month they had together. She thought about sitting in the soft sheets of the bed as he rubbed his hand on her thigh, enrapt as she explained the minute details of one of her favorite films.

“The whole scene is long and repetitive, it almost puts you want to sleep as you watch, so then the next shot of the grass in full color, it feels like a dream,” She explained excitedly. She wasn’t sure if he spent more time looking at her nippels or her eyes, but she was content he was just looking at her, “So yeah it’s a long film from soviet russia, but I really love it,” she finished looking away from him as he layed on the bed next to her, watching her kneeling form.

“I’d love ta’,” Digger replied without hesitation. Claudia was so ecstatic that she dove forward, catching his lips in a haphazard kiss. This lead them to be distracted by each other for some time, and while they did eventually get to watching the film by Tarkovsky, it was not until a quite a few hours later.

A ball of joy swelled in Claudia’s check at the memory of him unabashedly accepting her interests, and so accepting her. She clawed at his shoulders pulling him closer as she felt his fingers slip past her panties and into her folds. He moved like they hadn’t been apart for a single day, curling his fingers just enough to hit the spot that he knew made her see stars. Unfortunately she was not the only who saw got to see those stars. Claudia felt a release like none other, every tension in her was gone, her body limp and weak, depending on Digger to hold her up.

As she relaxed she noticed his grip falter. Never before had Digger had any difficulty holding her up but now his arms fell to his side and his head leaned back, the rest of his form following as he fell limp to the floor. Claudia clung to him in confused terror as he fell.
She straddled his still body, not even noticing the smoke which set off the fire alarms. She fought the exhaustion that crept across her eyes as she grabbed at Digger’s lapels, trying to shake him awake. Soon the sprinklers began as Deadshot burst through the door.

He yelled something unintelligible as Flag joined him. Floyd easily lifted Claudia off Digger, forcing her to let go of the aussie’s shirt as he handed her off to Flag. Rick carried her out of the parlor. Claudia watched through half lidded eyes and the chaos of patrons, keeping an eye on Deadshot who carried Boomer over his shoulder. Eventually she lost the battle against fatigue and easily succumbed to exhaustion, losing all contact with the world.
Claudia and Digger sat together on the roof watching the sunset.

The forecast called for large thunderstorms starting around ten at night and Claudia had wanted to make sure the buckets were set out to collect, even though they were in no short supply of water. It was late August and had rained about twice a day for the past two weeks, and of course it felt like every other storm involved some lightning. Usually the rainy season was something Claudia despised but Digger had changed that. Once her hair started stand on end, she couldn’t get him to keep his hands off of her.

“You know,” Digger said, sipping his beer and watching the clouds on the horizon as they billowed, growing ever darker with their approached, “At Belle Reve, they had ta stop using the taza’ on me,” He grinned, “Wouldn’t knock me out, just give me a stiffy,” He looked at her out of the corner of his eye, chuckling at her blushing expression.

“Shut up, that’s not true,” She chided him in a light tone, slapping his shoulder with her free hand as she balanced a beer can in the other. Claudia had never felt so quite content in a moment, looking out at the pink sky slowly being swallowed by gray. Everything felt so beautiful and light, it was almost unreal. She leaned on his shoulder with a sigh, “I’m so happy they let you stay.”

He reached out, gently taking her chin in his fingers, turning her head to face him. The serious expression sat across his brow ignited a ball of excitement that welled within her. She could tell that what he said next was not going to be a joke. It was not often that Digger genuinely opened up and she cherished the handful of moments when he had let his guard down around her.

His eyes seemed to bore into hers as he spoke, “Wake up.”

“What?” Claudia spoke quickly as she jolted backwards away from his grasp. He sounded completely unfamiliar, almost stern and female.

“Wake. Up.” He repeated in the strange voice, with a much more irritated tone.

Claudia shot up in her bed, suddenly awake.

She blinked, trying to take in her surroundings, her vision still blurry with sleep. She tried to grasp at the last remnants of the dream but all she could remember was the terror after Digger spoke. As she rubbed her palms against her eyelids, she heard the voice again.

“Do you know who I am?” it said with palpable annoyance.

After blinking a few times, the figure in front of her came into focus. Claudia didn’t need to look around to know they were in her room, instead opting to keep eye contact with the woman who stood above her, looking focused and deliberate with her arms clasped behind her back. Claudia vaguely wondered if the stranger ever smiled, and if she was proud of the fact that she didn’t.

Wisps of loose hair brushed her cheeks as Claudia shook her head from side to side, nonverbally communicating that she had no clue who the fuck this lady was.

“I’m Amanda Waller,” the woman declared.

Now Claudia understood, “I’ve heard of you,” she said in a soft voice kicking herself afterwards for sounding weak.
“And believe it or not, I’ve heard of you too, Claudia,” Waller stated before looking into the file she held, “Or should I call you, dia-zero-four-two?”

Waller grinned inwardly to herself as she watched the understanding wash over the girl who sat in front of her, still half tangled in the bed sheets. Claudia had no response as she looked up, her jaw slightly slack.

“I’ve known about you for a while now, You’ve been spending a lot of time inside government computers. We didn’t know what it was getting in until someone found your ad on TOR. The one explaining that you could get any information from anywhere without detection,” Waller began, looking down her nose, “Despite what you think, there’s always been hints that you’d been somewhere. No clues to your actual identity, just where you’d gotten into. When we found the ad, we could finally put a name to the ghost in the machine, Dia. But still no signs of who you really were,” She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, relishing in the look of fear that slowly crept across Claudia’s face as she gripped the blanket tighter, “Who knew that Captain Boomerang would lead us, quite literally, to your doorstep?”

Claudia felt like she was made of pure panic. She wrapped her arms around herself, impulsively squeezing the flesh of her shoulders between her fingertips as if trying to create a new pain to distract herself from the present.

“I was surprised that Boomer had no clue when I mentioned your alias,” Waller commented.

Claudia’s face snapped back to the woman’s eyes, “I never told him, it-it wasn’t important.”

“And now it is,” Waller stated as she reached into her coat pocket, pulling out a small piece of cardstock which she handed to Claudia, “We will be keeping an eye on you. If we should need to contact you, we will use the address on the reverse.”

Flipping over the small business card, Claudia found ‘0118999@667132.gov’ written in pen on the blank side.

“Why should I pay attention to it?” She asked in a depressed tone as her shoulders slumped. Claudia felt completely broken down under the government’s thumb.

“Because Captain Boomerang has requested the freedom to contact you as reward for his recent civic duties. Any letter he writes to you will be sent to that address,” Waller reached into her pocket pulling out another slip of paper, “And this address is for if you wish to contact him.”

Claudia looked over the scrap of paper, memorizing the numbers, 8819991@667132.gov.

“Have they left?” Claudia spoke suddenly, the memories of when she had last seen Digger, the feeling of his limp body, flooding back to her.

“No but we will shortly,” Waller responded.

Leaping to her feet, Claudia barreled past the woman and her guards towards the steps. She didn’t care about the biting pain of the asphalt and rocks under the pads of her feet as she hurried towards the group, spotting him instantly. Noticing her approach Digger braced himself for her impact.

A warmth washed over him, stretching out from the points where her arms made contact. Digger fought his impulse to lean forward and engulf her in his embrace, still acutely aware of everyone behind him.

Looking back over his shoulder, Boomer spoke to Flag, “Can we, er, have a mo’ alone?” Rick
almost looked like he’d allow it when Waller’s voice cut in.

“No,” she stated while descending the rusted staircase, “Say goodbye now. We head out in two minutes,” She spoke with a finalizing tone that no one dare question.

Digger looked down at Claudia, who still stood with her arms wrapped around his torso. He found himself at a complete loss for words as he looked down into her deep chocolate eyes. pivoting slightly to the left, Digger moved to shield his Claudia from the others’ view as he leaned forward.

He was uncharacteristically gentle as he brought his lips to rest on hers. It was like nothing she had experience before. He moved with a carelessness that almost felt foreign to him, though he just wanted to drag out the moment as long as he could. He wanted to remain in the dream like bubble that he felt as they kissed. The bubble he felt when he was just near her. He didn’t want to go back to prison, back to solitary. He knew the moment was fleeting and there was no way to preserve it besides drinking in every detail for him to later review while alone.

“Let’s go,” Flag’s voice called from the cab of the nearest humvee.

“I’ll write you,” Claudia whispered in a low breath as their lips parted, and their foreheads balanced together.

“Tell me every detail of the last film yeh watched,” Digger requested as he stole one last peck before pulling away to climb into his seat.

Claudia stood still, alone in the warehouse long after the vehicles had left. Eventually she turned around, climbing the rickety staircase to the room which had served as a safe haven, but now felt like a prison, especially when knew she’d be alone. The worn foam of her old computer chair sank under her weight as she curled up in front of the monitors, pulling up and email dialog box

‘Dear Digger,’ she thought, watching the text appear instantaneously in the screen, ‘The last film I watched was call A Very Long Engagement. I don’t think you’d really like it, it was a sappy story about a woman searching for her lover who had gone to serve in World War I. It was very long and very french but what I enjoyed the most was,’ Claudia began, easily losing herself while writing the explanation of the film for him.

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